

ments in *Questioning Slavery* in 1996. Thanking all the staff of the Library Company, I wrote “I hope others do not take it amiss if I single out Phil Lapsansky for praise and thanks. He steered me towards sources and books I did not know about and generally acted as my mentor and guide—often above the call of duty.” Clearly the books, tracts, and illustrations formed the bedrock of my work on slavery. But my access to it would have been utterly different (more difficult and time-consuming) without the friendly expertise of Phil Lapsansky.

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Ashli White

As any visitor to the Library Company of Philadelphia well knows, Samuel Jennings’s *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences* makes a striking impression (see p. 71). Measuring five feet high and over six feet wide, this rendition of liberty bestowing gifts of knowledge to eager African Americans occupies a prominent place in the reading room, right above the enormous card catalog and opposite the entrance. Several scholars have remarked on this picture, less for its artistic execution than for its historical significance. Dating from 1790–1792, it is one of the first allegorical paintings by an American, and it features an abolitionist theme. In the context of the Library Company’s holdings, the painting points to the centrality of African American history to the institution’s collection from its earliest days, a collection which Phil Lapsansky has nurtured for the past forty years.

The Library Company, under Phil’s influence, has been particularly attuned to connections between African Americans and the broader black Atlantic, and in this spirit I offer a brief and speculative rereading of Jennings’s famous painting. Most often this allegory has been considered as part of a very local story about abolition, yet from an Atlantic perspective the painting’s theme and timing are revealing. Jennings, a Philadelphia native studying

in London, presented his services to the Directors of the Library Company in early 1790, proposing to paint a large canvas for the Library Company’s new building. The artist suggested a classical theme, with Clio, Calliope, and Minerva, to honor the arts and sciences. A few months later the Directors,



Detail. Samuel Jennings, *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences*. Oil on canvas, London 1792. Gift of the artist.

among whom were several abolitionists, accepted Jennings's offer but insisted on a different subject: Liberty "with her Cap and proper Insignia," introducing various fields of knowledge to "a Groupe of Negroes sitting on the Earth, or in some attitude expressive of Ease & Joy." Jennings agreed to the change and added his own interpretive flourishes, most notably, another group of African Americans gathered around a liberty pole in the background.

Jennings finished the painting in 1792, but before he shipped it to Philadelphia, he made a small copy with one minor alteration: he placed a British shield at Liberty's feet. Clearly, Jennings hoped that this canvas would be a showpiece—a work that would generate interest and business on both sides of the Atlantic. In this era allegories of liberty resonated in sundry national venues, and given the transatlantic abolitionist movement, so, too, might the theme of the painting. In an effort to drum up business in the United States, Jennings asked the Directors of the Library Company to solicit subscriptions among the public for an engraving of the painting. While an advertisement to that end appeared in Philadelphia newspapers in May 1792, the print was never issued, nor, it seems, did Jennings have any luck selling reproductions of his rendition of *Liberty* in England.

The short life of Jennings's project begs the question: why did the painting not enjoy the success and distribution that Jennings anticipated? His contemporaries, like many subsequent critics, may have found the painting lacking artistically, but more likely the answer lies in the greater Atlantic world. In 1791—a year after the initial conception of the painting but before its completion—slaves in the French Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue revolted, inaugurating what would become the Haitian Revolution. News of the insurrection spread swiftly, and white observers expressed more sympathy for white planters than for rebel slaves. Even abolitionists were wary of this campaign for liberation: immediate freedom achieved through violence contrasted starkly with their plans for gradual manumission by legal means. The following year, 1793, was even more problematic, as French republican officials endorsed the slaves' fight by declaring emancipation on the island—a move that anglophone abolitionists found reckless. The Pennsylvania Abolition Society began to retreat from calls for universal liberty, while on the other side of the

Atlantic, abolitionists faced increasing criticism as Great Britain invaded Saint-Domingue with the aim of reinstating slavery.

Given these reactions to the Haitian Revolution, Jennings's depiction of Liberty—replete with liberty cap and poles and freed slaves—may have become too radical to disseminate widely. Perhaps more troubling, events in Saint-Domingue exposed the lie at the heart of Jennings's painting (and in the views of abolition societies), namely that enslaved peoples would wait patiently to receive liberty from enlightened whites, remaining, all the while, submissive at their feet. The Haitian Revolution showed that slaves were ready to seize freedom for themselves and on their own terms. For all its abolitionist overtures, the abandoned trajectory of Samuel Jennings's painting invites us to reconsider the thorny relationship between slavery and freedom in the age of Atlantic revolutions, and thanks to Phil's unparalleled stewardship and scholarship, the Library Company of Philadelphia is a crucial place to carry out this important work.

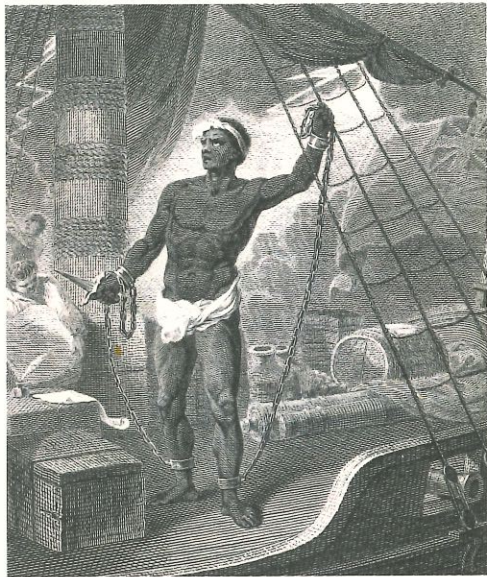
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Heather S. Nathans

My quest for the right picture took almost four years. My second book, *Slavery and Sentiment on the American Stage, 1787–1861*, explores the ways in which sentiment was deployed onstage not only as a weapon against slavery, but in the service of racial uplift. The book deliberately moves away from well-known stage images such as Uncle Tom, Eliza, and Jim Crow, in search of other models of sympathy and attraction. However, while these alternative images filled the stage, very few were ever captured in antebellum visual culture. Thus in 2005 I launched a seemingly endless search for that one, defining visual image to adorn the cover of my book and distill the essence of my argument without resorting to the familiar icons of the American antislavery movement. I looked in vain for an image that would combine the theatricality of emancipation with the sentimental culture of the period, while simultaneously recognizing African Americans' agency in their post-slavery transformations.

In thinking about appropriate images, I had been strongly influenced



"Slave on Deck," by George Cooke, frontispiece to Thomas Day and John Bicknell, *The Dying Negro, a Poem* (London: John Stockdale, 1793).

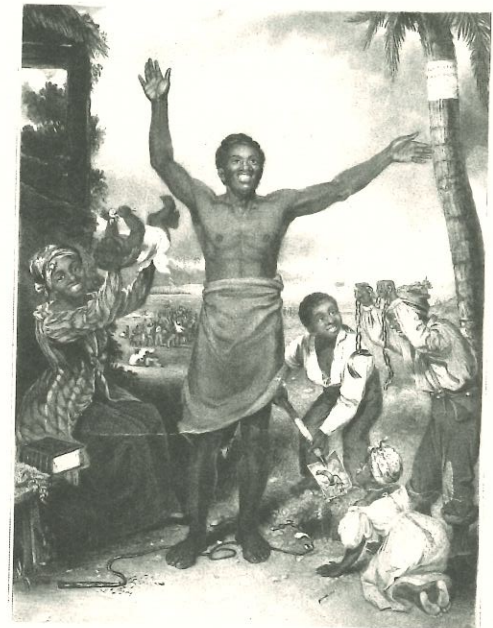
by Phil Lapsanky's essay, "Graphic Discord: Abolitionist and Antiabolitionist Images" and by my discussions with him while I was a fellow at the Library Company. As Lapsanky notes in his essay, "supplicants adorned countless abolitionist books, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, broadsides, letterheads, and printed ephemera" (206). The ubiquitous icon, "Am I Not a Man and a Brother," would certainly have been familiar to both contemporary readers and to 18th- and 19th-century theatre audiences, with the kneeling slave raising his

hands to a sometimes visible, sometimes invisible white liberator. Yet the representations I was studying in the playhouse depicted more complex relationships among black and white communities. These relationships were fraught with tension and often featured the black character firmly fixed at the center of his or her narrative, rather than displaced by the ghostly presence of a white benefactor.

With Phil's guidance and that of his colleagues in the Library Company's Print Department, who showed me hundreds of prints, maps, daguerreotypes, cartoons, engravings, and portraits, I narrowed my cover choice down to two possibilities: "The Slave on Deck" (1793) and *To the Friends of Negro Emancipation* (1834). George Cooke's "Slave on Deck," an illustration included in the 1793 edition of *The Dying Negro*, features a highly theatrical setting with the rebellious slave standing on the deck of a ship, arms and legs shackled, yet with knife drawn, as jagged bolts of lightning streak across the sky. The image conjures the story of a man who has escaped for one brief

moment of freedom—even if that moment will end in his suicide or murder by the ship's white crew. It recalled for me the character of Hassan, in Matthew G. Lewis's 1798 drama *The Castle Spectre*. In the play Hassan describes the terrible trauma of being on the slave ship, vowing vengeance on his white captors, "In that moment when the last point of Africa faded from my view . . . in that bitter moment did I banish all humanity from my breast. . . . Oh how it joys me when the white man suffers!"

The "Slave on Deck" print also conjured images of the *Amistad* uprising—an event



To the Friends of Negro Emancipation, engraving by David Lucas after a painting by Alexander Rippingille (London, 1834).

dramatized by American entertainers in forms ranging from wax works to plays such as *The Black Schooner*.

Yet the “Slave on Deck” image, while powerful, also spoke of defeat and despair. Perhaps more importantly, the tone evoked Gothic horror rather than sentimental culture. Alexander Rippingille’s 1834 study *To the Friends of Negro Emancipation* also offered a rich landscape of symbols, including young African boys burying the broken chains of slavery, a discarded whip, a ship sailing off in the distance (perhaps representing a retreating colonial power), and a young mother lifting her baby to the heavens. Yet it was the central figure—so similar and yet so different from the figure in “Slave on Deck”—that captured my imagination. Like the African in “Slave on Deck,” the male figure in Rippingille’s study is half clad and surrounded by other figures in European dress (indeed their poses almost mirror each others’). Yet in Rippingille’s portrait, the man’s partial nudity conveys not savagery, but a stripping away of all European accretions—a symbolic rebirth, like the swaddled baby next to him, who is also lifting its arms in triumph.

At the end of a long search, I finally found my cover image, but beyond that, I gained a deeper appreciation of the extraordinary role visual culture played in transforming the abject, downtrodden victim of slavery into a powerful and victorious hero. Phil’s work guided me not only towards a greater understanding of the development of antebellum abolitionist and antiabolitionist imagery, it offered me a new vocabulary for discussing the dynamic exchanges between print and performance culture.

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Dana D. Nelson

I grew up working class in Colorado and did my graduate work in Michigan. I worked my way slowly east through my young adulthood, a physical movement that eventually drew me to my scholarly center. As a westerner, big cities were a foreign land to me but as an early Americanist, Philadelphia was a foregone conclusion: a research lodestone, birthplace of the public library, home to amazing archives. I first went for a summer just out of graduate school, doing work on Benjamin Rush’s niece, Rebecca Rush, the supposed author of the 1812 novel *Kelroy*, written “By a Lady of Pennsylvania.” I’d been turned down on a Mellon Foundation fellowship by the Library Company and went on my own dime: intrepid, poor, and so, so green. Staff and reading room assistants at the Library Company—Mary Anne Hines, Denise Larrabee, and Jim Green—helped me scour their holdings and brainstorm for other ways to track down information about the elusive author for my Oxford University Press Early American Women Writers reprint edition. At the edge of my awareness all summer was Phil—silver-haired and blue-eyed behind smudged glasses, distracted, humming, elusive. I didn’t have the impression he was interested in my *Kelroy* project. I didn’t have the nerve to ask.

That first summer, though, I did some preliminary scouting for my next book, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Duke University Press, 1998), and it was clear the Library Company was an important archive for that project. So with some coaching from Jim Green, I refined my application and won a Mellon residency. And *this* time, I managed to earn the attention of Phil. What a pleasure and treasure that became. For this essay, John Van Horne asked contributors to think of a source or two—“book, pamphlet, periodical, broadside, or graphic”—that Phil brought to our attention. But the sources Phil brought to my attention are all over *National Manhood*, and it would be impossible to isolate one or two as key. Probably more important are the ones I can’t even remember. I can’t count the times Phil either brought something to my table or took me upstairs to look at images or materials not yet cataloged. I’d ponder, not always seeing a place or an immediate connection. “Just think about it,” Phil would quietly and officially conclude. Many of these did not show up in my book—but