

THE YALE
HISTORICAL REVIEW

Spring 2011

An Undergraduate Publication

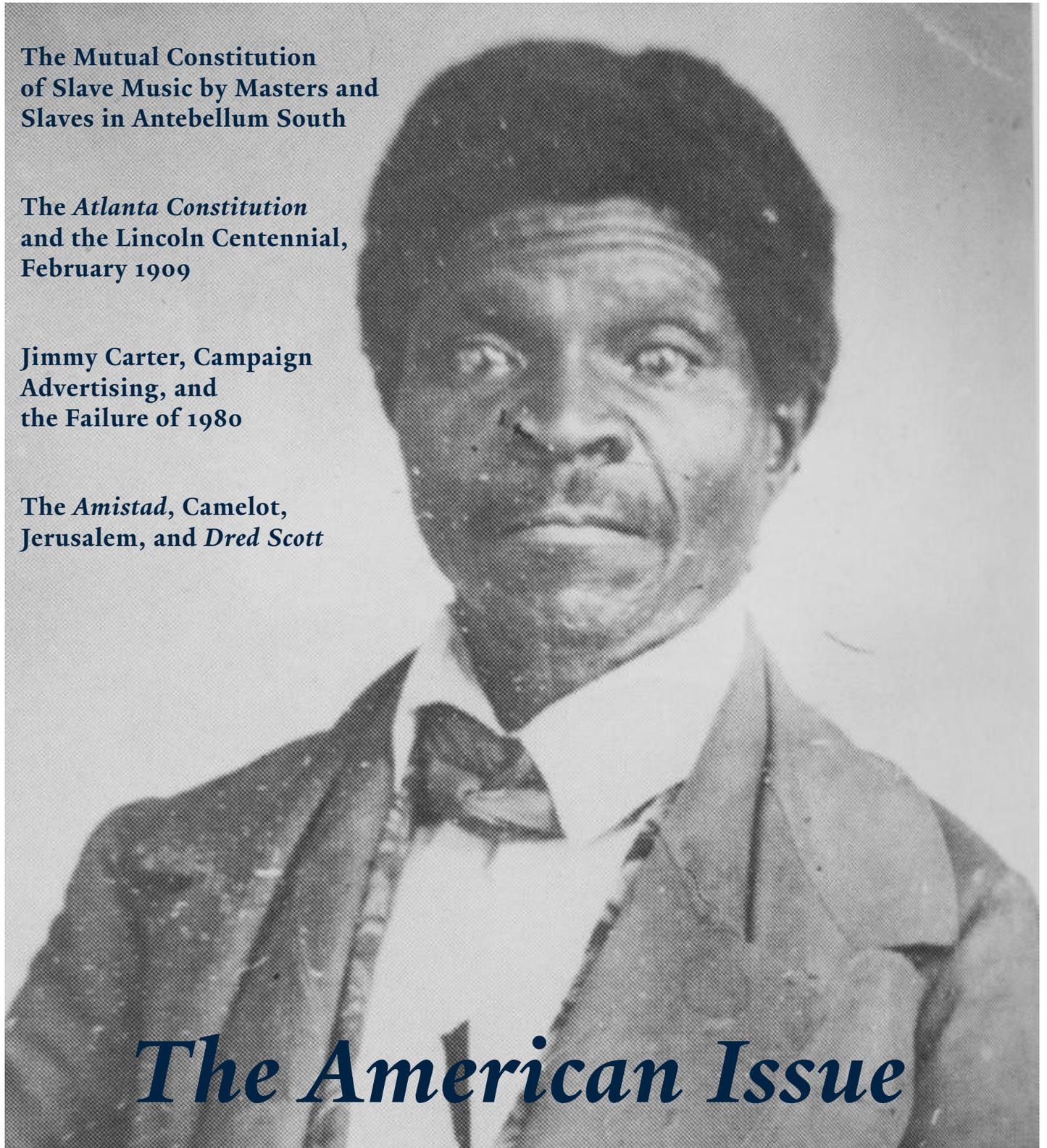
Volume I • Issue 4

**The Mutual Constitution
of Slave Music by Masters and
Slaves in Antebellum South**

**The *Atlanta Constitution*
and the Lincoln Centennial,
February 1909**

**Jimmy Carter, Campaign
Advertising, and
the Failure of 1980**

**The *Amistad*, Camelot,
Jerusalem, and *Dred Scott***



The American Issue



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COVER: Dred Scott, 1857. Yale University Library Visual Resources Collection.

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PAGE 7: William Harlan Hale and Selden Rodman, editors of the "Harkness Hoot" 1930/1931.

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A Moment in Yale's History

Bringing Back the *Hoot*

Paul Needham, SY 2011 and Andrew Ruben, SY 2011

The last time Yale built neo-Gothic residential colleges, between World War I and World War II, a group of students writing and editing *The Harkness Hoot* decided to raise hell over the issue. William Harlan Hale, the short-lived magazine's founder and editor, wrote:

“It seems almost incredible. When the world is witnessing a sweeping rebirth of genuine architecture, and when every clear-headed designer who is not bound to copies and formulas is envisioning a new order of forms and masses and relationships, then the builders of Yale join the tribe of impotent imitators who grind out their lifeless plagiarisms.”

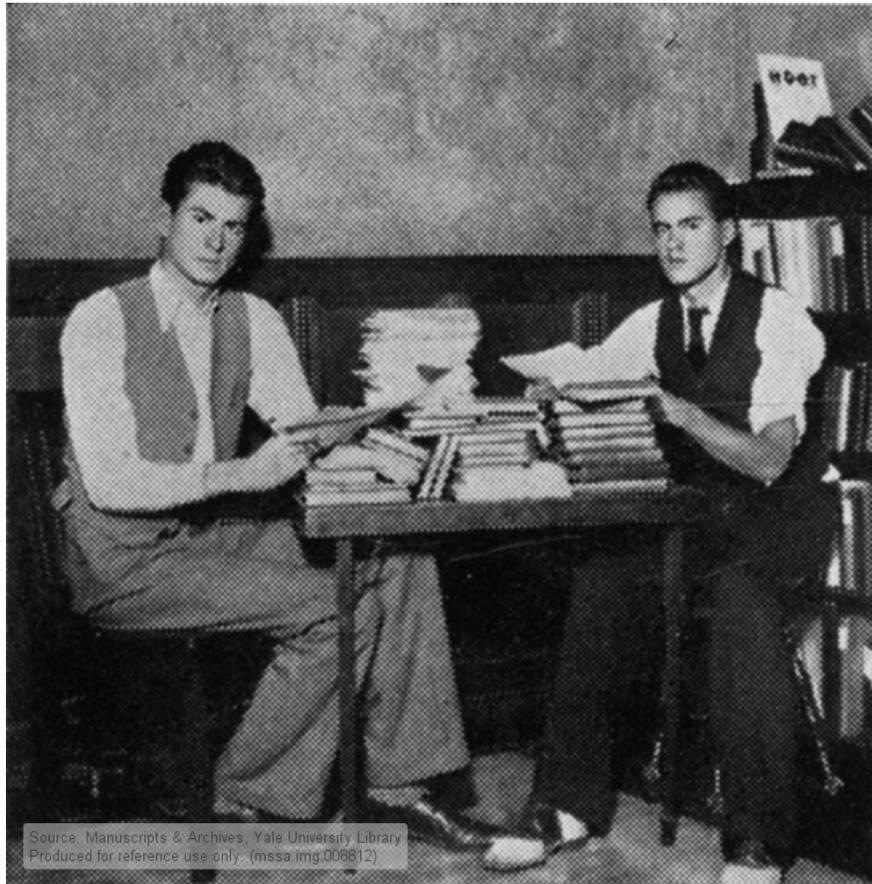


The *Hoot* existed in a day when even peripheral student publications had a wide audience; Hale's article was reprinted in two major national magazines, and Frank Lloyd Wright, perhaps the most famous American architect of the last century, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Hoot* praising the article.

While it was Hale's polemical attacks on Yale's architectural direction that won the *Hoot* wide praise, and while much of what was written in the magazine's four years of existence was more humorous than anything else, the *Hoot* was above all a forum for criticism of the social culture at Yale. Its editors saw at Yale too much extracurricular inanity at the expense of serious thought.

Further, the editors believed that these social institutions, governed by committees and sub-committees, mimicked the bureaucratic organization of the business world, which so many Yalies would enter after graduation (the editors deplored this, too). The

Hoot editors therefore took aim at senior societies; at the football program; at the *Yale Literary Magazine*, from which they had broken free; and at the “extracurriculum” more generally. In this way, the *Hoot* made the same criticism of the university that A. Whitney Griswold, later the president of Yale and a friend of many *Hoot* editors, made when he referred to “that Dink Stover crap.”



William Harlan Hale and Selden Rodman, editors of the "Harkness Hoot."

The criticism of the new colleges, then, in some ways had less to do with the misused Gothic details and ornaments than it had to do with Yale's effort to institutionalize the ideal of a sociable, privileged, Stover-like Yale Man. In the eyes of the *Hoot*, the College Plan threatened to make permanent Yale's commitment to provide its students with a social environment over an intellectual one.

In some sense, the purpose of the *Hoot* was to stand athwart the Yale Man, yelling "Stop:" if its arguments aligned with or were accepted by the Yale administration, the *Hoot* was no longer relevant. The *Hoot* editors saw themselves as Socrates' "gadfly," their goal being to provoke the school in the name of virtue and truth.

The magazine closed in 1934. Perhaps the editors felt that the campus had become desensitized to the *Hoot's* arguments. Or perhaps the editors recognized that, as with a college education, four years is time enough to make a mark. Nearly 80 years have passed since the *Hoot* went out of print. Yale is again building colleges that pretend to be of an era long ago, and a culture of reflexive careerism continues to prevail. A note to eager freshman: perhaps it is time for the *Hoot* to be revived.

Junior Seminar

‘Lords of Sounds:’ The Mutual Constitution of Slave Music by Masters and Slaves in the Antebellum South

Matthew Joseph, PC 2012

The Rise and Fall of Atlantic Slavery

Professor Edward Rugemer

2010

Faculty Advisor: Professor Edward Rugemer

During their junior year, history majors complete at least two seminars covering history from two different geographical regions. Majors can choose from a plethora of topics and often find inspiration for their senior theses in junior seminars where students can hone in on particular areas of interest. Matthew Joseph, a current junior in Pierson College, wrote this paper for Professor Edward Rugemer’s seminar “The Rise and Fall of Atlantic Slavery,” a class devoted to analyzing emergence of slavery in the Atlantic world.

Introduction

In 1838, English actress Fanny Kemble married a slave holder and took residence with him for a contentious year on his Georgia plantation. Both captivated and unsettled by the “barbaric” slave music she heard, the actress reported that such music would “make the fortune of an opera,” save for a minor “skillful adaptation and instrumentation.”¹ Kemble was one among many members of the master class who found themselves entertained by slave music. Yet, Kemble’s remark conveyed more than simple aesthetic pleasure. There is a subtext to her musing. It reflects the desires (and associated privileges) of whites to co-opt slave culture to meet the dominant group’s interests.

As this essay attests, slave music in the antebellum South hardly remained impervious to the interventions of white masters who aimed at controlling its forms, symbols, sounds, and performances. Equally apparent, however, were the efforts of slaves to accommodate their masters’ tastes, when necessary, while struggling to maintain slave music as a method for collective affirmation and resistance. Out of this reciprocal process of thrust and parry a New World genre of music emerged; one, that this essay will argue, was *mutually constituted* over time by slaves and masters.

A thorny issue involving control underlay much of the coercion, resistance, and accommodation. Who might more rightly claim ownership to the sounds and songs slaves created and performed? At play on the masters’ side of this contested process were dehumanizing devices of silencing, such as iron and leather muzzles. Once affixed to the slave’s head, the muzzle rendered the wearer mute.² For their part, slaves sought to create safe havens, like hush arbors, where they might reclaim their humanity and voice. In the words of Zora Neale Hurston, these were spaces where “the bossman were gone,” blacks could cast off the “[m]ules and other brutes [that] had occupied their skins,” and they could become “lords of sounds.”³

Historiography of Slave Music

Since the mid-1800s, competing interpretations of slave music have been advanced, each striving to explain its origins, essential features, and functions. As the following historiography shows, the mutual constitution of slave music has gone largely unrecognized or underappreciated by the many authors who have tended to privilege *either* the slaves *or* the masters.

¹ Bernard Katz, ed., *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States* (New York: Arno Press and *The New York Times*, 1969), ix.

² Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History Through Songs, Sermons, and Speech* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005), 13.

³ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (J.B. Lippincott, Inc., 1937), 1.

The earliest writings date back to the time of slavery. In that era, several authors posited that slaves created music out of happiness.⁴ Proponents of the “happy slave model” hailed from both the South and the North and the majority explicitly endorsed the continuation of slavery. They argued that the snappy, fast paced tempo of slave songs indicated that the slaves were content with their lives. Accordingly, the authors took the next step into the national controversy over slavery and asserted that the purportedly upbeat nature of slave songs demonstrated that the institution of slavery was righteous and uplifting.⁵

Abolitionists roundly rejected this celebratory interpretation of slave music. They countered that most slave songs were actually melancholy in nature. In the view of these writers, far from being jaunty, the music’s somber lyrics and moaning tones embodied the horrors of slavery. Proponents of this alternative interpretation, like William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, Lucy McKim Garrison, and Thomas W. Higginson, were among the first to document and musically transcribe slave songs. They collected primarily religious spirituals, and they interpreted those about the afterlife as proof that slaves were passive beings, patiently awaiting their just rewards in heaven.⁶ It is certainly possible that these authors purposely depicted slave music as the creation of devoutly Christian, docile, and resigned slaves in order to win over a larger white audience to the abolitionist cause. This goal may also have caused them to pay less attention to secular slave music.

Although proslavery and abolitionist writers advanced diametrically opposed descriptions and interpretations of slave music, both sides shared one perspective. In seeking to determine the functions of the music, both schools focused on the institution of slavery and its benevolent or evil masters. Left unexamined were the African cultural traditions and human agency of the slaves. This much needed intervention came in the early 1900s. At that time, black intellectuals like W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, and J. Rosamond Johnson revisited African diasporic history and slave spirituals, and white anthropologist Melville Herskovits documented the rich cultures of Africa and New World blacks.⁷

⁴ Barton, *Old Plantation Hymns* (New York: Lamson, Wolfe and Company, 1899).

⁵ Barton, *Old Plantation Hymns*.

⁶ William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States* (Baltimore, MD: Clearfield Company, 1867), xix; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, “Negro Spirituals,” in *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States*, ed. Bernard Katz (New York: Arno Press and *The New York Times*, 1969), 14.

⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thomson Organization, Ltd., 1973); James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, *The Books of American Negro Spirituals* (New York: Viking Press, 1925); Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941).

Du Bois argued that references to heaven in slave songs functioned metaphorically and could signify “a faith in the ultimate justice of all things...Sometimes it is faith in life.”⁸ He and the Johnson brothers insisted that slaves were not passive beings awaiting their deliverance to the afterlife. On the contrary, they were subjects with agency – historical actors for whom ‘heaven’ could signify a better life on earth – a life of freedom. These scholars also attacked the then-popular, racist assumption that held that Africans and New World blacks were too primitive to produce meaningful cultures and to contribute to world history. Upon analyzing slave spirituals, Du Bois countered, “I know these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world.”⁹ Anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits further contributed to this revisionist thought. Based on decades of ethnographic research, Herskovits documented in his 1941 *Myth of the Negro Past* the existence of vital African and New World black cultures. He maintained that “Africanisms” endured in black American cultural forms, like music, and that synergistic exchanges between “Negroes” and whites enriched New World black and white cultures. The analysis of slave music offered below builds upon and contributes to these scholars’ convictions that slaves were historical subjects who produced New World black cultures and that cultural forms in the Americas are beneficiaries of power-laden encounters between blacks and whites.

At the very moment when Du Bois, the Johnsons, and Herskovits were advancing a progressive view of slave music as creative, historically engaged, and syncretic, a more retrograde group of scholars came to the forefront. The latter argued that the production of slave music was best understood as an essential and immutable trait of the black race. The logic went as follows: Since slave music was originally African, and because music was an essential component of everyday life in Africa, then slave music could not have been primarily created to express the emotions associated with servitude or to mask slaves’ pursuit of freedom in the here and now. Rather, these racial determinists argued that slave music was reproduced in the New World because blacks were ‘naturally’ a ‘musical race.’ Stated simply, black slaves *needed* to make music. Song collector Lydia Parrish and music historians Henry Edward Krehbiel and Miles Mark Fisher further reasoned that because slave music was about life itself, it would, by necessity, have to reference the fullest gamut of life’s emotions. Accordingly, these authors argued, that slave music was as upbeat as it was melancholy. Parrish even asserted that the abolitionists had placed too much emphasis on slaves finding “release from their misery,” a position which she deemed to be “lot of sentimental nonsense.”¹⁰ The arguments advanced by Parrish and her colleagues challenged competing interpretations, which viewed somber slave music as a product of and testament to the brutality of slavery.

Surely a product of its time, the “Afro-essentialist” model drew upon a century of European and Anglo-American thought, which sought to classify, produce knowledge about, and

⁸ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 262.

⁹ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 538.

¹⁰ Lydia Parrish, *Slave Songs of the George Sea Islands* (New York: Creative Press, Inc., 1942), 176.

better control ‘distinct categories’ of persons. In this ideological environment, racialized corporeal features like skin pigmentation, hair texture, and *vocalization* (for instance, allegedly grunting natives) were deemed to be inherent and immutable for each distinct ‘race.’

Accordingly, advertisements for runaway slaves published in Chesapeake region newspapers helped their white readers “know” and identify specific fugitives by listing not only information about the slave’s phenotypical features but also his or her vocal characteristics. Consider the following mid-to-late eighteenth century postings: “James, about 30 years of age...his jaw teeth are out, is remarkabl[y] fond of singing.” Another reported the loss of “Cajah, of yellow complexion, well made,...[has a] voice [that] sounds as if coming out of a hollow tree.”¹¹

Following the Civil Rights Movement, the study of the history of slavery changed – and so too did the study of slave music.¹² Inspired by new scholarship in social and cultural history and in resistance studies, many now view slave music as a vehicle through which slaves resisted and contested masters’ power.¹³ Contemporary authors point to the ways in which slave music served as a form of escapism (to sing away one’s sorrows); as a means of entertainment; as a medium of communication among slaves (for matters as mundane as keeping pace while working in the fields to something as secretive and subversive as planning plantation sabotage); and as a vehicle for asserting individual and collective self-worth in ways that challenge denigrating discourses promulgated by most whites.¹² Describing the relationship between slave songs and resistance, Kerran Sanger observed that other forms of resistance such as lying, cheating, and theft might easily have reinforced dominant representations of slaves as barbaric and sub-human. “In order to protect themselves from this possibility, the slaves enacted less explicit means of resistance....Among these were the slave spirituals” that refuted white claims “and replaced them with ones of [the slaves] own making.”¹³

¹¹ Ronald Radano, “On Ownership and Value,” *Black Music Research Journal* 30:2 (2010): 363, accessed October 10, 2010.

¹² Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan Roll: The World the Slave Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the New World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).

¹³ Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

¹² Katz, ed., *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States*; Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977); Charshee Charlotte Lawrence-McIntyre, “The Double Meanings of the Spirituals,” *The Journal of Black Studies* 17:4 (1987): 379-401, accessed October 10, 2010; Roger D. Abrahams, *Singing the Master: The Emergence of African American Culture in the Plantation South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992); Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History Through Songs, Sermons, and Speech* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005).

¹³ Kerran Sanger, “Slave Resistance and Rhetorical Self-Definition,” *Western Journal of Communication* 59 (1995), 179, accessed October 10, 2010.

A review of key strands in the historiography of slave music leaves today's reader with two pressing questions. Has the study of the history of slave music swung too far in the direction of slave agency? Is there any room to argue that masters also shaped the evolution of slave music? By answering the latter question in the affirmative, this essay intends to privilege both slaves and masters as historical actors who shared fields of power and struggled over control of the production, performance, and consumption of slave music.¹⁴ This work also diverges from the contemporary trend to privilege the study of slave spirituals, and turns instead, to an analysis of work and instrumental songs, which have been, by comparison, under-researched.¹⁵ It describes how slaves and masters, together, crafted and deployed these musical genres to advance their own, often competing, claims about black sound, its ownership, and the relationship of slave music to symbolic representation, laboring, and freedom.

West African Roots and the Middle Passage

As music historian Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. states, slaves were descendants of people whose “play, sport, work, relaxation...everyday events and the vicissitudes of life...were accompanied by and expressed in musical forms.”¹⁶ Moreover, West African societies were “robustly collective” and their members almost uniformly celebrated music communally.¹⁷ It was this musical tradition that slaves brought to the American South.

Yet, even before slaves reached New World plantations, they were introduced to captains of slave ships who themselves realized the centrality of music to everyday life in West Africa and sought to exploit this connection. Captains instituted policies aboard vessels to strenuously exercise their human cargo. A British surgeon who traveled aboard three slave ships noted, “Exercise being deemed necessary for the preservation of their health, they [slaves on board ship] are sometimes obliged to dance...If they go about it reluctantly, or do not move with agility, they are flogged; a person standing by them all the time with a cat-o'-nine-tails in his hand for that purpose.”¹⁸ Such exercise kept the slaves healthy, but also physically fit and disciplined – the latter two traits were valuable to potential buyers. Exercise commonly included forcing slaves to dance to European music played by members of the boat's crew. Accounts from slave traders

¹⁴ Jay O'Brien and William Roseberry, *Golden Ages, Dark Ages: Imagining the Past in History and Anthropology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

¹⁵ Karran Sanger, “Slave Resistance and Rhetorical Self-Definition;” John White, “Veiled Testimony: Negro Spirituals and the Slave Experience,” *Journal of American Studies* 17 (1998): 251-263, accessed October 10, 2010; Renee K. Harrison, *Enslaved Women and the Art of Resistance in Antebellum America* (New York: Macmillian, 2009).

¹⁶ Samuel Al Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁷ Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 34. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 6.

¹⁸ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 9.

report that the Africans originally had no idea that they were supposed to dance to this foreign music, and had to be violently coerced into some sort of movement.¹⁹ This was a preamble to the connection between music and the forced extraction of labor that slaves were to face and attempt to modulate from the time of the Middle Passage onward.

When slaves first arrived in New World plantations, they continued to sing traditional songs in African languages. Masters would have had a difficult time co-opting the lyrics of these songs, since they were yet sung in English. Perhaps because of this, there is little historical evidence of masters refashioning early slave music, aside from the censoring of loud African instruments like drums and horns. Masters' attempts to control instrumental music will be discussed in more detail later. Large-scale cooptation of the rhythms, symbolic content, and performance of black music began in the antebellum period, once slaves became creolized and spoke English almost exclusively. It is for this reason that this essay treats this later historical period.

Work Songs

In the antebellum South, slaves “accompanied seemingly every type of possible work with song,”²⁰ as their ancestors had done in West Africa. They sang while planting tobacco, chopping cotton, swinging axes, cleaning clothes, rowing their masters' boats, and toiling on docks. The music included a rhythm that was appropriate to the task at hand. Slaves used a call and response style for work in the fields, while stevedores modified Christian hymns in order to better suit the “swinging” rhythm of their work.²¹

While from one vantage point, the practice of work songs may be viewed as an accommodation by slaves to brutal exploitation, from another, it may be interpreted as a form of resistance. Work songs defied masters' wills in several ways. First, the performative practices associated with slave songs served as tools whereby slaves might reject their purported value as commodities and assert their identity as human beings. Although the slaves' work was characterized by alienating, “backbreaking monotony,”²² which could reduce humans to little more than beasts of burden, the acts of singing with a community of peers rendered the work social and more endurable. Thus, when one ex-slave recalled picking 150 pounds of cotton daily, she quickly added, “We would pick cotton and *sing*, pick and *sing* all day (emphasis added).”²³

¹⁹ Tim Marcus, “Harmony and Howling,” The Dread Library, accessed October 10, 2010, <http://www.uvm.edu/~debate/dreadlibrary/marcus.html>.

²⁰ White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery*, xv.

²¹ Parrish, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, 243.

²² White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery*, xvi.

²³ White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery*, xvi.

An affirmation of personhood and human dignity also inhered in the decision of many slaves to face each other while working and singing.²⁴ The practices of deploying a call and response technique and commonly utilizing the pronouns “I” and “you” in work songs also created a form of conversation among slaves, which fostered a sense of community.²⁵ Moreover, by singing collectively, slaves resisted those hegemonic processes that converted black bodies into individual units of forced labor, which were routinely sold away from family and friends. Finally, the singing of work music and masters’ encouragement of it allowed certain slaves to control the songs’ tempo, and thus set (within reason) their own pace of work. To quote folklorist Roger D. Abrahams, work songs were a cultural form by which slaves “neither divested themselves of their African cultural heritage nor acculturated to the behaviors and performance patterns of their masters.”²⁶

The decibel level of work songs can also be viewed as a form of resistance. Work songs, when sung in unison, were often incredibly loud; or in the words of one white southerner, “abominably loud.”²⁷ A Liverpoolian visiting New Orleans exclaimed that only steamboats could drown out the sounds of slave music.²⁸ Another visitor was apparently kept awake by slave music and wrote, “All night long I could hear the whizzing of the wheel [to grind hominy] and the shouts of the people.”²⁹ In 1867, slave music compilers William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison reported that slave stevedores’ songs were sung “with a volume of voice that reached a square or two away.”³⁰ Such intensity of sound would have been perceived as an annoyance, a nuisance, or even a war-call to whites, many of whom deemed slave music to be “uncouth and detestable...dull and stupid”³¹ If slaves managed to stake claim to the domain of sound and to further imagine that they were its “lords,” they surely did so through the provocative practice of booming work songs.

The often-coded lyrics of work songs also contested blacks’ enslavement and the associated “chattel principle.” Slavery historian Walter Johnson defines the latter as that process where slaves’ communities and identities “might be disrupted as easily as a price could be set.”³² Consider the following lyrics from the song “Chained to the Land:” “Master he be a hard, hard man. / Hoe Emma Hoe, Hoe Emma Hoe./ Sell my people away from me.../ Hoe Emma Hoe, Hoe Emma Hoe. / Lord send my people into Egypt land. / Hoe Emma Hoe, Hoe Emma Hoe. /

²⁴ Parrish, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, 225.

²⁵ Sanger, “Slave Resistance and Rhetorical Self-Definition, 183.

²⁶ Abrahams, *Singing the Master*, xxii.

²⁷ White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery*, xi.

²⁸ White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery*, xvii.

²⁹ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 163.

³⁰ Allen, Ware, and Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States*, viii.

³¹ White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery*, xii.

³² Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 19.

Lord strike down Pharaoh and set them free.”³³ There can be little doubt that the Pharaoh being targeted here for divine retribution is the song’s aforementioned “hard, hard master [who] sell my people away from me.” From church sermons and Bible readings, African Americans had learned that God had heard the Israelites plea and struck down the wicked Pharaoh who had enslaved them. Blacks would similarly have known that God had then instructed Moses on how the Jews might gain freedom. “Chained to the Land” likely gained inspiration from this Biblical account.

Another work song, “Debt I Owe,” expresses slaves’ rejection of the predatory manner in which wealth was accumulated in plantation economies. They sing, “Debt I owe, Lord, debt, I owe / I ain’ gonna pay no debt I owe... O Mister Watchman don’t watch me / I ain’ gonna pay no debt I owe.”³⁴ The song’s lyrics feature slaves who represent themselves as independent agents who are unwilling to pay their debt – unwilling to sacrifice their bodies and minds to slavery.

It might be appropriately asked why slaves were given leeway, at all, to infuse their lyrics with meanings, which might challenge the institution of slavery. Part of the answer may lie in the fact that many slaveholders viewed black songs as mechanisms whereby “negroes” could entertain themselves and “let off steam.”³⁵ As long as song lyrics did not contain overt references to blacks’ actually destroying property, running away, or rebelling, masters seemed to allow their slaves a degree of poetic license. A second factor that likely contributed to the relative tolerance for moderately transgressive lyrics resides in the fact that many whites focused more on the work songs’ rhythmic drive than its verses.³⁶ For example, song compiler Lydia Parrish states that rhythm is “all-important... The words mean little except that their syllables lend themselves to... [work] steps.”³⁷ Kemble called the lyrics of work songs “primitive,” and added that the simplicity of some sent her into “fits of laughter.”³⁸ Kemble’s assertion conforms to one popular school of thought among members of the master class, which held that as subhuman species, Africans and New World blacks were incapable of producing lyrics that reflected higher (Euro-American) forms of expression and reason.³⁹

With many whites overlooking or dismissing the lyrical content of work songs, slaves were able to incorporate somewhat more transgressive content into their songs. For example, an Englishman travelling in Charleston noticed that slave oarsmen sang in “satire... [of] unkind

³³ “Slave Work Songs,” Colonial Williamsburg, accessed October 10, 2010, <http://www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/february03/worksongs.cfm>.

³⁴ Parrish, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, 210.

³⁵ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*.

³⁶ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 162.

³⁷ Parrish, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, 228.

³⁸ Harold Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 118.

³⁹ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*.

masters.”⁴⁰ In this same vein, the aforementioned work song “Chained to the Land” euphemistically codes its reference to an overseer with the word “possum” and then mocks the overseer’s labors and surveillance:

Now see that possum he works hard. / Hoe Emma Hoe, you turn around dig a hole in the ground, Hoe Emma Hoe. / But he cain't work as hard a me. / Hoe Emma Hoe, you turn around dig a hole in the ground, Hoe Emma Hoe. / He sits a horse just as pretty as can be. / Hoe Emma Hoe, you turn around dig a hole in the ground, Hoe Emma Hoe. / He can ride on and leave me be.⁴¹

According to James Scott, such instances of euphemism and sarcasm belonged to slaves’ toolkits of resistance—“hidden transcripts” that allowed the dominated to speak truth to the powerful while avoiding the likely sanctions that more direct criticism would bring.⁴²

Another work song deploys an additional element in the political dialogue between slaves and masters—symbolic inversion.⁴³ One of its lyrics reads, “The trumpets blow, the bugles sound, / Oh, stand your ground.”⁴⁴ The ex-slave who sang the song for an early, white chronicler apparently took yet another page from book of the arts of resistance. Practicing dissimulation, the singer reported that the song’s protagonist was Caesar, not the Biblical character Joshua.⁴⁵ Judicious blacks no doubt understood that whites would be disturbed by the knowledge that African Americans had celebrated (and continued to recall) the feats of Joshua—a figure with whom God spoke, who managed with an up-start army to conquer a powerful, walled city, and who cursed Jericho’s inhabitants and their descendents. With its true meanings shrouded from members of the dominant class, the song celebrates a subaltern warrior and his followers whose aggression against their enemy led to victory and a reversal of power relations.

Slaves also deployed work songs to protest the inequities of the slave system. Another song associated with corn shucking contains the following lyrics: “Massa in the great house counting out his money, / Oh, shuck that corn and throw it in the barn; / Mistis in the parlor eating bread and honey, / Oh, shuck that corn and throw it in the barn.”⁴⁶ The song depicts the injustice of slavery by juxtaposing a greedy master against poor, hard-working slaves. Like the above “battle song,” this song invokes the Bible, as slaves discuss their mistress, who eats “bread and honey” while her deprived slaves are left to labor incessantly. Through the vehicle of song, the slave singers and their black audience are called upon to ask themselves when and how they,

⁴⁰ White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery*, xvi.

⁴¹ “Slave Work Songs,” Colonial Williamsburg.

⁴² Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, xxi, 35, 153.

⁴³ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 166-167.

⁴⁴ Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.*, 119.

⁴⁵ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 2. Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.*, 119.

⁴⁶ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 181.

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too, may enjoy freedom and reside in the ‘land of milk and honey.’ In addition to its biblical referents, the slave ditty likely gained further inspiration from the English children’s rhyme, “Sing a Song of Sixpence.” The latter features a king who “sits in the parlor counting all his money” and his wife who “sits in the kitchen eating bread and honey.” Yet, unlike the rest of the verses of that old English rhyme, the slaves introduced into their song the resentment of forced laborers who produce the ill-gotten wealth (the profits from the shucked corn) enjoyed by the master class.

Another work song, “Shuck dat Corn Before You Eat,” also references stark differences between masters and slaves over the ethics of work and about the just distribution of the rewards derived from the slaves’ labors. Slaves at corn-shucking competitions among ‘rival’ plantations apparently sang the song. Its lyrics afforded blacks the opportunity to narrate an alternative “moral economy” in which the obedient and skillful slave victors would be personally rewarded for their labors at the plantation house with the types of food and drink routinely enjoyed by members of the master class. While competing, slaves sang:

All dem purty gals will be dar, / Shuck dat corn before you eat.... / I know dat supper will be big, / Shuck dat corn before you eat./I think I smell a fine roast pig,/Shuck dat corn before you eat... / I hope dey'll have some whisky dar. / Shuck dat corn before you eat. / I think I'll fill my pockets full. / Shuck dat corn before you eat.

According to ex-slave Francis Fredrick during competitions masters would instruct their slaves to sing both to increase their tempo of work and to heighten their levels of enthusiasm over the grueling hours. Moreover, in the competition Fredrick participated in, the winning master who was Fredrick’s owner did fulfill his end of the moral pact encoded in the song cited above. A feast and whisky were provided on the veranda of Mr. Taylor’s home.⁴⁷

Lyrics like those found in “Shuck dat Corn” and the action of victorious masters like Mr. Taylor to reward their slaves for their ‘loyalty’ and disciplined labor may have momentarily encouraged certain slaves to imagine that they had achieved some movement in their contested relationships with slave owners. Could masters’ assimilation of lyrics of corn-husking songs and their willingness to host victory feasts mean that slaves had successfully (if not momentarily) established a longed-for relationship with their masters based on a shared humanity and a modicum of economic justice? This question based from an examination of a section of Francis Fredrick’s slave narrative. It is precisely after Fredrick describes his experience at the corn-husking competition, the songs that were sung, and the feast that followed, that he writes the following passage. “What I have written [above] cannot convey a tenth part of the spirit, humour, and mirth of the company; all joyous — singing ... But within one short fortnight, at

⁴⁷ Francis Fredrick, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky* (London: Wertheim MacIntosh, and Hunt, 1863), 49.

least thirty of this happy band were sold...to unutterable horrors, soon to be used up. Reuben, the merry Captain of the band, a fine, spirited fellow who [led the singing] was one of those, dragged from his family. My heart is full when I think of his sad lot.”⁴⁸ While slave work songs might make reference to an alternative system of social relations and economic justice, and although blacks might briefly experience minor breaks in the norm, the cruel precepts of forced labor and grossly unequal exchange held sway.

Although protest and resistance lurked beneath the surface of certain work songs, many masters, like the ones attending the above-referenced corn-shucking competition, appreciated the benefits that work songs might afford them. Accordingly, they attempted to co-opt the genre. Whites began to see the advantages of work songs when they witnessed the extreme precision by which slaves worked while singing. Kemble notes that songs were “effective”⁴⁹ in accompanying work, because music kept the slaves “in time with their [work] stroke.”⁵⁰ Upon witnessing slave rowers, another observer remarked that “all timing [of] the strokes of their oars [is] to the measure [of the song].”⁵¹ The tremendous precision created by work songs led one owner of a tobacco plant in Richmond to conclude that, “the boys work better while singing.”⁵² Yet another observer summed up the importance of work songs for slaves: “songs... [with] rhythmic swing acted as an incentive to a steadier and better labor.”⁵³

Masters altered work songs in order to increase slaves’ efficiency and to ensure that they never stopped working. Historian Bernard Katz proclaimed, “Masters not only encouraged continuous singing, they often insisted on it.”⁵⁴ Such “continuous singing” allowed masters to monitor the comings and goings of their slaves, making forced singing disturbingly similar to the use of the cow bell to chart the movement of livestock. As Frederick Douglass explains, “Slaves are generally expected to sing...A silent slave is not liked by masters or overseers. ‘*Make a noise,*’ ‘*make a noise,*’ and ‘*bear a hand,*’ are the words usually addressed to the slaves when there is silence amongst them...[Singing] was one means of letting the overseer know where they [the slaves] were, and that they were moving on with the work.”⁵⁵ Yet, it was not enough for masters to force their slaves to sing. Many masters also demanded that their slaves sing fast-paced songs, which would oblige a more consistent and grueling pace of work. In an essay entitled “Management of Negroes,” one anonymous master (calling himself Agricola) wrote, “When at work, I have no objection to their [slaves’] whistling or singing some lively tune, but no *drawling* tunes are allowed in the field, for their motions [the work done] are almost certainly to keep time

⁴⁸ Francis Fredrick, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky*, 50-51.

⁴⁹ Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.*, 119.

⁵⁰ Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.*, 117.

⁵¹ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 177.

⁵² White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery*, xvii.

⁵³ Katz, ed., *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States*, xiv.

⁵⁴ Katz, ed., *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States*, xiv.

⁵⁵ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 162.

with the music.”⁵⁶ Masters even paid certain slaves who agreed to “regulate the tempo” so as to extract the greatest level of exertion from the slave labors.⁵⁷ The paid collaborators would usually rapidly increase the tempo. Such “speed-ups” were so enervating that there some stories tell of slaves beseeching their companions not to sing a specific song “because it made them work too hard.”⁵⁸

In addition to altering the tempo, masters and managers often prohibited the singing of melancholy work songs. Rather, as Fanny Kemble observed, many insisted that their laboring slaves give voice to only “cheerful music.”⁵⁹ Such an insistence on upbeat and fast-tempo songs fueled the belief among many whites that slaves who sang were content. This same mindset operated when slave owners placed their human property on the slave block for sale. There, too, slaves were ordered to sing happy and fast-tempo work songs to demonstrate that they were healthy, obedient, and worthy of a high resale price.⁶⁰ True to the dialectic of domination and resistance, such coerced performances by slaves served to shore up the hegemonic belief that servitude was both socially justified and morally sound.⁶¹ In other words, a singing slave not only served as a vehicle for the smooth extraction of labor and accumulation of wealth, but the singer might also fuel the ideological “fantasy” operating among certain white Americans, which held that a modicum of mutual consent actually existed between masters and slaves.

Slave work songs, which so entertained Fanny Kemble and other whites, developed into an American musical genre – one that drew selectively from both African and European traditions, and was the byproduct of processes of coercion, accommodation, and protest. Slave songs bear the scars of a system of production governed by dehumanization, the brutal commodification of labor, continuous surveillance, and almost total control. In this context, otherwise valued traits of agency, human dignity, and communalism had to be cloaked in both deed and word. As described above, slaves managed through such modest acts of subversion as facing each other when singing and picking cotton to reclaim some of their humanity and communal identity. Slaves also brought veiled resistance, as well as dreams of revenge and societal inversions, to the lyrics of their work songs. These verses rejected the chattel principle and referenced biblical accounts of subaltern rebellion and freedom. The rhythms, beat, and volume of work songs similarly reflected struggles around resistance, accommodation, and cooptation between slave and master. The slave work songs produced in the antebellum South

⁵⁶ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 162.

⁵⁷ Mary Wylie McCarty, “Negro Spirituals, Shouts and Chanteys,” in *Flags of Five Nations*, ed. Howard E. Coffin (Sea Islands, GA: Cloister Hotel, n.d.), 31; Katz, ed., *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States*, xiv.

⁵⁸ Katz, ed., *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States*, xiv.

⁵⁹ Katz, ed., *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States*, xiv.

⁶⁰ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 163.

⁶¹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 49.

were products of these on-going struggles. So too was another genre of slave music— instrumental songs.

Instrumental Music

In most West African societies, unaccompanied singing was rare.⁶² Yet, owing to the demands of the plantation system and to the proscription placed on instrumental music in most antebellum Protestant churches, slaves were usually forced to adopt an a cappella style when singing at work and when worshipping God.⁶³ This a cappella mode is yet another example of the stamp placed by whites on the music produced by slaves. There is, however, a noteworthy exception to this prohibition and it is found in the genre of slave instrumental music. As described below, while this category of music managed to retain key features of its African past, it can in no way be considered autochthonous or unchanged. Like slave work songs, a subaltern spirit of cultural resilience and resistance as well as elite practices of disciplining and cooptation characterize instrumentals.

Despite the pressuring by masters to adopt European instruments, like the fiddle (also called the violin) or the guitar, slaves managed to retain and refashion African-style instruments and to maintain their centrality within their musical repertoire.⁶⁴ These African-styled instruments included drums, musical bows, quills (or panpipes), the balafo (similar to a xylophone), and the banjo (an amalgamation of many African string instruments).⁶⁵ Challenged by the lack of traditional, African materials with which to craft their instruments, slaves ingeniously turned to alternative objects. Slaves constructed traditional string instruments out of local gourds with strings made from pig entrails.⁶⁶ Drums were crafted out of old kettles or hollowed tree trunks with goat or sheepskin stretched over them.⁶⁷

Although scholars know more about *what* slaves played than *how* they actually played, historians surmise that slaves favored a highly percussive style.⁶⁸ They would have done so, because beat was a highly valued trait in West African music. An emphasis on beat apparently unsettled many white listeners whose European classical tradition privileged melody instead. Perturbed whites described slave instrumental music as “monotonous”⁶⁹ and “irregular and

⁶² Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 13.

⁶³ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 133.

⁶⁴ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 128.

⁶⁵ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 54.

⁶⁶ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 66.

⁶⁷ “African Instruments in Louisiana: Wash Wilson Narrative,” in *Slave Narratives: Texas*, Vol. XVI: Part 4, Federal Writers’ Project (New York: Library Reprints, 1999).

⁶⁸ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 168.

⁶⁹ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 137.

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grotesque.”⁷⁰ Moreover, many whites failed to value the traditional African falsetto singing, which often accompanied slave instrumental music. Rather, the former was derided as “rude” and “very loud and shrill.”⁷¹ In these demeaning words, we see a further manifestation of the struggle between slaves and masters over the claim to be “lords of sound.”

Refusing to buckle under the master class’s dehumanizing representations of black personhood or the white Protestants’ insistence that religion and instrumental music remain apart, slaves endeavored to maintain the communal and spiritual character of their instrumental music. They gathered in large groups during their free time, which included evenings, Sundays, and holidays (mainly Christmas and Easter), and played instrumental music.⁷² Imbued with conviviality and spiritual fervor, such communal events were generally all-night affairs. A visitor to Virginia in 1787 noted with astonishment that after a day of hard labor, slaves, instead of resting, walked six or seven miles to the site of a communal dance where “He [the slave] performs...the most vigorous exertions...until he exhausts himself, and scarcely has time, or strength, to return home before the hour he is called forth to toil next morning.”⁷³ Such communal, almost ‘trance-like’ celebrations were enacted each Sunday in Congo Square in New Orleans. There slaves danced to drums together in a ring and when someone fainted, he or she was quickly replaced by other eager participants.⁷⁴ These performances replicated key features of traditional, West African ring dances, such as trance and communication with deities.⁷⁵ Communal dances and weekly celebrations in Congo Square represented practices and spaces wherein slaves might sustain an alternative form of spirituality to that demanded by Christianity.

Although slaves continued to privilege their own African-origin instruments and styles, they did, nonetheless, adopt certain Western instruments that whites thrust upon them. From one vantage point, this acceptance may be read as a form of accommodation. Yet such an interpretation requires further nuancing when we consider the subtle ways in which slaves often worked this accommodation to their own benefit. First, many black fiddlers managed to outperform their white instructors and counterparts. Indeed, many southerners came to subscribe to Thomas Jefferson’s assessment, which held that, “in music ... [blacks] are more generally gifted than the whites.”⁷⁶ The prodigious mastery many slaves demonstrated in playing European stringed instruments led yet another white observer to proclaim, “Every negro is a

⁷⁰ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 67.

⁷¹ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 14.

⁷² Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 66; 156.

⁷³ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 167-168.

⁷⁴ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 135-136; Gary A. Donaldson, “A Window on Slave Culture: Dances at Congo Square in New Orleans, 1800-1862,” *Journal of Negro History* 69:2 (1984): 63-72, accessed October 10, 2010.

⁷⁵ Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 21.

⁷⁶ Katz, ed., *The Social Implications of Early Negro Music in the United States*, ix.

musician from his birth ... [The violin] seems necessary to their existence.”⁷⁷ In light of such praise, slaves could assert a degree of superiority: Not only were blacks widely recognized as better musicians, but they also could play European instruments, like the fiddle, far better than whites. Slaves who were skilled at playing European instruments could also claim a modicum of technological mastery at a time when blackness was associated with primitiveness. Paradoxically, by agreeing to take up European stringed instruments and demonstrating a profound mastery over them, blacks as a “race” once again deployed music as a privileged site to claim a collective and valued African identity.

The manner in which slaves actually played European instruments was yet another way in which slaves managed to complicate the notion that they simply bent to the will of white masters. Black fiddlers, who were praised for their musicality, played their instrument in a far more percussive and African-sounding style than did whites. The percussive sound was sometimes rendered by positioning someone behind the fiddler who would rhythmically beat the fiddle’s strings with sticks or knitting needles.⁷⁸ Slaves also created fiddle music that was usually faster than the music conventionally played by whites. Northerner Lewis Paine shared a vignette, which illustrates how the very speed of fiddle music could be deployed as a form of subaltern subversion. Paine reported that at a dance he attended, which included both masters and slaves, when the slave musicians became more “intoxicated” with the music, they played faster and “wilder.”⁷⁹ When the winded whites could no longer keep up, they were forced to stop dancing. This was, according to Paine, exactly what the black musicians and dancers desired. Slaves then sang out, “Now show the white man what we can do!” and began to dance even more vigorously.⁸⁰ In this way, the slaves at once refused to replicate the Western musical conventions placed on playing the fiddle and asserted a claim to being superior dancers and musicians.

Subversion not only haunted the playing of European instruments, it also loomed over certain lyrics that accompanied instrumental music. Similar to their response to work songs, most whites simply overlooked this provocation. This likely owes to the fact that whites tended to concentrate far more on the songs’ instrumentation than their words. Indeed, WPA song collector Lydia Parrish minimized the connotative significance of lyrics when she asserted that instrumental music was solely “done for fun.”⁸¹ In practice, certain lyrics of fiddle songs clearly lament the slave condition and gesture to resistance. One such song includes the following verses, “My ole Miss’ promis’ me / Put on de silver slippers. / When she die she set me free / Put on de silver slippers. / She live so long till her head got bal’ / Put on de silver slippers. / It look

⁷⁷ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 149.

⁷⁸ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 168.

⁷⁹ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 168.

⁸⁰ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 168.

⁸¹ Parrish, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, 93.

like she never die.”⁸² Rather than amounting to “fun,” the song crystallizes slaves’ resentments and calls for freedom and justice. The singer yearns to replace and reverse her degraded, barefoot status through the receipt of silver slippers. Such gilded slippers connote not only an elevation in material worth for the slave, but also the much vaunted movement from bondage to freedom. One can easily imagine the songstress as a house slave who toils at the feet of her elderly mistress. The song calls for a much-desired reversal of fate, with the mistress being bid, upon her death, to place silver slippers on her slave. Symbolic reversal, it will be recalled, is a central element of the hidden transcripts of resistance maintained by subaltern figures like black slaves.⁸³ Finally, while the phrase, “It look like she never die,” may well capture the singer’s despair over the longevity of slavery, it may also entail a more transgressive meaning. If the mistress’s life and the institution of slavery refuse to die off on their own accords, then the intervention of others (including slave insurrectionists) may be needed to bring each to its demise.

Resistance perhaps best manifested itself in the sheer volume and communicative power of instrumental music – with slaves once again seeking sonic mastery over their environment. This bid for control was particularly evident in drum music. To better appreciate why drums and drumming were so privileged, we must return briefly to the African past. Many West African societies maintained a tradition of “talking drums” by which drums facilitated communication over long distances. This was possible, because drum playing was adapted to reproduce the speech-tone inflections and rhythms of spoken language.⁸⁴ Similarly, in the New World, slaves conceived of and played drums as if they were an extension of the human voice. Drums were utilized as a form of communication and formed part of a secretive language, which facilitated the planning and execution of several slave uprisings. One such revolt occurred in Stono, South Carolina in 1739. An official account of the uprising states that there were several slaves “calling out Liberty... [They] marched on with Colours displayed and two Drums beating, pursuing all the white people they met... They [the number of slaves] increased every minute... Singing and beating Drums to draw more Negroes to them.”⁸⁵ It is noteworthy that the only words repeated twice in the above account are “drums” (which is capitalized for emphasis) and “beating.” Another slave insurrection, which occurred in St. John the Baptiste, Louisiana in 1811, also seems to have been stirred to action by drumming. An official report of this incident reads, “They [the revolting slaves] were goaded to a frenzy by the beating of drums and iron kettles, accompanied by the barbarous shrill notes of reed quills.”⁸⁶

For their part, masters viewed instrumental music quite equivocally: as potentially dangerous, as well as entertaining and profitable. Accordingly, masters took steps either to ban

⁸² Parrish, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, 118.

⁸³ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 6.

⁸⁴ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 14.

⁸⁵ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 39.

⁸⁶ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 52.

or co-opt certain elements of instrumental music. Masters spearheaded bans on drums and horns throughout most of the plantation-South. Following the Stono rebellion, the colony of South Carolina passed a law which expressly forbade slaves from “using and keeping drums, horns, or other loud instruments, which may call together, or give sign or notice to one another of their wicked designs or purposes.”⁸⁷ The whites of St. John the Baptiste, Louisiana similarly responded to their town’s recent insurrection by prohibiting slaves “from beating the drum or dancing after sundown.”⁸⁸ Despite such bans, drums persisted in the antebellum South, albeit in fewer numbers than before the passage of the laws.⁸⁹ Slave drumming continued in Congo Square in New Orleans despite regulations to the contrary until the eve of the Civil War; and, drumming must have been maintained surreptitiously throughout the rest of the South, since WPA interviews collected in the 1930s describe slave drumming quite vividly.⁹⁰ Finally, many slaves kept African percussive traditions alive despite the official ban on drumming. They did so by deploying alternative forms of percussive instrumentation. Some chose to play the fiddle with drum-like beats. Some slaves beat sticks on the ground to keep musical time, while others played tin buckets and pans as if they were drums.⁹¹ Perhaps the instrument that best substituted for drums, however, was the human body. Slaves played their own bodies in an approximation of drums. This African practice is called ‘patting juba.’ It is likely that the prohibition on drums contributed to the development and proliferation of this seemingly ‘less threatening’ rhythmic device within the genre of slave instrumental music.⁹²

Masters did not only respond punitively toward those elements of instrumental music that their slaves transported and attempted to replicate in the New World. Masters also sought to co-opt this genre for their own entertainment and economic gain. As noted earlier, one feature of this cooptation involved the insistence that slaves play instruments that whites esteemed. This demand gave rise to a new type of black musician: one who played European stringed instruments. To reiterate, many whites soon concluded that blacks were naturally talented musicians, who were predisposed to playing instruments, such as the fiddle, exceedingly well. One northern-born mistress described slaves’ fiddle noises as “the high heaven of sound.”⁹³ Another mistress was moved to tears when her favorite fiddler gained his freedom, primarily

⁸⁷ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 59.

⁸⁸ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 60.

⁸⁹ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 47.

⁹⁰ “African Instruments in Louisiana,” Vol. XVI: Part 4; “Drums and Shadows,” in *Slave Narratives: Georgia*, Vol. IV, Federal Writers’ Project (New York: Library Reprints, 1999), 62; Robert B. Winans, “Black Instrumental Music Traditions in the Ex-Slave Narratives,” *Black Music Research Journal* 10:1 (1990): 43-53, accessed October 10, 2010.

⁹¹ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 144-145.

⁹² Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 141.

⁹³ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 150.

because she so enjoyed his fiddle playing and feared his absence.⁹⁴ Due to their high regard for slave fiddling, whites often insisted that blacks play at whites' antebellum dances and cotillions.⁹⁵

Motivated by the desire to keep their other slaves entertained and docile, many a master chose to keep and cultivate his slave fiddlers. One master wrote in an article entitled "Management of Negroes upon Southern Estates" for the *De Bow's Review*: "I have a good fiddler, and keep him well supplied with catgut [for the strings], and I make it his duty to play for the Negroes every Saturday night until twelve o'clock."⁹⁶ One suspects that this purveyor of advice viewed 'contented' and fatigued slaves as far less likely to engage in insurrectionist plots the next day when they were afforded their only day of rest. When slave fiddlers played for white audiences, masters could additionally anticipate personal, financial gain. Many masters booked their prized fiddlers to other plantations for black and white dances. One master advertised his "celebrated musician and fiddler" in the *Richmond Daily Inquirer* and insisted that those interested must "in no case pay to him [the slave] or any other person [other than the master] the amount of his hire."⁹⁷ So valuable were fiddlers to masters that if masters' property was unjustly taken from them, they often sued and asked juries to take into account their slaves' musical abilities when assessing damages.⁹⁸ These examples underscore two related facts: whites commonly conceived of blacks' instrumental talents in terms of economic value and whites viewed slave music as part of the owned slave – the property of the master class.

For their part, most slave fiddlers also came to recognize their economic worth and sought to take advantage of it. Well-respected and talented fiddlers received preferential treatment. Their fiddles gained them entry into places that otherwise excluded slaves and often saved them from hard labor in the fields.⁹⁹ In fact, several slave fiddlers were known to have earned a degree of fame as well as remuneration from their craft.¹⁰⁰ One expert fiddler, Solomon Northup exclaimed:

Alas! Had it not been for my beloved violin, I scarcely can conceive how I could have endured the long years of bondage. It introduced me to great houses – relieved me of many days' labor in the field – supplied me with conveniences for

⁹⁴ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 171.

⁹⁵ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 144.

⁹⁶ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 157.

⁹⁷ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 144.

⁹⁸ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 152.

⁹⁹ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 170.

¹⁰⁰ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 154.

my cabin – with pipes and tobacco and extra pairs of shoes...It heralded my name around the country – made me friends.¹⁰¹

This section of the argument featured critical discussions of the reproduction of and assault on African percussive musical traditions, slaves' appropriations of European stringed instruments, and masters' cooptation of gifted slave fiddlers and their music. It is this essay's contention that slave instrumental music should not be reduced to either a form of slave resistance or accommodation to domination. In that uneven relationship of power that linked master and slave, it is certainly true that coercive acts, like the ban placed on drumming, might be met with subaltern resistance and subterfuge. As we have seen, when required, drumming was replaced by related percussive practices like patting juba, and slaves took to playing European instruments in a manner that privileged beat over melody. Reciprocally, black instrumental music was broadened and enriched through the inclusion of European instruments. Slave musicians were encouraged to both reproduce and re-imagine their musical craft by white masters who sought entertainment and financial reward. In accommodating to their masters' demands, the most talented slave musicians gained respect and greater control over their labor and movement. Thus while some slaves sought to escape the dehumanization of slavery through the beating of drums and the call to rebellion, others found in fiddling a safer and more accommodating route.

Conclusion

Over the course of the last half-century, advances in social and cultural history, African American studies, and resistance studies have individually and collectively contributed to improved research and scholarship on slavery and slave music. Replacing past accounts of blacks as naturally musical and slaves as persons either content or resigned to their lot, today's authors underscore the meanings of protest and acts of resistance embodied in slave music. This essay has not shied away from this necessary revisionism. Yet, it adds the provocation that holds that in their zeal to bring agency and resistance into their studies, scholars have inadvertently shortchanged another dimension crucial to the production of slave music. While courageous acts of refusal by slaves certainly helped to shape the New World musical genres of black work songs and instrumentals, so too did the acts of cooptation and coercion taken by white masters. As a consequence, we can claim no certain victor between slave and master for the title of "lords of sounds." Analogous to the resolution of political strife in certain West African and European societies, in the case of slave music, the feuding parties of master and slave may be said to have attempted to moderate their struggles by uneasily sharing the crown.

¹⁰¹ Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: The Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841 and Rescued in 1853, from a Cotton Plantation near the Red River in Louisiana* (Auburn, NY: Derby and Miller, 1853), 216-217.

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Directed Studies

New World Order: Tocqueville on European and American Democracy

Benjamin Watsky, DC 2012

History and Politics

Professor Stuart Semmel

2009

Faculty Advisor: Professor Norma Thompson

Ben Watsky, currently a junior in Davenport College, wrote this essay for Professor Stuart Semmel's History and Politics seminar. The class is part of Directed Studies, a program for freshmen by competitive application consisting of three year-long courses in the foundational texts of Western civilization.

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) was a French nobleman, historian, and political thinker who visited the fledgling United States of America as a young man. After his extensive travels, he produced his most famous work, *Democracy in America*, which placed the rapidly expanding and democratizing Jacksonian America as the backdrop for his exploration of the effect of the social changes wrought by democracy. The book is at once sympathetic and critical towards its subject, and remains one of the most insightful treatments of what Winston Churchill described as "the worst form of government, except for all those others that have been tried."

Alexis de Tocqueville begins *Democracy in America* by describing “the equality of conditions” that he perceives as having had an immense influence upon American politics and civil society. This democratic spirit, he asserts, is on the rise not just in America but in Europe as well, as notions of equality have begun to supplant the old guard of aristocrats who have held sway there for centuries. But Tocqueville quickly distinguishes the shifts toward democracy in Europe and America, warning his fellow Europeans that, despite the similarity of their ideals, Europeans and Americans are establishing democracy in very different sociopolitical climates. America, he argues, has erected a successful democracy because its laws and mores have struck a balance between equality of conditions and individual freedom. In European democracies,¹ however, the trend towards centralization of power threatens to suppress freedom to the point of despotism. These respective relationships between equality and freedom form the foundation of Tocqueville’s analysis of democracy: the success of the Americans rests on their continued maintenance of a balance between the two, and unless Europe can restrict the centralization that accompanies the rise of equality, her people will see despotism following fast on democracy’s heels.

Tocqueville argues that the complex relationship between equality and freedom in a country determines the future of its democratic government. He considers democracy a political result of the equality of conditions that is advancing inexorably through Western society as “the noble has fallen on the social ladder, and the commoner has risen,”² but warns that nations are often too hasty to address the relationship between this equality and freedom. According to Tocqueville, the rise of equality produces two opposite tendencies: one towards growing independence and anarchy, and one towards servitude – freedom’s total suppression. He cautions that the immediate fear of anarchy is one of the contributors to the more dangerous threat of servitude: in order to safeguard themselves against excessive freedom, people defer to a centralized government, placing their freedom in the hands of “the all-powerful and so to speak unique right of society.”³ This centralization of power, Tocqueville fears, will give rise to a new form of despotism: an “immense tutelary power”⁴ that will quietly suppress the freedom of its subjects. He sees this power as an imminent threat to any democratic nation unless it can incorporate individual freedom into its government to temper centralization; it is here, he argues, that America has thus far succeeded and Europe has failed.

According to Tocqueville, the success of the future of American democracy rests on its maintenance of the principles that have governed it since its founding. He sees America as a country in which “freedom is old” and “equality is comparatively new”⁵; because of Americans’

¹ Tocqueville frequently uses the general adjective “European,” often in reference to his native France.

² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 642.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 663.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 646.

deeply ingrained respect for the ideals of free institutions upon which their country was founded, the presence of a central government has not eliminated these essential freedoms. The preeminence of freedom is evident in American law, as evidenced by “the township institutions that, moderating the despotism of the majority, at the same time give the people the taste for freedom and the art of being free.”⁶ In addition to these laws, Americans have cultivated democratic mores, such as education and religious community, which Tocqueville describes as the “habits and ... ideas most favorable to maintaining [democracy].”⁷ The success of American democracy thus appears to lie in the support and guidance of freedom: the law upholds local freedoms alongside the federal government, and mores encourage Americans to preserve the equilibrium between equality and freedom that has been a stabilizing political force.

Toqueville does temper his optimism, however, when considering the future of democratic rule in America; towards the end of his treatise, he writes, “Americans believe that in each state the social power ought to emanate directly from the people, but ... they imagine so to speak no limits to it.”⁸ This opinion echoes Tocqueville’s fears about centralization of power in Europe, and in fact, this mention of Americans is fairly isolated in a section more focused on the future of European democracy. While his expression of concern seems to indicate that Tocqueville has become more guarded in his praise of America over the course of his work, his remark soon after that “these same opinions are spreading more and more in Europe”⁹ suggests that Americans still have the time and the motivation in their young government to avoid the onset of overly centralized power, while the European governments are already too far gone. Though Tocqueville makes no sweeping pronouncements about the future of American democracy, and though he takes into account the dangers of excessive faith in the democratic system, his sentiments about its current state indicate an overall sense of optimism as long as American laws and mores continue to empower local and individual freedom, giving rein to the federal government to provide a political structure while restricting its control on a small scale.

Though it spans both sides of the Atlantic, the trend towards equality and democracy has affected Europe far differently than America. Tocqueville attributes this disparity to the two strikingly different sociopolitical situations in which democracy has taken hold: America was founded on democratic ideals, whereas European democracy emerged through rebellion against the governmental systems prevalent in earlier “centuries of aristocracy.”¹⁰ These opposing “points of departure” highlight a difference in the relationship between freedom and equality in the two Western civilizations: because Europeans (in particular, the French) built democracy

⁶ Ibid., 274.

⁷ Ibid., 295.

⁸ Ibid., 641.

⁹ Ibid., 642.

¹⁰ Ibid., 660.

over the crumbling foundations of a social hierarchy, they felt the need to eliminate local government – and therefore local freedom – in favor of a centralized system. In an effort to erase the traditional source of power in the aristocracy, Tocqueville claims, “all [European democratic revolutions] have shaken or destroyed secondary powers.”¹¹ With no outlet for freedom analogous to the American township, the power of the European central government “overflows on every side and goes on to spread over the domain that individual independence had reserved for itself until now.”¹² It is this restriction of freedom that characterizes the pre-despotic democracy, which has arisen despite the desire for freedom that galvanized European democratic revolutionaries. Tocqueville diagnoses this unstable relationship between equality and freedom, explaining, “[Democratic revolutionaries] had wanted to be free so as to make themselves equal, and as equality ... established itself, it made freedom more difficult for them.”¹³ By eliminating any semblance of local or individual autonomy, European governments submitted themselves to the danger of despotism, whose arrival Tocqueville considers an inevitable result of the current democratic system.

Having examined the dangerous future of democracy in his homeland, Tocqueville expresses the hope that Europe “will seek new remedies for new ills” amidst the equalizing sociopolitical atmosphere.¹⁴ To this end, he entreats his countrymen to recognize the danger of servitude present in growing equality and to embrace the idea of freedom, lamenting that those who fear anarchy “abandon freedom because they deem it dangerous”; those who fear servitude, “because they judge it impossible.”¹⁵ But Tocqueville recognizes that the American system of laws and mores is not necessarily the solution for Europe, emphasizing that he is “very far from believing that [Europeans] ought to follow the example that American democracy has given.”¹⁶ America has avoided despotism through an internal system, appealing to the fundamental values and mores of its people, but Europe, having so recently thrown off the yoke of the aristocracy, cannot rely on its citizens’ democratic sentiments. Instead, Tocqueville argues, Europe must achieve a stable democracy through law, by “fix[ing] ... limits for social power” and “preserv[ing] for the individual the little independence, force, and originality that remain for him.”¹⁷ Tocqueville thus tailors the cultivation of a successful democracy to its surrounding political situation, advising European governments to rely on law to encourage freedom in the absence of democratic mores.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 651.

¹² *Ibid.*, 653.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 660.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 672.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 672.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 302.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 672.

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For all his praise of equality, Tocqueville believes that the future of democracy is a dangerous one unless governments exercise caution. American laws and mores provide a balance between freedom and equality, but European democracies, fearing the consequences of freedom, expose themselves to the dangers of despotism by centralizing their governments. Tocqueville understands that the sociopolitical conditions in Europe and America necessitate different approaches to the cultivation of a stable democracy, but in both cases, he emphasizes the need to temper the despotic elements of equality with freedom to ensure a prosperous future for democracy on both sides of the Atlantic.

Interview

Professor Stuart Schwartz

Conducted by Christopher Magoon, BK 2011

March 11, 2011

Professor Stuart B. Schwartz teaches classes on colonial Latin America, focusing on Brazil and Early Modern expansion. He received his Ph.D. from Columbia in 1968 and published his first book, *Sovereignty and Society in Colonial Brazil*, in 1973. In addition to his professorship at Yale, Schwartz also taught at the University of Minnesota and served as the Master of Ezra Stiles College from 2003 to 2008. With the rapid expansion of the Brazilian economy, Schwartz's scholarship has been in the emerging spotlight, and the Yale Historical Review greatly appreciates his insights on history and advice for Yale's history students.

Interview

How did you get involved with graduate level history?

I was always interested in history, even since I was in grade school. The more historical something was, the better I liked it—and the more foreign something was, the better I liked it. So I liked ancient history and the history of China or Africa. And in college I was a history major, but thinking of going to law school. I applied and was admitted to law school, but I won the History Prize my senior year, so I decided to pursue a Master's degree in history to see if I liked it...I started a Master's program in Japanese history and after the program, I decided history was what I wanted to do.

Many history majors are facing a similar dilemma between pursuing scholarship and going to law school. What advice would you give them?

I think history is great training for lots of different things. You learn how to write and weigh evidence, as well as balance opinion and evidence, so history is good preparation for lots of different fields ... The academic life is tough. It's not particularly well paid and very demanding. Not everyone who studies history has to become an academic, though, and I think history is good preparation for lots of things.

What, in your opinion, do undergraduates have to do to make good history?

They need to distinguish the levels of veracity in the historical evidence. They need to use sound judgment and good common sense in order to make sense out of an argument. What is interesting about history is that while mathematicians often do their best work in their twenties, historians actually have to mature. Experience is worth something in history. Historians benefit from building up a fund of knowledge. History also has this interesting aspect to it in that you are basically an interpreter between the original material and the audience. That means you need good communication skills through writing and creativity. You have to have a literary grace to communicate effectively...Very good historians, such as Jonathan Spence, are able to package their material in an interesting manner without sacrificing any of the historical integrity.

How did you become interested in Brazil?

I had an interest in Latin America since college, and when I got to graduate school, hardly anyone was studying Brazil. I had a graduate advisor who encouraged me to take Portuguese, and the more I learned, the more interested I got. It is an enormous country, and we didn't really know too much about it in the United States ... Brazil has been the country of the future for five hundred years, and it certainly has the potential to be so, with its resources, culture, and dynamic political systems. I think the future is bright for Brazil, and I'm glad I made the choices I made. I never thought in a million years that I would end up dedicating most of my professional life to Brazil, but it certainly has been the case.

What improvements would you ask most undergraduates to make with their history papers?

The first thing students need to do when writing a paper is to choose a title. Often students come in and they give me their notes and they know what the paper is going to be about, but they don't have a title. It's wrong. You should start with the title because the title tells you what you think you're doing. If you don't know what you're doing, how can anyone else know what you're doing? So even if you change the title, you need one to keep you focused on what you're doing.

What inspired your writing style, and what resources would you suggest students use to improve their own writing?

Well, reading good books isn't a bad way to do it. Read a good book and see how people other than historians deal with emotions and that sort of thing. I think in some ways I wrote better as an undergraduate than when I got through with graduate school. I got professionalized...I'm a great fan of Herman Melville—of course *Moby Dick*, but I also like some of his shorter novels. I like Gabriel Garcia Marquez. His books are often on historical issues but they're novels. Even in the English translation, they exhibit very good writing. I also think Winston Churchill was a very good writer. He had a great ability to communicate. There are many wonderful authors, but that's what I think of when I think of good writing.

Anything else you'd like to say?

I'd have given it all up for a few seasons in Major League Baseball, but it's been a wonderful profession. I sometimes think I'm going to take a break and read some novels, but I always wind up reading history books. It's hard to get away from it when you're addicted.

At-Large

A Southern Strategy: The *Atlanta Constitution* and the Lincoln Centennial, February 1909

Frank Cirillo, SM 2011

The Memory of the Civil War

Professor Samuel Schaffer

2010

Faculty Advisor: Professor Samuel Schaffer

The At-Large Category encompasses papers written by Yale sophomores, juniors, and seniors which fall outside the range of Junior Seminar papers and Senior Essays. Frank Cirillo '11 wrote this essay in Professor Samuel Schaffer's seminar, "The Memory of the Civil War." The course was offered as part of the Residential College Seminar Program, which includes a wide variety of courses intended to enhance the educational life of the residential colleges. In his paper Frank offers a unique and focused look at the southern perception of Lincoln after the Civil War. His investigation relies heavily on newspaper articles written directly before the centennial of Lincoln's birth in February of 1909. Frank is a senior history major in Silliman College.

In the days surrounding the centennial of his birth in February 1909, Abraham Lincoln emerged from beyond the grave to take center stage once more in the American public eye. Newspapers saturated their columns with Lincolnian headlines, detailing lavish celebrations and sublime speeches in Chicago, New York, and Lincoln's adopted hometown of Springfield, Illinois. The *Atlanta Constitution*, based in the former Confederate state of Georgia, was no exception, featuring over fifteen articles on Lincoln in the days before and after his February 12 birthday. The articles all shared a common theme: praise for the former president.

Southern laudation of Lincoln was nothing new: the mainstream southern press had moved from detesting the Union leader as a crude tyrant during the Civil War to admiring him as the quintessential American amid the spirit of reconciliation in the 1880s. The *Constitution's* coverage of Lincoln, however, represented an unprecedented version of white southern adulation. Whether addressing southern commemoration ceremonies, involving southerners and southern symbols in northern events, connecting Lincoln and the South, or relating the former president to racial matters, the *Constitution's* articles all attempted to co-opt the centennial—and Lincoln himself—as means for asserting white southern primacy within the new nation. In the pages of the *Constitution*, the figure of Lincoln and the occasion of his centennial became weapons in the service of a southern-dominated reunion.

The *Constitution's* portrayal of Lincoln denoted a new stage, or at least a singular case, in the evolution of white southern thought respecting the fallen American president. Lincoln's transition from an object of southern scorn to icon in the southern pantheon of heroes is a well-covered historical subject.¹ The memory of Lincoln in the South began during the American Civil

¹ Southern, or southern-oriented, historians first explored the issue in the twentieth century. Archibald Rutledge's "A Southerner Views Lincoln" (*Scribner's Magazine* 83 [Jan.-Jun. 1928]:204-213), Richard Harwell's "'I Have No Prejudice Against the Southern People': Lincoln and the South" (in *Lincoln for the Ages*, Ralph Newman ed. [Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1960], 203-207), Avery Craven's "Southern Attitudes Towards Abraham Lincoln" (in *Papers in Illinois History and Transactions for the Year 1942* [Springfield, IL: The Illinois State Historical Society, 1944], 1-18), J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton's "Lincoln and the South" (*The Sewanee Review* 17, no. 2 [Apr., 1909]: 129-138), and James G. Randall's *Lincoln and the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1946) all discuss how white southerners came to respect and even admire Lincoln by the early twentieth century. Studies have continued in recent scholarship. Merrill Peterson, in *Lincoln in American Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) discusses how people in the North and South celebrated Lincoln as a white supremacist or a common man of the people at the time of the 1909 centennial. Michael Davis, in *The Image of Lincoln in the South* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1971), describes the southern use of Lincoln in the early twentieth century as a way of reintegrating themselves into the nation as patriotic citizens. Richard N. Current, in *Speaking of Abraham Lincoln: The Man and His Meaning for Our Times* (Urbana, IL: The University of Illinois Press, 1983), explores the tension between the visions of Lincoln as Great Emancipator and white supremacist. See also Harold Holzer, "Confederate Caricature of Abraham Lincoln," *Illinois Historical Journal* 80, no. 1 (Spring, 1987): 23-36; and Scott A. Sandage, "A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939-1963," *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (Jun., 1993):135-167.

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War itself. As historians Harold Holzer and Michael Davis showed, Confederate authors portrayed Lincoln in an overwhelmingly negative fashion – an unsurprising treatment, given that the election of Lincoln precipitated southern secession in the first place.² Southern views of Lincoln began to shift after the end of the war and Lincoln’s assassination in 1865. With the onset of Radical Reconstruction, and, as their narrative went, its oppressive treatment of white ex-Confederate southerners, many residents of Dixie came to believe (or at least to publicly claim) that the kind-hearted Lincoln, if alive, would have checked the bloodlust of Republican congressmen and provided the South with a more lenient reconstruction.³ As Davis and Richard N. currently illustrate, the former leaders of the Confederacy, such as Jefferson Davis, combined antipathy for Lincoln’s role in the war with regret at the consequences that his assassination entailed.⁴ To these ex-Confederates, Lincoln was still the enemy, but was the lesser evil when compared to men such as Thaddeus Stevens.

The predominant white southern view of Lincoln further changed in the 1880s with the rise of the “New South” and its associated ideals. Historians such as C. Vann Woodward and Edward Ayers have chronicled the rise of the New South starting in the mid-1870s; as investors began pouring money into southern sawmills and coal mines, railroads began connecting the southern landscape, and southern cities like Atlanta began to modernize and grow at astonishing rates.⁵ In what Woodward termed a “colonial economy,” northern industrialists and railroad magnates poured capital into developing the South, both transforming the South into the producer of raw materials for northern factories and relegating southern elites to positions as

² See Holzer, “Confederate Caricature”: 23-33 and Davis, *The Image of Lincoln*, 62-72. Some southerners lampooned him as the “Illinois Ape,” the hapless and uncouth mid-westerner who, as ardent Confederate John McCabe, Jr. wrote in his 1863 novel *The Aide-de-Camp: A Romance of the War*, was “a weak tool in the hands of the wicked rulers of his [Republican] party.” John McCabe, Jr., *The Aide-de-Camp: A Romance of the War* (Richmond, 1863), quoted in Davis, *The Image of Lincoln*, 70. Others, like the author of a November 1862 cartoon in *Southern Illustrated News* in which Lincoln removes his face to reveal the visage of Satan underneath, attributed the blame of war to Lincoln rather than to his Republican overlords. “Masks and Faces,” *Southern Illustrated News* (November 1862), depicted in Holzer, “Confederate Caricature”: 31.

³ Indeed, Lincoln’s “Ten Percent Plan” of December 1863, in which a former Confederate state could rejoin the Union after ten percent of its voters swore allegiance to the United States, was lenient compared to the plans of the Radical Republicans. Moreover, Lincoln pocket-vetoed the radical Wade-Davis Bill in 1864. Current, *Speaking of Abraham Lincoln*, 88-90.

⁴ Current, *Speaking of Lincoln*, 147-148 and Davis, *The Image of Lincoln*, 111-112. For example, Jefferson Davis, writing in his 1883 *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, declared, “For an enemy so relentless in the war for our subjugation, we could not be expected to mourn; yet, in view of its political consequences, it could not be regarded otherwise than as a great misfortune to the South.” Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1881), 683.

⁵ See C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951) and Edward Ayers, *Southern Crossing: A History of the American South, 1877-1906* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Urban growth in the South occurred at twice the national average from the 1880s and into the early 1900’s. Southern cities were also the first to receive modern infrastructural elements, such as electric rail-cars and electric lights. Ayers, *Southern Crossing*, 14, 38.

middling executives for northern-owned banks, railroads, and corporations.⁶ Increased economic ties therefore fostered a spirit of sectional reunion. Men like Henry Grady, the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* in the 1880s and the voice of the New South, urged both sections to put aside wartime animosities in favor of national progress through intersectional cooperation.⁷

For Grady and other proponents of the New South, Lincoln became a rallying point around which northerners and southerners could reunite. In his “New South” speech given in New York in December 1886, Grady put forth the idea that America was comprised originally of the northern “Puritans” and the southern “Cavaliers.” He then asserted that Lincoln was “the sum of Puritan and Cavalier, for in his ardent nature were fused the virtues of both.” Lincoln was “greater than Puritan, greater than Cavalier” in that he was “the first American,” the prime example of a purely national specimen.⁸ Lincoln transcended sectional bounds, embodying the strengths of both the North and South; he was hence the appropriate symbol for a reunified nation. By including Lincoln in their pantheon of worship, southerners could display their commitment to reunion and intersectional progress. Early twentieth-century historians, such as J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton, reported and reflected the continuation of southern patriotic feelings towards Lincoln in the twentieth century.⁹

As historians have noted, other strains of southern attitude towards Lincoln existed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some unreconstructed southerners, such as the Virginian Charles Minor, never surrendered their hatred of Lincoln,¹⁰ while other prominent southerners proffered a white supremacist view of Lincoln.¹¹ Virulent racists such as Senator James Vardaman and the authors Thomas Page and Thomas Dixon claimed kinship between their views and Lincoln’s on the “Negro question.”¹² Some of these white supremacists, such as

⁶ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 291-292.

⁷ See Henry Grady, “New South’ Speech,” 22 December 1886, <http://www.anselm.edu/academic/history/hdubrulle/CivWar/text/documents/doc54.htm>.

⁸ Grady, “New South Speech”

⁹ As Hamilton notes, “...everything has tended to implant in the minds of this generation of Southerners, reverence for his [Lincoln’s] memory as part of their heritage.” Hamilton, “Lincoln and the South”: 137.

¹⁰ Minor, in *The Real Lincoln* (Richmond, VA: Everett Wadley Company, 1901) deconstructed the heroic view of Lincoln piece by piece. For example, Lincoln was not respectful of religion but was “an infidel.” He did not behave with dignity while in office, but his “gross jokes and stories” constituted “grossly unseemly behavior.” Minor, *The Real Lincoln*, 25, 29-32.

¹¹ See Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 168-170; Current, *Speaking of Abraham Lincoln*, 33-34; and Davis, *The Image of Lincoln*, 145-152.

¹² See Current, *Speaking of Abraham Lincoln*, 33-34 ; Frederick Curtiss, “A Southerner’s View of Abraham Lincoln, February 12, 1909,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 69, Third Series (Oct., 1947- May, 1950): 308-330; Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Clansman* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1905); and Dixon, *The Southerner: A Romance of the Real Lincoln* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1913). Vardaman, for example, constantly cited Lincoln’s denunciation of racial equality during the Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858, as well as Lincoln’s support for colonization and gradual, compensated emancipation. Lincoln did indeed come out against racial equality at

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Dixon, went as far as to claim Lincoln as a southerner. One of the protagonists of his 1905 novel *The Clansman*, Mrs. Cameron, told President Lincoln that she recognized him as a southerner “by your looks, your manner of speech, your easy, kind ways...”¹³ The most important facets of Lincoln’s “southern-ness” were his “ways” regarding race, evinced in his declaration later in the novel that “I can conceive of no greater calamity than the assimilation of the Negro...as our equal.”¹⁴ Dixon hence used Lincoln to justify southern race relations – to show that Lincoln was a southerner, or at least a southern sympathizer, when it came to the “Negro question.” Whereas Grady urged southerners to view Lincoln as a national hero possessing somewhat ambiguous trans-sectional values, Dixon stressed that the “first American” held southern racial views. Lincoln thus became a figure through which the South could advocate its racial solution as the proper American formula. Couching their policies in Lincolnian rhetoric, southerners could assert the propriety of its racial equilibrium and could even export its solution to the rest of the union.

Historians, however, have looked more towards Grady than towards Dixon in explaining how southerners viewed and co-opted the memory of Lincoln during the 1909 centennial. Scholars like Merrill Peterson and Davis have noted the discrepancy in how different groups of southerners viewed the Lincoln centennial. Compared to centennial-related activities in northern cities like New York and Chicago, southern celebrations were scarce.¹⁵ Some southerners, such as Thomas Page, went to the national capital and the North to deliver speeches on Lincoln.¹⁶ Others opted for celebrations in the South involving Confederate and Union veterans.¹⁷ As Davis explains, the southern festivities that did occur focused on the image of Lincoln as national hero or deity, in the same vein as Grady and Kentucky newspaperman Henry Watterson.¹⁸

Charleston, Illinois in September 1858, and supported colonization and gradual emancipation even years into the war. However, Vardaman and other white supremacists tended to ignore the speeches and actions of Lincoln that contradicted their claims. Moreover, they ignored the evolution of Lincoln’s views on race over the course of the war. Current, *Speaking of Lincoln*, 29-34 and Davis, *The Image of Lincoln*, 147.

¹³ Dixon, *The Clansman*, 31.

¹⁴ Dixon, *The Clansman*, 46.

¹⁵ Whereas an estimated million people participated in centennial-related events in New York City, and 20,000 attended the Reverend Jenkins Lloyd Jones’ stereopticon lecture on Lincoln on February 13th in Chicago, nothing of such scale occurred in the South. Though a number of banquets and celebrations did occur, festivities were largely confined to major cities and towns. Memphis and Little Rock were the only cities to form centennial commissions, and Arkansas was the only state to declare the day a half-holiday. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 183-191 and Davis, *The Image of Lincoln*, 166-168.

¹⁶ Curtiss’ “A Southerner’s View of Abraham Lincoln” reproduced Page’s February 12th speech at a centennial gathering in Washington, D.C.

¹⁷ This occurred in northern celebrations as well. Davis, *The Image of Lincoln*, 166-168.

¹⁸ Davis, *The Image of Lincoln*, 168. Watterson argued in an 1895 speech that Lincoln was “one of God’s own” – a divine instrument to purge the nation of slavery and sectionalism, so that the nation could move forward in unity. Watterson in Davis, *The Image of Lincoln*, 165.

The South, however, had changed since Grady's 1886 speech. Numerous scholars have noted the resurgence of southern pride and assertiveness that began in the 1880s and 1890s. David Blight chronicled a shift among Lost Cause practitioners from mourning defeat to asserting the role of the South in the national heritage.¹⁹ Writers like Page aimed literature at northern audiences, while Confederate heritage groups and monuments began to multiply.²⁰ As Nina Silber and others have shown, southern men reasserted themselves as masculine and martial contributors to the nation, especially after the Spanish-American War, in which the first American to die was a southerner.²¹ Southern men – and the South itself – achieved new prominence in the national eye following the war, as both southern and northern authors praised the glories of southern manhood.²² Though Silber emphasized the channeling of newfound southern assertiveness into nationalistic sentiments, some southerners used resurgent Dixie pride to promote the position of the South within the Union.²³ Lincoln, Grady's quintessential American, was the perfect instrument for such schemes.²⁴ By making the former president stand for southern positions, southerners could advertise and spread their values to the rest of the country as Lincolnian – and hence properly American – mores. Dixon's novels, for example, co-opted Lincoln to export the South's vision of racial hierarchy nationwide.

In 1909, the *Atlanta Constitution* followed and surpassed the *Clansman's* example; going beyond solely racial matters, its coverage of the Lincoln centennial, and of Lincoln itself, portrayed the South as the soul of – and hence the dominant partner in – the reunited nation. Though it is unclear if the editors of the *Constitution* intended to coordinate their articles in a concerted strategy or not, different articles nonetheless used various approaches to arrive at the common conclusion: the right of the South to cultural, moral, and racial dominance within the union. For instance, the articles covering the centennial celebrations in Atlanta turned the Grady formula on its head, subtly using the rhetoric of reconciliation to establish the South's moral superiority within the reunited nation. "Atlanta's Significant Tribute to Lincoln," an article from February 14 commenting on the official celebrations that would take place that night at Trinity Church, seemingly deployed the rhetoric of patriotism and nationalism. The *Constitution* began

¹⁹ David Blight, " 'For Something Beyond the Battlefield': Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for the Memory of the Civil War," *Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (Mar., 1989): 1156-1178.

²⁰ The United Confederate Veterans formed in 1889 and the United Daughters of the Confederacy formed in 1895. The years 1885-1912 saw a flurry of Confederate monument-building, especially after the statue of Robert E. Lee went up in Richmond in 1890. Blight, "For Something Beyond": 13, and Ayers, *Southern Crossing*, 262-263.

²¹ According to Silber, the South prior to the 1890s was largely seen in feminized terms, as the subordinate and unruly partner of the North. This changed amid the cult of patriotism and masculine ethos of the 1890s. Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 159-196 and Ayers, *Southern Crossing*, 258.

²² Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 187.

²³ Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 196.

²⁴ Minor, who railed against the deification and idolization of Lincoln that had occurred in the North, inadvertently illustrated how popular Lincoln had become. Minor, *The Real Lincoln*, 9-10.

by praising the planned ceremony, which would involve speeches from members of both the United Confederate Veterans and the Grand Army of the Republic and thus “bring together in common cause to honor the memory of the great American, the veterans both of the blue and of the gray.” The memory of Lincoln could facilitate fraternal reconciliation, since the former president “belong[ed] to the whole United States” and since “his work was not sectional, but national...” Hence, in a Grady-like summation, southern celebration of Lincoln was “evidence of a triumphantly restored nationalism.”²⁵ In words that could have come from 1886, the author stressed the ability of the Lincoln centennial to foster national unity.

While the author paid lip service to Grady, he ultimately revealed an ulterior, sectional agenda. In a seemingly reconciliationist vein, he praised the “victory of fraternal spirit over the deep-rooted enmities of civil strife,” a moral triumph without which no celebration was possible. The “mutual tribute which confederate survivors, together with those who stood in opposing ranks” would pay to Lincoln evinced such a spirit of fraternalism. The laurels of moral victory, however, tipped to one side in the reunion. Northerners, in paying tribute to Lincoln, were honoring their “most abiding of friends.” Southerners, on the other hand, were honoring their “most generous of enemies” – a kindly former nemesis, to be sure, but their conqueror nonetheless. Thus, the “south’s [moral] victory [was] greatest” since it “had not only to erase the enmities of war, but to crush and blot out the rankling bitterness of defeat.”²⁶ Southerners had to overcome their loss in the war and their associated resentment of Lincoln. Their ability to celebrate Lincoln’s birthday was thus a tribute to their moral strength. Northerners, who underwent no such trials, displayed less moral courage; in claiming victory, the author turned military defeat into a display of moral superiority over the North. By implication, the South and its values, as the ethical hearts of the nation, thus deserved national pre-eminence.

The *Constitution’s* report following the Trinity Church ceremony revealed the same pattern. The February 15 article “Blue and the Gray Join in a Tribute to Lincoln” discussed the splendor of veterans in blue and gray standing side-by-side and detailed the various speeches, lingering on excerpts from the sermon of the Trinity Church pastor, Reverend Dr. James W. Lee. The excerpt included Watterson-like rhetoric, in which Lee praised Lincoln as “one of our race ... who live[s] again not only in eternity, but throughout all time.” The memory of Lincoln would rightfully persevere. In practical terms, Lincoln could also foster national unity, since “soldiers in blue, and soldiers in gray ... are able to see ... territory sufficient in the heart of Lincoln for all brave men to stand and love.”²⁷ Northerners and southerners could build ties over their mutual adoration for Lincoln, thus furthering sectional reunion.

²⁵ “Atlanta’s Significant Tribute to Lincoln,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 February 1909.

²⁶ “Atlanta’s Significant Tribute to Lincoln,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 February 1909.

²⁷ The Reverend Dr. James W. Lee, quoted in “Blue and the Gray Join in a Tribute to Lincoln,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 February 1909.

At the same time that he praised sectional harmony, however, Lee also made the case for the right of the South to moral authority within the reunited nation. Towards the end of the article, Lee declared that “[s]o great are we [the former Confederacy] as a people that it has taken only fifty sad heart-rending years to bring us to a national level of good will,” in which they could honor not only dead Confederates but also “those who fought on the side of victory.” As in the previous article, the South had become the epitome of morality, overcoming suffering to display goodwill towards its former enemies. The Lincoln centennial was an occasion for a southern display of ethical greatness. Lee made southern moral superiority over the North explicit later in the article. The reverend declared that “the time is not far distant when memorial services like this will be held in the great cities of the north in honor of Jefferson Davis.” As an example, he cited President Roosevelt’s “climb[ing] high enough above sectional lines to congratulate the people of Mississippi” on producing such a great man as Davis.²⁸ While the North would someday honor Davis, however, it had not done so for his centennial in 1908. While it offered the occasional compliment, the North could not yet place Davis in its pantheon of heroes. Thus, the only section that had the present courage to honor its former chief adversary was the South. Lee looked forward to the day when the North would follow in the South’s moral footsteps and display the same level of goodwill; the South was thus the moral guide of the nation. The article’s author, who ended the excerpt soon after these statements, further ensured that the theme of southern ethical dominance would remain in the minds of his audience.

While the *Constitution* asserted the moral superiority of the South through its coverage of the Atlanta ceremony, it emphasized the rightful prominence of southerners and their symbols in the identity of the reunited nation through its coverage of northern commemoration events. An article from February 13 entitled “Lincoln Paid High Tribute at Old Home” summarized centennial celebrations across the United States, including those in New York, Chicago, Memphis, and Birmingham. The city of Little Rock announced its intention to hold a banquet for the centennial, in which “confederate flags w[ould] mingle with the stars and the stripes in the decorations.”²⁹ This southern ceremony mixed the symbols of the two former enemies, symbolizing a southern willingness for reconciliation.

Below these notices, however, was an item under the blaring headline of “Removed Confederate Flag.” This item detailed the removal of a Confederate flag from decorations for the Lincoln celebration in Indianapolis following “vigorous protests . . . by veterans of the civil war.”³⁰ While the author did not voice his opinion on the subject, the juxtaposition of this event – in which northerners refused to allow the symbol of the Confederacy on their soil – with the southern events provided a clear message. As Silber noted, the martial reconciliation ceremonies

²⁸ “Blue and the Gray Join in a Tribute to Lincoln,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 February 1909.

²⁹ “Lincoln Paid High Tribute at Old Home,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 February 1909.

³⁰ “Lincoln Paid High Tribute at Old Home,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 February 1909.

that began in the 1890s included symbols, such as military uniforms, from both sections.³¹ As seen in the Little Rock ceremonies, white southerners embraced intersectional symbolism for the Lincoln centennial, viewing it as another event of national reconciliation. The North, however, refused to do so. The author thus subtly criticized northern actions, evincing the South's moral superiority. Moreover, he implied that the Confederate flag deserved a role in celebrations of national heritage, especially one honoring the quintessential American. The article, in subtly protesting injustice, asserted the right of a southern symbol to prominence on the national stage.

Other articles used the Lincoln centennial to thrust another southern symbol, the song "Dixie," into national prominence. In "Singing of 'Dixie' No Act of Treason," from February 7, the *Constitution* explored a controversy over the singing of "Dixie" in the North. The article began with the following question: "Did any authorized...person in Chicago forbid as an act of treason the singing of 'Dixie' in the public schools during the Lincoln celebration?" The author then related that a rumor confirming such a ban had circulated among southerners. As with the Confederate flag article, the author did not make his own explicit judgments. Nevertheless, the use of the word "treason" in the question practically invited a sense of outrage among readers. For southerners, who mixed southern and national symbols at their own celebrations of Lincoln, there was nothing traitorous about the presence of a southern cultural symbol at an intersectional event. Any accusations to the contrary thus insulted southern honor. A reprinted letter from a member of the New Orleans Progressive Union to the Chicago Association of Commerce president declared that the ban be rescinded if "Chicago wishes to make any progress in the south." As with the Confederate flag, the article used the occasion of Lincoln's centennial to assert the rightful place of "Dixie" on the national stage. Chicago officials concurred, denying that a ban had existed.³²

While the article took advantage of the opportunity that the nationally celebrated Lincoln centennial provided to push for the prominence of southern symbols nationwide, it also co-opted Lincoln in the service of southern cultural dominance. Under the heading "Lincoln Liked Dixie," the article reprinted the words of Joseph Nimmo, Jr., a surviving friend of Lincoln who responded to the Chicago rumor by recalling Lincoln's discussion of "Dixie" in 1865. Nimmo noted how Lincoln traced the song from its northern roots to its southern co-optation during the war. Lincoln then wryly noted that since "Dixie" was now captured Union property, a band before him could strike up the tune. Thus, as Nimmo concluded, the "good-natured humor of Abraham Lincoln" made "Dixie" a "truly national song."³³

In one sense, Lincoln nationalized a song that was northern in origin, taking it back from the grasp of the South. Indeed, the notion of captured property implied as much. In another

³¹ Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 178-179.

³² "Singing of 'Dixie' No Act of Treason," *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 February 1909.

³³ "Singing of 'Dixie' No Act of Treason," *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 February 1909.

sense, however, Lincoln legitimized a southern symbol as an American icon. As time had shown, the wartime association of “Dixie” with the South was indelible.³⁴ Thus, the article credited Lincoln with the diffusion of a southern icon into the national psyche. Whether Lincoln wanted to recapture “Dixie” from the South or mask his affection for the now-southern song in the language of the mock conqueror, the “first American” nonetheless enabled “Dixie,” with its southern cultural stamp, to become a national symbol. The *Constitution* hence co-opted Lincoln to stress the legitimacy of “Dixie” and the southern values it stood for as American values. The authors of an untitled article from February 8 smugly announced the actualization of the southern cultural coup, noting that they were “now listening to the National song of ‘Dixie’ at a Lincoln celebration.”³⁵ By aiming to transform southern icons and values into national symbols and mores, the *Constitution* worked to further southern cultural dominance of the national identity. With respect to “Dixie,” at least, the paper succeeded.

The *Constitution* articles, besides emphasizing the right of southern symbols to national cultural participation or even hegemony, also used the occasion of the northern centennial events to assert the prominent role of the southern people in the Union. Many articles focused on the experiences of the southerners who went north to participate in the centennial celebrations in major northern cities. “Congressman Howard to Be Lincoln Orator,” an article from the February 11 issue of the *Constitution*, discussed the invitation of Georgia Congressman William Howard to northern centennial events. After speaking in Decatur, Illinois, he would go to Springfield as the “guest of the state celebration committee – the ceremonies . . . being not only of state-wide, but of national interest.”³⁶ The article not only spotlighted the presence of a southerner at northern celebrations, but also emphasized the propriety of such a southern role. The Illinois centennial commission, recognizing that the Springfield celebration was a national ceremony, naturally made a southerner its guest of honor. The Lincoln centennial was a platform from which all could affirm the right of southerners to prominence in national events.

Other articles focused on Judge Emory Speer of Georgia, who delivered a centennial oration on Lincoln’s birthday at the Twelfth Regiment Armory in New York City. These articles went beyond asserting the presence of southerners at national events, declaring the right of the denizens of Dixie to advance clearly southern views at such ceremonies. The *Constitution* articles discussing Speer’s upcoming speech emphasized his role as a southerner. “Judge Speer Goes to New York,” from February 10, notes that “[as] a southerner, [Speer] will be heard with much

³⁴For example, the band accompanying the congressional declaration of war on Spain in 1898 played both “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “Dixie,” symbolizing the reunited marital prowess of North and South. Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 178-179.

³⁵ “Article No. 2-Untitled,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 February 1909.

³⁶ “Congressman Howard to Be Lincoln Orator,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 February 1909.

interest.”³⁷ The article clearly implied that Speer traveled to New York as a bearer of his southern sectional identity. An earlier article from February 7, “Judge Speer to Speak at Lincoln Centenary,” likewise noted that Speer’s speech on Lincoln would be fascinating due to Speer’s “southern loyalty and patriotism” and his ability to “represent in true form the southern outlook.”³⁸ Speer was a vessel through which southern views could enter into a national celebration of the first American – and on northern soil, no less.

Speer’s own speech, excerpted in an article from February 13, explained the national implications of a southern presence at the Lincoln centennial. He devoted much of his speech to a Davis-like lamentation at the consequences of Lincoln’s “taking off” for the South, leaving no doubt in the minds of his audience that he was speaking from a southern point of view. The first part of his speech, then, emphasized the right of a southerner to advocate his sectionalist views on a national stage. Speer then declared the resurgence of southern patriotism, asserting that “the old American spirit is again flaming in our hearts.” The South would forever defend the American nation because “southern men worthy of the name ever cherish a common, tender sympathy for the homogenous population” and for the “primitive virtues of the brave and kindly American stock.”³⁹ Speer thus cloaked his ultimate agenda in the language of reconciliations. At least some northerners took the bait, embracing Speer’s speech as a paean to reunion. The *New-York Tribune*, for example, highlighted the reconciliationist aspect of the speech in a February 13 article, excerpting little of the address beyond Speer’s discussion of Lincoln’s benevolence and the Georgian’s affirmation of a southern patriotic spirit.⁴⁰

Speer, however, had an endgame in mind other than mere reconciliation. As the *Constitution* article noted, Speer invoked Lincoln in discussing the “primitive virtues.” In one sense, Speer thus reflected Grady’s notion of Lincoln as the “first American,” binding the sections together through his quintessentially American values. Speer, however, invoked Lincoln by “referring to the fact that he was southern born.”⁴¹ Speer drew on a strong American belief in the connection between a person’s values and his heritage. For example, on the same day as Speer’s speech, then-President Roosevelt explicitly linked the former president’s values to his geographical origins, speaking about Lincoln’s character at his birthplace in Kentucky.⁴² By invoking Lincoln’s southern heritage, Speer implied that Lincoln also possessed southern values. Moreover, since Lincoln did indeed epitomize the national character, southern values were the true American mores. Speer supported a reunion based on the traits of Lincoln because such a

³⁷ “Judge Speer Goes to New York,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 February 1909.

³⁸ “Judge Speer to Speak at Lincoln Centenary,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 February 1909.

³⁹ Judge Emory Speer, quoted in “Tribute Paid to Lincoln by Judge Emory Speer,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 February 1909.

⁴⁰ “In School and Armory Lincoln’s Virtues and Deeds Extolled,” *New-York Tribune*, 13 February 1909.

⁴¹ “Tribute Paid to Lincoln by Judge Emory Speer,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 February 1909.

⁴² See “Lincoln Paid High Tribute at Old Home,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 February 1909.

reunion cast southern values as the purest form of American ideals. Lincoln and his values became the means through which the southern way of life could dominate the American values system and an American icon and the language of reconciliation could legitimize southern pre-eminence in the Union. Thus, the *Constitution's* articles on southern symbols and speakers at northern events asserted the right of southern mores to a presence in (or dominance of) the national heritage.

A series of articles and advertisements furthered Speer's ideas, connecting Lincoln to the South and legitimizing southern dominance of the still-developing national psyche. An advertisement from February 1, though not an official opinion of the *Constitution* and its writers, nonetheless fit in with the newspaper's strategy of stressing the connection between Lincoln and the South. The ad, under the title of "The Real Menace of Pistol Toting," publicized the February 1909 issue of *Uncle Remus' The Home Magazine*. Included in the issue would be a reprinted story by the late creator of the magazine, the southern writer and former *Constitution* associate editor Joel Chandler Harris, on "The Kidnapping of Lincoln."⁴³ The fictional story dealt with the "historical attempt ... to steal the person of the President from Washington ... and hold him in the South as a hostage of war." Harris, the ad noted, "through the traits of his own sympathetic nature, was peculiarly fitted to understand Lincoln, whose creed was also one in which love and laughter found conspicuous place."⁴⁴ Harris could portray Lincoln because of their similar beliefs and behavior. Harris, as a southern icon, possessed the values of Dixie. Hence, Lincoln too was, at least temperamentally, a son of the South.⁴⁵ Thus, Harris returned to the pages of the *Constitution* in 1909 to co-opt Lincoln as a southern symbol. With the "first American" a southerner, Speer's vision of southern domination was only a short leap away.

Other articles explicitly marked Lincoln as a man of southern blood. In the February 15 article "Virginia Claims Abraham Lincoln," a reporter for the *Constitution* discussed Lincoln's southern roots. The correspondent noted that Lincoln "sprang from a very old Virginia family" and accurately explained how his ancestors migrated from Virginia to Kentucky.⁴⁶ While technically correct, the author's misleading emphasis on Lincoln's direct connection to Virginia,

⁴³ Harris worked at the *Constitution* from 1876-1900. The creator of the "Uncle Remus" stories, his *Uncle Remus' Magazine* merged with another publication to become *Uncle Remus' The Home Magazine* following his death in 1908. Hugh T. Keenan (Ed.), *Dearest Chums and Partners: Joel Chandler Harris' Letters to His Children* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1993), 507.

⁴⁴ "The Real Menace of Pistol Toting," *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 February 1909.

⁴⁵ The substance of the story reaffirmed the ad's implications: as Michael Davis noted, Lincoln ultimately escaped an untimely fate in the story by revealing his southern personality. In the story, Billy Sanders of Georgia traveled to Washington, D.C. to kidnap Lincoln. Upon meeting Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln, however, Sanders fell under the sway of their southern charms. He ultimately abandoned his plot, choosing fraternity over malice. Davis, *The Image of Lincoln*, 143-145.

⁴⁶ "Virginia Claims Abraham Lincoln," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 February 1909. Lincoln did indeed descend from Virginian ancestors. Randall, *Lincoln and the South*, 7.

and his omitting of the Lincoln family's moves beyond Virginia and Kentucky, seemed to create the impression that the Lincolns had never left the South.⁴⁷ Indeed, the article included a picture of Abraham Lucius Lincoln, a member of the Virginia Lincolns, with a caption falsely describing him as the "Lineal Descendant of President Abraham Lincoln."⁴⁸ At the end of the article, the correspondent mentioned the remarks of Reverend W.W. Staley, who, at the Virginian Lincoln's graduation from Elon College in 1908, remarked that the student physically resembled the former president. Staley then urged him to "build a character" of equally strong resemblance.⁴⁹ The article, in alternating between the Illinoisan Lincoln's Virginian ancestors and his spitting-image Virginian "descendant," all but portrayed Lincoln as a Virginian himself. Given the belief in the connection between heritage and values that Speer and Roosevelt illustrated, the author's implication was clear: Lincoln's southern origins begot southern values.

Moreover, the article depicted Lincoln as yearning to establish a formal connection to the South. The news around which the article focused was the discovery of letters from Lincoln to Abraham Lucius' grandfather from 1848. The letters were, in the words of the correspondent, "pathetic effort[s] to establish and prove his [Lincoln's] claims to Virginia ancestry."⁵⁰ The *Constitution* reprinted the letters in a concurrent article as proof.⁵¹ Having recognized the affinity between his mores and those of the South, Lincoln, the southerner by birth, applied for admission into the ranks of the southern people. Lincoln's correspondence earned the author's sympathy because of the earnestness with which Lincoln sought to establish a connection between himself and the Virginian nobility—a connection that would garner him recognition as the possessor of legitimately southern values. The article thus tied Lincoln to the South through both his heritage and his willful intent. Lincoln's greatness, then, stemmed from his conscious efforts to embrace and emulate the ideals of his southern ancestors. The South made Lincoln the man he was. As the literal and moral progenitor of the great American, the South thus deserved recognition as the soul of the American civilization.

The *Constitution's* coverage of the Lincoln centennial reproduced Dixon's assertiveness to further southern domination of the American moral and cultural entity as a whole. At the same time, the newspaper did not neglect the issue that preoccupied Dixon: the race question. At the heart of the issue in 1909 was the desire of white Atlanta elites for a stable racial hierarchy. Since the segregation of railroad cars in the 1880s, the separation of whites from African-Americans

⁴⁷ By the early 1900's, Kentucky—originally a part of the Old Northwest—was considered a southern state. Thomas Lincoln and his family, including son Abraham, had left Kentucky and moved to Indiana and then Illinois, consciously rejecting a slaveholding society. Current, *Speaking of Lincoln*, 162-163.

⁴⁸ "Virginia Claims Abraham Lincoln," *Atlanta Constitution*. The article itself demonstrated that Abraham and Abraham Lucius Lincoln were not lineally related. The ex-president's grandfather and Abraham Lucius' great-grandfather were brothers, but their lines diverged henceforth.

⁴⁹ The Rev. W.W. Staley, quoted in "Virginia Claims Abraham Lincoln," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 February 1909.

⁵⁰ "Virginia Claims Abraham Lincoln," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 February 1909.

⁵¹ "Unpublished Correspondence as to Lincoln's Ancestry," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 February 1909.

had become the norm across the South. The white-dominated society imposed upon African-Americans constant reminders of their social inferiority. Beginning in the early 1900s, black resistance to the racial status quo gathered around the sociologist W.E.B. DuBois and his Georgia-based Niagara Movement, formed in 1905, which called for black equality in all spheres of life.⁵² As David Godshalk noted in his study on the subject, fear of the side effects of the New South system, combined with rising racial tensions due to the Niagara Movement's agitations, precipitated a race riot in Atlanta in September 1906.⁵³ Following the multi-day riots, which left at least twenty blacks dead, African-Americans increasingly turned to radical agitation, leading to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909.⁵⁴

White elites, seeking to restore calm and stable race relations, looked to their black 'ally,' Booker T. Washington. Washington had gained national prominence following a 1895 speech that established his principle of the "Atlanta Compromise," in which blacks should publicly renounce claims on an arena already lost to them – politics – and focus instead on achieving economic progress. White elites immediately latched on to Washington's proposals, seeing in them a way to maintain proper race relations in an orderly fashion.⁵⁵ Following the 1906 riots, Atlantan white elites reached out to Washington to establish biracial efforts at order and cooperation. Washington, fighting a rearguard action against increasing black opposition to his policies, reciprocated, tying himself more closely to the white elites.⁵⁶

Biracial cooperation did not entail a more progressive attitude towards African-Americans. Indeed, as Scott Sandage noted, Atlanta passed disfranchisement and discrimination

⁵² Ayers, *Southern Crossing*, 100, 267. As an example of institutionalized racism, blacks needed to doff their hats when entering public spaces reserved for whites, while whites did not remove their hats for blacks, even when entering an African-American home. Blacks were also not allowed to walk, shake hands, or fraternize with whites in public. Ayers, *Southern Crossing*, 89.

⁵³ The riot began in central Atlanta, the home of the unofficial organ of the Niagara movement, Jesse Max Barber's *Voice of the Negro*. In addition to racial tensions, the effects of rapid industrialization, commercialization, and urbanization, such as the proliferation of saloons and brothels in central Atlanta, led whites to seek a scapegoat on which to blame the moral ills of their society. African-Americans provided such a scapegoat, especially after white newspapers like the *Georgian* and the *News* inflamed the public over the summer through repeated reports of black assaults on white women. David Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riots and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 1,31-34, 39-41.

⁵⁴ Godshalk, *Veiled Visions*, 1-3.

⁵⁵ Washington's ideas were more complicated than white newspapers such as the *Constitution*, which called the Atlanta Compromise "the beginning of a moral revolution in America," made them out to be. For example, by 1900 he was spending thousands of dollars behind the scenes to fight segregation and even disfranchisement across the South. White newspapers tended to overlook or ignore such acts. Ayers, *Southern Crossing*, 162-167, 267.

⁵⁶ White leaders offered Washington and a selective few other Atlantan black elites the prospect of interracial law-and-order dialogue and organizations. Washington felt that such actions would prove his belief that interracial dialogue could best ameliorate racial tensions. A biracial civil league hence formed in November 1906. Godshalk, *Veiled Visions*, 126, 151.

laws against African-Americans a month before the Lincoln centennial.⁵⁷ The *Constitution*, not known for progressive racial sentiments, displayed none in its coverage of the Lincoln centennial.⁵⁸ Two articles, “Protest by Negroes” from February 1 and “Three Great Countries Honor Abraham Lincoln at Springfield Banquet” from February 13 mentioned black criticism over their exclusion from the Lincoln centennial banquet in Springfield, Illinois.⁵⁹ The February 1 article noted how a black organization condemned their exclusion from the banquet as an act “absolutely in violation of the very principle for which Abraham Lincoln fought hardest.”⁶⁰ The February 13 article described and briefly quoted the protests of a black minister.⁶¹ Neither article, however, offered a word of endorsement for the African-American position.

Racial justice was not on the *Constitution*’s agenda; racial stability, however, was. The *Constitution* thus used Booker T. Washington and the Lincoln centennial to firm up its vision of racial hierarchy. At the same time, the paper worked to co-opt or neutralize the so-called “emancipationist narrative,” popular among blacks and some northern whites, which called for the use of the memory of Lincoln – the “Great Emancipator” of the slaves – to fight racial injustice in the present day.⁶² An article from February 13 excerpted a centennial speech that Washington had given the previous day in New York. Washington’s speech included a number of provocative elements. He lauded Lincoln as the “Great Emancipator,” spreading the principle that man everywhere must be physically free but also “must be enlightened.” Education and intellectual progress were the legacies that Lincoln bequeathed to blacks. Moreover, Lincoln emancipated the white race of the need to keep blacks in ignorance. In saying that “no man ... need feel constrained to fear or hate of his brother,” Washington criticized those men who continued to pursue discriminatory policies. Finally, he drew a parallel between Lincoln and blacks. Like blacks left bondage, Lincoln “unfettered himself” of the burdens of prejudice to see the truth of racial harmony. Therefore, through comparison Washington created a measure of equality between blacks and the former president.⁶³

The *Constitution* article reprinted none of these provocative passages in its article. As Godshalk noted, the paper had a tendency to selectively choose its desired message out of

⁵⁷ Sandage, “A Marble House Divided”: 237.

⁵⁸ For example, Clark Howell, the editor and owner of the *Constitution*, publicly opposed black education in his run for Georgia governor in 1906. He opposed disfranchisement laws such as literary tests only because they would qualify poor whites alongside their intended target of blacks. Godshalk, *Veiled Visions*, 49.

⁵⁹ Jim Crow maintained a presence at the banquet, as well as at William Jennings Bryan’s speech and other events in Springfield. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 183.

⁶⁰ “Protest by Negroes,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 February 1909.

⁶¹ “Three Great Countries Honor Abraham Lincoln at Springfield Banquet,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 February 1909.

⁶² See Sandage, “A Marble House Divided”: 139, 148-149 and Blight, “For Something Beyond the Battlefield.”

⁶³ Booker T. Washington, “An Address on Abraham Lincoln,” 12 February 1909, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=937>.

Washington's words.⁶⁴ Under the headline of "Example to Negro Race, Says Booker Washington," the author used Washington's speech to promote the white southern version of race relations. Omitting his discussion of enlightenment and his comparison between Lincoln and blacks, the article reprinted Washington's exhortation for blacks to follow Lincoln's example by being "simple, without bigotry and without ostentation." Whereas Washington had paired such advice with a call for education, and with a leveling of the plane between Lincoln and blacks, the *Constitution* reduced him to reminding blacks to lead simple lives – to accept their places as inferiors unworthy of extensive education or grand dreams. The *Constitution* also kept Washington's declaration that "Lincoln... was a southern man by birth," albeit one that recognized the immorality of keeping "another group of humanity ... in ignorance."⁶⁵ By stressing Washington's depiction of Lincoln as a white southerner, the article strengthened the claim of the white South on Lincoln and hence on the national identity. Lincoln's southern-ness was a universal truth, to the point that even an African-American leader admitted it.

Moreover, Washington's qualification of Lincoln's southern nature proved irrelevant, since white southerners were not racial oppressors but emancipationists. The *Constitution* allowed Washington to call Lincoln "the great emancipator of my [the black] race," but only because Washington immediately followed this statement with a tribute to the "white men of the south who ... are today working ... to uplift the negro in the south and complete the emancipation that Lincoln began." Though these southerners "saw in Lincoln's policy the ruin of all they believed in and hoped for," they loyally accepted the results of the war and set about fulfilling Lincoln's goals with regard to the African-American race.⁶⁶ Here was the southern argument for moral superiority: since southerners had to come farther than northerners in learning to accept the postwar world, they deserved recognition as the moral force of the nation. Here was the southern claim to cultural predominance: southerners, as the practitioners of Lincoln's policies, were also heirs to his title of "first American." And here was the subversion of the emancipationist narrative to serve the white southern view on race relations: since southern whites were the heirs of Lincoln, they could cloak racism under the emancipationist guise as policies meant to protect their wards. Through his use of Washington, the author left opponents of southern race relations with an impossible choice: accept the status quo or abandon Lincoln. The article thus worked to push the southern racial solution towards national acceptance.

⁶⁴ Godshalk provided numerous examples of the *Constitution*, as well as other papers, distorting Washington's messages. In an August 30 speech, for example, Washington briefly criticized "black vagabonds before launching into a denunciation of lynching as the ultimate obstacle to southern economic prosperity. The *Constitution* ignored the latter criticism, opting instead for the title "Law-Breaking Negroes Worst Menace to Race." Godshalk, *Veiled Visions*, 83.

⁶⁵ "Example to Negro Race, Says Booker Washington," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 February 1909.

⁶⁶ "Example to Negro Race, Says Booker Washington," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 February 1909.

At-Large

The *Constitution* worked to subvert the emancipationist narrative by another means through the article “Lincoln Paid High Tribute at Old Home.” In discussing the ceremonies at Lincoln’s birthplace in Kentucky, where President Roosevelt delivered a speech, the author noted that African-American attendance at the event was low. The mixing of the few blacks that were present “among the whites,” however, showed “that none had been kept away by race prejudice.”⁶⁷ The author therefore established the benevolence of white southerners, who did not deny blacks a role in the ceremonies. At the same time, the author challenged the connection between blacks and Lincoln which the emancipationist narrative espoused. Blacks consciously avoided the ceremony out of a seeming lack of respect towards the former president. Hence, either the emancipationist narrative’s claim that blacks were the prime recipients of Lincoln’s grace was a lie, or the African-Americans were ungrateful. The article thus posed another dilemma for opponents of southern race relations, all the while showing that white Kentuckians respected Lincoln. Southerners had adopted the northern president as their own; in the same way, northerners should emulate the southern racial system.

The *Constitution*’s coverage of the Lincoln centennial thus challenges the historical consensus that southerners in 1909 used the Lincoln celebrations to reintegrate themselves into the section-less nation. The Atlanta newspaper’s articles did indeed display a desire for a complete, fulfilled reunion; the southern version of a national reunion, however, entailed their moral and cultural dominance. Through the figure of Abraham Lincoln and the celebrations surrounding his centenary, the *Constitution* asserted the South’s role as the nation’s moral compass, its cultural source, and its wise sage on racial matters. The publication, either as a singular actor or as the representative of a larger sentiment, deformed Lincoln’s character and the beliefs for which he actually stood. Lincoln’s memory became a weapon in a renewed – albeit bloodless – sectional war. It was an effective weapon, given the lasting import and power of the Civil War and its figures in American memory. Indeed, the inclusion of southern symbols like “Dixie” at national centennial events demonstrated the ability of the *Constitution* and other southern advocates to use the memory of the Civil War to successfully further the position of the South in the present. That the *Constitution*’s strategy worked made the journal’s conscious twisting of the character, values, and actions of Lincoln all the more nefarious.

⁶⁷ “Lincoln Paid High Tribute at Old Home,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 February 1909.

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Outside of Yale

No More Traipsing through the Peanut Fields: Jimmy Carter, Campaign Advertising, and the Failure of 1980

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The History of the United States since 1945

Professor Benjamin Waterhouse

2010

The Outside Essay category provides one non-Yale student the opportunity to publish an essay in the Yale Historical Review. Nick Andersen, a sophomore at the University of North Carolina, wrote this essay for The History of the United States Since 1945, a class taught by Benjamin Waterhouse in UNC's history department. Nick's paper was selected from over fifty submitted essays. This essay takes a media studies approach to Jimmy Carter's reelection bid and discusses the influence of television on campaigns.

Outside of Yale

It was a Presidential election cycle unlike any other in American history. The beleaguered, unpopular President, Gerald Ford, – beset with economic and foreign policy crises and forced to deal with an upstart challenger from the extreme wing of his party in the primaries – had to summon the strength and financial resources to defeat a surprisingly resolute opposition candidate in the general election. Despite a sharply divided internal organization and a series of minor campaign gaffes from Jimmy Carter, the opposing party won the White House, ushering in a new understanding of the role of the president and his election in modern American life.

The election of 1976 would be unique if it had not been repeated in 1980. With a shift in party names and positions yet many of the same central actors, both elections stunned observers, proving to be lasting indications of the direction American national politics would take as the 20th century entered its final quarter.¹ In the election of 1976, the Democratic Party regained the White House in the person of Jimmy Carter, an obscure populist and former Georgia governor. Carter ran an expansive grassroots campaign from the primaries on. His success exemplified a new way of winning national elections for the American Left through forced regional coalitions of unlikely political actors.² On the Right, similarly unlikely former governor Ronald Reagan of California swept his party's primaries and rode a conservative wave of support to a resounding defeat of Carter in 1980.

Beyond the similar narratives of each cycle, these two presidential elections had much in common in the prevalence of television advertisements as a method of conveying essential thematic candidate images to the general public. The effects of television ads in political campaigns are still widely debated, but many studies suggest that the electorate's opinion of a candidate's essential image and therefore overall electability is greatly influenced by exposure to political advertisements.³

While all candidates can be aided by the images their advertisements project, no candidate was helped and later hurt by his advertisements quite like Carter. Though many factors conspired against Carter in the 1980 presidential election, his inability to lock in a concrete public image in his second presidential campaign contributed greatly to his failure to be reelected. This was not an issue in Carter's first campaign; indeed, it is often said that Carter's "winning" image in the 1976 election carried him all the way to the White House.⁴ Combining

¹ Paul T. David and David H. Everson, eds., *The Presidential Election and Transition 1980-1981* (Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 253-256.

² Martin Schram, *Running for President 1976: The Carter Campaign* (Briarcliff Manor, N.Y.: Stein and Day, 1977), 7.

³ Darrell M. West, "Television Advertising in Election Campaigns," *Political Science Quarterly* 109, no. 5 (1994), 807-809.

⁴ Richard B. Cheney, "The 1976 Presidential Debates: A Republican Perspective," October 1977, Robert Teeter Papers, Box 62, File: Post-Election Analysis – Speeches and Reports, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

his folksy, people-power populism and Ole Dixie upbringing with vague promises to his electorate, Carter's 1976 campaign ads conjured the image of the former peanut farmer turned politician. Running as an outsider to the corrupt ways of Washington, D.C., Carter depicted himself as a principled, honest idealist on whom the country could depend.⁵ But four years into an unpopular and difficult presidency, Carter was no longer able to run as an outsider to Washington in 1980. Instead, his campaign produced ads that tried and ultimately failed to paint the President as a man who was 'presidential' and therefore more capable than his rival to lead the country.⁶ Carter's re-election campaign seemed unsure which approach to take, combining a jumbled hodge-podge of various political methodologies in a cocktail of disaster. The image Carter presented – that of a worn, mean-spirited incumbent more knowledgeable and worldly than his friendly populist challenger – worked just as poorly for him as it did for his opponent in 1976, President Gerald Ford. And although Carter's staff recognized the distressing similarities between the President in 1980 and his predecessor in 1976, Carter often ignored their advice as he adopted many unsuccessful elements of the Ford re-election campaign.

Image as Politics

While portraiture has a longstanding tradition in American political history, such imagery has changed significantly in the last sixty years. In a transient political climate in which voters' personal interpretations of the issues and candidates obscure more traditional party associations, individual candidate perception takes on heightened importance. Media scholar Dan Nimmo has written that voting behavior responds to the perceived character of the potential candidates, making this constructed image a central factor in so-called "candidate-centered" election cycles.⁷ Who the candidate is, or who he claims to be, and how he relates to the general public through carefully orchestrated media events and advertising is just as important as his stated opinions on the issues at hand. As political media scholars Lynda Lee Kaid and Mike Chanslor have written, political image can be conceived as "a combination of physical attractiveness and surface-level communications skills such as the ability to speak convincingly into a television camera."⁸ How a candidate invents and perfects this image forms the backbone of many recent presidential elections. Modern political candidates are as much a product of the media environment as of the political sphere in which they operate, and, as such, the advent of television must be considered when analyzing contemporary political campaigns. At times, the line between the

⁵ Patrick Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter: The Campaign of 1976* (Baton Rouge, L.A.: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 33.

⁶ Paul T. David and David H. Everson, *The Presidential Election and Transition 1980-1981*, 128-129.

⁷ Dan Nimmo, "The Formation of Candidate Images During Presidential Campaigns," in *Candidate Images in Presidential Elections*, ed. Kenneth L. Hacker (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1995), 56-57.

⁸ Lynda Lee Kaid and Mike Chanslor, "Changing Candidate Images: The Effects of Political Advertising," in *Candidate Images in Presidential Elections*, 83-84.

world of politics and the world of mass media is blurred, and television is a key player in this obfuscation of public spheres and figures.

The rise of television as a major communication medium has dramatically transformed the nature of the public's interaction with its political candidates and elected officials. Historian and media scholar David Greenberg has written extensively on television, describing how its instant access to the living rooms and break rooms of millions of Americans created an environment in which image held more gravitas than the candidate himself.⁹ Furthermore, this image, formerly constructed through deliberate and exhaustive grassroots campaigning efforts across the country, could now be created just as effectively with a few well placed and well timed television advertisements. Indeed, political analyst Thomas E. Patterson has determined that the 1970s saw a political field in which "advertising [had] become the most costly activity of the campaign, demanding funds that previously would have been invested in the candidates' grassroots efforts."¹⁰

Image in the Carter Camp: The Early Days

No presidential candidate in recent memory benefited more from his own deliberate image creation as much as Jimmy Carter in the election of 1976. Indeed, Gerald Rafshoon, Carter's advertising guru and later a White House communications officer, admitted in 1979 that "Jimmy Carter wouldn't be President if his campaign hadn't been covered by television," and that paid television advertisements were a central part of said television coverage.¹¹ It is not entirely surprising that television ads became a focal point in the development of political campaigns. The short, simple delivery of a pre-packaged message or symbol was relatively easy to produce and even easier for the public to consume. Patterson argued that watching television, unlike other national news and content mediums, requires little to no effort on the part of the viewer, easing the delivery of any message, political or otherwise.¹²

From the outset of his campaign, Carter focused heavily on image creation and distribution. A campaign volunteer guide for Carter's 1970 campaign for Georgia governor – filled with images of the candidate and his wholesome, all-American family – urged supporters to spread the word about Carter, a supposedly non-partisan politician with real solutions for the

⁹ David Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), xix.

¹⁰ Thomas E. Patterson, *The Mass Media Election: How Americans Choose Their President* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980), 5.

¹¹ Gerald Rafshoon, in discussion with David Alsobrook (Presidential Papers Staff), found online at <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/exitInt/Rafshoon.pdf>.

¹² Thomas E. Patterson, *The Mass Media Election*, 57.

state.¹³ Two years later, as the national Democratic Party floundered in the 1972 Presidential election with the increasingly marginalized liberal candidate Senator George McGovern, Carter met with close aides in Atlanta to discuss his political future, including Rafshoon and his future chief of staff, Hamilton Jordan.¹⁴ At this and other early meetings, Carter's future campaign staffers agreed that any pending run for higher office would have to be ripe with carefully orchestrated imagery, highlighting the Governor's winning personal attributes while recognizing his unusual qualifications for President and, indeed, emphasizing those attributes as the fundamental reasons for his ability to effectively govern. Longtime Carter staffer Jody Powell's personal briefcase from the 1976 campaign trail included a memo emphasizing some of Carter's central themes. The memo argued that Carter's apparently contradictory, complex personality — a local non-politician running for national office, a conservative Baptist aiming for the liberal Democratic mantle — only indicated the candidate's fundamental honesty and thus, heightened his appeal to a national electorate searching for a different kind of politician.¹⁵ In what was perhaps the most important document to come out of these meetings, Jordan stressed early aspects of Carter's nascent image: "I believe that your farmer-businessman-military-religious-conservative background would be well received.... You should attempt to develop the image of a highly successful and concerned farmer living in a small rural town, speaking out on the pertinent issues of the day."¹⁶ These early discussions would come to play a large role in the 1976 campaign cycle four years later.

The national political mood in the mid-1970s was one of general disgust. President Richard Nixon's involvement in the notorious Watergate scandal brought the country to uncharted political territory, as a once-popular President resigned in shame and a former congressman assumed the highest office in the land.¹⁷ As the 1976 campaign approached, it became clear that this particular race to the Presidency would be different than any other before, if only for the feeling of national apathy and disinterest in politics. Carter and his campaign sought to capitalize on the unique set of circumstances surrounding the 1976 election as they prepared to create his national image. Carter, Rafshoon said in a 1974 memo on image, was a religious and virtuous Southern farmer who had never been privy to the Washington political game.¹⁸ In previous election cycles, these attributes could have been serious political liabilities —

¹³ 1970 Campaign for Governor: Campaign Handbook, Emily Gordy Dolvin Collection, "Campaign for Governor 10/70 - 11/70," Box 2, Jimmy Carter Library.

¹⁴ Jules Witcover, *Marathon: The Pursuit of the Presidency, 1972-1976* (New York: The Viking Press 1977), 108-110.

¹⁵ Notes, Jody Powell, Records of the White House Press Office, 1977 - 1981, "Primaries - JLP's Briefcase Contents, 3/4/76-4/4/76, 03/04/1976 - 04/04/1976," Box 198, Jimmy Carter Library.

¹⁶ Martin Schram, *Running for President 1976: The Carter Campaign* (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1977), 55-57.

¹⁷ David Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow*, 71-72.

¹⁸ Gregory Paul Domin, *Jimmy Carter, Public Opinion and the Search for Values, 1977-1981* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 10-11/

no man had been elected President from the heart of the old Confederate South in more than a century – but the Carter campaign realized that Carter’s quirk and marked difference from other political figures of the time could carry him through the primaries, into the national election and ultimately to the White House. Above all, Carter’s sunny, simple idealism broadened his appeal in primary contests and beyond, preaching the virtues of a better America just over the horizon.¹⁹

These tropes were highly visible in Carter’s early campaign advertisements and stump speeches. The candidate was often the central focus of the ads, speaking plainly and directly to his unseen audience with a gentle smile and calm gaze. Indeed, campaign memos often stressed Carter’s “Kennedy-esque smile” as an asset.²⁰ The national ad, entitled “South,” depicting the candidate strolling through peanut fields in his native Plains, Georgia, and featuring a twangy musical background and reassuring voiceover, serves as a useful model for the overall Carter television campaign.²¹ Carter’s narration promised honesty and fairness for all people and the images presented the candidate as an everyman farmer and commoner, yet still a leader by virtue of his forthright speech about his vision for a nation of ‘common folks’ just like him. Ads like this one were important both in the general campaign and in the primaries; according to Rafshoon’s memos, Carter’s team spent several thousands of dollars on ads in individual state and regional television markets throughout the primary and general election season.²² The advertisements that Carter’s campaign ran during his madcap, ‘run-everywhere’ primary campaign were more reactionary than thematic, defending the candidate’s record and diffusing potentially harmful comments made by his immediate Democratic rivals for the nomination.²³ The ads reflected the campaign’s desire to establish Carter as a known, viable national candidate. Once he proved his worth and won the nomination, his general election ads would come to focus more on a carefully nuanced image.

At times, the positive public reception of these ads waxed and waned. Brief, 30-second spots on the candidates’ background could be quickly recalled and easily attributed to a specific candidate, giving these ads greater effectiveness than dry policy outlines.²⁴ Still, a September 1976 briefing in *Time Magazine* cited a Patterson study indicating that the efficacy of both candidates’ advertisements was harmed in part by the overemphasis on imagery, such as “all the footage of Jimmy Carter traipsing through the peanut fields.”²⁵ But the idea of Carter as a simple man of the people prevailed throughout his primary and general election ads.

¹⁹ Patrick Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 33-34.

²⁰ Gregory Paul Domin, *Jimmy Carter, Public Opinion, and the Search for Values, 1977-1981*, 8.

²¹ Gerald Rafshoon, “South,” *The Living Room Candidate*, online video clip, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1976> (accessed 24 November 2010).

²² Advertisement Costs, Hamilton Jordan’s Subject Files as Campaign Director, “Advertising Costs – Jerry Rafshoon,” Box 198, Jimmy Carter Library.

²³ Martin Schram, *Running for President*, 73-76.

²⁴ Darrell M. West, “Television Advertising in Election Campaigns,” 795.

²⁵ Time eds., “Knock Off the Imagery (The Nation),” *Time*, September 22, 1976.

As portrayed in his ads, Carter was a man of the South, a man of the people, and perhaps most importantly, a man who had never served in Washington. A common stump speech line often ran, "I'm not a lawyer.... I've never worked in Washington.... I've never met a Democratic President."²⁶ This focus of such ads, which included a powerful five minute biographical spot that strongly emphasized Carter's small-town background and successful career as a Naval officer and small-business owner, often obscured Carter's longstanding political aims.²⁷ Carter had been a rising political figure of the 1970's. Jordan and Rafshoon made a last-ditch attempt to attach the then-governor's name to the doomed McGovern Presidential ticket at the 1972 Democratic Convention, and Carter served as chairman of the 1974 Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee to help House and Senate candidates with their mid-term election efforts.²⁸ Additionally, Carter had served for four years as governor of one of the largest states in the country, making his anti-politician campaign pitch a seemingly unlikely one. But Carter benefited from his general anonymity on the national stage in 1976, giving him the opportunity to dictate the terms of his exposure to a larger audience. Patterson wrote that mass public consumption of political imagery generally focuses on a single, specific aspect that tends not to change once developed, among them, incumbency, political novelty, or personality.²⁹ This single-issue orientation was a political boon for Carter. Constantly battling a widely-held assumption among officials in both parties that voters could not readily identify him, Carter was easily able to run as an outsider despite his decidedly insider connections.³⁰ It is also worth noting that Carter's down-home folk rhetoric, with its emphasis on his family's history as hard-working but poor Georgian farmers, consisted mostly of myth: recent analysis of Carter's genealogy revealed that Carter descended from a line of wealthy English planters in the former colony of Georgia.³¹ Carter's reliance on the outsider image would come to hurt his reelection efforts in 1980. After he spent four years in national office, voters were no longer convinced by the benefits of Carter's original image. This image, however, proved successful in the peculiar context of the 1976 campaign.

Jimmy Goes National, Jerry Goes Home: November 1976 and Beyond

President Gerald Ford enjoyed no real advantages when Carter entered the general election. Ford, a former House Minority Leader who had been appointed Vice President in the

²⁶ Christopher Matthews, *Hardball* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1988), 156.

²⁷ Gerald Rafshoon, "Bio," *The Living Room Candidate*, online video clip, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1976> (accessed 24 November 2010).

²⁸ Martin Schram, *Running for President*, 56-61.

²⁹ Thomas E. Patterson, *The Mass Media Election*, 135.

³⁰ Jonathan Moore and Janet Fraser, eds, *Campaign for President: The Managers Look at '76* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1977), 134.

³¹ Douglas Brinkley, "A Time for Reckoning: Jimmy Carter and the Cult of Kinfolk," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (1999), 779-780.

hectic final months of Nixon's administration and later assumed the Presidency after the latter resigned, had never actually been elected to a national or statewide office. As such, the Presidential campaign trail was just as foreign to Ford as it was to Carter, made even more difficult by lack of partisan support and memory of a certain public image, held sacrosanct for an incumbent in the television age.³² There were no lingering images of candidate Ford from a previous national election, making the president an unusually unknown public figure in the most public of American offices. Ford was also saddled with his party's overwhelmingly negative reputation after the Watergate scandal. Indeed, that Carter barely won the election at all is sometimes attributed to the fact that he ran as a Democrat in, "a year in which nearly any respectable Democrat should have triumphed," as the editors of *Time* magazine wrote.³³ Additionally, Ford was forced to beat back an intra-party primary challenge from former Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan, a popular governor from California. In both the bitter primary challenge and the national election, Ford's campaign had to work double duty, spreading a positive background image of a man most people only knew as the man who pardoned Nixon while also running on the supposed strength of the incumbency.³⁴ Ford pursued the so-called "Rose Garden" strategy as a way to highlight his fundamental qualifications for the office he already held, avoiding large campaign events by staying actively involved in the day-to-day responsibilities of governing.

Reagan's primary challenge in 1976 reveals much about the issues that would plague Carter in his battle with the conservative Californian four years later. While Ford emphasized his incumbency, Reagan ran as an outsider "citizen politician."³⁵ With a truncated two-year term in office full of media mishaps – the infamous Air Force One stumbling incident chief among them – and foreign policy difficulties, Ford was an easy target for the "citizen" politician. In reflections and memoirs, Ford's campaign staff readily admits that the challenge from the right wing of the Republican Party forced the reelection effort to clarify its message and strengthen its organizational structure.³⁶ And while the image of the president is often perceived as beneficial to a candidate, in 1976 and 1980, the public preferred political neophytes to a beleaguered incumbent. Even if an incumbent could control the media environment – the presence of the president at an event immediately made it newsworthy – he could not control the public debate over his legacy and efficacy in office.³⁷ By presenting himself as a more 'presidential' figure through his exemplary leadership qualities and careful criticism of the incumbent, an opponent

³² E.D. Dover, *Presidential Elections in the Television Age* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1994), 124-125.

³³ Time Editors, "Carter!" *Time*, November 15, 1976.

³⁴ Jules Witcover, *Marathon*, 530-531.

³⁵ Robert T. Nakamura, "Impressions of Ford and Reagan," *Political Science Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1977-1978), 648-649.

³⁶ Jonathan Moore and Janet Fraser, *Campaign for President*, 38-39.

³⁷ James Glen Stovall, "Incumbency and News Coverage of the 1980 Presidential Election Campaign," *The Western Political Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1984), 621-622.

like Reagan or Carter could assume an aura of charismatic leadership benefitting the presidency, even as he besmirched the powers of his desired office.³⁸

The general election season unfolded in a somewhat-unpredictable fashion. Typical campaign gaffes plagued both candidates – misstatements, flubbed press events, policy errors – and turned what was once considered a shoe-in election for the Democrats into an exceptionally close race. Carter staff memos often joked that the election would have been a landslide if the candidate had simply rested on the strength of his considerable post-convention public opinion ratings and avoided campaigning altogether.³⁹ Carter’s infamous interview with *Playboy* magazine was among the low points of an election cycle fixated on imagery and personal perceptions of the candidates.⁴⁰ This interview is notable for both the public uproar that surrounded it – Ford’s campaign produced an ad featuring Pastor W.A. Criswell subtly denouncing Carter for appearing in the sexually charged magazine – and for the relevancy of its actual content when compared to the larger aims of the Carter campaign.⁴¹ In the nearly 20-page interview with reporter Robert Scheer, Carter spoke frankly, offering a confusing image nevertheless supported Powell’s belief that Carter’s unusual and contradictory background gave him an honest veneer.⁴² The most famous comment of the interview – in which Carter admitted he had looked at women other than his wife “with lust” and “committed adultery in [his] heart many times” – came from Carter’s deeply personal interpretation of his Baptist faith; this did not stop political cartoonists and comic commentators across the country from pouncing on the odd statement.⁴³ And though the Ford campaign sought to capitalize on this apparent campaign flub, Carter continued to defend his words, if not the decision to sit down for the interview.⁴⁴ This stubborn refusal to clarify his complicated public image indicated much about Carter’s personal interpretation of himself and would surface again in the distant 1980 campaign.

Aside from the candidate characteristics that made the 1976 election unique, the televised campaign debates and news cycle brought a special focus on the perception and control of a candidate’s image. The rapid, visual format of broadcast news at the time lent itself to the so-called “horse-race” election coverage model as described by policy analyst C. Anthony Broh, in which the disparate elements of a campaign – candidate image, public relations, volunteers and

³⁸ Mark J. Rozzell, *The Press and the Carter Presidency* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 7.

³⁹ Jonathan Moore and Janet Fraser, *Campaign for President*, 131.

⁴⁰ Patrick Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 110-114.

⁴¹ Bailey / Deardourff, “Criswell,” *The Living Room Candidate*, online video clip, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1976>, (accessed 24 November 2010).

⁴² “Jimmy Carter,” interviewed by Robert Scheer, in *The Playboy Interview*, G. Barry Golson, ed. (New York: Playboy Press, 1981), 464-488.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 461.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Moore and Janet Fraser, *Campaign for President*, 144.

strategic choices – were joined together as a supposedly complete package of election news.⁴⁵ This packaging allowed viewers to digest election news in heavily visual, easily digestible chunks that glorified the imagery and symbolism of a campaign while serving as visual cues themselves.

The 1976 campaign was particularly notable, not for only for its lack of party identification but also for its abundance of campaign information. In their analysis of the election, Steven H. Chaffee and Sun Yuel Choe described how voters who entered an election cycle without strong party identification tend to be the most active interpreters of campaign media materials.⁴⁶ The 1976 election saw a large number of such voters, making each candidate's television advertisement campaigns part of a winning strategy. Even more, the very existence of campaign media strategies could generate significant news coverage within the horse-race election model. The "pseudo-event," as defined by historian Daniel Boorstin, was "a staged happening that becomes news not for intrinsic reasons but because those who cover the news deem it so."⁴⁷ Theatrical events – Ford speaking from the Rose Garden, Carter addressing an adoring crowd in central Georgia – could borrow from imagery defined in campaign ads and literature and in doing so served to reinforce cultural understanding of a candidate. Presidential debates could also alter this image. The three debates of the 1976 election were generally seen as beneficial to each candidate in some fashion, either giving Carter greater exposure to outline his national vision or allowing Ford to chip away at his opponent's 'holier than thou' assumption of pre-presidential leadership qualities.⁴⁸

Ford's campaign advertisement strategy reflected his desire to maintain control over the incumbency through specific examples of leadership. Warm, congratulatory ads entitled "Leadership," "Children / Achievements" and "Peace" depict Ford as a dependable, noble candidate with a firm grasp of the duties and responsibilities of the president.⁴⁹ Cheery music, smiling faces and images of Ford making presidential-like decisions in the Oval Office and in his Presidential limo underscored the campaign's desire to inject a personal touch into the race for leadership. This strategy depended on a vast reformation of Ford's public image. While the media campaign on this front was aggressive, the public side of the strategy saw Ford stepping back from anti-Carter campaign stumps and generally sticking fast to his central theme of reelection as redemption.⁵⁰ An especially notable ad is the October spot, "Man on the Street – Democrats," in which nominally Democratic Atlanta residents tell an unseen interviewer that

⁴⁵ C. Anthony Broh, "Horse-Race Journalism: Reporting the Polls in the 1976 Presidential Election," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1980), 515.

⁴⁶ Steven H. Chaffee and Sun Yuel Choe, "Time of Decision and Media Use During the Ford-Carter Campaign," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (1980), 67.

⁴⁷ David Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow*, xix-xx

⁴⁸ Jonathan Moore and Janet Fraser, *Campaign for President*, 141-143.

⁴⁹ Bailey/Deardourff, "Peace," "Leadership," and "Children / Achievements," *The Living Room Candidate*, online video clip, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1976>, (accessed 24 November 2010).

⁵⁰ Jules Witcover, *Marathon*, 533-535.

Ford has shifted their support away from their former Governor.⁵¹ This ad embodies many of the Ford campaign themes: Ford's competency and universal appeal in contrast to Carter's questionable ability to lead and tendencies to alienate people, all the while avoiding direct personal attacks by Ford himself. Under a different president, many of these concepts and strategies would resurface in an election four years later.

A Symbolic Presidency and A Failed Mandate

With 50.1 percent of the vote to Ford's 48.0 percent, Carter managed to squeak by to victory in the low-turnout 1976 election.⁵² He pledged to govern with an eye for the common man and the betterment of all, but his four years in office managed to hurt his public image just as much as it had mixed effects on the lives of an American electorate, which had hesitantly placed him in office. Members of Carter's administration often called for a "symbolic" presidency filled with orchestrated acts of inflated importance as a way of carrying the themes of the 1976 election into the White House.⁵³ Emphasizing humility, decency and honesty in acts as varied as walking down Pennsylvania Avenue in the inaugural campaign and eliminating the traditional "Hail to Chief" musical greeting of the president, Carter's administration worked hard to cement its campaign rhetoric in concrete physical and symbolic gestures.⁵⁴ But by late 1979 and early 1980, the only national theme readily apparent was one of general malaise, economic uncertainty and foreign policy disaster. Carter ran into image issues early on in his presidency – polls showed that the public failed to grant the new president the traditional "halo effect" of warm feelings after an election, giving his term an immediate air of uncertain expectancy.⁵⁵ By running as an outsider in 1976, Carter had already set himself up for a difficult presidency. In his campaign, Carter hesitated to assume leadership of the national Democratic Party during the primaries. Once he won the nomination, he proceeded to cloak himself in the industrial labor union/urban minority coalition, thereby muddling his already complicated image.⁵⁶ Once in office, Carter's continuing status as an outsider (genuine or not) made passing legislation a constant struggle.⁵⁷

While enviable as a campaign theme, the role of the outsider in politics became a liability once the election was over and real governing began. For Carter, the careful manipulation of his

⁵¹ Bailey/Deardourff, "Man on the Street – Democrats," *The Living Room Candidate*, online video clip, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1976>, (accessed 24 November 2010).

⁵² Jules Witcover, *Marathon*, 643.

⁵³ Elizabeth Drew, "Phase: In Search of a Definition," *The New Yorker*, August 27, 1979.

⁵⁴ Mark J. Rozell, *The Press and the Carter Presidency*, 35-38.

⁵⁵ Jack Germond and Jules Witcover, *Blue Smoke and Mirrors: How Reagan Won and Why Carter Lost the Election of 1980* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), 23-24.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Moore and Janet Fraser, *Campaign for President*, 6.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Drew, "Phase: In Search of a Definition," 73.

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party affiliation in his campaign efforts allowed him to ride an anti-Washington populist wave to electoral victory.⁵⁸ This strategy did not endear Carter the president to the Democratic House and Senate that he inherited in 1976. Indeed, the Democratic Party's kingmakers and leaders – men like House Speaker Tip O'Neill and Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy – were deeply suspicious of Carter and his out-of-nowhere rise to the White House.⁵⁹ Kennedy's nearly successful effort for the Democratic nomination on the strength of his party purity furthered Carter's estrangement, and situations like this typified Carter's relationship with the Democratic machine.⁶⁰ Most importantly for Carter, who used his populist outsider character to great benefit in 1976, it would be impossible for an incumbent president to run as an outsider again after a four-year record in office, even as his stalled legislative agenda continued to suggest his alienation from his own party. Posthumous analysis of the Carter administration's legislative record suggests that the president's staff were "fine human beings who simply do not know the territory... whose goals may have been noble and worthy [but] floundered for lack of capability in 'working the hill.'"⁶¹ This inability to cope with the challenges of governing a pluralistic Congress would come back to harm Carter in the election of 1980.

Reagan's Second Coming and Jerry Ford 2.0: The Failure of 1980

The 1980 presidential election was remarkable for its marked similarity to 1976. With a deeply unpopular president, an affable political outsider running on the opposition, and a fierce internal primary challenge from a would-be standard bearer, 1980 stood to be just as unusual as the year that brought Carter to power. Pat Caddell, Carter's longtime pollster and political analyst, admitted that Reagan in 1980 had many of the positive characteristics that Carter himself used for victory in 1976: "Governor Reagan was viewed as very strong, very decisive ... a very good governor of California ... a man of vision."⁶²

In a series of earlier internal memos on campaign strategy, Caddell and other reelection staffers recognized larger, more troubling parallels to the last election. These documents highlighted Carter's similarities to Ford, the man whose political weaknesses he exploited to win the presidency, suggesting that the administration should have been well aware of the nature and extent of the challenge Reagan presented in the upcoming general election. A 1980 memo from Caddell to Carter directly quoted from the 1976 Ford campaign strategy book, deceptively

⁵⁸ Gregory Paul Domin, *Jimmy Carter, Public Opinion, and the Search for Values, 1977-1981*, 65-66.

⁵⁹ Timothy Stanley, *Kennedy vs. Carter: The 1980 Battle for the Democratic Party's Soul* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 22-23.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶¹ Jerry Roschwalb, "Grading the Incumbent," *Change* 12, no. 6 (1980), 44.

⁶² Jonathan Moore, ed., *The Campaign for President: 1980 in Retrospect* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1981), 189.

substituting Carter's name for Ford in opinion polls before revealing the memo's true origins: "The president is perceived as being boring, a poor communicator and lacking empathy."⁶³ The pollster made clear how general disinterest and disappointment in Ford's accomplishments as president ultimately doomed his reelection bid. Caddell went on to explain that Carter, despite his similarities to Ford, suffered from more negative personal ratings than Ford ever did. Caddell stressed the need for a different kind of campaign to overcome the tandem difficulties of a strong opposition and a weak public image. While repeating a common Carter campaign assertion that Reagan was an unintelligent, simplistic populist lacking any ability to run the country, Caddell reiterated that attacks painting such an image of the opposition had to be made by campaign surrogates and through subtle inference, not by Carter himself.

In his own memo to the President, Rafshoon, then the White House Communications Director, strongly underlined the image dilemma facing Carter as the general election approached. Despite the strengths of the 1976 campaign, President Carter could no longer wander thorough his peanut fields in attempts to woo voters. Rafshoon called for high-quality print and television ads to emphasize the Carter administration's successes in order to counter growing public opinion that Carter was shaping up to be a "failed, inept" president.⁶⁴ The advertising guru went on to encourage Carter to avoid being perceived as a distant, uncompassionate politician, identifying Ford as a figure who should not be emulated. Furthermore, Rafshoon asked Carter to surround himself with the noble imagery of the presidency, reserving a single day each week for campaigning while using the incumbency and the power and apolitical nature of national leadership to win public sympathy. In short, he told Carter to do a good job at being president as a way to keep that same job in the election. Reagan was not to be mentioned by name in campaign speeches in order to avoid demonizing the likable candidate.

Taken as a whole, these and other carefully worded campaign memos presented a fairly clear path to victory for Carter: emphasize personal accomplishment, appear presidential, and avoid direct criticism of his opponent, all the while steering clear of Ford's disastrous thematic choices in a similar political scenario. Above all, internal campaign literature was quite clear in its recognition of Carter's inability to run as an outsider in his second election effort, criticizing the "rushed and uncertain" election campaign of 1976.⁶⁵ Historical understanding of why the Carter campaign ultimately failed to follow any of these suggestions is murky at best. Indeed, Carter's reelection strategy in the general election bears striking similarities to that of Ford's, going as far

⁶³ Memo, Pat Caddell to Jimmy Carter, 1980, Hamilton Jordan's 1980 Campaign Files, "Campaign Strategy - Caddell, Patrick General Election," Box 77, Jimmy Carter Library.

⁶⁴ Memo, Gerald Rafshoon to Jimmy Carter, July 3, 1980, Files of Susan Clough, Personal Secretary to the President, "Campaign Briefings, 1980-1980," Box 34, Jimmy Carter Library.

⁶⁵ Memo, "A Strategic Approach to the 1980 Presidential Election," Pat Caddell to Jimmy Carter, Hamilton Jordan's 1980 Campaign Files, "Campaign Strategy - Caddell, Patrick General Election," Box 77, Jimmy Carter Library.

as to record television advertisements that were directly influenced by the former president. Even as the campaign recognized aspects of their own 1976 campaign in the Reagan camp – the exploitation of the image of a credible, optimistic outsider in a time of crisis and concern – it never seemed to fully acknowledge its own duplication of the losing efforts of that earlier election.⁶⁶ A 1977 memo written by former Ford Chief of Staff Dick Cheney highlighted the difficulty of running a comprehensive reelection campaign as an incumbent: campaign too aggressively and the president becomes yet another candidate, thereby losing the defined image appeal of his office.⁶⁷ While it is extremely unlikely that Carter’s campaign staff read this memo in their perusal of Ford’s campaign strategy books, they clearly did not follow its cautionary advice in the development of their 1980 campaign.

As the campaign progressed, Carter repeatedly ignored the pre-campaign cautionary tips he had been given. The campaign never seemed fully committed to its own decision to tout the administration’s shaky record in office. Instead, it presented a divided image of a man standing firmly behind his record while admitting the sheer weight of the office he held.⁶⁸ It would prove difficult for Carter to claim he had been an effective, decisive president if he spent an equal amount of time claiming that the presidency was a hard job that didn’t always produce ideal results. Indeed, the crippled economy, lingering hostage crisis in Iran, and soaring energy costs proved this inconsistency of results without Carter’s help. Yet his ads continued to proclaim this split message. The 1980 spot, “Oval Int,” described the presidency as an agonizing, decisive job – presenting Carter as a man who was capable of making those decisions; indeed, perhaps the only man qualified to do so.⁶⁹ This and other ads were meant to build up public perception of the supreme authority of the presidency in an effort to make voters question Reagan’s supposedly loose qualifications for that office.⁷⁰ Inexperience was a charge Carter had previously been forced to deflect himself in 1976, but the failure of that particular Ford strategy did not seem to faze Carter’s campaign. The ads “Streetgov” and “State 60” seemed to be lifted from Ford’s own campaign strategy guide, and they directly and indirectly questioned the opponent’s competence in yet another shift from pre-campaign strategy plans.⁷¹ The former featured a series of California residents addressing an unseen cameraman as they proclaimed their support for the former Governor Reagan, but their fear of a potential President Reagan.⁷² The latter, an almost rote copy of clips in Ford’s earlier “Leadership” ad, showed Carter acting presidential while in a

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Drew, “1980: The President,” *The New Yorker*, October 20, 1980.

⁶⁷ Richard B. Cheney, “The 1976 Presidential Debates: A Republican Perspective,” 5.

⁶⁸ Memo, Pat Caddell to Jimmy Carter, 1980, Hamilton Jordan’s 1980 Campaign Files, “Campaign Strategy – Caddell, Patrick General Election,” Box 77, Jimmy Carter Library.

⁶⁹ Rafshoon Communications, “Oval Office Int,” *The Living Room Candidate*, online video clip, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1980>, (accessed 24 November 2010).

⁷⁰ Jonathan Moore, ed., *The Campaign for President*, 199.

⁷¹ Jack Germond and Jules Witcover, *Blue Smoke and Mirrors*, 243-244.

⁷² Rafshoon Communications, “Streetgov,” *The Living Room Candidate*, online video clip, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1980>, (accessed 24 November 2010).

limousine, interacting with foreign leaders, and attempting to project an aura of leadership.⁷³ These ads managed to violate several of Rafshoon and Caddell's warnings, criticizing the opponent and incorporating a variety of Ford thematic choices. Each is indicative of a larger campaign trend that drove Carter into a defensive posture, thereby whittling away at the strength of his already weak reelection efforts.

An October 13, 1980 mention in *The New Yorker's* "Talk of the Town" section tells much about the tone of the presidential campaign raging at the time. It decries the negative twist in the campaign efforts of both parties, noting in particular the national impression that the contest was more of a struggle to keep either candidate out of the office, rather than keep the incumbent in.⁷⁴ This disapproving tone is likely to be in response to Carter's growing image as a petty, sniping hack – the so-called 'Mean Jimmy' phenomenon inflamed by the press – insulting his opponent while offering few solutions to the nation's problems.⁷⁵ Carter actively tried to present Reagan as an incompetent idiot; his internal campaign literature is filled with comparisons of the erudite, knowledgeable president and his "dumb," "stupid" or "untested" opponent. Carter ignored his own staff's advice, thereby assuming the role of the campaign's political challenger even though he was the incumbent president.⁷⁶ Post-mortem campaign literature indicated that some of these attacks were spontaneous speech choices made by Carter himself, but the campaign largely ignored its previous surrogate attack dog strategy in the general election, much to its eventual detriment: "the president felt at times the instinct to get into it himself and did, sometimes not necessarily to his total advantage."⁷⁷ By running counter to the one consistent image most people kept of Carter – that of his honest, decent compassion and kindness – the 1980 campaign destroyed any chance that Carter had of running and winning on his previously established and highly effective image.

Reagan was a strong challenger in a difficult campaign season. His friendly, personable appearance and soaring campaign rhetoric propelled him to a natural leadership position in the Republican Party; those strengths helped lead him to a clear victory in the primaries and gave him the added bonus of a unified national party operation early in his campaign.⁷⁸ Even more, despite all the parallels between Reagan and the first campaign of his opponent Carter, the California governor had the advantage of a larger national profile at the time of his primary run. His near theft of the Republican nomination in 1976 had given Reagan wide exposure, and his

⁷³ Rafshoon Communications, "State 60" *The Living Room Candidate*, online video clip, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1980>, (accessed 24 November 2010).

⁷⁴ *New Yorker* Eds., "Goings on About Town," *The New Yorker*, October 13, 1980.

⁷⁵ Jack Germond and Jules Witcover, *Blue Smoke and Mirrors*, 248-249.

⁷⁶ James Glen Stovall, "Incumbency and News Coverage," 629-630.

⁷⁷ Jonathan Moore, ed. *The Campaign for President*, 208.

⁷⁸ William Crotty, "The Presidential Nominating Process in 1980," in *The Presidential Election and Transition 1980-1981* eds. Paul T. David and David H. Everson (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 5.

ability to seamlessly blend back into the national party after almost splitting it in two put him in the good graces of both the public and the party elite.⁷⁹

Reagan had much greater control over his image in the 1980 campaign than did Carter; Reagan could shape his exposure on the national stage as he wished. The Reagan campaign made an active choice to amplify the candidate's positive aspects – experience, leadership qualities, and sense of powerful change – before it began to criticize Carter, allowing for the development and maturation of the 'Mean Jimmy' trend.⁸⁰ That Reagan himself ran a series of highly negative, critical television advertisements seemed to escape many voters and commentators, for Reagan was generally perceived as a kindhearted, warm man who had fallen victim to false and mean-spirited sniping from the president.⁸¹

The Aftermath and Beyond: A Conclusion

It is impossible to measure how much of a role image played in the Election Day rout of 1980. Reagan took 44 states and nearly 51 % of the popular vote, sweeping to victory on what many called a mandate for change in federal theory.⁸² Ultimately, the election was seen as a repudiation of the Carter administration's failures. But in two election cycles filled with conflicting and influential imagery, Carter's inability to carry a single, winning public visual element through his first term as president and into his botched reelection efforts certainly hindered his ability to effectively govern or campaign. Carter, the candidate and symbol of hope, promised many things to many people: honest government, reform of Party politics, affordable energy, a safer and more just world for all. The incoherent shifts he made to his symbolic image throughout his national political career are likely one of a few key causes that truncated his presidency.

Just as television created and nurtured Jimmy Carter as a candidate, so too did it foster a growing depreciation of his national value. It is, of course, pure supposition to consider how Carter, the consistent candidate, might have changed his political fortune, but perhaps by acknowledging his own political advisers in 1976 and 1980, he would have won a resounding victory in both cycles. Carter's campaign staff showed a real knack for honest assessment of their candidate. In 1976, Rafshoon correctly pointed out Carter's national overexposure, and in 1980m he and Caddell pushed for a cautious and strategic reelection effort. Their limited recognition and incorporation of selected elements of the Ford campaign strategies occasionally helped, but movement towards the strategies that harmed Ford ended up being just as harmful

⁷⁹ Jonathan Moore, ed., *The Campaign for President*, 15-16.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 212.

⁸¹ Mark J. Rozzell, *The Press and the Carter Presidency*, 185-186.

⁸² E. D. Dover, *Presidential Elections in the Television Age*, 165-166.

to Carter. Perhaps Carter, by pushing onwards in both cycles in his own decisive and independent fashion, stayed true to his personal vision even as he warped and ruined the image his handlers had carefully helped him craft.

In defense of his *Playboy* interview, Carter admitted a lapse in judgment by appearing in a morally questionable publication, but refused to retract his words. Carter's image followed a similar pattern. Molded in the quick-fire format of modern television campaigning, Carter and his staff ultimately destroyed his image and chances for reelection. It may well be the medium and not the message that ended Carter's presidential career.

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Senior Essay

The *Amistad*, Camelot, Jerusalem, and *Dred Scott*

Chase Olivarius-McAllister, BR 2010

Senior Essay

Advisor: Professor David W. Blight

2010

This paper looks at the *Amistad* case, which was tried in Federal Court in 1840 and heard at the Supreme Court in 1841. Aboard La Amistad, Joseph Cinqué led a number of slaves in rebellion against the ship's crew. Although the ship was taken into custody by the United States government, the courts ruled the slaves free because the international slave trade had been abolished. Chase does an admirable job distilling the historiography and analyzing the complexity involved in defending Africans bound for slavery in antebellum America.

Senior Essay

Despite being a diplomatic catastrophe, a major Supreme Court decision, and an abolitionist coup, academics have found the *Amistad* cases, *United States v. The Amistad*¹ and *Gedney v. L'Amistad*,² less than compelling. Marouf Hasian and A. Cheree Carlson declare that “the paucity of essays written on the case is itself an embarrassment.”³ Though abolitionists and legal historians celebrated it “as a smashing victory for anti-slavery forces,” and it was “the most famous case to appear in American courts before the landmark *Dred Scott* decision of 1857,” only three historians have produced books that treat it as a complex and evitable event in history.⁴

Iyunolu Folayan Osagie wrote the most recent of these three books. In it, she argues that *Amistad* “was singular not just because its successful outcome was unprecedented but mainly because its legal victories did *not* foster a just pattern of development in other court trials involving race.”⁵ The judge and legal scholar Michael Hawkins echoes her as well as Paul Finkelman, Guido Calabresi and Charles Ogletree in arguing that *Amistad* was “a remarkable decision, especially for its time. One is left to wonder how the ‘same’ Court could, just sixteen years later, decide *Dred Scott v. Sanford*.”⁶ The contrast that he draws between *Amistad* and *Dred Scott* is, apparently, one of the starkest in the canon of American legal history: *Amistad* is widely viewed as having asserted that liberty was the inherent property of all free men, white or black, of declaring that the Court was everyone’s, and of acknowledging that there was such a thing as “natural rights.”⁷ *Dred Scott* decreed all blacks inexorably and legally inferior to whites,

¹ 40 U.S. (15 Pet.) 518 (1841).

² 10 F. Cas 141 (D. Conn. 1840) (No. 5,294a).

³ Marouf Hasian, Jr. and A. Cheree Carlson, “Revisionism and Collective Memory: The Struggle for Meaning in the *Amistad* Affair,” *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 67 (2000), No. 1, 60.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 50; Howard Jones, “All We Want Is Make Us Free,” *American History*, (January-February 1998), 22-28. Most recent scholarship on *Amistad* does not treat it as a complex and evitable event, but as a body of evidence worth reviewing in so far as it exposes Mr. Steven Spielberg to charges of intellectual hooliganism. The three books that do not are Howard Jones’s *Mutiny on the Amistad*, Iyunolu Folayan Osagie’s *The Amistad Revolt*, and Maggie Montesinos Sale’s *The Slumbering Volcano*.

⁵ Iyunolu Folayan Osagie, *The Amistad Revolt: Memory, Slavery, and the Politics of Identity in the United States and Sierra Leone*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 136.

⁶ Hon. Michael Daly Hawkins, “John Quincy Adams and the Antebellum Maritime Slave Trade: The Politics of Slavery and the Slavery of Politics,” *Oklahoma City University Law Review* (2000), 53. In their masterful analysis of the Supreme Court’s 1990 term, Guido Calabresi and Charles Ogletree write that, “discrimination and scapegoatism have been our curse and our history. The occasional victories over these sins have been our true glories.” Of the three cases they cite, *Amistad* is the only victory to have taken place before 1954. Guido Calabresi and Charles J. Ogletree, Jr., “The Supreme Court, 1990 Term,” *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 105 (1991), No. 1, 121. Paul Finkelman, the legal historian, agrees that beneath the international diplomacy, popular controversy, and swaggering legal argumentation that erupted out of the *Amistad* affair, “were the lives and futures of thirty-nine innocent victims of kidnapping. Perhaps what is most remarkable about this case is that in the end these people received some measure of justice.” Paul Finkelman, *Slavery in the Courtroom: an Annotated Bibliography of American Cases*, (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1949), 229.

⁷ For instance, Howard Jones writes that the *Amistad* case had “lasting importance because black people had testified in antebellum American courts and won their freedom on the basis of innate human rights... That the *Amistad* blacks went free allowed the abolitionists to herald the Court’s decision as a triumph of freedom based on higher law and a major

citizenship incommensurate with blackness, and slavery, blacks' sole fate. This essay argues that that contrast, while arrant, and widely argued by scholars, is an illusion.

The academic cartography of *Dred Scott* has been the project of generations: serious, laden with detail, and attempted because the decision completed slavery's inscription on American law and the hastening of America's political journey into the Civil War. *Amistad*, by contrast, is a Camelot. There is no road to it or from it. Osagie writes that, "as a reference or inspiration, the *Amistad* has become an uncanny presence in the American literary imagination."⁸ Slave rebellion on the high seas, the risk of war with Spain, a protracted legal dispute climaxing in the Supreme Court, a public brawl between a former and sitting American President, and a happy ending – such facts need little authorial aggrandizement to win readers' attentions. Douglas Egerton wryly notes that "the tale of the *Amistad* captives has attracted the sort of attention from novelists and playwrights that has eluded even the well-known slave rebel Nat Turner."⁹ It is a potent narrative, that authors, artists, playwrights, poets, and filmmakers have used, sensibly, understandably, to enrapture, to make money, or to add the glamour of hope – of the underdog, prevailing over Goliath – to an antebellum history without of many white heroes, or black victors.¹⁰

It is a Camelot to scholars, too.¹¹ But closer examination reveals that this sparkling fable,

stroke against the racial discrimination that permeated the American legal system and underlay slavery in general." Howard Jones, "The Impact of the *Amistad* Case on Race and Law in American," Annette Gordon-Reed, *Race on Trial: Law and Justice in American History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 14.

⁸ Osagie, *The Amistad Revolt*, 21.

⁹ Douglas R. Egerton, "Reviewed: *The Amistad Revolt: Memory, Slavery, and the Politics of Identity in the United States and Sierra Leone* by Iyunolu Folayan Osagie," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 21 (2001), No. 3, 556.

¹⁰ The *Amistad* affair has been a tenacious source of inspiration to innumerable artists since the captives landed in America in 1839. Osagie provides a thorough inventory of its recurrence in American literature, drama, and film in both the 19th and 20th centuries: It was a basis of Frederick Douglass's only fictional work, *The Heroic Slave*, Herman Melville's novella, *Benito Cerano*, Blair Niles's *East by Day*, Emma Gelders Sterne's *The Long Black Schooner*, Mary Dahl's *Free Souls*, Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Echo of Lions*, David Pesci's *Amistad*, and Steven Spielberg's *Amistad*. Osagie, *The Amistad Revolt*, p. 21.

¹¹ Many legal scholars have argued that the *Amistad* cases were a heartening exception in a dark and discouraging period of American law. In their masterful analysis of the Supreme Court's 1990 term, Guido Calabresi and Charles Ogletree write that, "discrimination and scapegoatism have been our curse and our history. The occasional victories over these sins have been our true glories." Of the three cases they cite, *Amistad* is the only victory to have taken place before 1954. Guido Calabresi and Charles J. Ogletree, Jr., "The Supreme Court, 1990 Term," *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 105 (1991), No. 1, 121. Paul Finkelman agrees that beneath the international diplomacy, popular controversy, and swaggering legal argumentation that erupted out of the *Amistad* affair, "were the lives and futures of thirty-nine innocent victims of kidnapping. Perhaps what is most remarkable about this case is that in the end these people received some measure of justice." Paul Finkelman, *Slavery in the Courtroom*, 229. Don E. Fehrenbacher characterizes the *Amistad* case as "something less than a legal landmark. It settled no major issue and contributed little to the development of American slave-trade law." The Court's ruling in *Amistad* was an inspiring, surprising exception, but an unimportant one, since for decades after its issuance, the Court still "decided most important constitutional questions in favor of slaveholding interests." Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 195.

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in which the American legal system vindicated the promise of freedom for a small group of blacks, has been told and retold by artists, rather than by historians, academics, and jurists precisely because the *Amistad* affair's anti-slavery connotations are a beloved fiction, and only loosely based on reality.

The legal protagonists of the *Amistad* case themselves – the lawyers Roger S. Baldwin, John Quincy Adams, Seth P. Staples, Theodore Sedgwick and Ellis Gray; and the abolitionists and philanthropists Lewis Tappan, Simeon St. Jocelyn, and Joshua Leavitt – advanced an argument for the freedom of their clients, legally and publically, that won because it definitively excluded blacks already enslaved in America. In 1841, the Supreme Court bowed to the Amistad Committee's argument, and joined in its objections to the legality of the *Amistad* captives' enslavement: these were Africans, proud, free, foreign, and thus utterly unlike American slaves. The Court could acknowledge the *Amistad* captives' rights to freedom from enslavement because their non-American blackness did not describe them as less than human.

As a legal precedent, the *Amistad* case is conspicuous because it did not affect the legality of slavery in the United States, expand the rights of blacks, or substantively influence the jurisprudence that succeeded it. But as a public controversy, the *Amistad* case was of terrific consequence for blacks in America, for abolitionists' self-conception, and for Northerners' perceptions of race, slavery, and freedom. Osagie and Howard Jones show that the abolitionists and attorneys behind the *Amistad* defense always made two cases: the legal one, which won the captives' freedom by distinguishing them from American blacks, and the public one, which brought the captives' deep yearning for freedom to a wide and attentive audience. The Amistad Committee presented the captives as sympathetic, human, and worthy of freedom, by contrasting the capacities and humanity of the *Amistad* captives with the incapacities and inhumanity of black slaves in America.

In defending the *Amistad* captives, presenting their plight to the public, and arguing that they deserved freedom, the Amistad Committee did not challenge white Northerners' notions of black inferiority so much as it used them – for the benefit of their clients, and, perhaps, to the detriment of blacks enslaved in America.

This was not the intention of the Amistad Committee, nor by any means its only legacy. Many of its members ultimately believed in and sought full equality for blacks. And had its Chairman, Lewis Tappan, chosen to make a different public argument for the freedom of the *Amistad* captives, one based on the idea that freedom was, regardless of race, the universal right of all men, the thirty-nine Africans who were depending on him might well have become the property of a white man in the United States, lived and died as slaves on plantations, and never returned to Africa. To paraphrase Howard Jones, Lewis Tappan was trying to change the world, but he had to live within it: we must be careful to neither begrudge his imperfections, nor those

of his brave, and noble, campaigns.

But Lewis Tappan wrote that the purpose of the *Amistad* case was to “determine whether a man, ‘though he is black,’ could find justice in the American court system.”¹² This essay will argue that he never found out.

What they were up against

On June 28, 1839, *L’Amistad* left Havana. On it were five white men, a cook and a cabin boy – both slaves, \$250 in cash, about \$40,000 of cargo, and fifty-three people who had recently been kidnapped from Africa, then sold as slaves in Cuba. On July 1, Cinque and Grabeau, two of the African captives, freed themselves from their irons, unshackled their fellow captives, and broached a box containing sugar-cane knives, which they used to kill the *Amistad*’s Captain, Ramon Ferrer, two sailors, and the slave cook, Celestino. They spared the lives of José Ruiz and Pedro Montez, two Spanish slave-dealers, and that of the slave Antonio, a cabin boy.

The *Amistad* zigzagged around the Atlantic for two months.¹³ Starvation forced the Africans to disembark in a series of East Coast port towns. In their wake, rumors of a black pirate ship swirled through New York newspapers in late August.¹⁴ Then on August 26, Lieutenant Thomas R. Gedney, commander of the USS *Washington*, a United States Coast Guard brig, seized the *Amistad* in Long Island Sound on the suspicion that it was a pirate ship. The Honorable Andrew T. Judson, a district judge, conducted a preliminary judicial investigation into the *Amistad* aboard the USS *Washington*. There, Ruiz and Montez lodged a complaint against the Africans; the United States swiftly framed an indictment, based on that complaint, charging them

¹² Tappan to Bacon, Oct 4, 1839, Bacon Family Papers, Box 5; Tappan to Joseph Sturge, Oct 9, 1839, in Howard Jones, *The Mutiny on the Amistad: The Saga of a Slave Revolt and its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 41. Tappan repeats that the trial is to “see if a man, although he is black, cannot have justice done him,” in Lewis Tappan, “Correspondence of Lewis Tappan and Others with the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society [Part 2],” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 12 (1927), No. 2, 187.

¹³ While the *Amistad* captives killed most of the ship’s crew, they had spared Ruiz and Montez because they claimed that they could, and would, steer the ship back to Africa. In fact, Ruiz and Montez only sailed the ship toward Africa during the day; at night, they sailed the ship in the direction of the United States.

¹⁴ For instance, the New York *Morning Herald* and the New York *Advertiser and Express* ran articles on August 24 warning that “a suspicious sail – a pirate” ship had been “discovered off our coast on Wednesday and in very mysterious circumstances.” There appeared no white men aboard it, yet a “number of negroes, twenty-five or thirty, were seen on deck. Some were almost or quite naked, some were wrapped in blankets, and one had on a white coat.” Most alarming was that this “strange crew on board were armed with muskets and cutlasses.” They could not be from Connecticut: since 1818, Connecticut’s constitution prevented blacks, slave or free, from carrying or owning such weapons. Indeed, these fearful men did not seem to be from America at all, as they “could speak no English, but appeared to talk in the negro language.” *Advertiser and Express*, August 24, 1838; *Morning Herald*, August 24, 1838, quoted in Maggie Montesinos Sale, *The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave Ship Revolts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 66-67. For a discussion of the history of antebellum states’ regulation of the right to bear arms according to race, see Clayton E. Cramer, “The Racist Roots of Gun Control,” 4 Kan. J.L. & Pub. Policy 17 (1994-1995), 17-26.

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with murder, mutiny, and piracy.

Gedney escorted the ship to New London, Connecticut.¹⁵ The Africans were jailed in New Haven, where the vast legal lattice of American racism threatened to juridically consummate their illegal enslavement. Immediately, Ruiz and Montez and Lieutenant Gedney filed claims to the ship and its merchandise – including the Africans – through a libel for salvage. Henry Green and Peletiah Fordham, two men whom the Africans had traded with, as well as the U.S. government, did the same by September's end.¹⁶

In 1817, King Ferdinand VII had announced that Spain would enter into a treaty with England that criminalized the purchase of slaves from Africa; it went into effect in 1820, and after that date, all Africans who entered into Spanish dominion were to be free. According to paperwork proffered by Ruiz and Montez, they had legally purchased the Africans in Cuba; the captives were *ladinos*, or blacks who had been enslaved or born to slavery before 1820, not *bozales* – people who had been kidnapped from Africa, brought to Cuba, and illegally sold into slavery since 1820. But Dwight P. Janes, a young New London abolitionist, thought the Spaniards' papers fraudulent. He implored the Reverend Joshua Leavitt to do something.¹⁷ Just days later, Leavitt, Simeon Jocelyn, and Lewis Tappan formed the Amistad Committee, taking on all responsibility for the Africans' legal defense.¹⁸

The Africans' legal position was perilous; the Committee's task must have seemed impossible, since none of the captives spoke English, Spanish, or any language intelligible in Connecticut. The captives could not contest the veracity of Ruiz's and Montez's paperwork, contradict their account of the journey from Cuba, nor appreciate the nuance of the American legal reality in which they were now mired. The Africans faced, in the first place, charges of murder and, consequently, the prospect of execution. At best, they faced enslavement. Tappan, Leavitt, and Jocelyn were wary of the Africans' chances in Connecticut's courts, and believed that

¹⁵ Many speculate that Gedney towed the ship to New London, Connecticut because he had calculated that New York's courts would never allow him to claim the Africans. In New York, slavery had been abolished outright. In Connecticut, it had been abolished by statute in 1784, on a basis so gradual that slaves remained until 1848.

¹⁶ Green and Fordham felt entitled to the *Amistad's* salvage because their transactions with the Africans had preceded Gedney's seizure of the ship. Ruiz and Montez had paperwork to indicate that they owned the ship, and therefore its contents. The U.S. government filed a right to salvage on behalf of Spain, which wanted custody of the Africans and hoped to try them in Spain. But because Lieutenant Gedney was the first person to actually board the *Amistad*, his claim to salvage was the most substantive of the bunch.

¹⁷ While aboard the *Washington* during Judson's inquiry, Ruiz had confessed to Janes that none of the Africans aboard the *Amistad* were legally slaves belonging to him or to Montez. Furthermore, there were four children amongst the captives – three girls and one boy. None of them spoke any Spanish, or any English, proving that they had been kidnapped from Africa.

¹⁸ The Committee furthermore took on responsibility for the captives' material well-being and spiritual education, and for financing their legal defense.

“the blacks’ greatest asset was public sympathy.”¹⁹

But by being black, and alleged slaves, the *Amistad* captives would be disadvantaged on entering the public arena: many Northerners would assume them to be stupid, cruel, heathen, and intended by God and science for slavery.²⁰ Indeed, it would have been bad enough to be black: the Northern public immediately assumed that the *Amistad* captives were intrinsically equivalent to American slaves. But they were blacks, and slaves, who had killed their white masters. It is hardly surprising that the *Amistad* captives made a fairly negative first impression on Northerners. Howard Jones writes that “popular excitement about the *Amistad* spread shortly after its arrival in New London.”²¹ The *Morning Courier* and the *New York Enquirer* “spoke of the black pirates, who had murdered the captain and crew and, but for Gedney’s bravery, would have continued preying on American merchant vessels and coastal dwellers.”²² Tappan had his work cut out for him.²³

Tappan’s Strategy

To capitalize on the Africans’ “greatest asset,” it was imperative that Amistad Committee persuade white Northerners that the *Amistad* captives were not like the blacks enslaved in the South, nor like those enslaved in Connecticut, of whom most white residents had a low opinion. Indeed, because blackness was synonymous with slavery, it had to make the *Amistad* captives as non-black as they could, different from American slaves, and more proximate – in their humanity, desires, and longings – to free whites in America. To this end, it devised a tripartite public relations strategy.

¹⁹ Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad*, 41.

²⁰ James M. McPherson writes that most white Americans considered blacks “by nature shiftless, slovenly, childlike, savage, and incapable of assimilation as equals into white society.” James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 134. Bloody race riots frequently took place in Northern cities between 1820 and 1845. White Northerners’ ideology of race was certainly variegated in 1839, but black inferiority, villainy, stupidity, moral weakness, and criminality remained its cardinal doctrines. The worst riot to erupt in New York occurred in 1834; race riots racked Ohio from 1815 through 1850. W. E. B. Dubois writes that in Philadelphia, “so intense was the race antipathy among the lower classes, and so much countenance did it receive from the middle and upper class, that there began, in 1829, a series of riots directed chiefly against Negroes, which recurred frequently until about 1840, and did not wholly cease until after the war.” W.E.B. Dubois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 24.

²¹ Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad*, 29.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Though many abolitionists were crucial to the Africans’ legal victory and to winning Northerners support, historians agree that Tappan deserves the lion’s share of the credit. The historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown writes that, “as founder and chief spokesman for the *Amistad* Committee, he wrote and managed all publicity, raised the funds, and supervised the prisoners’ needs. Tappan set legal policy, initiated the Cuban slave-owners’ arrest for slave trading, and enlisted all attorneys, including ex-president John Quincy Adams.” Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “Review,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 85 (1998), No. 3, 1175.

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First, Cinque, the acknowledged leader of the *Amistad* captives, was more like a prince, warrior, and Revolutionary soldier than like an inert, stupid, and barbarous American slave. Second, his fellow captives were denatured, to appear powerless, benign, and unthreatening to white supremacy; it was the duty of all Christians to convert these exotic specimens and send them back to Africa, where they belonged. Third, Ruiz and Montez were rendered the very embodiment of evil: foreign men who lived by the slave trade, which itself, in Tappan's telling, became an un-American abomination.

Cinque, Part I: Phrenology

The *Amistad* Committee's first action was to dispatch Tappan and Leavitt to New Haven in order that they visit the captives in jail. From this meeting, Tappan produced a lengthy article recounting his experience and impressions of the captives. The article was reprinted in a great number of newspapers across the country. In "The Schooner *Amistad*," Tappan presents Cinque as the protagonist of the *Amistad* narrative, and as an exception within, rather than as a member of the black race as Americans understood it:

Among the slaves purchased by Ruiz was one called in Spanish Joseph Cinquez, who is the son of an African chieftain. Cinquez is an extraordinary man. He is about twenty-six years of age, 5 feet 7 or 8 inches high, well made, and possessing superior strength and agility, which together with his fortitude, courage, and presence of mind, renders him a dangerous person to deprive of liberty. The Phrenological developments of his head are said to evince great sagacity, unshaken courage, and an ardent love of home and kindred.²⁴

Though dismissed as a "pseudo-science" by contemporary scholars, phrenology was science in 1839.²⁵ Eminent doctors subscribed to it, and swathes of Northerners were swayed

²⁴ Lewis Tappan, "Schooner *Amistad*," *The Colored American*, September 7, 1839.

²⁵ George E. Lewis writes that in *Amistad; an Opera in two Acts*, "moments of satire abound," as when "Cinque is paraded before a group of white phrenologists in early pursuit of the pseudoscience of eugenics (Act Two, Scene 4)," George E. Lewis, "Liner Notes," *Amistad; an Opera in Two Acts*, Soundtrack, Anthony Davis, New World Records, 1997, 7. In the capable hands of a dramaturge, phrenology should be used to delight. It seems that many historians have decided to treat phrenology like a good gag, rather than as a serious science phenomenon in its time. Matthew Rebhorn, for instance, depicts phrenology as a bizarre American mania of the 1800s, then scoffs that it was a "pseudoscience." Matthew Rebhorn, "Minding the Body: *Benito Cereno* and Melville's Embodied Reading Practice," *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 41 (2009), No. 2, 163. Susan Dudley Gold jeers that phrenology as a "pseudoscience... that was popular in the 1880s." Susan Dudley Gold, *United States v. Amistad: Slave Ship Mutiny* (New York, NY: Benchmark Books, 2006), 25. Todd Vogel too dismisses it as "pseudoscience." Todd Vogel, *Rewriting White: Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 26. Though the modern scientific establishment now holds that phrenology was scientifically incorrect, it enjoyed the support of the American medical establishment in the nineteenth century and thus must be taken seriously by the historian.

by its scientific explanations of black inferiority, including black abolitionists.²⁶

Moreover, it lent the cluster of arguments that pro-slavery forces typically deployed real and new weight. For instance, in his 1839 article, “Differences in the Intellectual Character of the Several Varieties of the Human Race,” Dr. Harvey Lindsly wrote that Africans’ unremitting inferiority as a race is “the only rational mode of explaining the docility and patience with which the blacks submit to slavery – and especially when, as is the case in some of the West India islands, they vastly outnumber their masters.”²⁷ He challenged his readers to suppose the racial dynamic of American slavery reversed. Aroused by his own counterfactual, he exclaimed that if ever “the Europeans [became] the slaves and the Negroes were the masters,” blacks’ “mental inferiority” would guarantee that it were temporary.²⁸ Lindsly acknowledged that, on occasion, blacks had rebelled against their masters, as the living guarantors of their slavery, and sought freedom. But even on those rare occasions, “their plans are so illy contrived – and so often betrayed through cowardice and ignorance and treachery,” that whites smited them “with ease and almost without effort.”²⁹ The black race could never produce “a Homer, a Demosthenes, a

Their scorn is furthermore regrettable on two grounds: in the first place, these scholars clearly, and understandably, prize science as a source of truth and of social progress. They also presume that science produces incorrect results only when the integrity of the scientific method is violated. This assumption is unwarranted, contrary to the notion that history is complicated, and without stable heroes, and unsupported by the history of science. Pierre Schlag argues that Francois Joseph Gall, who is generally considered the founder of phrenology, employed a scientific “method” that “was very much in keeping with early nineteenth century science.” Pierre Schlag, “Law and Phrenology,” *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 110 (1997), No. 4, 880. Then there is the example of Samuel George Morton, a Philadelphia phrenologist, who amassed a collection of skulls so large that it became famous throughout the world. He also discovered that by pouring white pepper seeds into a brain cavity, he could precisely and accurately ascertain the volume of a brain case. In 1839, he investigated forty-seven American Indians’ skulls, fifty-two Caucasian skulls, and twenty-nine “Ethiopian” skulls. He found that Ethiopians’ brain cavities were smallest, Caucasians’, largest, and American Indians’, in the middle. The method of measurement that he had devised was sound and scientifically innovative; he did not falsify his results. His sample was not representative, and so had no race-wide implications: this was his mistake. Alan Wilbert Currie Green, “Legacy of Illusion: The Image of the Negro in the Pre-Civil War North, 1787-1857,” (PhD. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1967), 71-73.

Many scientists have made that same mistake since. But historians label them “wrong,” not “pseudo-scientists.” In severing phrenology from the history of science, and cordoning it to the status of a mere “pseudo-science,” one is forced to wonder whether some scholars act from a sort of theism, or at the least, a political impulse to save science from its mistakes or embarrassing usages.

In the nineteenth century, phrenology was certainly “science” in the eyes of the American medical establishment for many decades. Finally, Donald Zochert shows the extent of public credulity in phrenology; it was not merely “science,” it was a science of historic import. Donald Zochert, “Science and the Common Man in Ante-Bellum America,” *Isis*, Vol. 65 (1974), No. 4, 448-473.

²⁶ Vogel writes that phrenology’s status in public discourse became so exalted “in the antebellum years that phrenological terms, despite a racist taxonomy, slipped into the public discourse, including even the writings of the black newspaper writers.” See, Vogel, *Rewriting White*, 30.

²⁷ Harvey Lindsly, “Differences in the Intellectual Character of the Several Varieties of the Human Race,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, Vol. 5 (1839), 616-620.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

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Milton, a Chatham, and a Franklin,” nor do any number of other things.³⁰

Lindsly’s claims could be mistaken for those made by Thomas R. R. Cobb or James D. B. DeBow, but for his theory of causation:

I think, can hardly doubt, that *here* an essential difference exists. And indeed a regular gradation in their intellectual powers, can be observed through the Caucasian, Mongolian, American, and Ethiopian varieties. And this gradation is in pretty exact proportion to the more or less perfect form of the head – the anterior and superior parts of the brain, being larger and more fully developed in the first, and more and more fattened and compressed as we descend in the scale.³¹

Lindsly would become president of the American Medical Association in 1858. His views on phrenology and race were already shared by the American medical establishment in 1839.

Though it is improbable that Tappan brought a phrenologist with him on his first visit with the *Amistad* captives, he ascribes to an alleged phrenologist the opinion that Cinque – due the dimensions of his head – is intelligent, brave, and honest; that freedom was his medical destiny.³² Tappan’s decision to enlist phrenology, a rabidly racist science, on Cinque’s behalf is a testament to the vivacity and iconoclasm of his intellect; it was the wit of giving to the beggar a loaf stolen from Herod.

Still, Tappan’s usage of phrenology contrasts Cinque with American slaves: whereas the slavery of blacks in America is justified by phrenology, phrenology holds that Cinque is singularly unfit for slavery. Tappan omitted from arguing that phrenology itself was wrong, or that all blacks, regardless of the shape or size of their head, deserved to be free.

Tappan should be credited with genius: his account insulated Cinque from a form of medical racism that would have endangered popular support for his freedom. But he achieved this by using medical racism as a foil; according to phrenology, Cinque was not really black, and therefore should not be subjected to the “justice” that American courts dealt blacks. Left unquestioned was whether Americans’ conception of blackness was just in the first place.

Tappan’s description of Cinque as endowed with unusual phrenological attributes penetrated the press’s reaction to his capture. The *New London Gazette* wrote that Cinque, “the master spirit and hero of this bloody tragedy,” was “of erect figure, well built, and very active.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² While the phrenologist Tappan refers to in this article is probably a fabrication, the *Amistad* Committee definitely hired phrenologists to analyze the Africans in later weeks.

He is said to be a match for any two men on board the schooner.”³³ The paper particularly relished that “his countenance, for a native African, is unusually intelligent, evincing uncommon decision and coolness, with a composure characteristic of true courage, and nothing to mark him as a malicious man.”³⁴ It concluded that according to “physiognomy and phrenology [Cinque] has considerable claim to benevolence. According to [the expert phrenologists] Gall and Spurzheim, his moral sentiments and intellectual faculties predominate considerably over his animal propensities.”³⁵

Moreover, that the famously anti-abolitionist *New York Morning Herald* disparaged Tappan’s account of Cinque in phrenological terms in some sense testifies to the radicalism, or power, of Tappan’s claims. In an editorial, the *Herald* declares that a man who had been disposed towards the Africans changed his mind on “looking” at them, and particularly, at Cinque. In Cinque, he saw no unusual phrenology: instead of the “graceful bearing of Othello, imparting energy and confidence to his intelligent and devoted followers, he saw a sullen, dumpish looking negro, with a flat nose, thick lips, and all the other characteristics of his debased countrymen, without a single redeeming or striking trait.”³⁶ This attack, while harrowing, is interesting in that it merely attempts to contradict the facts that Tappan had attested to. Contravening a saucy narrative can prove more onerous than inventing one: so at least, it must have seemed to the editors of the *Herald*, who failed to dislodge the public’s belief that the heroic Cinque was phrenologically white.³⁷

John W. Barber wrote a history of the *Amistad* case in 1840. In one lengthy section dedicated to Cinque, he writes that,

The following is a phrenological description of the head of Cinque as given by Mr. Fletcher: ‘Cinque appears to be about 26 years of age, of powerful frame, billious and sanguine temperament, bilious predominating. His head by measurement is 22-3/8 inches in circumference, 15 inches from the root of the nose to the occipital protuberance over the top of the head, 15 inches from the Meatus

³³ *New London Gazette*, as reprinted in the *New York Journal of Commerce*, August 30, 1839.

³⁴ *Ibid.* On the subject of slavery, the *New London Gazette* considered itself a reasonable interloper in a debate gone mad. Though it frequently published both articles and columns that were open to abolitionism, and though its editor, John J. Hyde, would grow sympathetic to the Africans, it could not be called an abolitionist paper.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ “The Captured Africans; *Correspondence of the Herald*; EN ROUTE TO HARTFORD, SEPT. 15,” *New York Morning Herald*, September 18, 1839, 2.

³⁷ Early newspaper accounts of the mutiny had inadvertently abetted Tappan in convincing Northern readers that Cinque was more phrenologically proximate to whites than blacks. For instance, the most powerful and widely circulated penny press in the nation, the *New York Sun*, had informed its readers that Cinque’s “eye is that of a Spaniard, and can express every variety of thought, from... cool contempt to the high resolve which would be sustained through martyrdom.” He also possessed “a set of teeth rivaling in beauty the most regular of those which we so praise in Caucasion [sic] beauty.” *New York Sun*, August 31, 1839.

Auditorious to do over the head, and 5 3/34 inches through the head at destructiveness.' The development of the faculties is as follows: Firmness; self-esteem; hope--very large. Benevolence; veneration; conscientiousness; approbateness; wonder; concentrativeness; inhabitiveness; comparison; form--large. Amativeness. philoprogenitiveness; adhesiveness; combativeness; destructiveness; secretiveness; constructiveness; caution; language; individuality; eventuality; causality; order--average. Alimentiveness; acquisitiveness; ideality; mirthfulness; imitation; size; weight; color; locality; number; time; tune--moderate and small. The head is well formed and nearly balanced, and the basilar moderate. In fact, such an African head is seldom to be seen, and doubtless in other circumstances would have been an honor to his race."³⁸

Barber prefaced his earnest history by warning readers that his sole intention was to document the *Amistad* affair objectively. That the first self-consciously objective history of the *Amistad* affair included a phrenological summary of Cinque as credulous and scrupulous as Barber's reflects both phrenology's stature in Northerners' discourse and its centrality to Northerners' perception of the Africans. Tappan's arguments for Cinque's racial transcendence were multiple; of them, phrenology was probably the most muscular. The smell of science, of objectivity, wafted around Cinque, emanated from his head, lingered in and enlivened Tappan's accounts of his superiority, and intoxicated Northern readers. According to many newspapers, as well as John W. Barber, Lewis Tappan, and several Yale phrenologists, no less, the proportions of his head verified that he should be free, and corroborated his "benevolence, veneration, conscientiousness, approbateness, wonder, and concentrativeness." In Cinque, the medical establishment found an exception that proved the inevitability of white rule: his head was of a different size than that of most American blacks, therefore he was different from most American blacks, and unlike them, should be free. This was, doubtless, useful to the *Amistad* Committee, and the people they fought for. But as certainly, it held no redemptive potential for blacks enslaved in America, whose heads remained, in the eyes of scientists and medics, of typical proportions, until well after the Civil War.³⁹

³⁸ This extract is simply too amazing to be abridged. Though Barber identifies the phrenologist as "Mr. Fletcher," it is likely L. N. Fowler wrote it, and that Barber made a mistake. L.N. Fowler, "Phrenological Developments of Joseph Cinquez, Alias Ginqa," *American Phrenological Journal and Miscellany*, Vol. 2 (1840), 136-138, quoted in John W. Barber, *A History of the Amistad Captives, Being a Circumstantial Account of the Capture of the Spanish Schooner Amistad by the Africans on Board Near Long Island, New York; With Biographical Sketches of Each of the Surviving Africans, Also, an Account of The Trials Had on Their Case, Before the District and Circuit Courts of the United States, for the District of Connecticut* (New Haven, CT: E. L. & J. W. Barber, 1840), 9-10.

³⁹ Despite Tappan's tales, phrenology remained a respected science that medically validated the appropriateness of slavery for American blacks. Indeed, Dr. S. A. Cartwright, of Louisiana, argued in an appendix to a pamphlet that published Taney's decision in *Dred Scott* that his decision was sound because the heads of "typical negroes" are "shining black, and as far as the conformation of the head and face is concerned," the "relative proportion of" bodily "matter outside of the cranium to the quantity of cerebral matter within it" attested that blacks were inferior to whites. "In the typical negro, a perpendicular line, let fall from the forehead, cuts off a large portion of the face;" one needed no

Cinque, Part II: The Revolution

In his excellent book *Holy Warriors*, James Stewart Brewer writes that membership of the American Colonization Society swelled in the early 1820s, and peaked by the end of the decade. Yet Lewis and Arthur Tappan, like many of its other members, renounced it by the end of the decade. “Inspired like their Puritan ancestors by Christian egalitarianism and a profound sense of personal guilt,” they embraced immediatism, and took “up the immense task of convincing their countrymen that slavery was a sin, and that race prejudice was at war with the teachings of Jesus.” Stewart writes that,

in so doing, they would appeal to the precedents set by the Revolution, the Declaration of Independence, the North-west Ordinance, and the outlawing of the African slave trade. Their opponents were to point to the ‘three-fifths clause’ and applaud the Revolution’s guarantee of property. The eighteenth century’s antislavery legacy, ambiguous in the extreme, would prove quite serviceable to all participants in the debates over slavery, which ultimately led to the Civil War.⁴⁰

Tappan certainly put the eighteenth century’s extremely ambiguous anti-slavery legacy to good use. In the “Schooner Amistad,” Tappan writes that Cinque made this rousing speech to his fellow captives when Lieutenant Gedney first boarded their ship:

Friends and Brothers - We would have returned but the sun was against us. I would not see you serve the white man, so induced you to help me kill the captain. I thought I should be killed - I expected it. It would have been better. You had better be killed than have many moons in misery. I shall be hanged, I think, every day. But this does not pain me. I could die happy, if by dying I could save so many of my brothers from the bondage of the white man... My brothers, I am once more among you, having deceived the enemy of our race by saying I had doubloons. I came to tell you that you have only one chance for death, and none for liberty. I am sure you prefer death, as I do. You can by killing the white men now on board, and I will help you, make the people here kill you. It is better for

medical degree to grasp the physiological difference between blacks and whites, merely the power of sight. Cartwright further argues that by using phrenology to analyze racial differences between black and white children, it becomes obvious that Taney’s candid assertion of blacks’ inferiority was medically justified: “Instead of the frontal and temporal bones being divided into six plates, as in the white child, they form but one bone in the negro infant. The head is not only smaller than that of the white child, but the pelvis of the negress is wider than that of the white woman.” S. A. Cartwright and J.H. Van Evrie, *The Dred Scott Decision: opinion of Chief Justice Taney, with an introduction by J. H. Van Evrie. Also, an Appendix, containing an essay on the Natural History of the prognathous race of mankind, originally written for the New York day-book, by Dr. S.A. Cartwright* (New York, NY: Van Evrie, Horton & Co, 1859), 45-48.

⁴⁰ James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: the Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1976), 32.

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you to do this, and then you will not only avert bondage yourselves, but prevent the entailment of unnumbered wrongs on your children.⁴¹

Again, Tappan's transcription of this speech was widely reprinted. At the point it was published, the Amistad Committee could not identify the language that the captives spoke, let alone locate a translator. Yet Cinque's speech was somehow comprehensible to Tappan, and delivered in the idiom of the American Revolution.⁴² Patrick Henry demanded that the British give him liberty or give him death in 1775; over sixty years later, Cinque does not simply paraphrase him, but shows mastery of the Revolutionary idiom. This had tremendous consequences for the public's impression of Cinque. In an editorial that crackles with William Lloyd Garrison's righteousness and incredulity, the *Liberator* announced that,

This young Prince, the Chief in the insurrection, has evidently within him the soul of a great man, and had his *skin been white*... he would have been lauded to the skies from one end of our Republic to the other as one of the greatest heroes – the bravest and the best that the world ever knew. Let the people read the speech which the interpreter and his foes say he made in view of death. Can any thing be found in the English language more touching, or noble, more exalted and sublime? He states his motives for what he did, and for what he still recommended. He had rather die than be a slave; who that possesses the soul of a free man could not?⁴³

Tappan had positioned the *Amistad* captives as the heirs to the American Revolution, and not its vandals. Sympathetic newspapers, like the *Gazette*, the *Courant*, the *Commercial Advertiser*, the *Colombian Centinel*, the *Liberator*, and the *Colored American* compared Cinque to James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Samuel Adams, Thomas Paine, George Washington,

⁴¹ Tappan, of course, served as the interpreter. Lewis Tappan, "Schooner Amistad," *The Colored American*, September 7, 1839.

⁴² In fact, several newspapers noticed that Tappan must have made up his account of Cinque's speech to his fellow captives aboard the *Amistad*. The *Herald*, for instance, declared that,

The extraordinary fabrications that have been put forth by the "Journal of Commerce," in relation to this important case, require to be promptly exposed and refuted.... so far from being a hero, Cinguiz is as miserably ignorant and brutalized a creature as the rest of them; that the speeches and declarations reputed to have been uttered by him, are all pure invention from beginning to end; that he made no speech whatever; and that if he had, there was no one who could translate what he said; the cabin boy knows nothing of the language, as asserted by the "Journal;" and had he been able to tell Mr. Hyde, according to the "Journal's" account, Mr. Hyde knows nothing of Spanish, and the boy cannot speak English.

"The Case of the Africans Decided for the Present--Habeas Corpus Not Sustained," *New York Morning Herald*, September, 25, 1839, 2.

⁴³ "From the Lynn Record, the Captured Brig Amistad," *The Liberator*, September 13, 1839.

and Andrew Hamilton. A week after Tappan's article, "Schooner Amistad," was published in newspapers throughout the East Coast, a Connecticut Reverend asked the readers of the *Colored American*: "what if we were doomed to take the place of those unfortunate men, who are now immured in the prison of a neighboring city, - yes, immured there for the very act which has rendered our forefathers illustrious - for drawing the *sword* for freedom! We build the sepulchres of our fathers, and incarcerate those who have imitated them!"⁴⁴

One reader's letter declared that Cinque and his fellow captives had been moved to kill their captors by "the spirit that prompted Patrick Henry to exclaim, on a memorable occasion, 'Give me liberty or give me death;'" it was "that same spirit that fired the bosom and stirred the arm of this daring African."⁴⁵ George Bancroft, the famous author, cried that Cinque was "more than a hero. He is, emphatically, one of God's noblemen. And by all the reasons and all principles on which we eulogize George Washington and his brave compeers, for resisting unto blood the attempts of Great Britain to subdue our people into *political* slavery... are we bound to laud Joseph Cinquez and his comrades for resisting, unto blood, the miscreants that would doom them to *personal* slavery."⁴⁶

The parallels that newspaper editors and readers drew between Cinque and Madison, Washington, Jefferson, and Adams may have advantaged Cinque and his fellow captives in many peoples' eyes. And it foreshadowed another, larger argument, that abolitionists honed in the *Amistad* trials, and would loom over American discourse until the Civil War: that America's soul and its truest legal character was contained in the Declaration of Independence, the Revolutionary document that promised freedom for all men, and not in the Constitution, which counted some as three-fifths of a person.⁴⁷

But those parallels positioned Cinque, again, as different from blacks enslaved in America. Northern memory had long removed blacks from the battlefields of the Revolution. Contemporary chroniclers even wrote that Henry Moss, a black soldier, transformed into a white man after the war, his hair changing from "the black crispy wool of the African, to the soft curly hair of the European."⁴⁸ According to the mythology of the Revolution, blood bought freedom,

⁴⁴ "To the Editor of the Evening Post," *The Colored American*, October 5, 1839.

⁴⁵ George Bancroft, "From the Herald of Freedom," *The Colored American*, October 5, 1839.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Bancroft's literary career was interrupted in 1848, when President Polk appointed him Secretary of the Navy.

⁴⁷ Tappan's account of Cinque's speech for instance moved the *Boston Courant* to declare that in judging whether American laws should bless Cinque's mutiny, "there could scarce be two opinions, especially among men who profess to accept the doctrines of our Declaration of Independence, and to believe, with the fathers of our Revolution, that 'resistance to tyrants is obedience to God. But they who have watched the practices of Americans, who are wont to glory in the 'self evident truths' of the Declaration, and eulogize the doings of our Revolutionary fathers, must long since have observed, that between those practices and their professions, there is not unfrequently an awful disparity.'" "The Amistad," *The Boston Courier*, reprinted in *The Colored American*, October 5, 1839.

⁴⁸ *The Weekly Magazine of Original Essays, Fugitive Pieces, and Interesting Intelligence*, Vol. 1 (1798), No. 3, quoted in Green, "Legacy of Illusion," 68.

and only those men who would spill blood for freedom deserved it. Corollary to Northerners' admiration for Cinque's Revolutionary desire for and means of getting freedom was the judgment that American blacks did not mutiny against their Southern masters, were unlike Cinque and the Founding Fathers, and that they therefore did not deserve freedom.⁴⁹

By the time Tappan's article was published, Cinque's coronation had already taken place on the stage of a New York theater where in a playwright's imagination he was an African prince. Tappan's characterization of Cinque as the "son of a chieftain" was factually bankrupt. Cinque himself denied it months later. When the Amistad Committee finally secured a translator, Cinque informed its members that he was merely the son of a powerful man in his tribe. But as an invention, "Cinque, the African prince, who has been unfairly deposed by the iniquitous slave trade," served several purposes. In the first place, it was the kind of lore that took on a life of its own. Even after Cinque debunked the myth of his own princedom, "the sobriquet by which he became known – 'the Black Prince,'" persisted.⁵⁰ The black abolitionist William Cooper Nell wrote in his 1855 book, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*, that, "among the slaves was one called in Spanish, Joseph Cinquez. He was the son of an African Prince."⁵¹

Secondly, it cleverly co-opted the paradigm of the "natural": for things to be restored to their proper order, Cinque ought not be enslaved, but returned to the throne, to Africa, to glory. Thirdly, though the invention of the United States was the political refutation of monarchy, Americans themselves still acknowledged monarchy as politically legitimate in the government of other peoples. In this way, Tappan's assertion that Cinque was a prince made honoring his right to freedom inordinately more palatable to white Northerners. If Cinque is a prince, Cinque is fundamentally not American, because no Americans were princes; nor is he black in the American sense, because it was inconceivable to imagine an American black the leader of a sovereign people. Finally, monarchy is hereditary, a right to rule conveyed by blood, by an exceptional lineage. Black slaves in America had no lineage, had no last names, no real names, no families worth

⁴⁹ Interestingly, Nat Turner's attempted rebellion in 1831 did not incite much admiration in Northerners, nor, certainly, did it provoke editorials that portrayed him as an heir of the Revolution. Had Lewis Tappan charged himself with publicizing it, this might have been different; but perhaps not. In comparison to the *Amistad* mutiny, Nat Turner's rebellion was, in infinite ways, more threatening to white Americans. Whereas the *Amistad* captives were Africans, Nat Turner was an American slave; to whites, his identity as a black man was therefore fixed, and implicated their identity as white Americans. Also, Nat Turner's rebellion had not taken place on the high seas, but in Virginia. This was discomfiting, and allowed white supremacists in both the North and the South to attribute Nat Turner's desire to rebel to abolitionists. Blacks, they argued, could not think for themselves. No such argument could be made about the *Amistad* captives.

⁵⁰ Horatio T. Strother, *The Underground Railroad in Connecticut* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), 71.

⁵¹ William Cooper Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution, With Sketches of Several Distinguished Colored Persons: To Which Is Added a Brief Survey of the Condition And Prospects of Colored Americans* (Boston, MA: Robert F. Walcutt, 1855), 393. C. L. Norton titled a 1901 article about Cinque, "Cinquez – the Black Prince." See, C. L. Norton, "Cinquez – the Black Prince," *Farmington Magazine*, Vol. 1 (1901), No. 4.

keeping together; none were exceptional. In casting Cinque as an African Prince, Tappan, in essence, forced white Northerners to view Cinque as the protagonist of an exotic tale, a character who acts and must be read outside the story of race in America. Tappan could only achieve this by contrasting Cinque with American blacks. In the eyes of Northerners, he became all that they were not: an exception, superior, while the inferiority of American blacks remained the ruling axiom.

Cinque's Fellow Africans

Tappan describes his first visit with the captives on the 9th of September in the *Journal of Commerce*:

The African prisoners are orderly and peaceable among themselves. Some of them sing well, and appear to be in spirits and are grateful for the kindness shown them... Cinquez is about 5 feet 8 inches high, of fine proportions, with a noble air. [His followers are] described in looks as being a very gentle race, cheerful in their dispositions, inquisitive, credulous, simple hearted, and much given to trading propensities... With suitable instruction these intelligent and docile Africans would soon learn to read and speak our language, and I cannot but hope that some of the benevolent inhabitants of this city will diligently continue to improve the opportunity to impart instruction to these pagans, brought by providence to their very doors.⁵²

Lindsly writes that the rudest African barbarians are “without chiefs, properly so called; without laws, or any thing like regular government.”⁵³ Tappan assures readers that this is not at all the case with the *Amistad* captives: they are well-governed, benign, friendly, intelligent, and helpless. Tappan’s account of the *Amistad* captives as “simple hearted” and “orderly and peaceable,” arranges them so that they do not appear to be a group of individuals, with names and separate identities, but a composite.

This serves a specific purpose: it denatures the *Amistad* captives so that they become a group of men without their own wills. The *Herald* had already introduced to the reading public its toxic claim that after the captives had mutinied aboard the *Amistad*, all they did was “eat and steal,” otherwise “they quarreled with themselves.”⁵⁴ While Connecticut had abolished slavery on a gradual basis in 1784, and most of its residents could countenance emancipation, equality, they could not. Connecticut had disenfranchised blacks in 1814. They were not deemed capable of self-government, of democracy. Tappan daintily rebutted the *Herald*’s libels against the

⁵² Lewis Tappan, “The Amistad Captives,” *Journal of Commerce*, September 9, 1839.

⁵³ Lindsly, “Differences in the Intellectual Character,” 616-620.

⁵⁴ “The Case of the Captured Negroes,” *New York Morning Herald*, September 9, 1839.

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Amistad crew without upbraiding Connecticut residents' racial certitudes. He portrayed them not as individuals, equals to whites or menacing to them, but as a harmless adjunct to Cinque. Tappan stoked the public to imagine that Cinque exercised perfect control over his fellow Africans: therefore the Africans, in killing their Spanish captors, had merely been following orders and are exculpated.

Furthermore, to white Northerners, the prospect of fifty, possibly cannibalistic, black Africans, being freed by the courts, arriving in their town, and doing violence, at the least, to its social order, was an unsavory one.⁵⁵ Tappan's depiction of the Africans deftly circumvented this looming anxiety. Though many white Northerners might oppose slavery, their comfort with blacks' freedom was contingent on blacks' continued and clear subjugation to whites. Tappan did not challenge their expectation of black subjugation, but flattered it: these Africans' freedom beckoned neither violence nor chaos because it would be nominal. They were already and would forever be subjugated, not to whites *per se*, but to Cinque. Thus it was not just lucky for the Africans and the Committee that Cinque was such a towering exception to his lowly race, but the hub around which all parts of the abolitionists' arguments interlocked.

Tappan deployed the "Africans" to formidable effect on other fronts as well. In his September 9th article, Tappan recounts a conversation that he had with one of the captives, aided, as ever, by the indispensable "interpreter."⁵⁶ "We endeavored to ascertain what his ideas were about the Supreme Being, if he had any," writes Tappan. Tappan needed God to be on the captives' side: so this captive said, "God is good."⁵⁷

With his typical flair for language, Lindsly explains that, "the darker varieties have, from time immemorial, been immersed in the lowest and most disgusting species of idolatry, or have been totally ignorant of the existence of a God, and of a future state of rewards and punishments."⁵⁸ Tappan's recollection of his conversation with the captive does not rebut

⁵⁵ In addition to Northern racism, Northerners' fears of the Africans were no doubt alloyed by the *New York Commercial Advertiser's* early allegation that one of the captives was a cannibal. "The Amistad," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, reprinted in the *Albany Evening Journal*, September 30, 1839.

⁵⁶ The "interpreter" was indispensable to Tappan, but imaginary. The Amistad Committee had sought the help of Josiah W. Gibbs, a linguistics professor at Yale College and Yale Divinity School, in locating someone who could translate the Africans' language into English. Gibbs could not recognize their languages, but conversed with the Africans, and at length memorized their words for some numbers. He scrambled about New York's and New Haven's waterfronts, saying the African's words for numbers, in the hope that someone might recognize the languages. Finally, he said them in front of James Covey, a former slave from Sierra Leone, and Charles Pratt, from Mendi, who spoke English fluently and were surprised to hear Mendi numbers spring from a white man's mouth. Gibbs brought them to New Haven for the first time, and the first real communication between the Africans and the Committee members, on September 9th, the day that Tappan's article was carried in the *Journal of Commerce*.

⁵⁷ Tappan, "The Amistad Captives."

⁵⁸ Lindsly, "Differences in the Intellectual Character," 616-620.

Linsdly's opinion, but exploits it; while blacks' aptitude for religion may be woefully meager, these Africans' are unlike them. They have the potential to know and love God.

The *Herald* was characteristically unimpressed by the captives' incipient religiosity, and suggested that, "the natives of Africa would be improved and elevated by transferring them to the genial climate of Carolina, and the mild restraints of an intelligent and humane planter."⁵⁹ Tappan did not need to counter the *Herald's* odious contention. For by ascribing an immature, but still monotheistic, perception of God to one, and therefore to all, of the *Amistad* Africans, Tappan issued an edict that New England's Christians obeyed like a destiny. Churches throughout Connecticut, and parishes throughout the country, began praying for the Africans' freedom. With their goodwill came donations, in droves. Tappan had adroitly defined helping the *Amistad* captives as nothing short of a religious duty, and simultaneously blighted the precept that the *Amistad* captives were black pagans, sentenced by race to hell.

Tappan was an un-ironic Christian, and his duty was to his clients. This essayist likes, admires, and regrets his mind: conniving, and rather wonderfully untethered by the realities, or ethics, that regulated the actions of many people who strived for the same things he did. And in falsely attributing the statement, "God is good," to one of the captives, Tappan may have gotten closer to Jerusalem. But getting to Jerusalem has its costs, and Tappan, again, left American slaves to pay them.

Not once did Tappan argue that converting to Christianity would qualify the captives for freedom. If conversion to Christianity could be a mechanism by which the *Amistad* captives might earn their freedom, conversion to Christianity could offer hope for the freedom of all black American slaves. Indeed, Ira Berlin has shown that before the Revolution, conversion to Christianity had been a route to manumission for many black slaves, and afterwards, continued to be in some parts the country.⁶⁰ Tappan had an opportunity to resurrect this legacy of thought, to make a real and concerted public argument for the *Amistad* captives that was without a downside, and that would also have benefitted American slaves. Instead, Tappan infantilized the captives by citing their proximate Christianity to evidence their Africanness, their otherness, and the urgent necessity of changing their beliefs. He never let Christianity hold a universal promise of freedom, of worth, regardless of race, and wrote the first chapter of a longer story, in which the *Amistad* captives, freed by American courts, were exported to Africa by the American Colonization Society.

⁵⁹ "The Case of the Captured Negroes," *New York Morning Herald*, September 9, 1839.

⁶⁰ Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 42-45.

The Girls

From the first, and long before Tappan became involved, the fact of there being little girls amongst the African captives was important. The *New York Commercial Advertiser* gave a detailed account of what the Africans aboard the *Amistad* looked like when the boat first docked in New Haven Harbor. It grimaced at the Africans' "emaciated bodies," pondered their strange clothing, and was loathing of, though riveted by, their nakedness. It declared that in one corner of the deck "sat the most horrible creature we ever saw in human shape, an object of terror," who the blacks "said was a cannibal."⁶¹ Then, its tone changed abruptly: the reporter cooed that "around the windlass were three little girls, from eight to thirteen years of age, the very images of health and gladness." It was the only happy detail in the story.⁶²

Any number of circumstances might provoke Northerners to feel shocked, angry, or affronted. But instances of violated female innocence, especially among the young and vulnerable, were particularly potent. Tappan gingerly utilized that species of rage, and the sentimental, and strange, systems of language in which that rage was encoded, to make the "three girls" a kind of allegory for the vulnerability of all the captives. He placed them at the forefront of his tales. About one of his first visits to New Haven, he reported that "the girls are in calico frocks, and have made the little shawls that were given them into turbans," in imitation of sartorial norms in their country.⁶³ The anecdote was charming, and made their youth, fragility, and childish normalcy legible and tangible to Northern readers. While most White Northerners could not feel any personal connection to the *Amistad*'s adult males, many identified in the girls something universal. Children playing with clothes, and doing funny things? These were fellow humans. Yet Tappan's anecdote still defined the girls as African, and therefore as outside American norms: after all, the children of slaves, and indeed the children of whites, didn't forge turbans from shawls.

In the same article, Tappan described the girls as "robust, and full of hilarity, especially the Mandingos." At least, they were robust and full of hilarity until "the sheriff of the county took them to ride in a wagon on Friday."⁶⁴ Immediately, "their eyes were filled with tears, and they seemed to be afraid."⁶⁵ Their vulnerability was affecting – a powerful means to change Northerners' minds, and open their pockets. Fortunately in this instance, the very moment that these little girls realized that this new, large, white person meant them no harm, they soon

⁶¹ "The Amistad," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, reprinted in the *Albany Evening Journal*, September 30, 1839.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Lewis Tappan, "To the Committee on Behalf of the African Prisoners and to the Marshal of the District of Connecticut," *New York Journal of Commerce*, September 10, 1839.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

“enjoyed themselves very well, and appeared to be greatly delighted.”⁶⁶ But by implication, much worse for them awaited if the captives lost their case. Tappan calculated correctly that the unhappiness of these three girls would be upsetting to white Northerners, even to those Northerners who, in their heart of hearts, despised blacks and would not change. To even those Northerners whose indifference to the heartbreaks, rapes, and beatings of America’s own slave children had long been absolute, the situation of the three little girls became a lever to provoke empathy and guilt.

Who had torn these children from their parents? What monster could do such a thing? Northern rage demanded to know. And the Amistad Committee answered: Spanish slave traders.

Public Reaction

The Amistad Committee’s presentation of the *Amistad* captives in the press was, by many measures, masterful. Its narrative of their noble leader, their terrible suffering, courageous mutiny, and current incarceration on charges that could lead to execution arrested millions of readers, and raised thousands of dollars. Indeed, Tappan’s depiction of the captives so mesmerized the Northern imagination that even the ever-hateful *Herald* was forced to note that when it came to the *Amistad* captives, “the enthusiasm that exists among the young people of Connecticut” was unparalleled. It rationalized that young Northerners’ ferocious sympathy for and interest in the Africans was a “species of hallucination,” and bitterly remarked that, “particularly the women... have invested in this affair, with all the romance of an eastern fairy tale, and they consider the black fellows as worthy of as much honor as the colored Moorish Knights of old.”⁶⁷ It was of course Tappan, with help from Leavitt and Jocelyn, and not Connecticut’s young women, who had placed the captives in a Moorish fairytale. Nor were Connecticut’s young women its only victims. The Committee began touring the country, telling the story of the mutiny, and changing the minds of people who had not or could not be reached by newspapers. At one point they “even sent Kale,” a young captive who had learned English and “one of the mutineers, on a speaking tour,” which served the dual purposes of generating publicity and profit.⁶⁸

But as Tappan’s narrative of the *Amistad* mutiny continued to peruse Northerners’ imaginations, there came a point when that same narrative ceased to need the Amistad Committee. New Haven’s Nathaniel Jocelyn – an oil painter of considerable repute – painted Cinque’s portrait. It codified Cinque’s public image as the noble African savage, staring out into the distance, trying to glimpse his faraway home. The draughtsman William H. Townsend

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ “The Captured Africans of the Amistad,” *The New York Morning Herald*, October 4, 1839, 2.

⁶⁸ Sidney Kaplan and J. W. B., “Black Mutiny on the Amistad,” *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 10 (1969), No. 3, 291.

made a small fortune on his drawings of the *Amistad* captives, which were reproduced throughout the nation, and primarily valued because they showcased the unique shape of Cinque's exalted head. Another artist, noting the public's fixation with the captives' phrenological traits, captured their likeness in a series of "anatomically correct" wax-works. The collection toured towns across the East Coast, so that even Northerners who lacked the means or opportunity to travel to New Haven might marvel at the shape of the Africans' skulls, and at how different they were to those of blacks in America. (Diagrams helpfully illustrated the phrenological differences that viewers should be looking for.) The *Colored American* was scandalized that so many "shameless people have made merchandise of the likeness of Cingues - as they have of the originals of his... countrymen."⁶⁹ Its outrage was naïve. For as the *Herald* tartly noted, even the *Amistad* captives "are utterly astonished at the prodigious sensation they have created; it is the only topic touched upon in conversation, in the streets, the bar room, the ball room, the boudoir, the bed room, the kitchen, the parlor and the pulpit."⁷⁰ Someone was bound to capitalize on it.

The barons of American theater certainly capitalized on it, and dramatized the *Amistad* mutiny on stage in ways that Lewis Tappan himself could not have gotten away with. "On stage at the Niblo's in New York the mutiny was dramatized in *The Black Schooner*, whose hero was Cinqué, a planter of rice in the Mendi country of Sierra Leone, son of a prince, 'of magnificent physique, commanding presence, forceful manners and commanding oratory.'⁷¹ That production brought in \$1,000. The revolt was also dramatized, "to crowded houses," at the Bowery Theater (\$1,650), the National theater (\$1,300), and the Park theater (\$1,300).⁷² The *Amistad* case also made New Haven and its neighboring counties a boomtown throughout the trials. "The public hotels at Hartford were filled with strangers, who were principally attracted by the novelty of the case."⁷³ Well-to-do visitors did not limit their tourism to the courtroom. "The public curiosity to see them is so great that the jail is thronged with visitors, from each of whom the jail keeper exacts a fee of 12.5 cents."⁷⁴

The *Amistad* Committee had succeeded in making *Amistad* the most famous trial in the young Republic's history. The *Colored American* proclaimed God had given America the *Amistad*: it commanded abolitionism with more force than "history" had "put forward since the days of Wilberforce."⁷⁵ But the public's reaction followed the channels that the Committee had dug. The "novelty" that attracted the crowds was an abolitionist spectacle, based on the peculiar existence of a group of blacks who had been free, had killed for their freedom, and might again become free

⁶⁹ "On Cingues," *The Colored American*, October 19, 1839, 1.

⁷⁰ "The Captured Africans of the *Amistad*," 2.

⁷¹ Sidney Kaplan and J. W. B., "Black Mutiny on the *Amistad*," 291.

⁷² Perry Walton, "The Mysterious Case of the Long, Low, Black Schooner," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 6 (1933), No. 2, 360.

⁷³ "The African Captives," *The Colored American*, September 28, 1839.

⁷⁴ "African Captives," *New Bedford Mercury*, November 13, 1839.

⁷⁵ "The Reflector, No. V," *The Colored American*, March 28, 1840.

– because they were Africans, and not American slaves. For instance, in a spirited editorial, *The Colored American* took on the *Herald*, which, to the black paper’s consternation, had published a graphic of

the mighty Cingues, with his *market price*. After giving him the character of Hannibal or Othello, [the editor] winds up his period with the 'he is a negro, who would command at New Orleans, under the hammer, at least \$1500!' But the lofty souled editor is mistaken. Cingues would not bring that in New Orleans. They don't want hands for the plantations, like Cingues. He is no slave. The slave jockey would not buy him. He would not like his air or his eye. Not to flatter the [editor of the *Herald*, but] we think *he* would *himself* command a much higher price at New Orleans or Washington than the stately Cingues.⁷⁶

The *Colored American*'s indignation is interesting because it is premised on the unfitness of the mighty Cinque for slavery, and not on the unfitness of slavery for anybody. Even Lindsly had conceded that, “notwithstanding, however, the decided superiority of the white races, we do not mean to assert, that there are not individuals among our darker brethren, capable of fathoming the most abstruse questions in philosophy, and of taking a high comparative rank among the gifted spirits of our race.”⁷⁷ The existence of an exceptional black man did not challenge the philosophy of white supremacy, nor the institution of slavery: indeed, acknowledging that a black man like Cinque was exceptional fortified the supposition that his race was generally inferior. White Northerners like Andrew T. Judson could admire Cinque’s accomplishments, then deem them all the more remarkable, considering that he was black. In proclaiming that the mighty Cinque was unfit for slavery, *The Colored American* did not mean to suggest that other blacks ought to be enslaved: but that is exactly what *The Colored American*'s characterization of Cinque still suggested. Moreover, it was the direct consequence of Tappan’s narrative of the *Amistad* mutiny, and its predication on Cinque’s superiority, on his being better than, rather than just like, blacks enslaved in America.

The Reverend Orville Dewey wrote a letter to the editor of the *Evening Post* that reflects all the practical political brilliance and the ultimate moral limitations of the *Amistad* Committee’s arguments for the release of the *Amistad* captives:

Has it then come to this - that, from the unhappy controversy which has arisen among us, concerning slavery, we are to be prevented from expressing the sentiments of common humanity? If it be so, then I think it is time that those

⁷⁶ “From the Herald of Freedom,” *The Colored American*, September 28, 1839.

⁷⁷ Lindsly, “Differences in the Intellectual Character,” 616-620.

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who are not abolitionists, as I am not, ... should let it be known, that neither are they callous to the claims of eternal justice.⁷⁸

The Amistad Committee had persuaded Dewey that the captives had an “eternal claim to justice.” He grounded that claim in the fact that the captives had once been free. Those who denigrated the captives’ right to freedom violated the “sentiments of common humanity,” because all humans, as Dewey sees it, should feel horror at the prospect of being born free and later being made a slave. His support was precisely the kind of support that they needed, and that the Amistad Committee deserves credit for winning: Dewey was in his own estimation no abolitionist, just an average person who could, in certain circumstances, look beyond color, and empathize with the wronged. But if the Reverend’s empathy for the *Amistad* captives had implications for his view of American slavery, he certainly did not know it. Indeed, the empathy that he expressed was based on an experience that black slaves born in America could never be lucky enough to have: the unjust abrogation of their freedom.⁷⁹

The *Amistad* captives’ claims to justice eternal, indeed, their humanity, was rooted, as Dewey saw it, in the fact that they had once been free: to the blacks who were already enslaved in America, he could not emotionally or morally relate. The emphasis that Tappan placed on the captives’ brutal kidnapping, their longing for a faraway home, and the abjection of their current helplessness had won the Reverend over: for American blacks, it was no victory. Indeed, it was the kind of thinking that defined their slavery as permissible, and for the duration of the *Amistad* trials, cluttered abolitionist newspapers.

Another consequence of the Amistad Committee’s propaganda, and particularly of Tappan’s decision to attribute to Cinque the same words, motivations, and philosophy that Patrick Henry had used to justify the murder of British royalists, was that more than twenty newspapers explicitly equated the captives’ right to freedom with their willingness to kill for it. Manly bloodshed as a means of self-liberation, of course, had deep roots in Christianity and in the Enlightenment. If the right to freedom was not inherent, but belonged only to those who would fight for it, then the “docility” of blacks slaves on plantations, or their unwillingness to embrace homicide in overthrowing their masters, confirmed that their enslavement was apt. *The Lynn Record* wrote that the Africans had “wanted that liberty which the Creator had given them, and took the only means to attain it – rose up upon their masters, murdered some of them, and then made themselves their own masters.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ “To the Editor of the Evening Post,” *The Colored American*, October 5, 1839.

⁷⁹ Many residents of Connecticut would consider the plight of run-away slaves in the same light after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 brought them into their own midst.

⁸⁰ “From the Lynn Record,” *The Lynn Record*, reprinted in the *Liberator*, November 13, 1839.

One must suppose that the *Lynn Record* would also acknowledge that if other blacks, at earlier points in history, had found themselves aboard a slave-ship destined for American shores, and taken it upon themselves to murder “the Captain and all the crew, by the laws of God and man, the laws of nature and of nations they would have been perfectly justified.”⁸¹ But those blacks, at those earlier points in history, had not done so. To the *Lynn Record*, and to the *Herald*, those blacks had thereby proven themselves unfit for liberty. And their children, sadly, would never have the chance to kill the person who was trying to enslave them: that job had been done, by their birth.

Impact

Perhaps the greatest failure of the Amistad Committee’s propaganda was that it demonized only the African slave trade, failed to prove its iniquity equivalent to that of plantation slavery, and never publicized its ongoing relationship with the domestic slave trade.⁸² Tappan’s narrative of the *Amistad* mutiny located the paramount evil, the original sin, in the acts of foreigners: the *Amistad* captives had been free in Africa. Wicked, rapacious Spanish slave-traders had kidnapped them from their African home and sold them into an illegitimate and dastardly genre of slavery, which required the intervention of the big-hearted American public to put right.

It was difficult to stick up for the slave trade, and had been for years. Even the *New York Morning Herald* felt compelled to express its repulsion, and indeed, to concede some measure of understanding for the Africans’ decision to mutiny:

Who will say that in all these movements they were not justifiable? We despise the humbug doctrines of the abolitionists and the miserable fanatics, who propagate them; but if men will traffic in human flesh, steal men from their homes on the coast of Africa, and sell them like cattle at Cuba, they must not murmur if some of the men stealers get murdered by the unfortunate wretches whom they have wronged and stole.⁸³

Indeed, American newspapers were united in condemning the slave trade, and the Amistad Committee triumphed in making slave-traders the villains of the *Amistad* affair. The *Colored American* furiously disparaged Ruiz and Montez as “Spanish savages,” and “kidnapping knaves,”⁸⁴ and called them “amenable for lawless outrages.”⁸⁵ Though *The Colored American* eviscerated

⁸¹ “The Captured Slaves,” *The New York Morning Herald*, September 2, 1839.

⁸² Finkelman estimates that “as many as fifty thousand additional slaves were imported into the United States between 1808 and 1865.” Finkelman, *Slavery in the Courtroom*, 212.

⁸³ “The Captured Slaves.”

⁸⁴ “Right,” *The Colored American*, October 19, 1839.

⁸⁵ “Right,” *The Colored American*, November 2, 1839.

Ruiz and Montez with glee and without apology, Ruiz and Montez fared better with its editors than with those of the *New York American*, a newspaper that had initially supported the arrest and trial of the *Amistad* captives for murder. The *New York American* explains that, “under the first representations,” it appeared “that the revolted crew were *legally held as slaves*.”⁸⁶ But “it would now seem, from the admissions of the white survivors of the *Amistad*, that the blacks on board *were not slaves*, even by Spanish laws – but, on the contrary, had been feloniously taken away from their own country, Africa, and in violation of Spanish laws, as well as the laws of Heaven,” and transported to Cuba where they were “held in duress.”⁸⁷ In light of this new information, the *New York American* now recommends that the Spanish slave-traders “who had stolen [the Africans]” be “hanged as pirates,” and as soon as possible.⁸⁸ The *New Bedford Mercury* too lambasted Ruiz and Montez, as Spaniards who had reduced these free Africans into “helpless and hopeless slaves.”⁸⁹ The *New Haven Record* recounted the process by which the Africans had been enslaved and transported to Cuba in nauseated and prodigious detail, beginning with the Africans’ kidnapping, chronicling their journey to Cuba, and ending with their sale to a series of Spaniards, in whose care they had been “harshly and cruelly treated, and but scantily supplied with food and drink.”⁹⁰ And Reverend Dewey himself despaired that the Africans had been “torn from their homes, and sold to the man-stealer that ever prowls about the coast of unhappy Africa. Alas! That that infamous traffic should still prevail, – nay, and with increased extent and atrocity.”⁹¹

Dewey was writing to an abolitionist newspaper. Yet his apoplexy was directed at the slave trade, not at slavery: “these unhappy persons are thrust into the hold of a slave-ship – treated with a cruelty never inflicted on beasts – suffer all the indescribable horrors of the *middle passage*.”⁹² To no American newspaper was there an obvious parallel between the Middle Passage and the plantations of North Carolina. To no American newspaper were there obvious parallels between the degradations that the *Amistad* Africans had faced in the slave markets of Havana and those faced by American slaves in the slave markets of Raleigh, Roanoke, Atlanta, or New Orleans.

Finally: had Ruiz or Montez been Americans, their ownership of the *Amistad* captives would not have been contested, and the Africans would indeed have been executed in American courts for murdering the men who kept them in bondage. The emphasis that the *Amistad* Committee laid on the Africans’ experience of violence, dehumanization, and incorrigible cruelty at the hands of slave traders could elicit horror and pity from white Northerners. But that horror and pity was

⁸⁶ “Schooner *Amistad*,” *New York American*, reprinted in *The Albany Evening Journal*, September 5, 1839.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ “African Captives,” *New Bedford Mercury*, November 13, 1839.

⁹⁰ “The Africans,” *New Haven Record*, reprinted in *The Colored American*, October 12, 1839.

⁹¹ Reverend Orville Dewey, “To the Editor of the Evening Post,” *The Colored American*, October 5, 1839.

⁹² *Ibid.*

possible only because Ruiz and Montez were Spanish, and not American. Northerners could discuss the slave trade in terms that they were comfortable with: an iniquity perpetrated by foreigners on foreigners. Moreover, the horror and the pity of white Northerners were not useful: the slave trade was already illegal in America, and, for that matter, in Spain.

The Courts

The Amistad Committee's arguments won in the courtroom too – but only some of them. In a move that was calculated to generate maximum publicity, Tappan persuaded John Quincy Adams, the former President, to represent the Africans before the Supreme Court, alongside Roger S. Baldwin. There, Adams argued that both the *Amistad* captives' right to freedom and their right to mutiny were derived from natural rights. Two copies of the *Declaration of Independence* hung on the walls of the chamber. Pointing at them, he thundered: "The moment you come, to the Declaration of Independence, that every man has a right to life and liberty, an inalienable right, this case is decided. I ask nothing more in behalf of these unfortunate men, than this Declaration."⁹³ Baldwin also argued that the question before the court was whether "[a] government, which was established for the promotion of justice, which was founded on the great principles of the revolution, as proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, can, consistently with the genius of our institutions, become a party to proceedings for the enslavement of human beings cast upon our shores."⁹⁴

The Court decided 7-1 in favor of the Amistad captives, but was quite sure that that was not the question before it. Justice Joseph Story wrote the opinion, and Chief Justice Roger Taney concurred: Cinque and his brethren were free to go home. But the Court's grounds for this decision were as narrow as it could make them. Fifteen years later, Story concurred with Taney's confident conviction in *Dred Scott* that the Constitution permitted enslavement. Both would have scoffed at the idea that there was anything legally inconsistent in the two decisions. In terms of the elaborate edifice of American law that sustained slavery before the Civil War, *Amistad* was a paradox only in its result, not in its logic.

The Court's decision started with a careful rendition of the case's unusual facts, noting that the *Amistad* had left Cuba on June 27, 1839, that "before the arrival of the vessel at her port of destination, the negroes rose, killed the captain, and took possession of her."⁹⁵ The Africans

⁹³ "Argument of John Quincy Adams, before the Supreme Court of the United States, in the case of the United States, appellants, vs. Cinque, and others, Africans, captured in the schooner Amistad, by Lieut. Gedney, delivered on the 24th of February and 1st of March, 1841, with a review of the case of the Antelope," reported in the 10th, 11th and 12th volumes of *Wheaton's Reports* (New York, NY: S.W. Benedict, 1841).

⁹⁴ *Reports of Cases Argued and Decided in The Supreme Court of the United States, Complete Edition, with Notes and References by Stephen K. Williams, Counselor at Law, Book X* (Newark, NY: The Lawyers Co-Operative Publishing Company, 1883), 847.

⁹⁵ *The United States, Appellants, v. The Libellants And Claimants Of The Schooner Amistad, Her Tackle, Apparel, And*

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now insist “that they were native born Africans; born free, and still of right ought to be free and not slaves; that they were, on or about the 15th of April, 1839, unlawfully kidnapped, and forcibly and wrongfully carried on board a certain vessel on the coast of Africa.”⁹⁶

“Before entering upon the discussion of the main points involved in this interesting and important controversy,” Story first wished to clarify that at this point, the issue was between only the U.S. Government and the Africans, and that the issue was only whether or not the Africans had lawfully been enslaved.⁹⁷ Story not only did not acknowledge Adams’s and Baldwin’s natural rights argument, he refuted it:

If these negroes were, at the time, lawfully held as slaves under the laws of Spain, and recognized by those laws as property capable of being lawfully bought and sold; we see no reason why they may not justly be deemed... merchandise, and, as such, ought to be restored to the claimants.⁹⁸

With *Dred Scott*, the Court made explicitly manifest that blackness was synonymous with enslavement. Taney ruled that blacks “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic, whenever profit could be made by it.”⁹⁹ The Court’s ruling in *Dred Scott* was fundamentally consistent with its ruling in *Amistad*. The Court only affirmed the Africans’ freedom because it “is plain beyond controversy” that “these negroes were never the lawful slaves of Ruiz or Montez,” but “natives of Africa” who were “kidnapped there, and were unlawfully transported to Cuba, in violation of the laws and treaties of Spain, and the most solemn edicts and declarations of that government.”¹⁰⁰ Story wrote that while “we may lament the dreadful acts, by which they asserted their liberty, and took possession of the *Amistad*, and endeavored to regain their native country,” they “cannot be deemed pirates or robbers in the sense of the law of nations.”¹⁰¹ The Court did not define the Africans as free, so much as it defined the Africans as not legally black, and therefore free, according to the logic of slavery later made more explicit in *Dred Scott*.

Story emphasized, repeatedly, that Spain’s laws held that “the African slave trade is utterly abolished,” and went so far as to call slave-dealing a “a heinous crime.” Story’s denunciation of the slave trade (though not slavery itself), like newspapers’ denunciations, was earnest. He had

Furniture, Together With Her Cargo, And The Africans Mentioned And Described In The Several Libels And Claims, Appellees, Supreme Court Of The United States, 40 U.S. 518; 10 L. Ed. 826, January, 1841 Term.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. (19 How.) 393 (1857).

¹⁰⁰ *United States v. The Amistad*.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

damned it before the circuit court's grand juries in Boston in 1819, arguing, "that if we tolerate this traffic, our charity is but a name, and our religion is little more than a faint and delusive shadow."¹⁰² Finkelman writes that, "in the ringing slogan of the British abolitionists, and in one of the most extreme antislavery statements by a U. S. Supreme Court justice, Story asked his fellow New Englanders, 'may not the miserable African ask, "Am I not a man and a brother?"'"¹⁰³ Yes – so long as he was African, so long as he was not a citizen of America. Story's opinion in *Amistad* made explicit that the *Amistad* captives were within the fraternity of freemen only because their initial enslavement had been illegal. Of course, the legality of American blacks' enslavement was a legal tautology: they had never been legally free, so they could never be legally free. This was the meaning of legal blackness.

Story in *Amistad* had ignored Adam's and Baldwin's argument that Declaration of Independence conferred on the *Amistad* captives natural rights. Taney in *Dred Scott* explicitly refuted it. Despite the ringing clarity of the Declaration's dictate that "all men are created equal," Taney reasoned that the Constitution held some men to be less than people: "it is too clear for dispute, that the enslaved African race were not intended to be included, and formed no part of the people who framed and adopted this Declaration."¹⁰⁴

In winning their freedom through violence, and then in America's highest court, the *Amistad* captives had successfully appropriated the Revolution while being black, so that the Court decided that the Declaration of Independence included them too. But the Court showed the Africans the same kind of brotherhood that *The Weekly Magazine* showed Henry Moss, the black Revolutionary soldier, in 1798: they allowed them the Declaration of Independence by transforming them into whites. In the end, if the *Amistad* captives wished to remain both black, and free, they had to leave the land in which this Constitution reigned.

Alumni of the American Colonization Society

To abolitionists, it had once seemed that the *Amistad* case would be lost – not before the Supreme Court, for it would never get there – but before the U.S. District Court, where the case fell into the hands of Andrew T. Judson. Judson had presided over the initial investigation into the events that took place on the *Amistad* while aboard Gedney's U.S.S. *Washington*. From his investigation, came indictments of the Africans for murder, mutiny, and piracy.

Though Judson was a well-known "Jacksonian Democrat," and "former Congressman," he had become famous as "the prosecutor of Prudence Crandall." In 1832, Crandall had admitted the daughters of free blacks to her small Quaker girls' school in

¹⁰² Joseph Story, quoted in Finkelman, *Slavery in the Courtroom*, 217.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ *Dred Scott v. Sandford*.

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Canterbury, Connecticut. Village merchants boycotted Crandall personally; neighbors vandalized her home; one person, or group, attempted to poison the school's well with excrement.¹⁰⁵ When these strategies proved insufficient, residents of Canterbury and the surrounding counties persuaded the state legislature, without apparent difficulty, to enact an "Act for the Admission and Settlement of Inhabitants in Towns," in May 1833, which criminalized the "'instruction or education of colored persons, who are not inhabitants of this State,' without the permission of the civil authorities in the town where the school was to be set up."¹⁰⁶

Under this law, Judson – then a state attorney for Wyndham County – jubilantly prosecuted Crandall. Before the Connecticut State Supreme Court of Errors in 1834, Judson bellowed that blacks, free or enslaved, were not citizens of any state, that "for the Founding Fathers to 'hold one portion of a *race of men* in bondage, while the other portion were made *citizens*,' ... would have been a 'strange inconsistency.'"¹⁰⁷ Black schoolchildren were a "'dangerous and destructive population.' People who believed blacks are citizens under the U.S. Constitution are 'madmen,' he says."¹⁰⁸ Concluding his argument, Judson "asks if Americans 'shall surrender the country purchased by the blood of our fathers, up to another race of men.' Judson thinks they should not, because, 'America is ours – it belongs to a race of white men the descendents of those who first redeemed the wilderness.'"¹⁰⁹ Judson's belief that blackness was incompatible with citizenship was unoriginal, yet his expression of that belief uncannily augured the emotion, logic, and even the language of Taney's decision in *Dred Scott*.

In the weeks preceding the *Amistad* trial, Northern abolitionists daily conjectured that Judson would torch every hope for the Africans freedom, and nowhere more ruefully than in Connecticut.¹¹⁰ Yet Judson's decision confounded everyone, including the U.S. attorney. First he ruled that under Connecticut law, slavery was illegal, therefore no claimant had a right to salvage over the Africans and no sum, commensurate with the Africans' market value as slaves, could be paid as compensation according to the right of salvage to any claimant.¹¹¹ Then, in November,

¹⁰⁵ Finkelman, *Slavery in the Courtroom*, 140.

¹⁰⁶ "An Act for the Admission and Settlement of Inhabitants in Towns," Boxes 17-18, Records of the General Assembly, Connecticut General Assembly Papers.

¹⁰⁷ Prudence Crandall, *plaintiff*. "Report of the arguments of counsel, in the case of Prudence Crandall, plff. in error, vs. State of Connecticut, before the Supreme Court of Errors, at their session, at Brooklyn, July term, 1834, by a member of the bar," quoted in Finkelman, *Slavery in the Courtroom*, 143.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*. Crandall was convicted, the conviction upheld on appeal, and only reversed by the Connecticut Supreme Court for technical reasons. Though the statute was repealed in 1838, it did not constitute a renunciation of Judson's theories of race, but instead a changed attitude towards Crandall as a person and to the dangers, specifically, of educating black schoolchildren.

¹¹⁰ In light of the fact that *Amistad* was in Judson's future, one aspect of the Crandall affair is especially ironic; Arthur Tappan, Lewis Tappan's brother, had bankrolled Crandall's defense.

¹¹¹ Yet Judson set their bail at the prices they would fetch on a slave market – which the *Amistad* Committee refused to pay. In another fascinating turn of mind, Judson affirmed that the *Amistad* captives no longer faced criminal charges,

Judson ruled that the Africans should be returned to their native land, at the President's expense: "Cinquez and Grabeau shall not sigh for Africa in vain. Bloody as may be their hands, they shall yet embrace their kindred."¹¹² The Africans had moved Judson, the staunchest of racists. No one could account for it.

James Brewer Stewart argues that the "spread of strong anti-slavery attitudes throughout whole regions of the North" between 1838, when the "wave of terrorism" ended, and 1842, was catalyzed by "antiabolitionist violence and Southern repression."¹¹³ That these three years coincided with the *Amistad* trials is lost on him; he does not mention them once in the entirety of his wonderful book, *Holy Warriors*.

Yet he notes that in the years in which the American Colonization Society's membership peaked, Lewis and Arthur Tappan, Joshua Leavitt, Simeon S. Jocelyn, William Lloyd Garrison, James G. Birney, Amos A. Phelps, and Samuel J. May, represented "only a partial list of the abolitionists who had at first believed that colonization promised much for the black race."¹¹⁴ Also in that group were Roger Taney, Joseph Story, and Andrew T. Judson.

The Tappan brothers, Leavitt and Jocelyn, and Taney, Story, and Judson, are seven men who remain written about because they affected American law and the unfolding of the slavery debate in America. No historians accuse them of having more than that in common: they spent their lives in opposing armies, trying to undue the consequences' of each others' works. Taney, Story, and Judson championed slavery and the Constitution. The Tappans, Leavitt, and Jocelyn championed abolition and the Declaration of Independence. In their furious contest for America's laws and soul, they allied only twice: as members of the American Colonization Society, and in their shared belief that the *Amistad* Africans should go free.

The *Amistad* ruling in many respects flattered the American Colonization Society's tepid abolitionism, doctrinal racism, and enthusiasm for deporting free blacks to Africa. But the *Amistad* case marked the Society's effective death, not the start of its triumph: it was the last time those seven men agreed with each other. This essay has already shown that the Court's opinion in *Amistad* was pro-slavery. Yet what is fascinating is that Taney, Story, and Judson wanted to claim the *Amistad* for their army, that they desired it enough that they wrapped the Africans in their Constitution, that they themselves became captives of the *Amistad* captives.

and kept them in the custody of the state, yet ordered the U.S. Marshall to house the Africans somewhere other than a jail.

¹¹² Finkelman, *Slavery in the Courtroom*, 228.

¹¹³ Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 72-76.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

Conclusion

The case of the *Amistad*, the most famous trial in the history of the young Republic, quickly disappeared from newspapers – even from abolitionist newspapers. Some papers mentioned it when Van Buren unsuccessfully ran for reelection in 1841, another smattering when they wrote of Adams' death in 1858. It is ironic that the abolitionists' first and greatest legal victory would prove so unimportant to abolitionist newspapers, but also inevitable. The price of their success was to make the freedom of the *Amistad* captives all but irrelevant to their future work.

The Amistad Committee worked tirelessly and skillfully to separate the plight of the *Amistad* Africans from that of blacks enslaved in America. It made Cinque a hero, turned Cinque's fellow captives into his likeable appendage, and recast the process of their enslavement so that it became a definitively un-American experience. Hasian and Carlson note that to white Northerners, the difference between the *Amistad* Africans and blacks enslaved in America was "as great as the journey just made by the former."¹¹⁵ Even Frederick Douglass could see a practical distinction, if not a legal one, between the desperate men on the *Amistad* and the subjugated victims of mass Southern slavery. It was one thing, he wrote in *The Heroic Slave*, "to manage a company of slaves on a Virginia plantation, and quite another to quell an insurrection on the lonely billows of the Atlantic, where every breeze speaks of courage and liberty."¹¹⁶

When the Africans landed in America and the authorities incarcerated them in a New Haven jail, the odds were stacked against them. But the Amistad Committee knew that; its members knew that in Connecticut courts, being black was being guilty, and that in American courts of every region, being black was being a slave. The Amistad Committee concluded that "it was vital that these captives were not viewed as slaves; indeed the very premise of the case turned upon the claim that they were free people unlawfully kidnapped from their homes."¹¹⁷

At every stage, the Committee chose to contrast the *Amistad* captives with American slaves and thereby make the captives less black: never did the Committee question the enslavement of blacks in America, or challenge white Northerners' perception of blackness itself. Insofar as the *Amistad* captives were freed by emphasizing their uniqueness, the intellectual and legal regime that enslaved millions of others was reinforced. Though there were more parallels than differences between the situation of American slaves and that of the Africans who mutinied on the *Amistad*, the Amistad Committee refrained from drawing them; its restraint is the probable

¹¹⁵ Hasian and Carlson, "Revisionism and Collective Memory," 50.

¹¹⁶ Frederick Douglass, "The Heroic Slave. Autographs for Freedom," ed. Julia Griffiths, (Boston: 1843), reprinted in *Three Classic African-American Novels*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York, NY: Penguin University Press, 1990), 62.

¹¹⁷ Hasian and Carlson, "Revisionism and Collective Memory," 50.

reason that the Africans became free, and that thousands of white Northerners could embrace their cause. As Wyatt-Brown writes, “the fate of a handful of bewildered Africans could arouse the pity of the American people... in a way that native born slaves caught in equally cruel circumstances could not.”¹¹⁸ In short, though the Amistad Committee was composed of abolitionists, its public defense of the *Amistad* captives was not exactly abolitionist.¹¹⁹ Indeed, its central, animating point was that unlike blacks who were “legally” enslaved in America, the *Amistad* Africans “were not automatically resigned to their fates, could commit violence without committing insurrection, and, most importantly, would not be staying in the country after their release.”¹²⁰

While black abolitionists were as unlikely as white abolitionists to rely on the *Amistad* case as a map for general progress, Cinque would still remain a kind of personal hero. In 1848, Frederick Douglass’s paper ran an advertisement for the *Prospectus of the American Phrenological Journal*; to its left was another, offering *A Tribute for the Negro*, a 300-page, eight-volume series that addressed blacks’ intellectual, religious, political, and historic achievements, for \$3.00. “The volume will also contain portraits of: Cinque, the Chief of the ‘Amistad Captives,’”¹²¹ among others; Frederick Douglass came lower down the list. In 1857, Douglass himself told a New York audience, discouraged by *Dred Scott*, to remember rebel slaves, to remember, “Joseph Cinque on the deck of the Amistad,” who “did that which should make his name dear to us.”¹²² In Cinque, black Americans would find proof, if ever they needed it, that freedom’s price was blood, which they too could meet.

Though the Amistad Committee bought the African captives’ freedom with the profits of playing Northern racism, its legacy in would not be simple. In 1859, Frederick Douglass’s paper ran an article on whites and blacks in Ohio who were being prosecuted for helping runaway slaves under the Fugitive Slave Act. It wrote that these imperiled people “ought to receive not only sympathy and prayer, but prompt and liberal pecuniary aid to keep them from suffering, and enable them to make a vigorous defense.”¹²³ Then it instructed its readers that “any money contributed for this purpose may be sent to” an address in Ohio, “or to the old Amistad Committee in New York, which is still in working order unbroken – Lewis Tappan, Treasurer,

¹¹⁸ Wyatt-Brown, quoted in *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Perhaps this use of the word, “abolitionist” is unduly narrow. But the formal aim of all American abolitionism was the abolition of slavery in America, whether gradually or immediately, whether emancipated blacks would remain in the country or be returned to Africa. This is precisely the position that the Amistad Committee never took in reference to the *Amistad* captives.

¹²⁰ Hasian and Carlson, “Revisionism and Collective Memory,” 50.

¹²¹ “Advertisements,” *Frederick Douglass’s Paper*, published as the *North Star*, March 11, 1848.

¹²² Frederick Douglass, “West India Emancipation,” in *Two Speeches, by Frederick Douglass; one on West India Emancipation, Delivered at Canandaigua, Aug. 4th, and the Other on the Dred Scott Decision, Delivered in New York, on the Occasion of the Anniversary of the American Abolition Society, May, 1857* (Rochester, NY: C. P. Dewey, 1857), 23.

¹²³ “The Oberlin Victims of Governmental Oppression,” *Frederick Douglass Paper*, Rochester, New York, August 8, 1859.

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No. 48 Bekman Street.”¹²⁴ The mission of the Amistad Committee did not end in 1841, nor did its good work. It is singularly appropriate that it later threw itself, its savvy, and its sincerity into defending those who fled slavery, and those who helped former slaves keep their stolen freedom, despite the threat and the violence of the Fugitive Slave Act.

The town of Farmington, Connecticut underwent a similar transformation. After the *Amistad* Africans won their freedom, but before the Committee could raise funds sufficient for their return to Africa, they spent many months in Farmington. Horatio T. Strother argues that out of Farmington’s residents’ interactions and experience grew sympathy for the Africans. That sympathy grew with time, and its implications for Farmington’s residents’ views of race and freedom, more radical. Strother argues that after 1850, their sympathy was “concretely expressed by some of Farmington’s well-known citizens in making their homes stations of the Underground Railroad.”¹²⁵ Its depth was the reason that Farmington became “so important a transfer point on the Underground Railroad.”¹²⁶

The Northern public, the Supreme Court, and Andrew T. Judson fell for the *Amistad* captives. For them, and for their freedom, they were willing to bend if not break the ideological confines of white supremacy; for those individual Africans, they felt genuine human compassion. For them, Lewis Tappan toiled, even though his daughter Eliza was dying of tuberculosis. “Tappan did not accompany his daughter to the gravesite in Brookline,” writes the historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown. “His *Amistad* Committee was staging a fund raiser; he felt obliged to attend.”¹²⁷

The *Amistad* is a powerful story. It was so powerful to white Northerners that it induced them to leave, momentarily, their categorizations of blackness behind in order to elope with the romance of freedom that it told. While its resolution was happy, it was so only for the thirty-nine Africans whom the courts defined finally as free: for blacks in America, free or enslaved, it was a loss, in which the freedom of few was achieved at their expense.

About the *Amistad* affair, the editors of *The Colored American* wrote on October 19th, 1839: “We wait to see the bearings of this providential event upon American Slavery.”¹²⁸ In fifteen years, their wait would end, with *Dred Scott*.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Quincy Blakely, “Farmington, One of the Mother Towns of Connecticut,” quoted in Horatio T. Strother, *The Underground Railroad in Connecticut* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), 167.

¹²⁶ Strother, *The Underground Railroad in Connecticut*, 66.

¹²⁷ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “Review,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 85 (1998), No. 3, 1175.

¹²⁸ *The Colored American*, October 19th, 1839.

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Bibliographical Essay

I originally planned to write my senior essay about antebellum litigation between free blacks: how did white judges adjudicate such disputes? While unable to testify in court against a white man, could free blacks become legally white in the eyes of the court, and vested with the same rights as a white man, if they sued one another?

Though I was, and remain, certain that “black-on-black” litigation occurred throughout the nineteenth century, weeks of dogged research yielded no documentation of it, not even one such case. My advisor, David Blight, encouraged me to change tacks, first with subtle hints, then with bolder directives. I did not want to; I had read so much about Northern law, free blacks, and racist precedents that I could not tolerate the prospect of losing my research investment. It was the reasoning of an inept gambler: in losing so much money, it becomes impossible to leave the casino, and urgent that one stays and wins big to redeem one’s losses.

In one discussion of my research problem, I asked David about free black lawyers and the abolitionist legal tradition. At some point, he mentioned that the *Amistad* was an important Supreme Court case and an abolitionist victory. I expressed surprise; I had thought it was a movie. In an astonished tone, he asked, “do you know anything about the *Amistad*?” He began a forty-minute monologue. The story of the captives’ mutiny so excited him that he knocked over a glass of water while gesturing for emphasis. It held me rapt. At the end of our meeting, he said, “great idea, Chase. Of course you should write about the *Amistad*. Start by reading Howard Jones’ book.”

It took me twenty minutes to realize that David had tricked me: my writing about the *Amistad* had been his idea. But Howard Jones’s *Mutiny on the Amistad* made me grateful for my gullibility. In the first place, it was a riveting history, in which my knowledge of antebellum law and free blacks would be useful. In the second, it was beautifully researched. His footnotes left no doubt that researching the *Amistad* would be utterly unlike black-on-black antebellum litigation, because there would be no shortage of primary sources: there was the plethora of legal documents it had generated, as well as presidents’ autobiographies, abolitionists’ correspondence, pamphlet literature, art, and newspaper accounts.

Given the wealth of primary documents, and the fame of the case, I was surprised at the difficulty I faced in trying to find other books about the *Amistad* affair. When David, at our next meeting, told me that that no academics wrote about it, I was baffled.

After talking to K. Stephen Prince, my brilliant, kind, and long-suffering TA, the absence of scholarship began to intrigue me. I found promising reviews of Iyunolu Folayan Osagie’s *The Amistad Revolt* on JSTOR and next read her book. Her analysis of the role that the *Amistad* played

in American and Sierra Leonean memory focused on the meanings it took on in both nations' literatures. I was impressed that the number of American authors who had written about the *Amistad* affair was so large, and that they spanned the 170 years since the captives arrived in America. The emphasis that she and Jones laid on the Amistad Committee's public relations campaign persuaded me to look at contemporary newspaper accounts of it.

First, though, I read Paul Finkelman's excellent overview of important slavery cases, *Slavery in the Courtroom*. His characterization of the *Amistad* as a remarkable anomaly in the greater scheme of slavery's entrenchment in American jurisprudence became formative of my legal research, and legal research became my priority. I found that most of the nuanced legal scholarship on the *Amistad* shared Finkelman's view of it, treating it as an exception. Finkelman also persuaded me that if *Amistad* was the high point of the antebellum Supreme Court's brief experiment with abolitionist thought and black equality, *Dred Scott* was its nadir. Finally, Finkelman led me to the belief that the *Amistad* was unimportant as a legal precedent: but if the Court's opinion in *Amistad* had contradicted its opinions in other cases, surely, it would have been cited by abolitionists in ensuing years – and it was not. I started to doubt that the Court's opinion in *Amistad* was all that inconsistent with the doctrines of race and slavery that it used to determine *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* and *Dred Scott*.

I wondered how I should value the Court's affirmation of the Amistad Africans' freedom: everyone seemed to agree that it was shocking, and I was prepared to concede as much, but still wanted to get a better grasp on the legal etymology of blackness and slavery in America. I then read Edmund Morgan's article, "Slavery and Freedom." Its discussion of changing demographics in colonial Virginia, the decline of white indentured servitude, and tobacco planters' concomitant transition to African slavery introduced me to a whole new range of questions: where and when did being black become synonymous with being enslaved? What was the legal meaning of being black? What constructions of blackness, in literature or in antebellum culture, complicated or contradicted the equation of blackness with enslavement?

I turned to Winthrop Jordan's *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism*. Jordan allowed me to develop a more supple understanding of race myths, their function, and their relationship to each other. The only positive representation of a black character in the literature that white Northerners might have encountered was Shakespeare's Othello. Osagie's and Jones's descriptions of Cinque, and the fuss that abolitionists, white Northerners, and black abolitionists kicked up about him then fell into focus: as the brave leader of the *Amistad* mutiny, who still fought for his freedom in American courts, Cinque for Americans, and particularly for Northerners, was like attending a two-year-long production of *Othello*, except that in this version, things didn't end tragically.

Senior Essay

I found it odder and odder that there was so little actual history written about the *Amistad*, and that too many of the few books about it read like adventure literature. Increasingly, I realized that Jones' book, while wonderful, beautifully researched, and the seminal work on the case, was actually very narrow in its aims. It was so assiduously researched and humanely imagined that it was not, at first, apparent to me that Jones did not venture much in the way of analysis: it was a piece of reportage, the kind that only a historian can do, but reportage nonetheless. When it came to the *Amistad*, the world's *Amistad* expert was not very opinionated. On the one hand, this seemed understandable. At the time Jones wrote *Mutiny*, there was very little history of the *Amistad* for him to revise, or take intellectual umbrage with. It also seemed to evidence Osagie's point, and vindicate the premises of her research: the history of the *Amistad* is a history of literature, of culture, of stories – not of events and causations.

I started reading contemporary newspaper accounts of the *Amistad* affair. Immediately, I was shocked by some of the language that journalists used to describe Cinque, at Northerners' apparently endless appetite for stories that discussed the captives' shapely heads, that so many newspapers made references to their "tumbling" abilities. They also showed me that to white Northerners, the *Amistad* captives' racial identity was far more complicated than black. Nor did they read the Africans' mutiny as merely the violence of slaves against masters; ironically, though the violence that took place aboard the *Amistad* was perpetrated by foreigners, on foreigners, it spoke to white Americans, and asked them to define their country's character. Maggie Montesinos Sale's *The Slumbering Volcano* persuaded me that the American Revolution was a central theme in Northerners' open-minded consideration of and support for the *Amistad* captives. James Brewer Stewart's *Holy Warriors* convinced me that defining the legacy of the American Revolution was critical to the slavery debate in America, and a self-conscious abolitionist project from the 1830s on.

James Turner's article, "Use of the Courts in the Movement to Abolish American Slavery," helped me crystallize a lot of the ideas that Stewart had planted, and exorcise some of the grievances I had been nursing. I had already begun to see the *Amistad* case as abolitionists' first and mightiest legal victory, as opposed to it being an abolitionist victory: neither the public debate nor the Court's ruling disturbed or really disapproved of blacks' enslavement in America. I increasingly identified Lewis Tappan's initial newspaper accounts of the *Amistad* captives as the origin of the public's most striking conceptions of the *Amistad* Africans. Yet the script Tappan succeeded getting Northerners to read from was clearly designed to differentiate the Africans from American slaves, and even placated pro-slavery arguments for blacks' inferiority. I began to feel angry at Tappan: it was he who had ruined the abolitionist potential of the *Amistad* case with his articles, with his phrenologists, with his charismatic lies. Turner sorted me out. His analysis of the *Amistad* case is unique in assessing its impact and meanings within the context of the abolitionists' use of the courts over the course of the nineteenth century. That the Supreme Court's opinion in *Amistad* was pro-slavery and consistent with *Dred Scott* did not preclude it from

having an enormous effect on abolitionism itself. Through the *Amistad*, Turner helped me see the connection between the Tappan's invocation of the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence on the Africans' behalf, and Frederick Douglass's break from Garrison over whether the Constitution was pro-slavery, and Lysander Spooner's constitutional theories. Turner showed me that while many of Tappan's arguments for the Africans' freedom did nothing good for American slaves in the 1830s, others later came into maturity in the Reconstruction Amendments.

Around this time, I read Hon. Michael Daly Hawkins's article, "John Quincy Adams and the Antebellum Maritime Slave Trade," and another article, "The Supreme Court, 1990 Term," by Guido Calabresi and Charles Ogletree. These convinced me that the history of slavery in antebellum courtrooms was so unrelenting in its cruelty toward blacks, and its legal justifications of this cruelty so intellectually flexible, that the Africans' victory in the *Amistad* was an inspiring exception. I also realized that academics are people too: they need to believe that human goodness is possible, search for proofs that it is, and hold on tightly when they think they have found one.

In the course of writing this paper, I looked at hundreds and hundreds of articles about the *Amistad* captives. But there are thousands. My argument is constructed with an incomplete body of evidence. This is its major weakness.

Of course, its other great weakness is that it essentially seeks to explain the absence of the *Amistad* from histories of slavery and antebellum law, from abolitionists' memory and later campaigns, and from the list of events, moments, and debates that undermined slavery and the theory of racial inferiority that sustained it. At points, I think this has required more ingenuity, better eyesight, and greater ethical discipline from me than any other historical question I have attempted answering. Nevertheless, it is hard to draw things that do not exist. Peering into absences, hoping to find the origins of the *Amistad's* non-existences, has nevertheless felt like a powerful tool for capturing what remains both mysterious and tangible in its legacy.

