The Strength and Influence of Abolitionist Imagery:
the *Amistad* Revolt Leader in Abolitionist Propaganda

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Introduction

Abolitionist Propaganda and the Black Image

American abolitionists frequently employed propaganda in their struggle to end slavery. By exposing the injustices of black servitude, abolitionists believed that they could persuade others to join their cause and hence accelerate slavery's demise. At the heart of abolitionist propaganda was the black bondsman; slavery's opponents manipulated images of black slaves as one way to present their moralistic antislavery arguments. For abolitionists, images of blacks, in written and visual media, emerged as a way to shape their Northern audiences' perception of slavery.

Visual propaganda, in particular, played an important role in American abolition as a means to disseminate antislavery views and to shape the black image. Images of black slaves, that abolitionists depicted using certain reoccurring themes, were the central focus of these antislavery illustrations. Abolitionists repeatedly portrayed bondsmen as victims in need of sympathy and rescue from abusive owners. They additionally asserted, through illustrations, that emancipation would be mutually beneficial to blacks and whites. Slaves could gain freedom without disrupting society because they would willingly assimilate. Finally, in a somewhat different vein, abolitionists depicted blacks as possessing natural nobility. Abolitionists generally focused on famous, achieving blacks, in the present and past, highlighted their accomplishments, and claimed that slavery prevented bondservants from similar achievements.[1] Over several decades, these themes evolved into the abolitionists' iconographic vocabulary-- the ideas from which abolitionists repeatedly drew when they created black images in their propaganda.[2]

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[1] A few scholars address certain black themes in abolitionist propaganda. Several historians discuss the idea of blacks as sympathetic victims in antislavery propaganda: Bernard Reilly, "Art of the Antislavery Movement," *Courage and Conscience: Black and White Abolitionists and American Slavery* (Bloominton: 1993); Phillip Lapsansky, "Graphic Discord: *Abolitionists and antiabolitionst Images,"* The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture In Anti-bellum America (Ithaca: 1994); Aileen Kraditor, *Means*

The recurrent ways of portraying black slaves were apparent throughout the whole of American abolitionist propaganda during the 1830s. In this decade, American abolitionists dramatically increased their propaganda production. These changes were in response to their movement's expansion, greater publishing capacity, and transformations in antislavery doctrine.[3] The rapid proliferation of abolitionist societies during this period created more offices to disseminate antislavery messages and yielded more subscribers to their publications. Abolition also had the benefit of wealthy activists like Arthur and Lewis Tappan, two merchant brothers from New York, who were willing to bankroll antislavery efforts. Additionally, during this decade, abolitionists expanded their journalistic capacities. By 1834, an arsenal of new publications joined the recently established major newspapers like *The Liberator*, and *The Emancipator*, published in New York by the American Antislavery Society, began to aim for national circulation. Technology aided antislavery efforts as steam-powered presses increased publishing capacity and decreased costs. Thus, abolitionists could produce even more antislavery propaganda quickly and cheaply. The American Antislavery Society's postal campaign during 1835 provides an

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and Ends in American Abolition: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850 (New York: 1969). The Following scholars address ideas concerning black emancipation and assimilation: Phillip Lapsansky, *Graphic Discord*; Winthrop Jordan, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (New York: 1974). Winthrop Jordan, *The White Man's Burden*, and Bernard Reilly, in *The Art of the Antislavery Movement*, discuss blacks portrayed as noble figures.

[2] In *Graphic Discord*, Phillip Lapsansky uses the term iconographic vocabulary to describe the legacy of graphic propaganda developed by the predecessors to the abolitionists of the 1830s, 202. Both Art Historians, Hugh Honour, in *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (Cambridge: 1989), and Guy McElroy, in *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art 1710-1940* (New York: 1990), express a similar sentiment of an "index" of defined black stereotypes in artists' portrayals of blacks in their artwork.

[3] Phillip Lapsansky, *Graphic Discord*, 202. James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York, 1976) 68. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland: 1969) 163.

example of their publishing capacity: that summer the Society mailed hundreds of thousands of pieces of antislavery literature to the South.[4]

The 1830s signaled an important transformation in abolitionist doctrine that redirected the movement and influenced their propaganda production. During the 1830s, the doctrine of immediate emancipation, which called for a direct end to slavery, emerged as the dominant attitude in abolitionist thought.[5] As antislavery doctrine became more militant, abolitionists expanded their desire to convert others to the movement. Abolitionist Elizer Wright embodied the sentiment of immediate emancipation as he asserted that antislavery needed to be proclaimed "so long as there is a slave" and that abolitionists should spread antislavery sentiment to "agitate the consciences of tyrants, so long as there is a tyrant on the globe."[6] Immediatism required that abolitionists be unrelenting in disseminating their views against human bondage thus abolitionist propaganda become a more necessary aspect of the movement.

Abolitionists promoted the discussion of slavery and manumission through a variety of media such as their own newspapers, tracts, pamphlets, speeches, and conventions. Antislavery illustrations, in particular, played an important role in abolitionist propaganda. Slavery opponents themselves recognized the potential persuasive force that visual antislavery arguments possessed. During a women's antislavery convention, Sarah Grimke asserted that her fellow abolitionists "regard anti-slavery prints as powerful auxiliaries in the cause of emancipation, and recommend that these 'pictorial representations' be multiplied a hundred fold; so that the speechless agony of the fettered slave may unceasingly appeal to the heart of the patriotic, the philanthropic, and the Christian."[7] Abolitionists perceived that visual representations could often be a more moving, and hence more effective mediam of persuasion, than written propaganda. Abolitionists, therefore, frequently placed visual reminders of their cause on a variety of media ranging from utilitarian objects such as purses and thimbles to more traditional media such as broadsides and pamphlets.[8] Despite the importance of visual propaganda to the antislavery movement, abolitionists did not explicitly use visual propaganda before 1787, when a group of British abolitionists created the first antislavery illustration the well-known supplicant slave image.[9] Following the creation of the supplicant image, both British and American abolitionists generated numerous antislavery illustrations. Abolitionists continued to promote the antislavery message with visual propaganda in order to "keep the subject [of slavery] before the public eye, and by every innocent expedient to promote perpetual discussion."[10]

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[4] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland: 1969) 162.
[5] A good discussion of immediate emancipation appears in James Stewart's *Holy Warriors*, 50-73. Stewart also make the connection between immediatism of the 1830s and an increase of propaganda production.
[6] The quote appears in Stewart's *Holy Warriors*, 44.
[7] The quote appears in Lapsansky's *Graphic Discord*, 203. It is from the proceedings of *the Anti-Slavery*

Throughout the 1830s, as visual propaganda became more important to the abolitionist movement, the black image remained a central focus of antislavery propaganda. Abolitionists used the reoccurring themes of blacks as victims, as obedient free blacks, and as ennobled figures when they created illustrations of blacks. Whether they invented a character for their propaganda or relied on an already known black figure, abolitionists shaped the images of the free and enslaved blacks that appeared in their propaganda in order to convey certain antislavery arguments. Their illustrations were, in part, a defensive measure in the face of proslavery images that portrayed negative aspects of free blacks and slaves. Proslavery advocates played to popular anxieties concerning black emancipation with their own visual propaganda. In less benign propaganda, slaveowners claimed that blacks were by nature creatures unsuited for freedom; on their own they were brute, violent savages. In their propaganda, slavery supporters defended

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Convention of American Women, 1837.

[8] Bernard Reilly, *The Art of the Antislavery Movement*, 50.

[9] Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 62.

[10] *The Liberator*, January 17, 1831.

the institution by depicting slavery as a civilizing and beneficial lifestyle for slaves. They claimed that slavery domesticated the beast within and turned the slaves into a jovial, contend servants. Slavery supporters also argued that servitude provided a religious as well as a civilizing influence as it brought blacks out of their native paganism and idolatry to experience a Christian country. Some even went so far as to claim that slaves were grateful for the "opportunities" that bondage afforded them.[11] Using their own propaganda, these are the images and ideas that abolitionists fought to support black emancipation.

Abolitionists frequently used black images as a way to shape the viewers' perceptions of slaves. In 1839, with the arrival of popular slave revolt leader, abolitionists gained an excellent opportunity to shape the image of a well-known African to promote antislavery ideals. In August of 1839, a United States cruiser, patrolling off the coast of Connecticut, captured a suspicious Spanish slaver, *La Amistad.* Officials soon discovered that the Africans who captained the vessel had "mutinied" against their captors and immediately imprisoned those aboard. Amid popular speculation that their Spanish owners had illegally enslaved them, these mutineers became a popular sensation. Northern newspapers gave the affair extensive attention, but most of the popular regard focused on the leader of the revolt, Joseph Cinque.[12] His descriptions monopolized many of the newspaper reports regarding the *Amistad* and within a few months, several artists had created and begun to circulate paintings featuring the revolt leader.[13]

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[11] George Fredrickson addresses the ideas of the natural savagery of slaves and positive effects of slavery in *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York, 1971) 52-54. He also discusses ideas concerning slave gratitude, 56. David Brion Davis touches on these ideas and addresses the "Christian influence" of slavery in *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: 1966) 473, 474.

[12] Cinque's African name was Singbe Pieh. His Spanish owners gave all of the Africans Spanish names on forged documents that claimed that they were Cuban natives. He is known in the United States by his Spanish name, Joseph Cinque. There are, however, variations concerning the spellings and pronunciation of this name. I will use the spelling Cinque (pronounced Sin-Kay). Several other spellings that appear in primary sources are: Jingua, Sengbe, Shinquaw, Cinques, and Cinquez.

[13] Several of the newspapers that highlighted the *Amistad* affair and featured Cinque in their articles

Within Cinque's two year stay in the United States, abolitionists generated numerous visual images and descriptions of him. The problem with using Cinque as an antislavery image, however, was that he did not easily fit into the traditional themes with which abolitionists depicted blacks. His already-established persona made merely plugging him into the iconographic language of previous abolitionist illustration difficult. Instead of creating new images for Cinque outside of the traditional ways of depicting blacks in their propaganda, abolitionists portrayed Cinque with their more familiar traditional themes. Cinque's image, therefore, demonstrated the continued importance of imagery in abolition and the strength of iconographic vocabulary with which abolitionists addressed blacks.

Cinque's involvement in abolitionist propaganda began with his entanglement in the illegal Cuban slave trade. In April of 1839, Portuguese merchants kidnapped and transported over five-hundred Africans aboard their slaver, the *Tecora*. By June, the Africans found themselves for sale at a market in Havana, Cuba.[14] Later that month, two Spaniards, Jose Ruiz and Pedro Montes, purchased some of these Africans; Ruiz bought forty-nine adult males and Montes purchased four children (three of them girls). Two days later the Spaniards loaded their purchases aboard the Spanish slaver, *La Amistad*, and set sail for Puerto Principe.

After three nights at sea, the Africans' journey as slaves took a different turn as Cinque unlocked his shackles with a nail he found above deck and freed the other captives. The Africans then found sugar cane knives, attacked the crew, and killed the captain and cook. They spared the Spaniards and forced Montes to navigate back to Africa; yet he

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include: *The New York Sun*, August 31, 1839, September 12, 1839; *The Liberator*, September 6, 1839, September 13, 1839; *The Niles National Register*, September 7, 1839, September 13, 1839.

[14] Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad: The Saga of a Slave Revolt and Its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy* (New York: 1987) 14-22. Jones' monograph is the most thorough account of this revolt and its effects in the United States. Bertram Wyatt-Brown also describes this event in his biography of Lewis Tappan, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, 205-225. B. Edmond Martin gives an account of this event in *All We Want is to Make Us Free, La Amistad and the Reform Abolitionists* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986).

obstructed the voyage as much as possible and navigated the *Amistad* eastward by day and north during the night. Montes kept the vessel in the Caribbean as long as he could, but within two months at sea, the *Amistad* began to make its way up the United States' East coast.[15]

On August 26th, the American revenue cutter, the *USS Washington* captained by Lieutenant Gedney finally seized the *Amistad* and took the vessel and its passengers to New London, Connecticut where District Court Judge Andrew Judson heard the testimony of the Spaniards on board the *Washington.* Judson immediately perceived questions concerning the case's jurisdiction and probable piracy and murder charges for the Africans. He decided to detain the fifty-three adult African males for the September 17th meeting of the United States Circuit Court in Hartford. Officials then took the Amistad captives to a New Haven jail until the trial.

The episode did not long remain an obscure judicial matter; the *Amistad* and its passengers drew tremendous public curiosity the day after their arrival. Northern newspapers gave the affair extensive attention and demonstrated the tremendous popular support the Africans initially received. Many articles concentrated on the Africans, described their revolt, their wanderings at sea, and their capture. One African in particular, the revolt leader Joseph Cinque, generated intense interest. Newspapers paid particular attention to the Africans' leader by providing lengthy descriptions of Cinque's physical and emotional characteristics. By the fall of 1839, Cinque dominated the early accounts of the *Amistad* episode. Soon abolitionists would also begin to use Cinque in their propaganda.

While Cinque received most of the attention, the Africans as a group generated support among the Northern press. Several newspapers criticized the Spaniards for illegally enslaving the Africans and asserted their natural right to freedom. *The Boston*

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[15] *The Emancipator*, September 5, 1839. The testimony of Senor Don Ruiz appears in the *Emancipator*. In it he gives an account of the revolt and their wanderings at sea.

Courier asserted that the blacks committed no crime and that they merely had "attempted to regain the liberty in which they were born."[16] *The Sunday Morning News*, a self proclaimed antiabolitionist paper, stated that the Spaniards put the Africans "in a state of involuntary durance and forced servitude" and that they were "justified in setting themselves free."[17] Yet in the same article, *The Sunday Morning News* asserted that, generally, blacks were "happier and better in a state of subjugation." This seemingly incongruous endorsement of slavery and justification of the Africans' freedom demonstrated that *Amistad* supporters reached groups and individuals beyond abolitionists and abolitionist sympathizers. That the *Amistad* captives were a popular sensation was also evident in the public's desire to see the newly famous Africans in person. New Haven residents paid admission to view the captives while they were in jail.[18] Joshua Leavitt reported the great "curiosity" to see the prisoners as he described the "multitudes" that visited the prison.[19] Over four thousand people paid the jailer to see the Africans just before their first Circuit Court trial in September.[20]

Despite widespread support, there were critics of the Africans throughout the North and especially the South. Dissenters were quick to highlight the violent means by which the Africans attained their freedom. Some newspapers claimed that the blacks were pirates and murderers who violated the safety of those who lived along the coast.[21] Those opposed to the *Amistad* captives did not even want the case to go to trial in the United States but wanted to give the Africans over to Spain. *The Evening Star* criticized the tremendous sympathy that the Africans received and asserted that if they were white they would receive punishment. They claimed that the event was a "God send to the ultrabolitionists" and that antislavery supporters would manipulate the episode for their own purposes.[22] *The Charleston Patriot* also criticized public sympathy for the Africans and reminded readers that the hands of the "piratical crew" still reeked with the "blood of murdered men."[23]

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[16] *The Boston Courier*, appearing in *The Liberator*, September 13, 1839.
[17] *The Sunday Morning News*, appearing in the *Emancipator*, September 12, 1839.
[18] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, 207.
[19] *The Liberator*, September 13, 1839.
[20] Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad*, 65.
[21] Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad*, 29.

Using the *Amistad* episode to advertise slavery's injustices was an opportunity not lost on the abolitionists. Shortly after the schooner landed, several local abolitionists became interested in the plight of the African captives. An abolitionist had been on board the *Washington* during Judge Judson's hearings and became convinced that the Spaniards had illegally enslaved the Africans. He wrote two more well-known abolitionist lawyers, Joshua Leavitt, a New Yorker and editor of the *Emancipator*, and Roger S. Baldwin, a New Haven lawyer, asked the two to investigate the case. By early September, New York abolitionists had appointed Lewis Tappan, Simeon Jocelyn, and Joshua Leavitt as an "*Amistad* Committee" to raise money, employ counsel, and look after the welfare of the Africans. All three members of the committee were individuals who had been long active in the abolitionist cause. Lewis Tappan was a well known Christian abolitionist and New York businessman. He was one of the founders of the American Antislavery Society. Tappan was instrumental in procuring legal aid and provisions for the captives. Simeon Jocelyn was a Congregationalist minister in New Haven and very active in the abolitionist cause. He was the minister of New Havens first church for blacks and founder of the city's Antislavery society. Joshua Leavitt was known for his work with the *Emacipator*. The *Amistad* defense team consisted of a group of local lawyers who were either abolitionists or abolitionist sympathizers: Roger S. Baldwin, Seth Staples, and Theodore Sedgewick.

Abolitionists did provide tremendous assistance to the Africans during their stay in the United States. While the Africans were in their care, the abolitionists attempted to educate and christianize them. Local activists taught them English and took particular care of their religious instruction by providing Yale divinity students for regular lessons. Abolitionists searched for interpreters in order to better communicate with the Africans and also to allow them to testify in their own defense in court. Abolitionists were completely responsible for their legal aid and raised funds for their court costs; abolitionists hoped, that once the Africans attained their freedom, they could be sent back to their native continent as missionaries.

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[22] *The Evening Star* appearing in the *Emancipator*, September 19, 1839.

[23] *The Charleston Patriot*, September 10, 1839, appearing in the *Emancipator* September 26, 1839.

Abolitionists sought not only to defend, care for, and educate the Africans, but also to use their case as a way to highlight the evils of slavery in the public forum of a courtroom. In addition to the slim possibility of making a legal impact on slavery, the event would be like a living antislavery pamphlet as abolitionists highlighted the injustices imposed upon the Africans. As "captives" of the slave trade, slavery, and the American legal system, the already popular Africans would evoke the sympathy that escaped the Southern bondsman. Abolitionists hoped that the public would eventually blur any distinction between the Africans on trial and the African-American slaves in the South.

The American courts would finally decide the future of the Africans. It took almost two years involving trials in the District, Circuit, and Supreme Courts to gain their freedom. There were many legal proceedings for the *Amistad* committee before their Supreme Court victory on March 9, 1841. The key issues involved in the cases were deciding whether the captives were native Africans who had illegally been enslaved and should therefore go free, or whether the blacks were indeed slaves born in Cuba. If they were Cuban natives then a Spanish-American treaty asserted that they must be returned.

Throughout their lengthy legal battle, the *Amistad* captives' plight remained a popular topic. The amount of attention they received was evident in the numbers of people who attended the court proceedings. According to *The New York Sun*, the captives' circuit court trial drew such tremendous crowds that the "public hotels seem to be filled with citizens from all quarters" drawn by their deep interest in the case.[24] Public interest did not diminish during the Africans' two year stay as *The New York Weekly Express* reported during their District trial in January, 1840, "the interest instead of diminishing, increases. The court is crowded. Most of the literati of this city, and many of the aged and most influential inhabitancies have been present."[25] The Africans' plight moved many Northerners to take action. Newspapers received countless letters to the editor regarding the *Amistad* captives. Many responded to the *Amistad* Committee's call for financial support and donated money to the group to aid the Africans. Lewis Tappan and the other committee members received numerous letters with money enclosed for the "uses of the Poor Africans."[26] Some were so inspired that they even composed and published poems about Cinque.[27]

The *Amistad* Committee seemed to gain victory upon the announcement of District Court Judge Andrew Judson's decision, in January of 1840. Judge Judson decided in favor of the Africans asserting that they had been "born free" and were "free and not slaves."[28] He stipulated that the Africans must go back to their native continent and obliged the president to transport them. The United States District Attorney appealed the decision and the Supreme Court date was set for the next year. In the mean time, abolitionists sought the aid of former President John Quincy Adams, who had previously been following the case and providing informal legal advice, and enlisted him to present the closing arguments before the Supreme Court. In March of 1841, the Supreme Court upheld the lower court's decision and ruled that the Africans were never slaves, that they were entitled to freedom, and that they could be immediately discharged. The abolitionists had won; however, the Africans received no compensation for their almost two years in the United States. Additionally, the government refused to pay for their passage back to Africa because they were not covered by American laws. Despite gaining their legal freedom and right to return to Africa, the *Amistad* captives and their abolitionist supporters did not have the funds to finance such an expensive journey. The next obstacle lay in raising the money to transport them to Africa.

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[24] *The New York Sun*, September 20, 1839.

[25] *New York Semi-Weekly Express*, January 15, 1840.

[26] From the Manuscript collection of the American Missionary Association. F1-4635. A letter from Ester Moore to Lewis Tappan. There are many letters enclosed with individual contributions recorded in this collection as well as an inventory of other contributions.

[27] *The Liberator*, October 11, 1839. The two poems inspired by Cinque were entitled, "Cinques" and "The African Chief."

[28] Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad*, 130.

The Friends of the *Amistad* continued to place the Africans in the public eye to promote antislavery but also to raise money for their trip home. The *Amistad* Committee asked for donations, published the outcome of the case in books, pamphlet, sermons, and newspapers.[29] Lewis Tappan even took the Africans on several tours and promoted a wax works display of them. Once, at the Broadway Tabernacle, the Africans displayed the Africans' skills in arithmetic and spelling and sang abolitionist hymns. Cinque also gave a speech, in his native language, that excitedly recounted the events surrounding the mutiny.[30] The *Amistad* Committee did eventually raise the funds to send the Africans to their native continent "not as slaves" commented Lewis Tappan "but missionaries."[31] Finally, on November 27, 1841, thirty-five survivors of the initial fifty-three sailed aboard the *Gentleman* to Sierra Leone. Five white missionaries and teachers accompanied the Africans to found a Christian Mission in Africa.

This work, that concerns abolitionist propaganda and its influence on Cinque's image, joins a large body of scholarship that has been thorough in the telling and analysis of the abolitionist crusade. Previous scholars have addressed the crusaders themselves by focusing on influential abolitionists and their contributions to the movement. Abolitionist biographers such as Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Aileen Kraditor, for example, have investigated the motivations and effects of key figures on antislavery.[32] Scholars have also addressed the external and internal obstacles that effected the antislavery crusade. Historians, such as Gilbert Barnes and James Stewart, have discussed the numerous impediments to antislavery.[33]

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[29] Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad*, 197.
[30] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, 217, 218.
[31] This quote appears in Bertram Wyatt-Brown's, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, 218.

Yet few scholars focus on, specifically, they way that abolitionists actually promoted their crusade among the unconverted. This is not to say that the subject of antislavery propaganda is ignored. Most scholars who study abolition, in fact, do address abolitionist propaganda and view it as an important part of the movement, yet the role of abolitionist propaganda, is too often treated as tangential to the antislavery crusade. Abolitionist visual propaganda, particularly, has received little investigation with the exception of a few historians, such as Philip Lapsansky and Bernard Reilly. But even in an article focusing on antislavery illustrations, Bernard Reilly asserted that antislavery artists and their propaganda possessed a subordinate and tangential role in abolition.[34] This idea seems to be reflected by the emphasis that many scholars have placed on abolitionist propaganda.

When Reilly and Lapsansky do investigate abolitionist propaganda, they are quick to point to the important role that the portrayal of blacks played in antislavery arguments. As abolitionists manipulated the black image to support their cause they attempted to combat and alter certain stereotypes and in turn, "abolitionism promoted new stereotypes of blacks."[35] Yet, few abolitionist historians have concentrated on the influence that these visual representations had on the abolitionists that generate them and the black slaves they defend. Though they do not focus on abolitionist propaganda, art scholars, such as Guy McElroy and Hugh Honour, are concerned about visual representations of blacks and their effects on the black image on a larger scale. They assert that visual depictions in art imposed a lasting influence on the black image.[36] McElroy claims that such "visual images have the persuasive power to identify and define."[37] As artists and antislavery supporters generated images of blacks, whether to entertain or to persuade, they influenced how viewers perceived blacks beyond the mere viewing of art or propaganda. An investigation into the effects of the way that abolitionists continually represented blacks can be useful to a better understanding of the black image and of the abolitionist crusade.

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[32] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*; Alieen Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolition: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850* (New York: 1969).

[33] Gilbert Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse: 1830-1844* (New York: 1933) ; James Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*.

[34] Bernard Reilly, *The Art of the Antislavery Movement*, 49.

[35] Bernard Reilly, in *The Art of the Antislavery Movement*, and Winthrop Jordan, in *The White Man's*

Until recently, scholars have paid little attention to the *Amistad* slave revolt and even less attention to its primary figure, Joseph Cinque. The event has usually received only a cursory citation in texts addressing early nineteenth-century abolitionism or African Art. Yet, the *Amistad* slave revolt possesses importance as a historical event in its own right. The episode provides insight into nineteenth-century abolitionism, legal arguments surrounding slavery and blacks, the slave trade and international tensions involving the practice, and the sectional tension over the issue of slavery. Howard Jones has thus far presented the most thorough account of the *Amistad* slave revolt in *Mutiny on the Amistad: The Saga of a Slave Revolt and Its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy.* [38] He focused on legal issues surrounding the trials, abolitionist involvement, foreign and domestic political relations, and provided a thorough narrative, if difficult to read, of the two year episode. But even Jones and other *Amistad* scholars have failed to

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Burden, discuss the abolitionists' intent to specifically alter stereotypes concerning blacks. The quote comes from Jan Pieterse, *White On Black*, 60.

[36] Guy McElroy, *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art 1710-1940* (New York: 1990) Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black In Western Art*, (Cambridge: 1989).

[37] Guy McElroy, *Facing History*, xi.

[38] Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad: The Saga of a Slave Revolt and Its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy* (New York, 1987).

address the importance of Joseph Cinque as he became the most popular figure to emerge from the event.

The goal of this thesis is to investigate the depiction of blacks in abolitionist propaganda, study the specific themes they used to portray blacks, and look at the influence that abolitionist propaganda had on the black image. In the first chapter, I will explore abolitionist visual propaganda of the 1830s to discover the reoccurring ways that abolitionists portrayed blacks. Then, in the second chapter, I will look at how abolitionist propaganda influenced the black image in the context of how abolitionists portrayed Joseph Cinque in their propaganda. My work focuses on Cinque as a good case study of the effects of decades of depicting blacks in abolitionist propaganda. I will analyze the way that abolitionists dealt with Cinque's characteristics that did not fit the traditional way of depicting blacks in propaganda. He is evidence that the recurrent themes that abolitionists used to portray blacks circumscribed the range of personality and emotion that blacks could express in antislavery propaganda. Abolitionists imposed upon Cinque certain traits in order to promote his and other blacks slaves' right to freedom. As abolitionists added him to their propaganda, they inched away from portraying a true depiction of the slave revolt leader. In their crusade against slavery, abolitionists promoted the black image to support and spread antislavery sentiment. Their depictions, however, imposed upon blacks the slavery of the new stereotype.

Chapter 1.

Reoccurring Black Images in Abolitionist Propaganda

Proslavery and antislavery advocates were concerned about how their audiences and detractors perceived the enslaved and thus the institution of slavery. They particularly argued over the inherent nature of blacks and their reaction to freedom and bondage. Both sides sought to manipulate the black image in order to promote their viewpoints for or against slavery. The perception of the black bondsmen, therefore, was an important aspect of the slavery debate. Abolitionists, in particular, promoted certain images of black slaves in their visual propaganda in order to convey their stance against slavery and persuade outsiders to support their cause. These images included depictions of slaves as victims, as obedient free blacks, and as ennobled blacks. After several decades, these recurrent themes evolved into an iconographic language with which abolitionists portrayed black slaves in their propaganda.

Abolitionists' portrayal of blacks as victims was the most popular antislavery image. As a victim, the slave appeared to be a helpless, innocent sufferer who required the aid of the white viewer to free him from bondage. Yet the bondsmen was not the only participant in the victim image. The victim required an antagonist, therefore, slaveholders and participants of the slave trade represented those that denied blacks' freedom and inflicted upon them unjust servitude. There were two influential victim images in abolitionist propaganda: the supplicant slave and scenes of the slave trade.

The image of the supplicant slave, first produced by British abolitionists, was the first and best-known antislavery illustration.[39] The original depicted a kneeling and chained, almost naked, male African. His clasped hands and upturned eyes seemed to petition for mercy as a caption beneath him pleaded "Am I Not a Man and a Brother." Abolitionists disseminated this particular illustration as early as 1787 when the Society commissioned the artist Josiah Wedgewood to create medallions using the supplicant image. The supplicant slave image probably first circulated in the United States after Wedgewood sent a packet of the medallions to Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia. In a letter to Wedgewood. Franklin commented that the image had an effect "equal to that of the best written Pamphlet, in procuring favour to those opressed People."[40] British reformers made the first contributions to the language of antislavery propaganda; American reformers later used, altered, and built upon these illustrations to create their own images.[41] Beginning in the 1820s, American abolitionists circulated the supplicant slave throughout the Northeast and used a variety of media for the image ranging from pamphlets and stationary to pottery and purses.[42]

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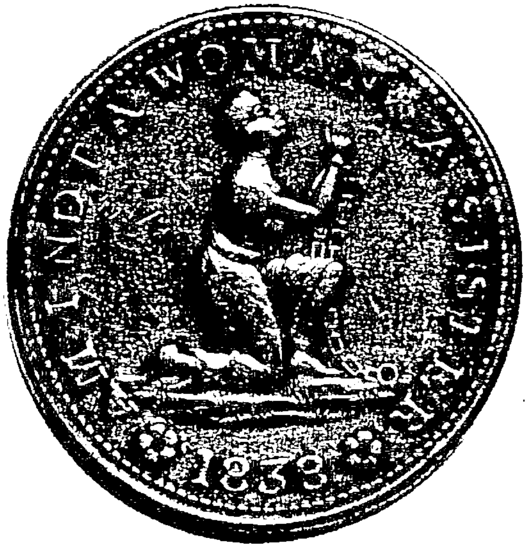
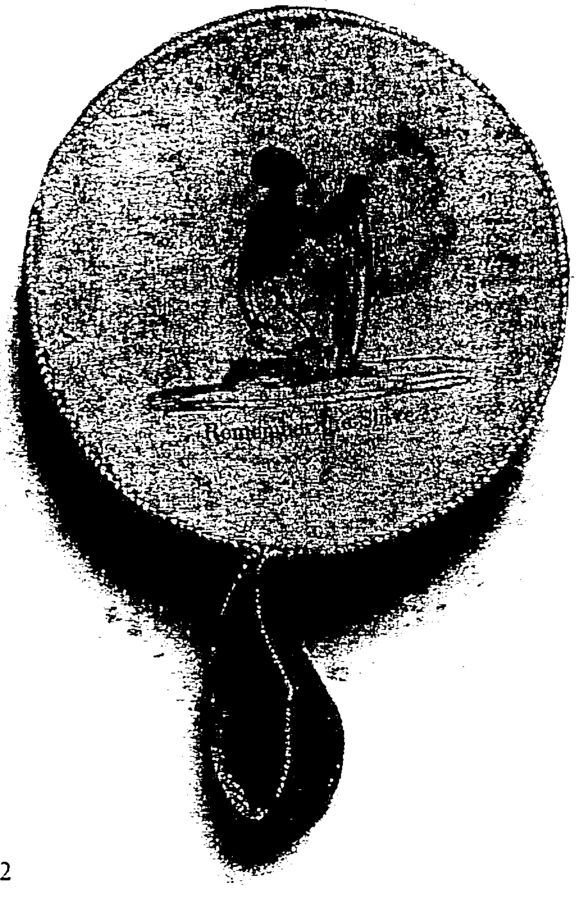
[39] Bernard Reilly, *The Art of the Abolition Movement*, 54. In *The Image of the Black In Western Art*, Hugh Honour gives a detailed discussion on the circumstances surrounding the creation of the supplicant image, 62.





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[40] Hugh Honour. *The Image of the Black in Western Art*. 62

[41] Bernard Reilly. *The Art of the Abolition Movement*. 49.

[42] Phillip Lapsansky. *Graphic Discord*. 206. Bernerd Reilly. *The Art of the Abolition Movement*, 54.

Illustrations involving the slave trade were also important victim images in abolitionist propaganda.[43] These visual depictions tended to involve diagrams of slave vessels and scenes of slave capture. English campaigns against the slave trade prompted the first illustration of a slave vessel which appeared in an anonymous broadside in 1789. The illustration portrayed a cross-section of a slaver carrying hundreds of Africans. As Bernard Reilly asserted, the slave ship diagram provided a "clear, albeit horrifying picture of the conditions faced by slaves transported along the Middle Passage."[44] Each cross-section showed that its human cargo lay tightly packed together. Slave traders arranged their Africans in space efficient rows and wedged additional slaves in remaining crevices. The Africans appeared extremely uncomfortable as they lay shoulder to shoulder in an arrangement that allowed for little range of movement.

By the late 1700s many Americans opposed the slave trade (even when they supported domestic slavery). Winthrop Jordan asserted that "from Virginia Northwards the traffic [of slaves] was almost universally condemned."[45] Images of the slave vessels and kidnapping served to reinforce the already accepted cruelty of the slave trade.[46] American abolitionists quickly assimilated the existent British illustrations into their own propaganda, but American renditions of the slave vessel varied little. Most versions appeared in pamphlets or magazines; both Charles Crawford's and Thomas Branagan's pamphlets, *Observations upon Negro Slavery* and *The Penitential Tyrant* published in 1790 and 1807 respectively, contained the slave ship diagram. In 1789, the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the abolition of slavery circulated twenty-five hundred copies of the slave vessel illustration.[47]

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[43] Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 64-66. Bernard Reilly, *The Art of the Antislavery Movement*, 60-62. Phillip Lapsansky, *Graphic Discord*, 203-204.
[44] Bernard Reilly, *The Art of the Antislavery Movement*, 60.
[45] Winthrop Jordan, *The White Man's Burden*, 144.
[46] Phillip Lapsansky, *Graphic Discord*, 203-204.
[47] Phillip Lapsansky, *Graphic Discord*, 203-204.

PLAN AND SECTIONS OF A SLAVE SHIP.

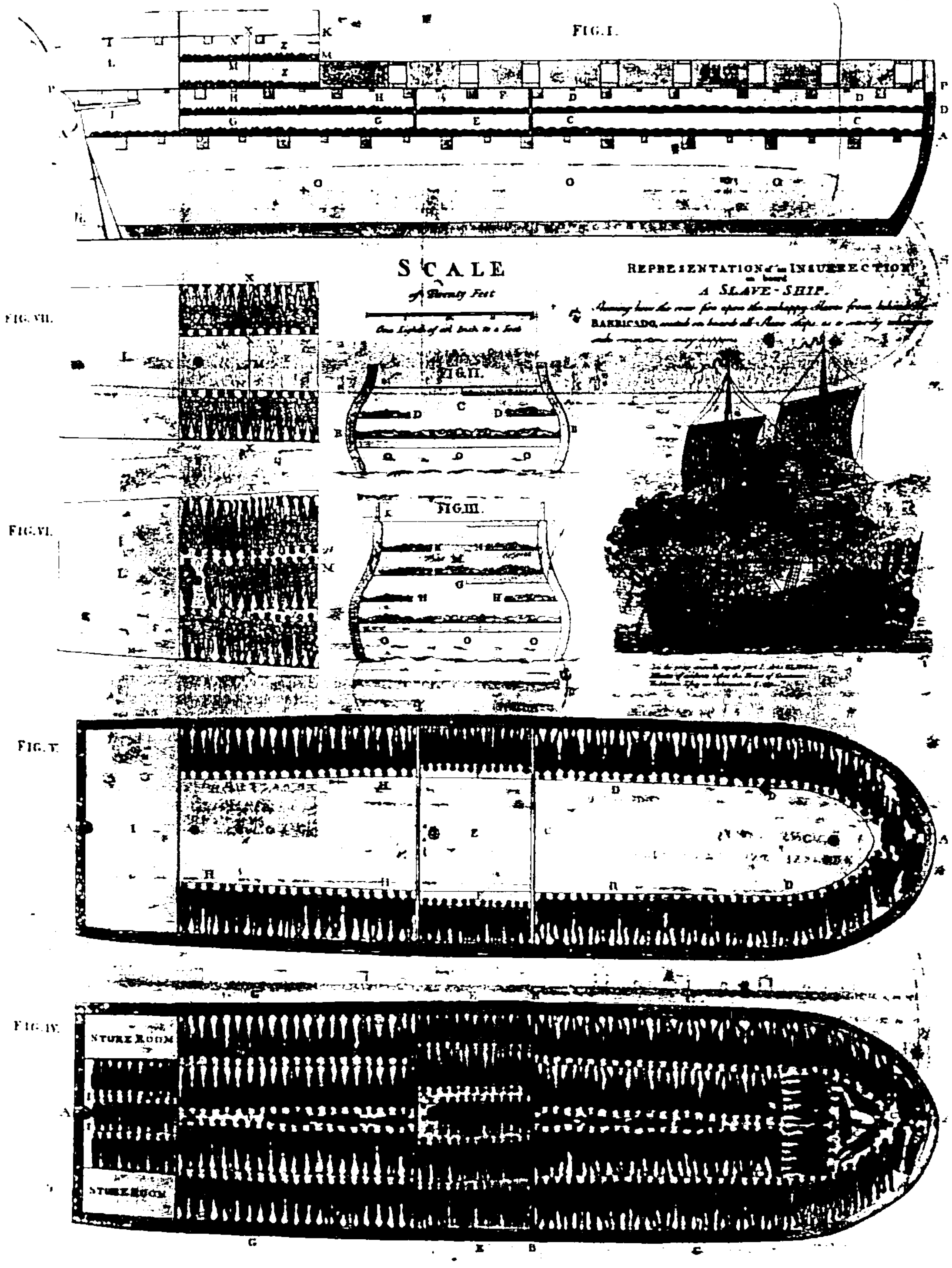
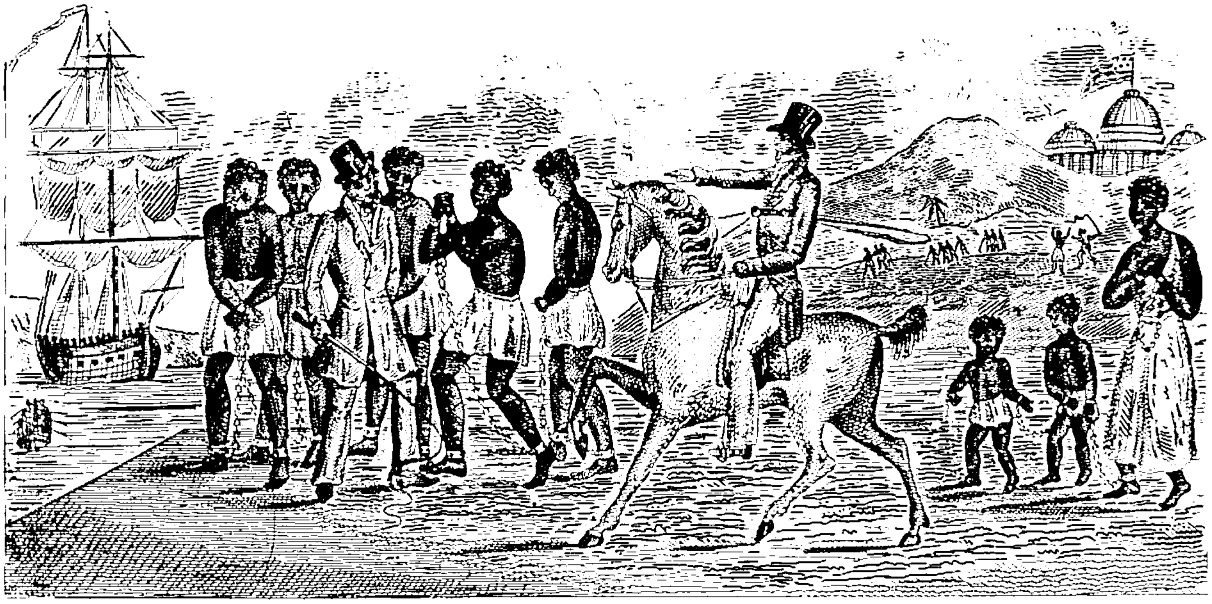


FIG. I.
FIG. II.
FIG. III.
FIG. IV.
FIG. V.
FIG. VI.
FIG. VII.
SCALE of Twenty Feet
REPRESENTATION of an INSURRECTION on board A SLAVE-SHIP.
BARRICADO
STORE ROOM
STORE ROOM

Scenes involving slave capture also highlighted the harsh realities of the slave trade. While illustrations of slave vessels pointed to the physical hardships that a slave might have endured during the middle passage, scenes of slave capture focused on the emotional traumas that Africans experienced as a result of their enslavement. These scenes often depicted frightened looking, newly enslaved Africans as white slavers capture or sell them. Frequently the immediate result caused the separation of a family but the long term consequences of slavery involved a lifetime of abuse for the African. An engraving from 1830 entitled the *United States Slave Trade* portrayed a group of Africans who had recently arrived in an American harbor. A nearby chained female and children allude that a mother and child soon will be separated by the whip-bearing white men. Abolitionists highlighted these scenes of family separation as a particularly cruel result of the slave trade. Abuse was another cruelty imposed on slaves as a black man is whipped in the background. Ironically, the dome of the United States' capital building is seen in the distant horizon and illustrates the beginning of the Africans' lives as slaves occurs in front of an important American symbol for freedom.



United States slave trade, 1830

Abolitionists promoted certain goals when they portrayed black slaves as victims. They wanted to expose slavery as an immoral institution and demonstrate the negative influence it had on black slaves. One obvious abolitionist appeal involved with the supplicant slave and slave trade images was sympathy. These illustrations depicted blacks in vulnerable situations; they were innocent sufferers who were subject to the abuses of their owners. Despite one's stance on slavery, abolitionists hoped that their illustrations would compel viewers to experience pity for the bondsman. Aileen Kraditor claimed that antislavery supporters used these images to attain the dual goals of converting outsiders and of reinforcing the commitment of abolitionists by promoting the theme of empathy. According to Kraditor, abolitionists wanted viewers not only to pity's the slave's situation, but to experience what she viewed as the more powerful emotion of empathy.[48]

The idea of free blacks as obedient and productive members of society was another abolitionist theme that appeared in antislavery propaganda. While emancipation was the end goal of abolition, for many white Americans, the idea of total manumission conjured fears of a nation overrun by uncontrollable, unsavory free blacks. Abolitionist propaganda responded to these apprehensions by portraying emancipation as a controlled, mutually beneficial event for both blacks and whites. The theme of docile and obedient blacks promoted the idea that, in their freedom, black slaves possessed the potential and the willingness to become more civilized and christianized laborers and not vengeful former slaves. A free black population would not be dangerous to concerned whites.

One antislavery image that portrayed a benign emancipation scene includes the masthead of the abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, from the 1830s. This illustration depicted two settings-- the first a slave auction, the other, an emancipation scene. The slave auction demonstrated several cruelties of slavery. In the foreground slave owners are buying a small girl. Their purchase will separate her from her family who stand by the auction block in tears. The auctioneers stand advertises his establishment as a place to purchase livestock and slaves, thereby, placing blacks on the same level as beasts. In the background a master is, ironically, whipping a slave in front of the Capital. The second scene depicted what could happen if abolitionists succeeded in their crusade against slavery. It in the foreground a black mother and child kneel in humble gratitude as a white figure stands over them and teaches them about emancipation. In the distant background a group of jubilant black men celebrate their freedom before the rising sun. In-between, an industrious group of ex-slaves work. The only change that they seem to manifest as a result of their emancipation is that they are wearing untattered clothes. Their freedom resulted not in a revolution of social roles but of the creation of grateful, benign workers.[49]

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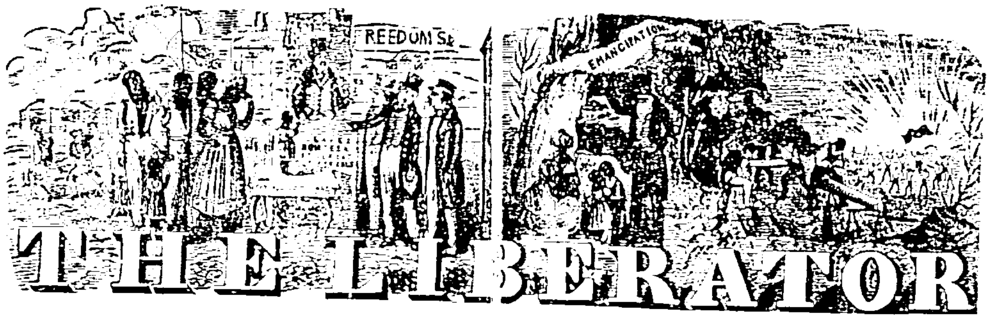
[48] Aileen Kraditor. *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism*, 237-238.



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[49] Phillip Lapsansky, *Graphic Discord*, 213.

While the image of the docile free black may have assuaged immediate fears connected to the moment of emancipation, those who were fearful of a free black population were largely concerned with the long term effects of manumission.[50] The obedient free black image promoted the idea that blacks would fit into white society. An important aspect of the docile free black image was that blacks were willing to become christianized and somewhat educated in order to assimilate into society as productive workers. An engraving by Patrick Henry Reason, for the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1839, depicts a scene in which blacks demonstrate an eagerness and capacity for conversion. Several white figures mingle among the black slaves to teach them. A white female figure stands in the middle holding a bible and represents the white efforts to uplift the blacks. The blacks respond to the white overtures at conversion with grateful, outstretched arms. A woodcut illustration for the antislavery magazine, *The Slave's Friend*, that ran from 1836 to 1839 also demonstrates a willingness on the part of blacks to learn from whites. The woodcut depicts a groups of black children anxiously gathered around a white teacher. Especially if indoctrinated at a very young age, a grateful, eager to assimilate free black population would prove to be advantageous rather than harmful to whites.

Abolitionists aimed their visual propaganda at destroying contemporary proslavery images and concerns of free blacks. They fought popular fears that slaves would radically and dangerously alter society by asserting that emancipation would not be a revolutionary; event; slaves would willingly and gratefully accept their freedom and become obedient and productive workers. Emancipation would not be a revolutionary event because blacks would be grateful enough for their freedom to become free laborers and they were malleable enough to become conforming, useful members of society.

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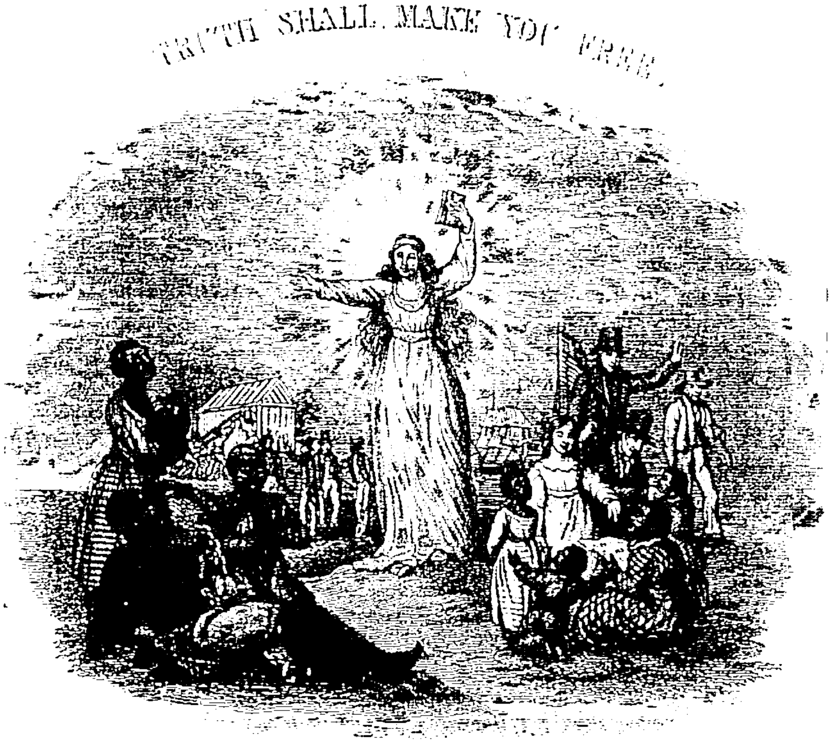
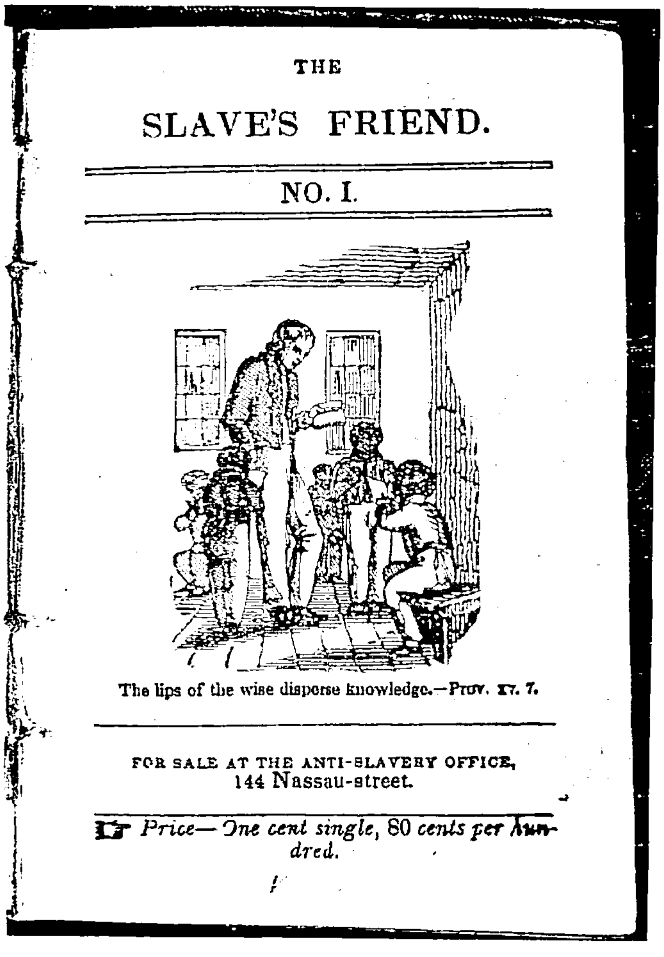
[50] Phillip Lapsansky, *Graphic Discord*, 211-222.


TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE.



THE

SLAVE'S FRIEND.

NO. I.

The lips of the wise disperse knowledge.—Prov. xv. 7.

FOR SALE AT THE ANTI-SLAVERY OFFICE,
144 Nassau-street.

☞ *Price—One cent single,* 80 *cents per hundred.*

Images of ennobled blacks were recurrent in abolitionists' visual propaganda and provided a contrast to the victim and obedient black images.[51] The other abolitionist illustrations tended to portray blacks as dependent upon whites for their status of slavery or freedom, and required white sympathy, attention, and culture to attain their full potential as free blacks. Images of ennobled blacks asserted that blacks were inherently worthy of freedom and that their worth was based on their innate goodness and their accomplishments outside of slavery. Their enslavement debased their noble nature. This image of the ennobled black frequently depicted blacks as noble savages or as more civilized and well-known historical figures.

When abolitionists portrayed blacks as Noble Savages, they drew from a long tradition associated with the image; the idea of the Noble Savage has its roots in Greek and Roman thought.[52] The Noble Savage, usually portrayed as a male, could be loosely defined as someone who lived beyond the borders of civilized society. Writers often portrayed his surroundings as a tropical but primitive Garden of Eden. As a being very connected to his environment, the Noble Savage possessed characteristics that attested to his innocent nature. He lived in state of "nakedness and innocence," possessed innate goodness, and lived in harmony with his surroundings.[53] Abolitionists admired the Noble Savage as a creature uncorrupted by civilization. He lacked such trappings of society as clothing, social status, and possessions.[54] His existence was balanced and unmarred by civilized society and abolitionists would assert that all that civilization would have to offer him would be slavery.

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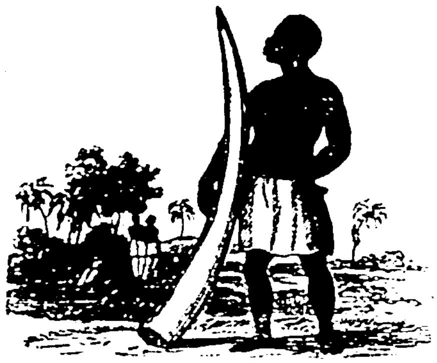
[51] Bernard Reilly, *Graphic Discord*, 55-60. Jan Pieterse, *White on Black*, 35.

[52] Hoxie Neale Fairchild provides a good discussion of the idea of the Noble Savage and its evolution in philosophy and literature in *The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism* (New York: 1928) 2-10.

[53] Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black*, 72. Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *The Noble Savage*, 10.

[54] Jan Pieterse discusses ideas of the lack of civilization and closeness to nature in the noble savage image in *White on Black*, 35. Hoxie Neale Fairchild. *The Noble Savage*, 2.

I. **The Black Man Free.**



Here we see a picture of the black man, on the territory which God gave to his fathers; a savage, and a pagan idolator, but FREE, as God created both him and us.

Abolitionists imposed upon the African the attributes of Noble Savage in their propaganda. An example of Noble Savage image, entitled *The Black Man Free*, appeared in the abolitionist newspaper the *Liberator*. The illustration depicted a bare-chested African man standing in the foreground of his native landscape and holding the large tusk of an animal that he has presumably killed. He appears to be very connected to his natural surroundings as he lacks ornate clothing or home or other trappings of civilization. The caption asserts that he lived in a place and in a manner that God has allotted him. God has even created his pagan status but, most importantly, he made the African "*Free*." This insinuated that any man made change would be against the will of God.

In order to present an ennobled image of blacks, abolitionists also portrayed well-known, black historical figures in their propaganda.[55] They highlighted famous individuals noted for their achievements or contributions to society through their bravery, intelligence, or industry. These images were, in large part, a response to proslavery arguments against the historical failure of blacks to develop a "civilized way of life in Africa."[56] Proslavery theorists claimed that black slaves in the present lacked inherent abilities to achieve. They claimed that this had been apparent throughout history and was, therefore, not subject to change. Abolitionists refuted such proslavery claims with "proof" in the form of real individuals who were undeniably successful and irrefutably black.[57]

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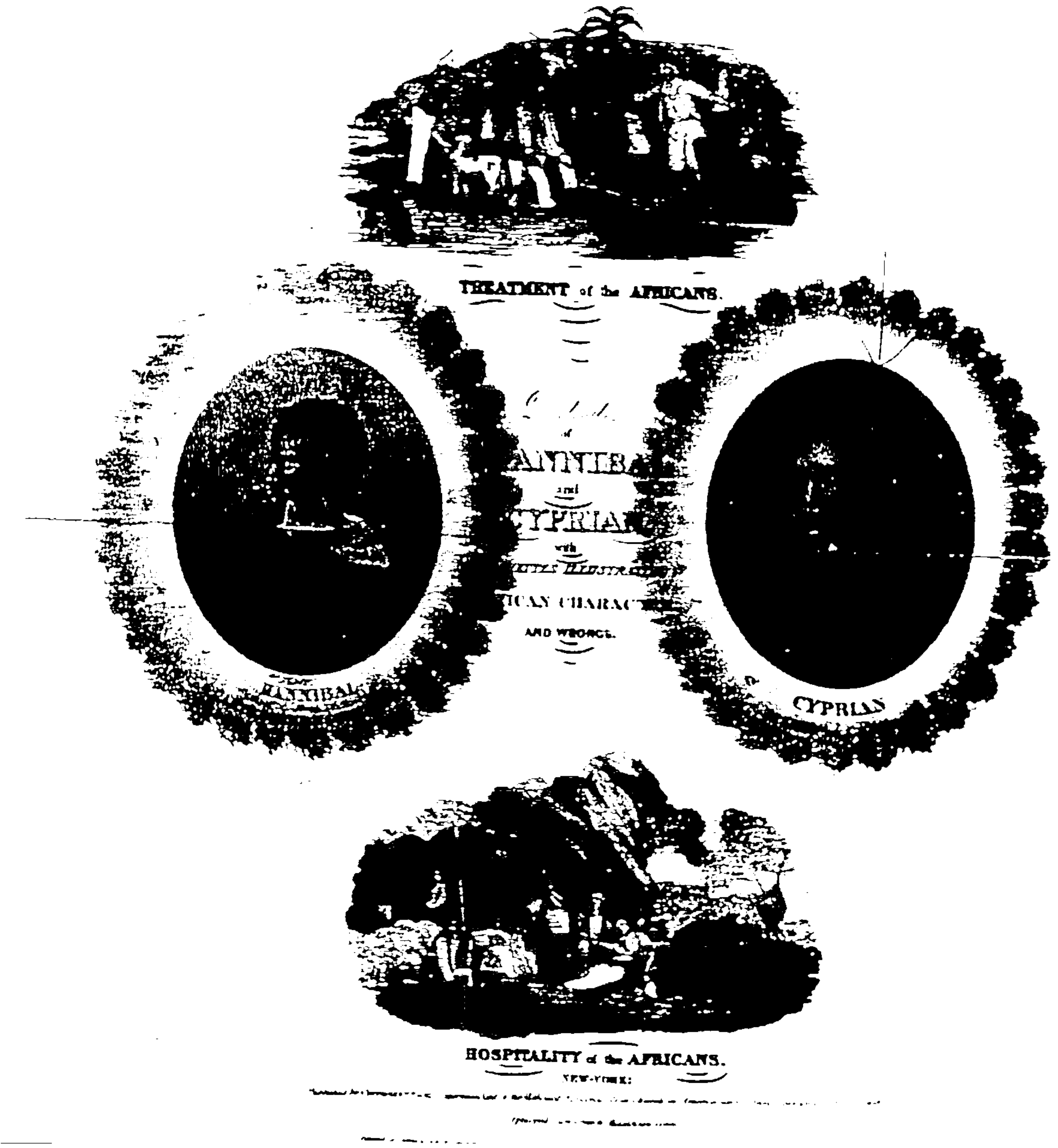
[55] Bernard Reilly, *The Art of the Antislavery Movement*, 55-60.


TREATMENT of the AFRICANS.
ANNIBA
and
CYPRIA
with
ICAN CHARAC
AND WRONGS.
HANNIBAL
CYPRIAN
HOSPITALITY of the AFRICANS.
NEW-YORK:

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[56] George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 49. Bernard Reilly, *The Art of the Antislavery Movement*, 55.
[57] Bernard Reilly, *The Art of the Antislavery Movement*, 54.

One such antislavery image can be found in an engraving published by two black clergymen in New York in 1836.[58] The illustration featured portraits of Hannibal, the successful and feared Carthaginian General, and Cyprian, a Bishop of Carthage and an influential figure in early Christianity. Their bearded profiles show expressions of calm intelligence. They are arrayed in Classical robes as their heads are surrounded by aureoles of light. Many viewers might not realize that Hannibal and Cyprian were black, but they would recognize their accomplishments. These illustrations ensured that viewers made the connection between achievement and color.

In August 1839, abolitionists would use a modern figure to support the ennobled image of the black. They added the image of the *Amistad* slave revolt leader, Joseph Cinque, to their propaganda. In their antislavery propaganda, Cinque embodied aspects of both the noble savage and black historical figures. Abolitionists depicted his as a noble, achieving black who did not need whites to bestow upon him freedom. Yet they also portrayed Cinque using the victim and obedient free black image in their illustrations and iconography.

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[58] Bernard Reilly, *The Art of the Antislavery Movement*, 55-56.

Chapter 2.

Cinque in Abolitionist Propaganda

From their first to their last months in the United States, abolitionists highlighted the plight of the *Amistad* Africans in order to publicize the evils of slavery. Yet abolitionist newspapers were not alone in the promotion of the *Amistad* episode. The nonabolitionist press had already provided numerous articles concerning the affair within the Africans' initial weeks in the United States. Their accounts discussed the Africans' revolt, their wanderings at sea, and their capture, but they also focused on the most popular figure to emerge from the episode, Joseph Cinque. The nonabolitionist press romanticized Cinque's actions, his motives, and his character, and, thereby, reinforced a persona that did not fit the traditional mold of antislavery images. These portrayals tended to promote Cinque's image of a freedom loving African who willingly used violent means to evade bondage. The nonabolitionist press additionally depicted Cinque as a uniquely superior black man who possessed qualities that they believed most blacks inherently lacked. These descriptions of Cinque circulated widely before abolitionists used him in their propaganda. Cinque's preexisting persona, reinforced by the Northern press, therefore, required abolitionists to work with an image which did not conform with their traditional themes. Importantly, the abolitionist response to Cinque's persona reveals that their iconographic vocabulary greatly influenced and circumscribed Cinque's image in their propaganda.

The Northern press reinforced a persona of Cinque that was not consistent with traditional abolitionist portrayals of blacks. A large part of Cinque's image involved his depiction as the instigator of the *Amistad* mutiny; Cinque fought his enslavement in a violent manner, through the murder of his captors, and led others to do the same. This was in contrast to the abolitionist theme of a peaceful and grateful emancipation bestowed by white owners. Cinque's persona presented a frightening contradiction to the calm emancipation scenes that abolitionists highlighted. This aggressive initiative also made the abolitionists' victim image incongruous with his own. It would be difficult to have pity for someone who could not only protect himself, but who was also a murderer of white men.

The idea of Cinque as a revolutionary rebel was evident in Northern newspapers' initial accounts of the *Amistad* episode. Reporters clearly attributed to him responsibility for the mutiny. *The Sunday Morning News* credited him with conceiving and executing "the design of liberating himself and fellow prisoners from their captivity" to "regain their liberty."[59] Another newspaper called him the "master spirit and hero" of the revolt.[60] The press portrayed Cinque as a freedom loving African chief who would not allow himself or his fellow Africans to remain enslaved. *The Niles National Register* asserted that he "would sooner die than be taken" into slavery.[61] *The New York Sun* even likened him to the Seminole chief Osceola who was widely recognized during this period for his involvement in the Seminole Indian Wars in Florida.[62] Osceola gained fame for his refusal to allow the United States to take his land; he demanded and fought for Native American freedom and autonomy. *The Sun* lauded Cinque as the "Oseola of his race" and in doing so likened the revolt leader's actions with those of a recognized figure who was associated with ideas of revolt and freedom.[63]

The first visual image of Cinque, generated by the *New York Sun* just days after his arrival, portrayed the *Amistad* leader as a freedom loving mutineer. The editor of the newspaper, Moses Beach, ordered a lithographed portrait of Cinque, from a drawing sketched on board the *Washington*, and made it available at the newspaper office for purchase.[64] Beach commissioned James Sheffield, a New London painter, to create the portrait. Sheffield depicted the African from head to mid-abdomen wearing a white shirt with an unbuttoned collar. Cinque bore a calm expression but his fixed gaze, aimed directly at the viewer, indicated determination and reserved anger. The portrait was titled *Joseph Cinque, the brave Congolize Chief who prefers death to Slavery, and who now lies in jail in Irons, in New Haven Conn. awaiting his trial for daring for Freedom*. The paper provided the speech that Cinque supposedly gave to his fellow Africans shortly after "Murdering the Captain &C. and Getting possession of the Vessel and Cargo." In the speech Cinque heroically claimed to his fellow Africans that it would be "better to die than be a white man's slave."

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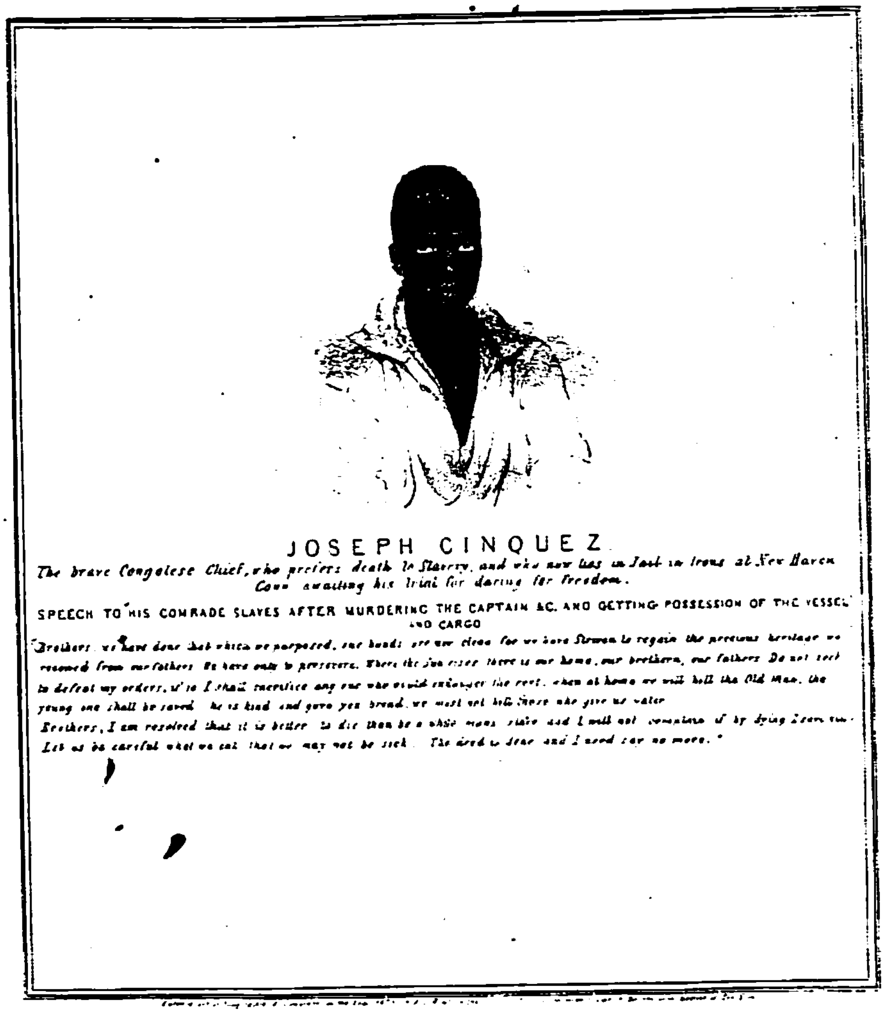
[59] *The Sunday Morning News*, September 1, 1839, appearing in *The Emancipator*, September 12, 1839.
[60] *The New York Sun*, August 26, 1839.
[61] *The Niles National Register*, September 7, 1839.
[62] For a discussion of Osceola see John Wolf, *The Battle at the Loxahatchee River: The Seminole War*.
[63] *The New York Sun*, August 31, 1839.
[64] *The New York Sun*, August 31, 1839. The paper issued a statement that the lithographed portrait of Cinque "taken with great accuracy" from a drawing on board the *Washington* would be at the desk of the



JOSEPH CINQUEZ

The brave Congolese Chief, who prefers death to Slavery, and who now lies in Jail in Irons at New Haven Conn awaiting his trial for daring for Freedom.

SPEECH TO HIS COMRADE SLAVES AFTER MURDERING THE CAPTAIN &C. AND GETTING POSSESSION OF THE VESSEL AND CARGO

"Brothers, we have done that which we purposed, our hands are now clean for we have Striven to regain the precious heritage we received from our fathers. We have only to persevere. Where the Sun rises there is our home, our brethren, our fathers. Do not seek to defeat my orders, if so I shall sacrifice any one who would endanger the rest. when at home we will kill the Old Man. the young one shall be saved he is kind and gave you bread. we must not kill those who give us water

Brothers, I am resolved that it is better to die than be a white mans slave and I will not complain if by dying I save you. Let us be careful what we eat that we may not be sick. The deed is done and I need say no more."

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office for sale that day.

These were visual and written images of Cinque as a man who refused to be enslaved; there is no doubt that in reality he abhorred his bondage. The revolt was evidence of his desire for freedom and return home. The press, however, seemed to have extrapolated his desire and actions and added a more romanticized and exaggerated element to his persona. While Cinque gave the speech quoted by *The New York Sun* on board the *Washington*, there existed no adequate translator to express his true sentiment (abolitionists found translators for the Africans several weeks later). It appeared that the newspaper imposed their ideas of what Cinque should say onto what he actually said. The press reported the facts of the revolt and the revolt leader but were also anxious to create a more sensationalized story of the *Amistad* episode. Perhaps a more exciting Cinque generated increased public interest and sold more newspapers.

In addition to presenting Cinque as a violent revolutionary rebel, the press portrayed him as an extraordinary African man. They believed that Cinque possessed superior physical and mental characteristics compared to those of his race and, in some respects, even compare to whites. These were exceptional descriptions since popular attitudes toward blacks during this period painted them as inferior creatures only worthy of slavery. Cinque's unique qualities set him apart from the *Amistad* Africans and other blacks. The press viewed him as such an extraordinary individual that they claimed Cinque to be equal to great Classical figures; his heroic deeds and great character would live on throughout history. His greatness made his enslavement seem a more terrible injustice.

The press depicted Cinque as possessing unique physical qualities and abilities which contributed to his superior status. *The Niles National Register* reported Cinque to be "a handsome negro" of "superior appearance to the rest [of the Africans]" and another newspaper claimed that he possessed a "good degree of gracefulness and native dignity."[65] *The New London Gazette* reported that Cinque's almost six foot frame yielded an "erect figure, well bilt, and very active" figure.[66] The reporter considered him to be a "match for any two men aboard" the *Amistad* schooner. Cinque possessed great endurance as well as great strength. Someone observed that his "physical proportions are those best calculated to endure privation."[67] Cinque's naturally superior stature predisposed him to perform extraordinary deeds. Certainly one so naturally endowed would lead a revolt to attain his freedom. Interestingly, one newspaper described Cinque's physical prowess in terms of his worth as a slave. According to the article, Cinque was "a negro who would command in New Orleans, under the hammer, at least $1500."[68] Despite the fact that these newspapers perceived human bondage to be beneath the black mutineer, they still described Cinque in the language of slavery.

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[65] *The Niles National Register*, September 21, 1839; *The New York Advertiser and Express*, September

According to the press, Joseph Cinque existed as a peerless African whose equals could only be found in great Classical heroes. Cinque's image was that of a great man living in the wrong era with the wrong skin color. One newspaper stated that "had he lived in the days of Greece and Rome, his name would have been handed down to posterity as one who had practiced the most sublime of virtues--disinterested patriotism and unshrinking courage."[69] Another newspaper asserted that Joseph Cinque was "the daring leader of this band of captives" and a "hero, worthy to stand by the side of the noblest Roman, whose name ever graced the pages of history."[70] Cinque, though a black slave revolt leader, was a present-day hero whose deeds, like those of the great classical figures, would survive and be celebrated throughout history.

A large part of Cinque's noble image, however, resulted from contrasting him to and establishing his superiority over the other *Amistad* Africans. Cinque was already

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14, 1839.

[66] *The New London Gazette*, August 26, 1839.

[67] *The New York Sun*, August 31, 1839.

[68] *The New London Gazette*, August 26, 1839.

[69] *The New York Sun*, August 31, 1839.

[70] *The Boston Courier* appearing in *The Liberator*, September 13, 1839.

considered to be their leader and overshadowed the other Africans as newspapers addressed him as "Cinque and his associates" [71] or even "Jingua, the daring leader of this band of captives."[72] Cinque, however, did not merely eclipse the other Africans because he was their leader. Newspapers portrayed him as possessing an innate superiority that the other Africans recognized. An incident that occurred at the New Haven jail demonstrated this sentiment. Before the first Circuit Court date, the jailer kept Cinque in a room separate from the other Africans. A newspaper reported that when he was allowed to visit them, "they shouted for joy upon seeing him, called him 'massa,' and everyone of them immediately, of their own accord, gave into his hands all of the money, &c, they had received from the visitors."[73] The article asserted that even the Africans recognized his superiority and demonstrated unabashed adoration.

Cinque's perceived greatness insinuated that he was an aberration among his race. The press could praise this slave revolt leader because they believed him to be unique; not all Africans or slaves bore his special characteristics and his peers could only be found in ancient heroes. They perceived Cinque as a distant, romanticized figure who was unique to his race and to his time. Abolitionists, however, wanted him to represent all Africans and make Cinque's persona relevant to their fight against slavery in the United States so they added him to their antislavery propaganda. Cinque was a well-known black figure in the North, therefore, abolitionists desired to shape and distribute his image to further their arguments against slavery.

Abolitionists did not choose to continue the established persona of Cinque in their propaganda. Instead they imposed upon him their traditional antislavery themes with which they depicted blacks. While Cinque appeared as a mutineer and a unique African, abolitionists attempted to portray him as a victim, a docile free man, and an ennobled black. But Cinque's persona, reinforced by newspaper accounts affected the abolitionists' use of the traditional themes. Cinque's persona seemed to harmonize more with the ennobled black image, therefore, abolitionists tended to portray Cinque using largely that traditional image. But abolitionists continued to use the other themes; their use of the docile free black image was in response to some of the more violent aspects of Cinque's persona. Abolitionists portrayed Cinque as a peaceful African who gratefully desired to be christianized and civilized by whites. Abolitionists, however, did not depict Cinque as a victim as frequently as the other two images. His aggressive and triumphant persona made it difficult for Cinque to seem like someone to be pitied.

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[71] *The Liberator*, September 6, 1839.

[72] *The Boston Courier*, September 1, 1839, appearing in *The Emancipator*, September 26, 1839.

[73] *The New York Sun*, September 12, 1839.

Abolitionists promoted the aspects of Cinque's persona that fit their ennobled black image; they portrayed him as possessing characteristics similar to those of the Noble Savage and heroic achieving blacks. Abolitionists frequently made comparisons of Cinque to Republican and Classical figures. Abolitionists portrayed Cinque as a "peerless " African who only met his equals among heroes of the Republic:

> "This young Prince, the Chief in the insurrection, has evidently with in him the soul of a great man, and had his skin been white, and he done precisely what he has done instead of being imprisoned as a murderer, 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 the world ever knew."[74]

Abolitionists compared Cinque's attempt at freedom with great heroes of the American Revolution. *The Liberator* asserted that Cinque "committed no crime against the laws of the United States" but "merely imitated the example of Washington and the heroes of the revolution."[75] Like the nonabolitionist press, antislavery newspapers compared Cinque to Classical heroes. *The Emancipator* claimed that Cinque was "worthy to stand by the noblest Roman, whose name ever graced the pages of history" [76] While Republican and Classical heroes tended to be white, Cinque stood among them as a peer as a result of his deeds. Lewis Tappan did make a comparison of Cinque to a strong literary black figure. When Tappan visited Cinque with a doctor in jail he commented in his report that as Cinque entered the room, his "bearing was like another Othello."[77]

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[74] *The Liberator*, September 13, 1839.
[75] *The Liberator*, September 6, 1839.

Just months after Cinque's arrival, abolitionists generated an important portrait of Cinque (which became one of the most famous images of the African to have been created) that combined many of the ideas concerning the ennobled black image expressed in abolitionists newspapers. In 1839, Robert Purvis, a wealthy black abolitionist from Philadelphia, commissioned a portrait of the slave revolt leader. Purvis was an important abolitionist figure who participated in a variety of abolitionist causes ranging from funding and organizing several abolitionist societies to supporting fugitive slave efforts.[78] Purvis commissioned the artist Nathaniel Jocelyn, an abolitionist sympathizer and a well established portraitist in the New Haven area, to create a portrait of Cinque.[79]

Jocelyn's portrait of the revolt leader, entitled *Cinque*, depicted Cinque as a noble African chief standing in the foreground of his native landscape. In this romanticized portrait, Jocelyn took liberties with some very distinctive western adjustments. Jocelyn portrayed Cinque in a white, Romanesque tunic instead of colorful Mendi clothing, and omitted Cinque's body tattoos and ornaments.[80] The portraitist showed the revolt leader from head to abdomen. His face bore a serious and thoughtful expression and his eyes look distant and determined. Cinque held a staff and seems prepared and able to use it as a weapon if challenged. Guy McElroy commented that Jocelyn portrayed Cinque as a "paragon of nobility and strength of character" and highlighted his "exotic aspects" to

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[76] *The Emancipator*, September 26, 1839.
[77] *The Emancipator*, September 12, 1839.
[78] Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 159.
[79] Guy McElroy, *Facing History*, 35.
[80] Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 161.

"romanticize and dramatize" the portrait.[81] Essentially, this was a painting of native African who, though in danger of being victimized by slavery, in reality possessed a spirit that "had been unbroken by the Middle Passage and slavery, and who regained his freedom by his own physical strength and courage with out assimilating himself to white society."[82]

Jocelyn's portrait became widely known and another artist, John Sartain, engraved a mezzotint copy of the painting. Sartain donated five-hundred copies to the *Amistad* committee. The *Amistad* Committee sold the paintings for a dollar a copy in order to raise money for the care and legal defense of the Africans. In 1841, after the captives won their freedom, Purvis submitted the painting to the annual exhibition of the Artist Fund Society of Philadelphia, but its hanging committee barred the painting on the grounds that the "excitement of the times" might prove injurious to the proprietors of such a display.[83] Not everyone was willing to accept the connotations of such a portrayal of a rebellious revolt leader, even after he left the United States.

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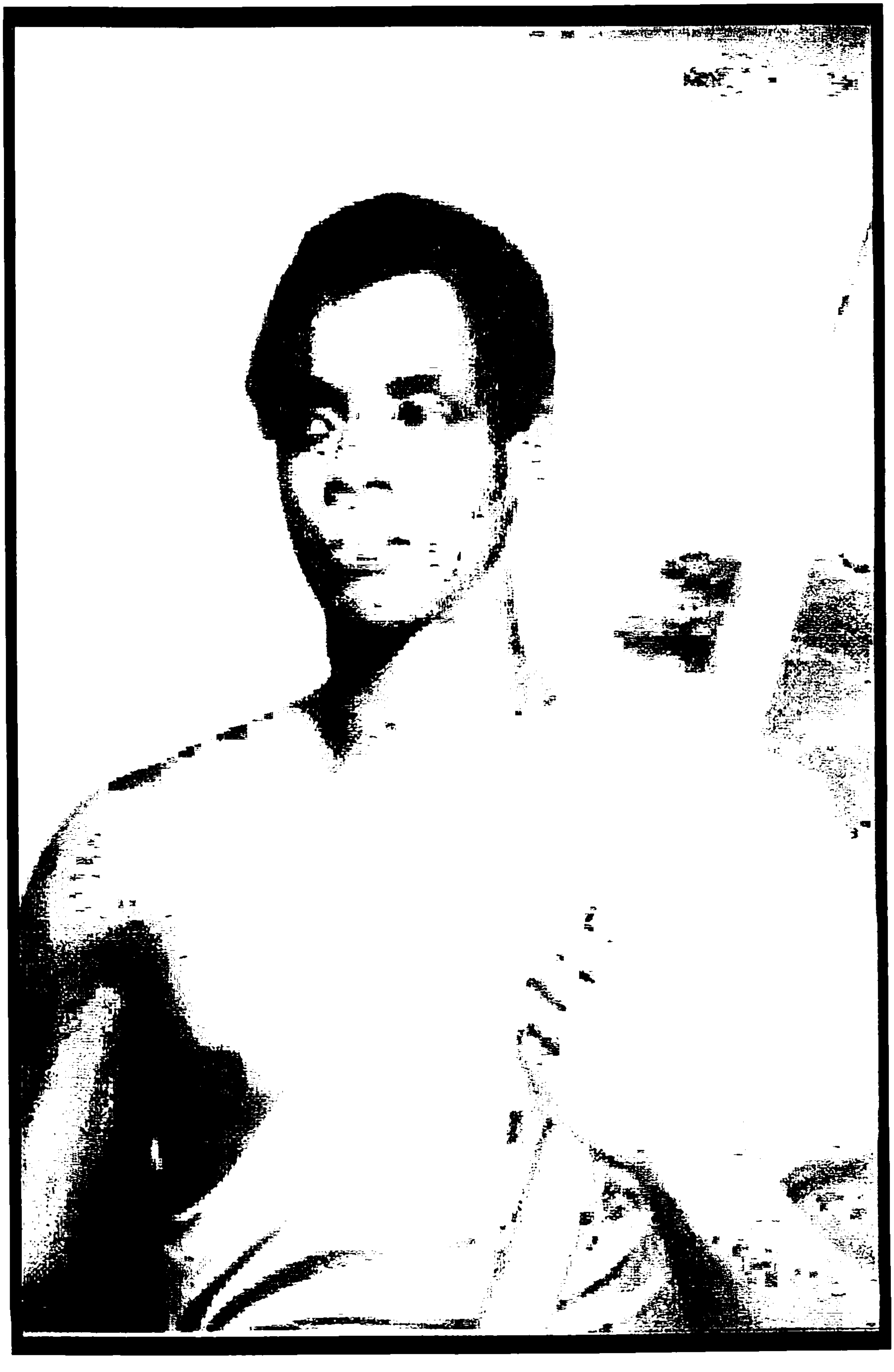
[81] Guy McElroy, *Facing History*, 35.
[82] Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 161.
[83] Bernard Reilly, *The Art of the Antislavery Movement*, 59.



It was not difficult to for abolitionists to portray Cinque using the traditional ennobled black image. Cinque's successful revolt and highly praised character allowed his persona fit in well into the ennobled black theme. This Classical mutineer, however, possessed an image too strong for some antislavery propaganda. Abolitionists countered the stories of Cinque's bloody revolt with more tame and even weak depictions of the African. Abolitionists' took the opportunity to highlight their successes at converting and civilizing the Africans, especially Cinque, in their propaganda. In their attempt to portray Cinque as a docile free black, abolitionists depicted him as willing to assimilate into white culture, as tame, and as grateful for his freedom. Abolitionists' docile free black portrayals of Cinque checked his aggressive mutineer persona with a more mild perspective of the revolt leader.

As abolitionists invested time and money into the *Amistad* captives' legal defense, they also sought to educate and christianize them. Abolitionists were, in reality, trying to assimilate the Africans into white culture by teaching them English and religion. Yale Divinity students and other educators regularly visited the jail to give them instruction.[84] These efforts were intended both for the Africans' benefit and also for the hope of sending them back to Africa as missionaries. Abolitionists were largely successful as the Africans seemed to accept and enjoy their lessons. In a letter to Lewis Tappan, Professor Day, one of their primary instructors, wrote about the Africans' progress. He claimed that they were "constantly becoming more orderly, are gradually conforming to the habits of civilized life. They now readily assemble at the ringing of a bell, at the religious exercises they all recite the prayer, sentence by sentence by the interpreter. They have also learned to look forward to the Sabbath"[85] Abolitionists made public their attempts and successes at civilizing and christianizing the Africans in order to prove that they and especially Cinque could be tamed and assimilated into white culture.

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[84] Howard Jones, *The Mutiny on the Amistad*, 42.

[85] Professor Day to Lewis Tappan F1-4650 October 23, 1839.

The abolitionists demonstrated how willing Cinque was to not only accept their religious instruction but also to take initiative to make certain that their lessons continued. John Barber reported that the abolitionists usually led one or two religious exercises with the Africans on the Sabbath. He claimed that "they ever appear interested in listening to the truths of God's word." But one Sunday the interpreter did not arrive and their teacher "dispensed with the usual exercises" and left. Cinque, however " assembled his companions and conducted the service himself."[86] Abolitionists also reported that, the day after the *Amistad* Africans heard the news that they were free, they still were full of gratitude. Upon the arrival of several members of the *Amistad* Committee, the Africans were eager to sing hymns and, after someone offered a prayer, Cinque independently requested that Simeon Jocelyn "preach."[87]

Abolitionists also portrayed Cinque as grateful for acquiring for the Africans their freedom. This alluded that Cinque required that white men grant him freedom and that he humbly recognized their generous gift. Abolitionists described Cinque's reaction to the Supreme Court's favorable verdict, they demonstrated that Cinque attributed the credit for their freedom to the abolitionists: "Me glad- me thank the American men- me glad."[88] John Barber yields a more detailed account of Cinque's grateful reaction to Roger Baldwin's legal assistance:

> "The succeeding day Mr. Baldwin, one of their counsel, entered the jail. Cingue was seated behind a table, and members of this class on either side of him. As Mr. B. approached, Cingue was told that he pleaded their cause; said it would be wrong to send to Havanna. He dropped his book, rose from his seat, seemed for a moment deliberating

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[86] John Barber, *A History of the Amistad Captives* (New York: 1969) 29.
[87] *The Liberator*, March 26, 1841.
[88] *The Liberator*, April 2, 1839.

> whether he should leap the table, seeing this to be attended with difficult, he reached forward, and seizing the extended hand of Mr. B. with a firm grasp, and looking him in the he face, his own countenance bearing with most grateful emotion, exclaimed. 'we thank you. we bless you. this is all we can do for you'"[89]

Interestingly, these two portrayals of Cinque's reaction the Supreme Court's verdict and to the abolitionists who argued the African's case reflect different levels of language proficiency; the second quote reveals a much more fluid expression of English. The discrepancy may allude that abolitionists did not directly transcribe Cinque's words and therefore may have altered his quotes to better fit their antislavery needs.

The victim iconography apparent in abolitionist visual propaganda was also evident in Cinque's depictions. The victim themes of a terrible slave passage, a tearful separation, and the call for viewers to take action against the injustice of slavery occurred in abolitionist depictions of Cinque's image. Cinque, however, did not fit into the victim image as the leader of a slave mutiny, but abolitionists could find victim characteristics within his persona. He was, at least, temporarily victimized by slavery as the result of his kidnapping by his Spanish captors, he was a victim of the slave trade, and he was a victim of the judicial system and American prejudices.

Abolitionists used Cinque to expose the terrors of the slave trade. Even Cinque experienced emotional separation from friends, family, and homeland. Abolitionists publicized an interview with both Cinque and another African, Grabung, in which they discussed their kidnapping. In expressing how difficult their kidnapping and separation from family was, Cinque remarked "that almost all of them were in tears, and himself among the rest" because "they were now about to be parted forever."[90] While Cinque may not have appeared to be the best figure to promote the victim image, abolitionists could still point to the injustice of his enslavement. Abolitionists asserted that, if antislavery forces did not act, Cinque and the other Africans would "be sent back to Havanna for execution." Abolitionists claimed that they must "all sit down mourning in sackcloth and ashes" for "these sons and daughters of abused, bleeding Africa." Only if abolitionists acted could Cinque escape such a situation and continue "sleeping on in quiet, till the day of judgment."[91]

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[89] John Barber, *A History of the Amistad Captives*, 30.
[90] *The Liberator*, October 18, 1839.

Abolitionists used Cinque in their antislavery propaganda in order to promote their crusade against human bondage. Yet their traditional iconography influenced the way they depicted Cinque. Instead of using his already-established persona, reinforced by the nonabolitionist press, abolitionists imposed their existing iconographic vocabulary on the slave revolt leader. Though Cinque's persona portrayed him as a superior African and a freedom loving mutineer, abolitionists depicted Cinque as a docile free black and a victim as well as an ennobled free black. The abolitionists' traditional iconography, therefore, circumscribed Cinque's image in their propaganda.

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[91] *The Liberator*, January 3, 1840.

Conclusion

The Black Image Circumscribed

The abolitionists of the 1830s sought to make universal emancipation an immediate reality. In their efforts to attain this extremely controversial end, abolitionists had to convince those who were indifferent (and even hostile) to their stance against human bondage of the validity and morality of their antislavery message. It is important for scholars to recognize abolitionist propaganda as a key aspect of the antislavery crusade as it facilitated the abolitionists' goal to keep the issue of slavery at the forefront of public discussion. Antislavery supporters sought to communicate their ideas to outsiders in hopes of persuading them of the merits of emancipation. As abolitionists spread their antislavery arguments through their propaganda, black slaves frequently appeared as the central figures of abolitionist propaganda. Abolitionists portrayed blacks in a variety of ways in order to persuade outsiders of the injustices of slavery. The black image, therefore, was significant to the abolitionists' fight against slavery.

It is important to realize, however, that abolitionist portrayals of blacks held a lasting influence on the black image that is evident in their own propaganda. Scholars of art have asserted that the way that artists depicted blacks in their work similarly had an influence on the black image. It appears that what McElroy describes as the "persuasive power to define" that these illustrations of blacks possessed, in the context of art, also bears meaning for abolitionist propaganda. As they sought to free black slaves, abolitionists circumscribed the black image with their visual propaganda. Through decades of depicting blacks in their antislavery illustrations, abolitionists developed an iconographic vocabulary of black images consisting of set of traditional themes that abolitionists recurrently used to portray blacks.

The way that abolitionists depicted the leader of the 1839 *Amistad* slave revolt. Joseph Cinque. presents a revealing case study through which to investigate the way abolitionists manipulated the black image in their propaganda and the influence that their shaping had on the black image. Though Cinque's persona appeared to support ideas outside of abolition's traditional ways of depicting blacks. abolitionists did not make create a new iconography for him. Instead, they imposed their traditional antislavery themes on Cinque's image. The way that abolitionists portrayed Cinque, therefore, demonstrates the limits that abolitionists placed on the black image within their own propaganda.

While abolitionists were eager to aid the Africans and uplift Cinque. they were not distracted from their ultimate goal of universal emancipation. An article in *The Liberator* illustrated the abolitionists' absolute priority:

> "Let not the *Amistad* affair be held up before their eyes so as to eclipse the grand anti slavery enterprise. as the human hand sometimes shuts out the sun and the whole heavens. Anti-slavery is the great matter. Let it not be lost sight of. Antislavery saves not only the brave Cinque and his gentle brothers, but it annihilates the slave system that sends the ship to Africa."[92]

For abolitionists. antislavery was "the great matter." They perceived that their arsenal of black images as stood as necessary and effective weapons in the battle against the sin of slavery. Yet in their crusade against slavery. abolitionists promoted and manipulated the black image to support and spread antislavery sentiment. Their portrayals, whether intentionally or not, imposed upon blacks the slavery of a new stereotype.

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[92] *The Liberator*. April 9. 1941.

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