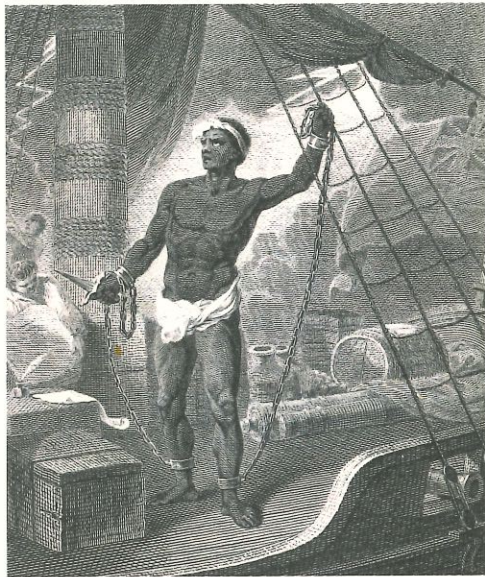


Heather S. Nathans

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).

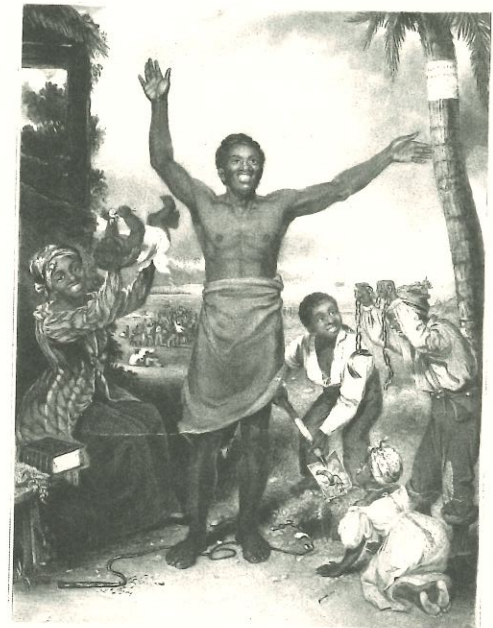
by Phil Lapsanky's essay, "Graphic Discord: Abolitionist and Antiabolitionist Images" and by my discussions with him while I was a fellow at the Library Company. As Lapsanky notes in his essay, "supplicants adorned countless abolitionist books, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, broadsides, letterheads, 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.

Heather S. Nathans is a Professor in the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies, University of Maryland. She edits the University of Iowa Press’s Studies in Theatre History and Culture series and has written *Early American Theatre from the Revolution to Thomas Jefferson* and *Slavery and Sentiment on the American Stage, 1787–1861: Lifting the Veil of Black* (both Cambridge University Press, 2003, 2009). She is currently writing “Hideous Characters and Beautiful Pagans: Performing Jewish Identity on the Antebellum American Stage.”

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