Visual Images of Blacks in
Early American Imprints

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I N intellectual and academic discourse, as well as in everyday life and
ordinary language, we are engaged in what W.J.T. Mitchell calls "the pic-
torial turn," a paradigm shift involving encounters with and concerns
about "the visual."[1] Scholars such as linguists are attempting, through verbal
discourse, to master the field of visual representation. Historians, too, need
to consider images systematically with a sharp eye to cultural meanings. Art
historians develop semiotic analyses that link American art with its social
and cultural context on the premise that images and texts are deeply inter-
connected.[2] Their approaches can help historians in other fields to assess and
appreciate more fully the role of nonverbal experience in transmitting and
transforming culture and ideology. By examining early American publica-
tions that contain both images and text, the present study shows that the
pictorial element provides new information, contends with or subverts the
verbal meaning, and creates a dialectic with the text that can enhance under-
standing of the subject. The focus of this inquiry is imprints—books, pam-
phlets, broadsides, magazines, and selected newspapers—published between
1640 and 1800 in what is now the United States, depicting images of blacks
that yield insight into racial attitudes in early America.[3] Published largely by

[1] Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays in Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago, 1994), 1–34.
See also Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, 1986); Mitchell, ed., *The Language
of Images* (Chicago, 1974); and David C. Miller, ed., *American Iconology: New Approaches to
Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (New Haven, 1993).

[2] Bryan Wolf, "All the World's a Code: Art and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century American
Painting," *Art Journal,* 44 (1984), 328–37; Wolf, *Romantic Re-Vision: Culture and Consciousness in
Nineteenth-Century American Painting and Literature* (Chicago, 1982).

[3] The illustrations of blacks come from Charles Evans, Early American Imprints, 1st Ser.,
microtext collection (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1968), and from 18th-
century periodicals as reproduced in American Periodicals Series I (Ann Arbor, Mich.:
University Microfilms, 1979). All images of blacks located in these two collections will be dis-
cussed. In addition, a few images of blacks have been drawn from Early American Newspapers,
AAS-Readex series (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1961–), available on
microfilm. Nearly all images in this study also have been examined in the original at the
American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass. Comparative references are made to an oil
painting and a sculpture of the period. Studies of American attitudes and imagery include Albert
Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D. C.,

white authors and printers for white audiences, these illustrations are, of course, the product of white views, yet, rather than fabricate a black type, they make many distinctions.[4] Moreover, blacks were not only objects of this representational enterprise but were themselves creators of black identities.

The study groups images into five categories, ranging from the seemingly simple to the increasingly complex: physiological descriptions of blacks, Africans in travel literature, blacks in Protestant tracts, blacks at historic sites, and portraits of blacks. It then discusses each group with reference to the power of the image and the power of the observer over the observed. Lastly, it considers the interaction of images and words, including the level of the text and the moment chosen for focus by the artist, as well as two related issues, the problem of artistic intention and the question of audience. Images are themselves a kind of language; rather than providing a transparent window into the past, they are an enigma, an opaque, distorting, mystifying mechanism of representation that must, like language, be decoded to be understood.[5]

Physiological descriptions of blacks are found in broadsides advertising slaves for sale, newspaper advertisements about runaways, and a magazine

1990); Guy P. McElroy, *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art, 1710–1940* (Washington, D. C., 1990); Ellwood Parry, *The Image of the Indian and the Black Man in American Art, 1590–1900* (New York, 1974). For a historiographical survey of some works relating racial attitudes and slavery see Alden T. Vaughan, "The Origins Debate: Slavery and Racism in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography,* 97 (1989), 311–54. For innovative work on the subject see Herbert Aptheker, *Anti-Racism in U. S. History: The First Two Hundred Years* (Westport, Conn., 1992), and Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton, 1987). For surveys of literary images of blacks see Milton Cantor, "The Image of the Negro in Colonial Literature," *New England Quarterly,* 36 (1963), 452–77; Mukhtar Ali Isani, "Far from 'Gambia's Golden Shore': The Black in Late Eighteenth-Century American Imaginative Literature," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3d Ser., 36 (1979), 353–72; and Shane White, "Impious Prayers: Elite and Popular Attitudes toward Blacks and Slavery in Middle-Atlantic States, 1783–1810," *New York History,* 67 (1986), 261–83. Multiple viewpoints are discussed by Jon F. Sensbach, "Charting a Course in Early African-American History," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., 50 (1993), 394–405.

[4] The names of the artists who designed the illustrations are largely unknown, although the artisan who cut or engraved the design (and who also may have originated the design) occasionally signed or initialed his woodcut or engraving. Two major publications about early book illustration are Elizabeth Carroll Reilly, *A Dictionary of Colonial American Printers' Ornaments and Illustrations* (Worcester, Mass., 1975), and Sinclair Hamilton, *Early American Book Illustrators and Wood Engravers, 1670–1870* . . . (Princeton, 1958). Recent scholarship on the history of the book has provided information about the business and technique of engraving. See Jane R. Pomeroy, "Alexander Anderson's Life and Engravings before 1800, with a Checklist of Publications Drawn from His Diary," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society,* 100 (1990), 137, 230.

[5] Two important works in American art history that address these questions are Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven, 1991), and Boime, *Art of Exclusion.* See also Boime, *Art in an Age of Revolution, 1750–1800* (Chicago, 1987); David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, 1989); Freedberg et al., "The Object of Art History," *Art Bulletin,* 76 (1994), 394–410; and Whitney Davis et al., "The Subject in/of Art History," ibid., 76 (1994), 570–95. For the innovative works of Jules David Prown relating material culture to social and intellectual history see "In Pursuit of Culture: The Formal Landscape of Objects," *American Art,* 9 (1995), 3.
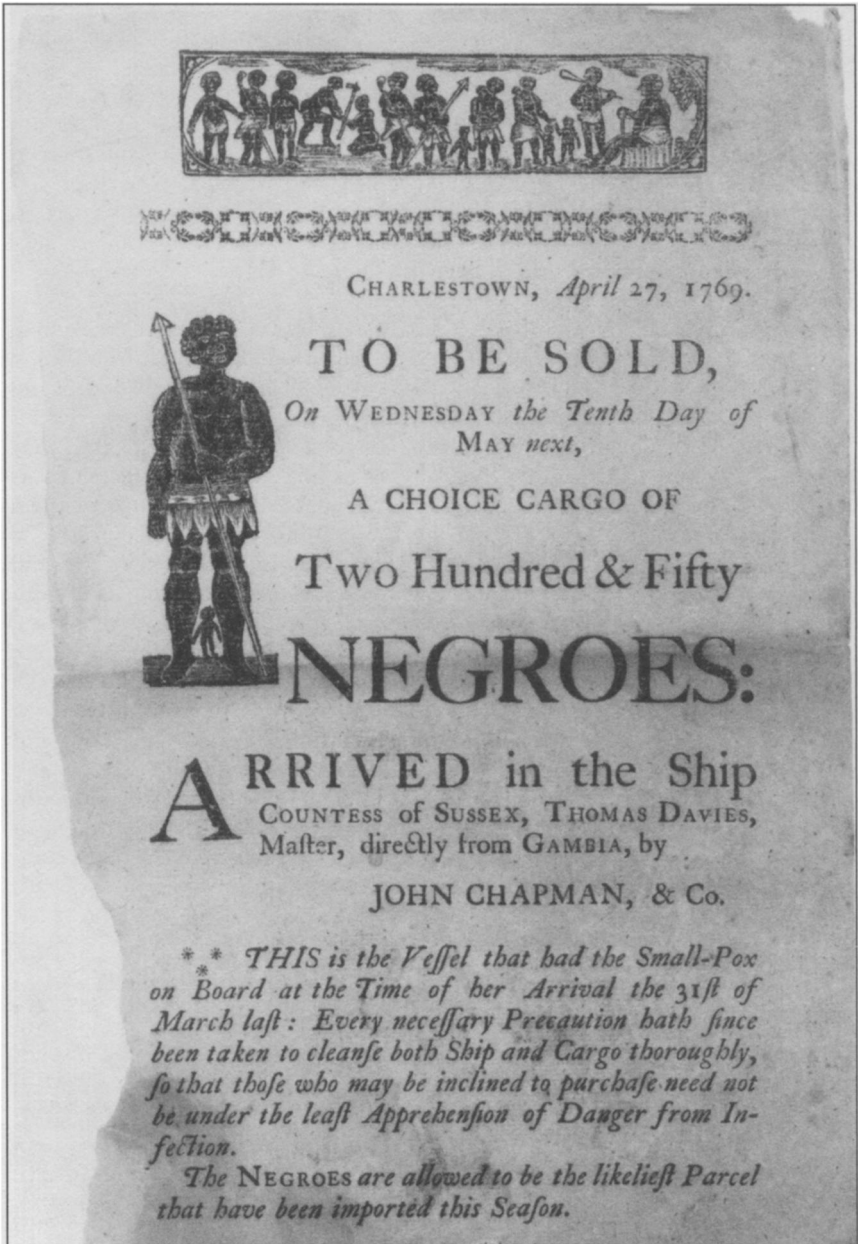
account of a disabled child born of an enslaved mother. Although they all purport to be objective depictions, careful analysis can reconstruct the pre-conceptions of their creators and audience.

Three illustrated broadsides for slave auctions in Charleston, South Carolina, in the 1760s are ideographic pictures that provided important information for potential bidders (Figures I, II, III). The broadsides adver-tise slaves arriving from Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Gambia. One displays a woodcut of a half-clad woman wearing bracelets and a bandanna with a small figure at her side, probably representing a mother and child (Figure II). The small figure may have been included to signal the fertility pur-chasable with a female slave.

A woodcut used in two of the broadsides shows a muscular black man with crudely rendered features dressed in a feathered skirt and holding a spear in his left hand (Figures I and II). Although he appears wooden and stereotyped, he dominates an ambiguous tiny figure who stands between his feet. The considerable difference in scale between the two human forms may reflect knowledge of African carvings and castings that display figures of var-ious sizes. The artisan might have seen such works, been informed of them by sailors, or copied details from engravings found in published travelers' accounts.[6] It is arguable whether the eighteenth-century colonial artisan and his audience understood the original cultural or religious meaning of African diminutive figures, although clearly they found them intriguing.

The headband ornament in Figure I, similar to the decoration in Figure III, depicts an African scene. A disproportionately large figure representing a ruler sits enthroned, his hand supported by a scepter. Other men work with clubs, spears, and axes, while two women hold children by the hand and carry babies on their backs. The figures are connected by touch or gaze, and they interact, suggesting a harmonious, cooperative society. Yet, near this idyll of village life, one figure kneels, in the posture of being subdued or enslaved, before another who wields an ax. This nuanced visual representa-tion of Africans seems to undercut the usual assumptions about South Carolina's overwhelming rejection of the slave's cultural heritage; however,

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[6] The tiny figure with the man remains ambiguous. Although the small figure at the woman's side would seem to be a child and is identified as a "girl child" by Parry, *The Image of the Indian and the Black Man in American Art*, 46, there is evidence that in African carvings and castings, as in medieval Christian art, size of figures is related to hierarchical status. A small figure with a warrior, for example, may be an attendant, sword bearer, or page; Bryna Freyer, *Royal Benin Art in the Collection of the National Museum of African Art* (Washington, D. C., 1987), 40. A 17th-century engraving of a court ceremony before the palace of Benin depicts and describes the king as surrounded by musicians, dwarfs, and attendants. Published in Amsterdam in 1668, with German and English translations appearing in 1670, the engraving is reproduced in Kate Ezra, *Royal Art of Benin: The Perls Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1992), 5. There is also speculation that such figures may have spiritual significance. Historian Mechal Sobel refers to the "little man" inside, the soul that is separate and separable from the body; *Trabelin' on: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Westport, Conn., 1979), 14. Anthropologist Jack Goody refers to "beings of the wild," intermediate between God and man, among whom a tripartite distinction can be made—the being himself, the child of the being, and the small being—in *The Myth of the Bagre* (Oxford, 1972), 302.

CHARLESTOWN, *April* 27, 1769.

TO BE SOLD,

On WEDNESDAY *the Tenth Day of* MAY *next*,

A CHOICE CARGO OF

Two Hundred & Fifty

NEGROES:

ARRIVED in the Ship

COUNTESS of SUSSEX, THOMAS DAVIES, Mafter, directly from GAMBIA, by

JOHN CHAPMAN, & Co.

** THIS is the *Veſſel* that had the Small-Pox on Board at the Time of her Arrival the 31*ſt* of March laſt : Every neceſſary Precaution hath ſince been taken to cleanſe both Ship and Cargo thoroughly, ſo that thoſe who may be inclined to purchaſe need not be under the leaſt Apprehenſion of Danger from Infection.

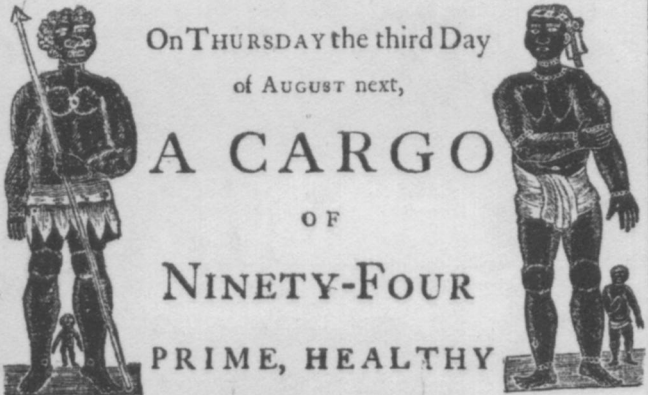The NEGROES are allowed to be the likelieſt Parcel that have been imported this Seaſon.

FIGURE I

John Chapman and Co., *To be sold . . . a choice cargo* (Charleston, Apr. 27, 1769). Broadside with relief cut. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

Charlestown, July 24th, 1769.

TO BE SOLD,

On THURSDAY the third Day
of AUGUST next,

A CARGO

OF

NINETY-FOUR

PRIME, HEALTHY

NEGROES,

CONSISTING OF

Thirty-nine MEN, Fifteen BOYS,
Twenty-four WOMEN, and
Sixteen GIRLS.

JUST ARRIVED,

In the Brigantine DEMBIA, *Fran-
cis Bare*, Master, from SIERRA-
LEON, by

DAVID & JOHN DEAS.

FIGURE II

David and John Deas, *To be sold . . . a cargo* (Charleston, July 24, 1769). Broadside with relief
cut. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

FIGURE III

Thomas-Loughton and Roger Smith, *Charles-Town M[arch] to be sold . . . a Cargo of . . . Slaves* (Charlestown, Mar. 18, 1769). Broadside with relief cut. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

> TO BE SOLD on Thursday next, at publick vendue,
> **TEN LIKELY**
> **GOLD COAST NEW NEGROES,**
> Juſt imported from the Weſt-Indies,
> Conſiſting of eight ſtout men and two women.
> To prevent their receiving the infection of
> the ſmallpox, they have been kept conſtantly
> on board the veſſel ſince they arrived, where
> they will be ſold.—Any perſon inclining to
> purchaſe them at private ſale may apply to Meſſrs. Johnſon
> and Wylly.
>
> RUN AWAY from the ſubſcriber, a NE-
> GROE MAN named FRANK, who car-
> ried off a gun and ſhot pouch with him. He
> is a likely well made ſtout fellow, ſpeaks bro-
> ken Engliſh, with the Spaniſh accent, having
> been ſeveral years at the Havana.—Whoever
> will deliver him to Mr. George Baillie in Sa-
> vannah, or to me in Auguſta, ſhall receive 20s. reward, be-
> ſides all charges. **JAMES GRAY.**

FIGURE IV

Georgia Gazette (Oct. 25, 1764). Relief cut. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

the silhouetted image of the man is graphically labeled "slave," and the language on the broadside referring to the Africans as "choice cargo" and "the likeliest parcel" is dehumanizing.

Such figures were sometimes labeled "New Negroes," as in the Georgia advertisement describing Gold Coast blacks for sale who had just arrived from the West Indies and were free of smallpox (Figure IV). The term, first used for slaves recently brought from Africa, subsequently was developed as a concept by blacks in reaction to their visual and literary debasement in American art.[7] In the Georgia advertisement, "New Negroes" is a term that refers to vigorous and healthy representatives of an outlandish, exotic culture. Both image and text suggest awareness of the remote but close-knit society of those who had not yet been completely subjected to servile status. Potential purchasers who read such advertisements and broadsides enjoyed a sense of power, not in this instance through brutalization and whipping, but

[7] Visual representations of the "New Negro" from 1710 to 1940 are discussed by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in McElroy, ed., *Facing History*, xxix-xliv.

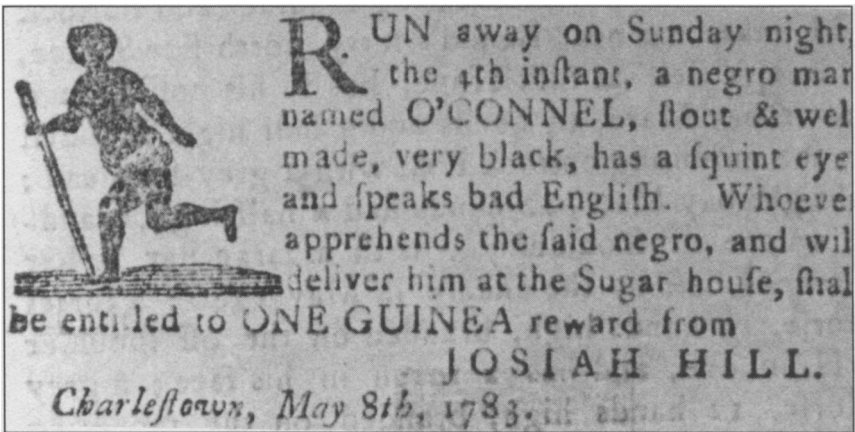the power of the observer over the observed; they gazed at an exotic people who became objects to be studied at a distance. Those so examined seem desirable and worthy of being conquered, possessed, and controlled. Stock figures for runaway slaves are found in advertisements both in the South and in the North showing Africans at different stages of acculturation into American slave society.[8] A Georgia advertisement published in 1764 has an image of the runaway wearing an African headdress and short skirt (Figure IV), whereas a similar advertisement published in South Carolina in 1783 portrays a partially draped figure in flight holding a simple stick, apparently fleeing enslavement and dehumanization (Figure V). The lively figure is a standardized signal, calling attention to the written descriptions of the runaways, which are minutely detailed accounts of personal traits designed to help slaveowners retrieve their stolen property.

In a Boston advertisement of 1765, the iconic runaway holds a walking stick but is shown well dressed (Figure VI). Ishmael, age eighteen, is described as an "artful" Negro boy brought up by a minister and wearing a striped jacket, leather breeches, and brass buckles on his shoes. His cultural level, measured by clothing as much as by skills, indicates the social status of both slave and master.

In all the advertisements for runaway slaves, the one common feature of the African heritage that remains is the walking stick.[9] The stick is a signifi-

[8] On runaways see Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (London, 1972), and Darold D. Wax, "The Image of the Negro in the *Maryland Gazette*, 1745–75," *Journalism Quarterly*, 46 (1969), 73–80, 86.

[9] On the importance of the walking stick see Robert Farris Thompson, "African Influence on the Art of the United States," in Armistead Robinson, Craig C. Foster, and Donald H. Ogilvie, eds., *Black Studies in the University: A Symposium* (New Haven, 1969), 122–70. Servants other than African are depicted without walking sticks. See, for example, the advertisement for a runaway Irish manservant in the *Boston Gazette*, Aug. 18–25, 1735.

RUN away from *Jacob Fowle*, Efq; the Twenty-ninth ult. a Negro Boy, about Eighteen Years old, was born in *Hopkington*, and brought up by the Rev. Mr. *Barret*; his Name is *Ifhmael*, he has been a Soldier at the Lake, is thick fett, has thick Lips, and goes limping by Reafon of the great Toe of his right Foot being froze and not quite well. He had on when he went away, a ftriped Jacket, leather Bree-ches, chequered woolen Shirt, blue under Jacket, light coloured Stockings, brafs Buckles in his Shoes, and an old mill'd Cap. He is an artful Fellow, and is fuppofed will endeavour to pafs for a Soldier, as he carried off with him a Firelock and Blanket.—Who-ever fhall take up the faid Negro and bring him to his Mafter, or confine him in any of his Majefty's Goals fo that his Mafter may have him again, fhall have FOUR DOLLARS Reward, and all Charges paid. *Marblehead, April* 2. 1765. JACOB FOWLE.

FIGURE VI

Boston Gazette (Apr. 8, 1765). Relief cut. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

cant remnant, because, as a potential weapon, it indicates that the power relationship between master and slave temporarily has been disrupted. That the figure is partially clad is also important. Clothing was a major cultural construct, and its absence may represent a descent into barbarism or suggest the foreign and strange—nudity and sensuality—thus adding a frisson to the physical description. The visual and the verbal descriptions are somewhat at variance in these advertisements, but both forms of identification were needed. The visual image signaled a general category of persons, and the verbal account gave a detailed listing of physical traits, costume, skills, and speech. Only by including the specific with the generic would the reader be instantly alerted and then informed and thus be able to identify the defined individual.

In two publications, *The American Museum, or, Universal Magazine* and *The Columbian Almanac,* the stark form of a black child born without arms accompanies a detailed description of his physical appearance (Figure VII). Although the writer wants "to describe accurately" the various "defects and

FIGURE VII

The Columbian Almanac: or, the North American Calendar, for the Year of Our Lord, 1791 (Wilmington, Del., 1790). Relief cut. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

distortions," to do so, he says, would "require a degree of anatomical knowledge, to which I have no pretensions." The visual image, intended as a kind of anatomical diagram, presents the child in three-quarter view, which was then conventional in portraiture. But, in this instance, the truncation exaggerates the child's unusual physique. The textual description is more sympathetic, providing informative detail about the boy's dexterity at play. Yet, when the author attempts to explain the child's condition, he leaps to the conclusion that, since the boy's mother was "old" and "has borne fourteen children," the child's misshapen body "can be accounted for, from the debility of the superannuated parent." Ultimately, the child is not regarded with compassion but as a curiosity, if not a monstrosity; he is the grotesque product of a fecund womb, presented in a calculated effort to capitalize on the reader's interest in the bizarre.[10]

The illustrated imprints providing physiological descriptions of blacks tend to be of males, shown briefly dressed and without a social context. They all depict slaves. The writers and illustrators took it for granted that slavery was the appropriate condition for black men, and even the scientifically inclined could rationalize their prejudices.

Many historians have sought to discover the source of prejudicial attitudes. Principal among them is Winthrop D. Jordan, who, in his analysis, calls attention to the travel literature produced in England from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.[11] Explorers, traders, and eventually missionaries came to Africa, recorded their observations, and published their findings in well-circulated books, a number of which were reprinted in America. Four such illustrated travelers' accounts are considered here. Some manifest condescending and hostile attitudes toward blacks, and others show curiosity and interest, depending on the region under discussion or the purpose of the author. Also discussed is an almanac representation of "America directing Europe Asia & Africa" that draws upon the "Four Continents" convention of travel literature dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Oliver Goldsmith's *An History of the Earth and Animated Nature*, a scientific study of the earth, sea, animals, and birds, presents man as a kind of animal. The frontispiece shows a variety of human beings: American, Negro, Hottentot, Laplander, and Chinese, all of whom are different in appearance but equal in size and type of detail (Figure VIII). The partially clad Negro grasps a club and spear, for example, while the American Indian in skimpy garb holds a bow and quiver of arrows. The white man, the "original source" from which these variations have sprung, is omitted because, according to the text, he is not on the same plane as the others. Those present are viewed

[10] *The American Museum, or, Universal Magazine* (November 1789), 350–51; *The Columbian Almanac: or, the North American Calendar, for the Year of Our Lord, 1791* (Wilmington, Del., 1790), 28. For English fantasies about the sexuality of the African woman see Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Africa That Never Was: Four Centuries of British Writing about Africa* (New York, 1970), 149.

[11] Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968). Contributions to the historiographical debate by Oscar Handlin and Mary Handlin, Carl Degler, Edmund S. Morgan, and others are reviewed in Vaughan, "Origins Debate."
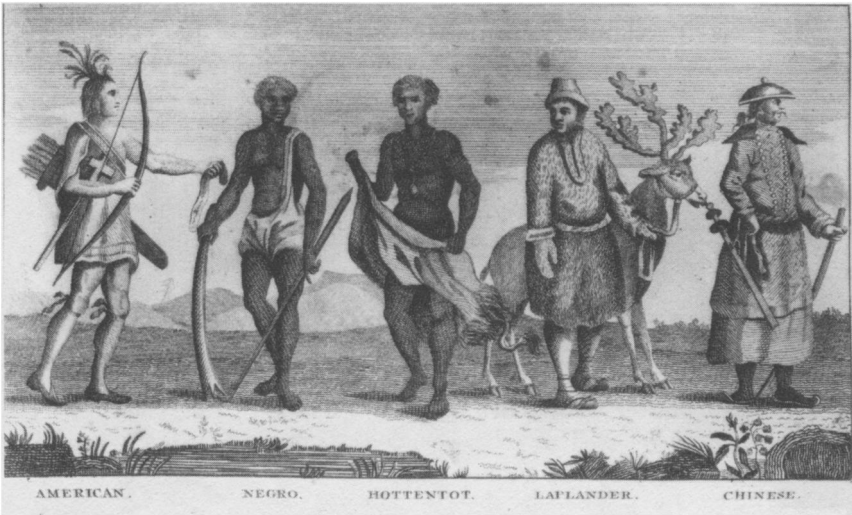
FIGURE VIII

Oliver Goldsmith, *An History of the Earth and Animated Nature* (Philadelphia, 1795). Engraving. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

as interesting specimens, differentiated by various conventions of posture and expression and posed with exotic attributes.[12] Placed as if in a frieze, they are, according to Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "a parade of the vanquished."[13] In *An Historical and Geographical Account of Algiers,* published in 1797 and dedicated to Joel Barlow's rescue of American captives taken by Algerian pirates, James Wilson Stevens finds opportunity to criticize the Muslims of North Africa for "the most deplorable barbarism."[14] As evidence, he offers a frontispiece showing men engaged in "The Manner of Bastinading," or whipping an individual on the soles of the feet, which was intended to provoke horror in the Christian reader at the sadism of Muslim Africans (Figure IX). The skin color of the man with the lash is not dark, but the depiction is consistent with written accounts of African physiognomy. André Thevet's *New Founde Worlde,* translated into English in 1568, observed concerning Africans: "Those of *Arabia* and of *Egypt* are betweene black and white, others browne coloured whom we call white Moores, oth-

[12] Goldsmith, *An History of the Earth and Animated Nature,* 4 vols. (Philadelphia, 1795), 1: 379–80. Best known for *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) and *She Stoops to Conquer, or the Mistakes of a Night* (1773), Goldsmith was an extraordinarily productive writer. For a profile see Samuel H. Woods, Jr., "Oliver Goldsmith," in Donald T. Siebert, ed., *British Prose Writers, 1660–1800,* 2d Ser., *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* vol. 104 (Detroit, 1991), 120–47.

[13] Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven, 1992), 92.

[14] Stevens, *An Historical and Geographical Account of Algiers . . .* (Philadelphia, 1797), v.

FIGURE IX

James Wilson Stevens, *An Historical and Geographical Account of Algiers* . . . (Philadelphia, 1797). Engraving. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

ers are cleane black."[15] A few American imprints, including Stevens's, manifest this perception of different shades of skin color among Africans who are not all simply "blacks."

A crudely drawn image of a dark, ragged misfit is found in *Weatherwise's Town and Country Almanack, for . . . 1781,* accompanied by a derogatory description of the Hottentots (Figure X). This group of Africans are called "the most nasty and brutish of all reasonable creatures," an identity bestowed on them as victims of the wanton and barbarous power of the Boers, Dutch competitors to British mercantile interests on the Cape of Good Hope.

In contrast with these three negative depictions of Africans encountered by travelers is the assessment in Captain James Cook's *Third and Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean,* a work that describes "an expedition of discovery" to the South Seas and trade in the "friendly islands." The frontispiece depicts white and black people in equal number, placed on the same plane, with a white man extending his hand amicably toward the group of black men (Figure

[15] Quoted in Alden T. Vaughan, "From White Man to Redskin: Changing Anglo-American Perceptions of the American Indian," *American Historical Review,* 87 (1982), 920.

A SHORT DESCRIPTION of the PEOPLE
called HOTTENTOTS, who live upon the Cape
of Good Hope; with a Reprefentation of a Male Inhabi-
tant in his proper Drefs.

THESE people are termed Hottentots from a frequent
repetition of that, or fuch like word; and are juftly rec-
koned the moft nafty and brutifh of all reafonable creatures,
having nothing, fave the fhape of a man, that can lay claim
to that noble character.   They live without any fign of reli-
gion, being deftitute of both prieft and temple; and never
fhew any token of devotion, except we reckon their dancing
at the full and new moon for fuch.   Their bodies are ufually
befmeared with common greafe, or fome worfe ftinking ftuff,
which occafions a very loathfome fmell: their ordinary habit
is a fheep's fkin, juft as it is pulled off from the carcafe; and
they ufe, as ornaments, the guts, " cum puris naturalibus,"
wrapped about their legs and arms two or three inches deep,
on which they frequently feed, when fcarce of better provi-
fions.---Notwithftanding the unparallel'd naftinefs of thefe
people, yet fome travellers talk of a certain inland Canibal
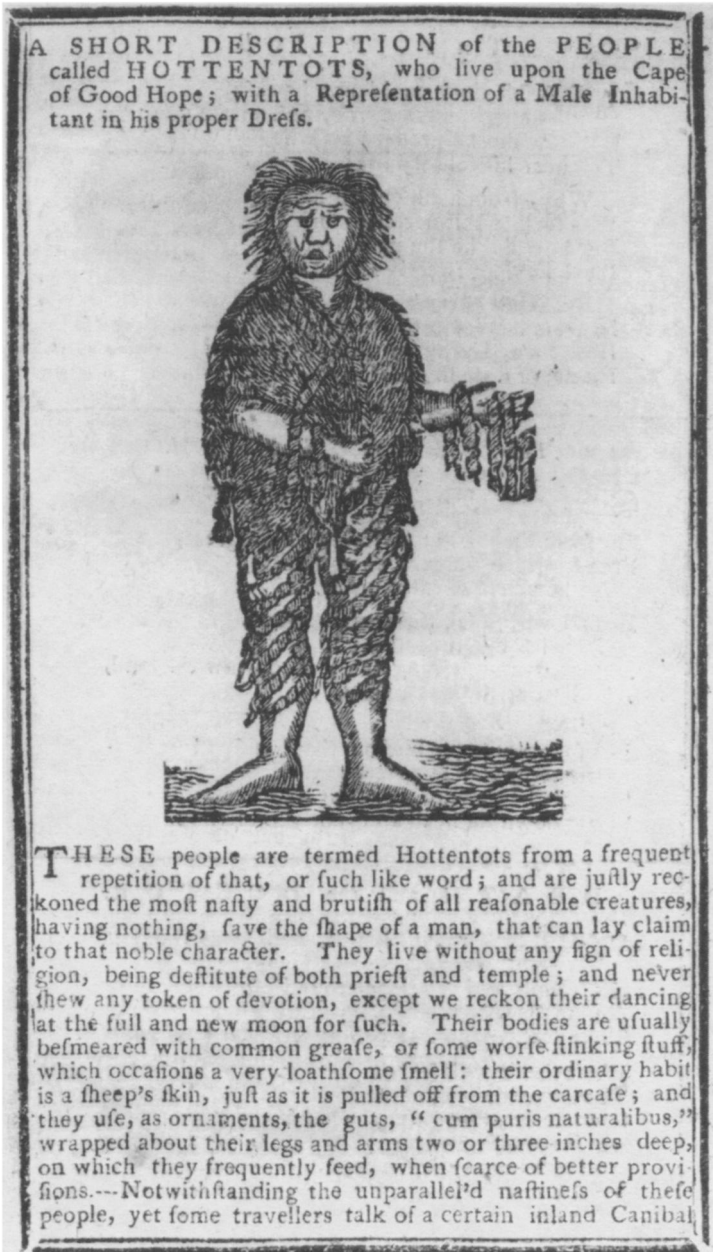
FIGURE X

[David Rittenhouse], *Weatherwise's Town and Country Almanack, for . . . 1781* (Boston, 1780).
Relief cut. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

FIGURE XI

James Cook, *Captain Cook's Third and Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* . . . (New York, 1795). Relief cut. Collections of the Library of Congress.

XI). The illustration contrasts with Goldsmith's frontispiece: here there is an appeal to the spectator about hopes for equality, based on the naïve assumption that the European presence in foreign lands would be received with open arms.[16]

Although these travel accounts lend some support to Jordan's findings that the British held negative perceptions of blacks before the colonization of North America, a prejudice that he links to the enslavement of blacks, other scholars portray a different tradition. After the medieval period, blacks, identified by Europeans simply as "Africans," were included in religious works of art representing the Magi, allegories of the continents, and decorative, exotic fantasies.[17] Although these subjects gradually fell out of favor with European artists, a vestige of this tradition continued in eigh-

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[16] James Cook, *Captain Cook's Third and Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* . . . (New York, 1795), v, 54. For an insightful analysis of the Cook voyage see Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton, 1992).

[17] Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), IV, 27–28; Clare Le Corbeiller, "Miss America and Her Sisters: Personifications of the Four Parts of the World," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin,* 19 (1960–61), 209–23; Peter Mark, *Africans in European Eyes: The Portrayal of Black Africans in Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Europe* (Syracuse, N. Y., 1974).

teenth-century America, as can be seen in an almanac illustration in the "Four Continents" tradition that has been imbued with new political meaning.

An engraved frontispiece to *The Gentleman's Political Pocket-Almanack for the Year 1794*, signed by George Graham, develops an allegorical idea that is quickly decoded in the title: "America directing Europe Asia & Africa to address themselves to liberty who receives & offers them protection and reward" (Figure XII).[18] Distributed among the personified continents is a rich array of symbols. Radiant Liberty, protected by Pallas Athene holding a liberty pole, regards America with a sovereign gaze. In a pyramid of three figures, Europe, crowned with laurel and holding a book, gazes over her shoulder to Africa and Asia. Asia, in a turban and feathers, casts her eyes downward, and Africa, the least visible figure, is at the apex, represented by a dark face, an arm holding elephant tusks, and a tusk-and-trunk headdress with elephant ears. Africa looks upward, head slightly tilted, her eyes directed toward Liberty.

The allegory operates within a time-honored artistic convention but is not simply a copy of an earlier model.[19] Usually, Europe, surrounded by the symbols of learning and the arts, is elevated above the other continents; here, however, America is the figure set apart, equal to or greater in size than the juxtaposed figure of Europe, offering herself as a model for Asia and Africa to emulate. Also, although many of the attributes of the personifications stay within the allegorical tradition, some, including the liberty pole, are given new associations. Often topped by a cap, the liberty pole was an artistic convention introduced into the iconography of the American Revolution by Paul Revere as a symbol of resistance to tyranny.[20] In Graham's allegory, since it is an object within Africa's gaze, it has implications for the cause of emancipation. Thus, by using the medieval allegorical convention but changing the geometry of the figures and placing usually unrelated symbols in proximity, a radical new idea, abolitionism, was given pictorial expression.

An early work that gives visual expression to abolitionism within the conventions of so-called high art is Samuel Jennings's 1792 "Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences" (Figure XIII). Analysis of this five-by-six-foot oil painting provides insight into visual references found in the small-scaled, more prolific low art publications on the subject. Jennings fulfilled a request from the Library Company of Philadelphia for a painting about slavery and abolitionism that would show the "figure of Liberty (with her Cap and

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[18] Graham was a mezzotint and stipple engraver who worked in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia; David McNeely Stauffer, *New York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America, 1564–1860* (New Haven, 1957), 269.

[19] The idea that a deviant replica is an expression of explicit criticism is developed by Leo Steinberg, "The Line of Fate in Michelangelo's Painting," in Mitchell, ed., *Language of Images*, 85–128.

[20] The cap's identification with liberty stemmed from its original use in the Roman custom of manumission; Yvonne Korshak, "The Liberty Cap as a Revolutionary Symbol in America and France," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, 1 (1987), 53–69.

FIGURE XII

Charles Smith, *The Gentleman's Political Pocket-Almanack for the Year 1795* (New York, 1794). Engraving. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

FIGURE XIII

Samuel Jennings, *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences* (London, 1792). Oil on canvas. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

proper Insignia) displaying the arts" and that would also include a copy of the library's catalog. In the completed work, the requisite books and other objects surround the monumental goddess, shown with blond hair and white dress, as she grants an audience to a group of diminutive blacks in suppliant posture: a child with clasped hands, black men bowing to the white woman, and a woman gesturing heart-felt appreciation for favors being bestowed. Another tableau, kept in the distance by architectural columns, is composed of even smaller figures who celebrate around a liberty pole with "Ease & Joy."[21]

Although sycophantic attitudes are depicted, self-congratulation was not necessarily the motive for sponsoring this painting. The work was the result of an effort to translate vernacular subject matter into the conventions and symbols of high art and might have been palatable to some but confusing to others. In some ways, the painting was revolutionary because it did not pre-

[21] Robert C. Smith, "Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences: A Philadelphia Allegory by Samuel Jennings," *Wint. Port.*, 2 (1965), 89. See also Frank H. Sommer, "The Metamorphoses of Britannia," in Charles F. Montgomery and Patricia E. Kane, eds., *American Art, 1750–1800: Toward Independence* (Boston, 1976), 40–49, and Boime, *Art of Exclusion*, 21.

sent blacks as servants, shows many figures of both sexes and of various ages, and portrays figures in mostly Western dress with realistic facial features and expressions. Although critics have pointed to the gaudy color, untutored drawing, and lack of space in the composition, the library directors themselves were well pleased with Jennings's allegory, which was almost certainly the first with an abolitionist message.

Printed literature produced by Protestant religious groups opposed to slavery reached a wider audience than did Jennings's painting. Among the American Protestant tracts, there are abolitionist works by Quakers, German Baptists, and some Congregationalists. Also considered in this category are reprints of English evangelical tales by Hannah More and a reprinted emblem on blackness by the English Puritan minister, John Bunyan.

A widely circulated antislavery image, first printed in England, was the seal of the Quaker-dominated Committee for Affecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. The seal depicted a single emblematic figure pleading for the cause of the suffering African. The design of the seal was turned into an elegant cameo by Josiah Wedgewood and was then mass produced and distributed among English supporters of abolitionism. Some of these medallions were also sent to Philadelphia where they were well received. Benjamin Franklin, president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, wrote that this one image had a psychological effect "equal to that of the best written pamphlet in procuring favour to those oppressed people."[22]

The emblem might first have appeared in print in America in Erasmus Darwin's The Botanic Garden, engraved by Benjamin Tanner (Figure XIV).[23] The slave kneeling in supplication, burdened by chains, perhaps reminded readers of the imprisoned apostle Peter, who, by turning to God and through the ministry of an angel, had the chains fall from his hands (Acts 12:6). As placed on the page of the book, however, the slave looks up, not to heaven, but to a second illustration, depicting individuals who took part in a commercial voyage to Botany Bay. Disconnected in life, the figures in reproduction become visually connected, visually compared. The spatial arrangement suggests the suppliant should look to white benefactors for deliverance from oppression.

The slave is rendered in what may seem like patronizing terms, as a diminutive, partially nude figure pleading on his knees to fully clothed, upright white figures. Many abolitionists, however, particularly the Quakers, believed themselves also to be outcasts and suppliants, laboring under civic or religious disabilities, and they felt a resonant response to the emblem's motto, "Am I not a Man and a Brother."[24] The pitiful visual image stimulated empathy in viewers.

[22] Quoted in Parry, Image of the Indian and the Black Man in American Art, 45–48.

[23] Benjamin Tanner (1775–1848), engraver, studied as an apprentice in New York, moving to Philadelphia in 1799 to set himself up in business. "Benjamin Tanner," Dictionary of American Biography, vol. 18 (New York, 1936), 295–96.

[24] Robin Blackburn, The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery: 1776–1848 (London, 1988), 141. Jean Fagan Yellin has shown how a similar abolitionist emblem, created in the 19th century, of a kneeling, chained female suppliant with the appeal, "Am I not a woman and a sister?" was

Copied from Capt. Phillip's Voyage to Botany Bay.
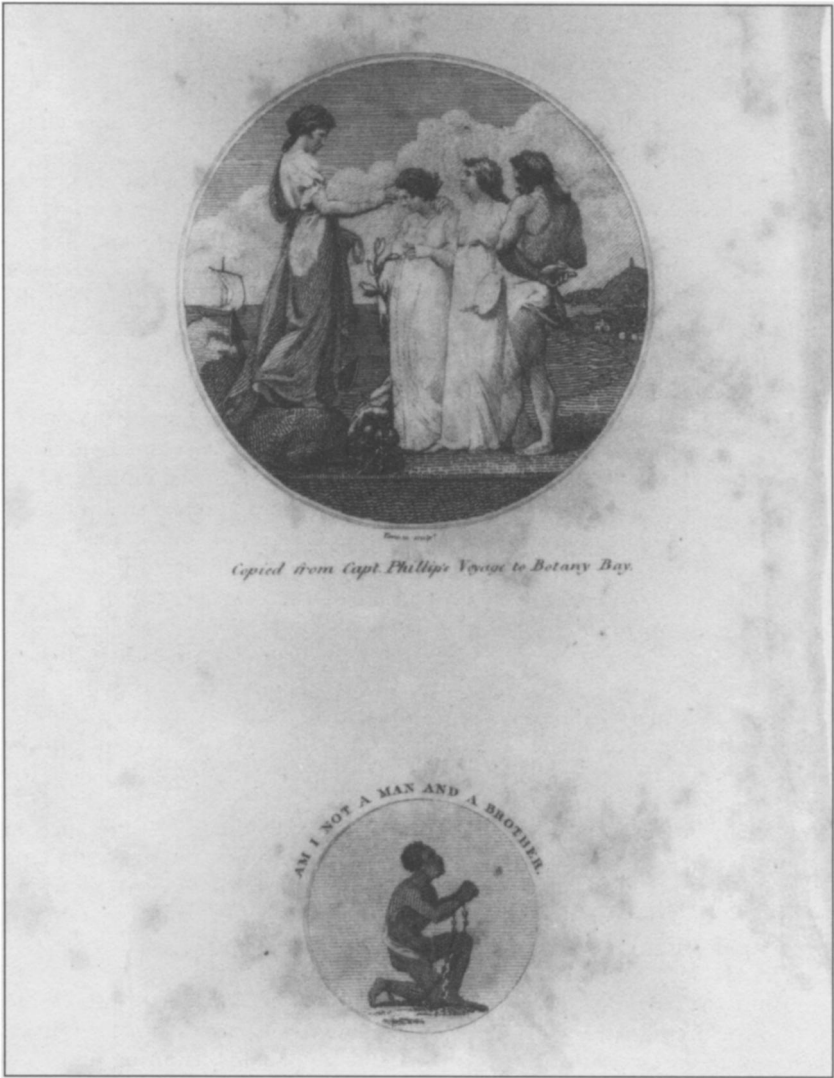
AM I NOT A MAN AND A BROTHER

FIGURE XIV

[Erasmus Darwin], *The Botanic Garden. A Poem in Two Parts* (New York, 1798). Engraving. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

Besides the Quakers, other sects in America, including the Dunkers, led by the Sower family of printers, were opponents of slavery and issued abolitionist literature.[25] In a German-language publication, *Sclaven-Handel* (Slave trade), written by Tobias Hirte, the barbarous treatment of Africans was vividly described (Figure XV). The wide border around the text, with ample white space surrounding each of twelve carefully placed small pictures, visually balances the densely crowded columns of text. Each small picture is captioned, so image and text are interrelated, and the eye, arrested as it scans the page, is made to concentrate on each terrible scene. Shackles, chains, and especially the whip, present in four places, show the means by which slaves were forced to work against their will. Such symbols were traditionally used to represent the fear caused by pain, violence, and the apparent success of evil.[26] The broadside indicates how families were separated and how slaves were worked, restrained, chastised, and marketed and develops the argument that all humanity was shamed by such practices.[27]

A Connecticut Congregationalist, educator Noah Webster, wrote a simplified version of the abolitionist appeal, "Story of the Treatment of African Slaves," for children. The account describes the capture and sale of Africans who are subjected to whippings, pestilence, starvation, and family separation. In a woodcut meant to bring home the horror, a white trader brandishes a whip at a coffle of four chained black men, urging them along through the countryside (Figure XVI). By depicting the slaves as black and smaller than the white slave driver and with a slight stoop in their posture, the image employs the usual symbolism of servitude found in artwork that conveys the hierarchy of master and slave.

The best-known abolitionist image, produced by English Quakers and reprinted in Philadelphia in both magazines and pamphlets, was "designed to give the spectator an idea of the sufferings of the Africans in the Middle Passage."[28] A diagram of the Liverpool slave vessel, *The Brooks*, shows three

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adopted and interpreted by antislavery women as a symbol of white American women's oppression as well; *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven, 1989). Pieterse argues that such art played a role in creating a new stereotype of blacks as victims; *White on Black*, 58. The pitiably helpless slave constructed in abolitionist literature came to be viewed as a despised object in the 19th century.

25 Christopher Sower (1693–1758) emigrated to Pennsylvania from Germany in 1724, seeking greater economic and religious liberty. He was the first German printer and publisher in America, leader of the German Baptist Brethren (the Dunkers), and vigorous proponent of social reform and religious dissent. His only son, Christopher Sower (1721–1784), also a religious leader and publisher, berated the Germans in his publications for allowing slavery to take root among them; "Christopher Sower," *DAB*, vol. 17 (New York, 1935), 415–17. See also Douglas C. McMurtrie, "The Early German Press in Pennsylvania," in *A History of Printing in the United States* (1936; reprint New York, 1969), II, 68–83.

26 Cesare Ripa, *Baroque and Rococo Pictorial Imagery: The 1758–60 Hertel Edition* . . . (New York, 1971), 76; Ripa, *Iconologia*, Padua, 1611 (New York, 1976), 514.

27 Similar critical accounts of cruelty toward slaves appeared in England, with illustrations by James Gillray, Isaac Cruikshank, and William Blake, aimed at displaying the barbarity of white planters and captains of slave ships and providing dramatic material for the campaign to end the slave trade.

28 Parry, *Image of the Indian and the Black Man in American Art*, 46–48.

FIGURE XV

Tobias Hirte, *Sclaven-Handel* (Philadelphia, 1794). Broadside with relief cut. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

FIGURE XVI

Noah Webster, *The Little Reader's Assistant* (Hartford, 1790). Relief cut. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

hundred figures in loin cloths, with arms shackled, ingeniously placed to fill every available niche (Figure XVII). Facial features are indicated, and there is shading in the limbs, but they are utterly helpless human beings. The text evocatively elaborates on the image, observing that the people are packed "almost like herrings in a barrel, and reduced nearly to the state of being buried alive, with just air enough to preserve a degree of life, sufficient to make them sensible of all the horrors of their situation." Although the print might have been "abolitionist propaganda" designed to promote a particular political goal, it has become an American icon that still is employed by writers of history textbooks. A recent attempt by a revisionist historian to undermine the power of this image by using statistical evidence makes clear that the image itself has become a fundamental historical document.[29]

Both abolitionism and evangelical religion were sources of inspiration in England for the influential Cheap Repository Series of pamphlets that had a circulation of more than two million. Written by educator Hannah More, with moral messages that were made clear from the actions of virtuous and wicked protagonists who got what they deserved, a number of tracts were

[29] James A. Rawley compares mortality rates for white seamen as well as black passengers and concludes that high death rates are related not only to crowded conditions but to particular ports of departure and the length of the voyage; *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York, 1981), 283, 300, 301.
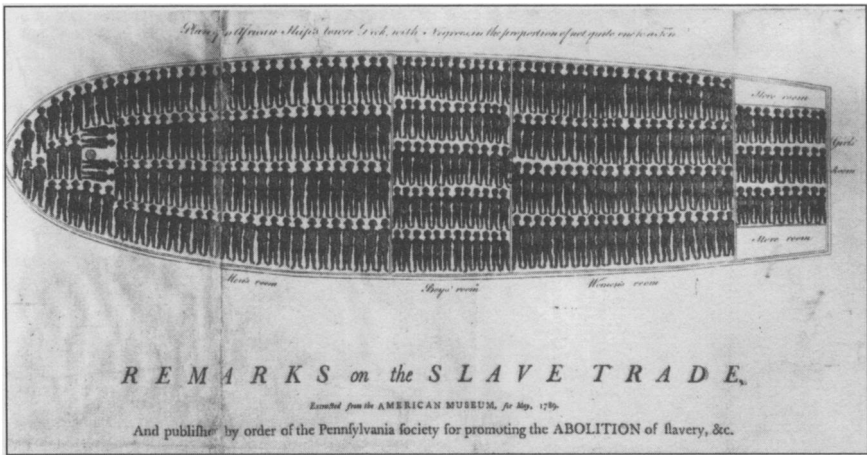
FIGURE XVII

Sir William Elford, *Plan of an African Ship's Lower Deck* (Philadelphia, [1789]). Broadside with engraving. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

reprinted in the United States.[30] *A True Story of a Good Negro Woman* tells the tale of Babay, shown on the cover as a poor Caribbean woman raising a white orphan boy (Figure XVIII). When the child reached maturity, he bought her freedom and brought her to England where, for forty years, she was treated with the utmost respect. *The Black Prince, A True Story*, relates the experiences of Naimbanna, an African king's son sent to England for his education, where he learned to read the Bible and to control his passions. The cover illustration, showing his interruption of a white man beating a riderless horse, is a display of his self-mastery (Figure XIX). Because the "rude and ignorant" black prince embraced the Christian faith with "a child-like simplicity," his example was expected to encourage the promotion of Christianity "among the savage nations of the earth."[31] Whereas these chapbooks offer to the middle class a black woman and a black man as models of

[30] Nicholas R. Jones, "Hannah More," in John R. Greenfield, ed., *British Romantic Prose Writers, 1789–1821*, 1st Ser., *DLB*, vol. 107 (Detroit, 1991), 198–212; Susan Pedersen, "Hannah More Meets Simple Simon: Tracts, Chapbooks, and Popular Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century England," *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), 84–113.

[31] More, *The Black Prince, A True Story; Being an Account of the Life and Death of Naimbanna, an African King's Son* (Philadelphia, 1800), 22, 24. For a recent discussion of the construction of African "noble savagery" toward the end of the 18th century see Harry Liebersohn, "Discovering Indigenous Nobility: Tocqueville, Chamisso, and Romantic Travel Writing," *AHR*, 99 (1994), 746–66. See also Hammond, *The Africa That Never Was*.

FIGURE XVIII

[Hannah More], *The Shopkeeper turned Sailor; To Which is prefixed, A True Story of a Good Negro Woman* (Philadelphia, 1800). Relief cut. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

FIGURE XIX

[Hannah More], *The Black Prince, A True Story; Being an Account of the Life and Death of Naimbanna, an African King's Son* (Philadelphia, 1800). Relief cut. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

FIGURE XX

John Bunyan, "Of Moses and his Wife," *Divine Emblems. Or, Temperal Things Spiritualized* (Philadelphia, 1796). Relief cut. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

goodness and nobility, two of the best known tracts in the series, *Black Giles, the Poacher* (1800) and *The History of Tawny Rachel, the Fortune Teller, Black Giles's wife* (1800), have main characters with names that allude negatively to the color black. But, in general, the pamphlets view black people as fully human, no more stereotyped than the whites; they offer for emulation some remarkable blacks who express God's grace.

A complex religious work, *Divine Emblems,* written for children by the seventeenth-century English Puritan minister John Bunyan and reprinted in America in 1798, includes an emblem on blackness. In "Of Moses and his Wife," the theological idea is developed that obedience to the law cannot bestow the goodness of grace (Figure XX). Because Moses is a "type" of the law, and his Ethiopian wife, Zipporah, is a type of humanity "that never saw another way unto eternal life," the "milk-white bosom" of Moses did not change the swarthy skin of his wife, who "came out thence as black as she went in." The verse concludes that "he that doth the law for life adore, / Shall yet by it be left a black-a-moor," that is, to continue the biased metaphor, one who is unconverted cannot be washed white. The negativity of this language is resisted by the power of the extraordinary accompanying woodcut in a clear instance of image at war with text.

The picture shows Moses clasping the hand of Zipporah; the two figures are of equal size, standing side by side, on the same level, occupying equal amounts of picture space. It is Zipporah whose hand is extended toward the

open tent, pointing out the direction to go in order to be saved, because it was she who appeased God's anger toward Moses by the circumcision of their son (Ex. 4:24–26). The pairing of human figures, reiterated by the pairing of tents, conveys a sense of partnership, a binary symmetrical relationship, rather than an asymmetrical, hierarchical order. Apparently not all Christians regarded blacks as a stigmatized group, cursed as "sons of Ham." Did American readers of *Divine Emblems* try to resolve the conflicting messages sent by image and text, or did they choose between them? Since the verse is based on arcane typological arguments, but the picture conveys immediately the desirable idea of cheerful camaraderie, it is reasonable to assume that the message sent by the picture was the only one received by most of the young audience.

Protestant tracts with illustrations of blacks provide some evidence that blackness was viewed positively, or without negative connotations, and was not necessarily associated with slavery. This observation is consistent with modern biblical commentary on color in the Old Testament, which emphasizes a color's value rather than its hue. Although the color black is mentioned to describe hair (Cant. 5:11) and is used symbolically to represent hunger (Lam. 5:10), colors are principally brilliant or somber, and terms for them occur infrequently and without uniformity or precision.[32]

A small group of imprints with images of blacks at historic American sites includes two skillfully executed illustrations, one well known and the other obscure, that serve to suggest the parameters of white attitudes before and after the Revolution. Paul Revere's engraving of the Boston Massacre was an important document in its time, providing a visual if distorted account of the incident that continues to contribute to national self-definition (Figure XXI). One of the casualties of the armed conflict was "Crispus Attucks, mulatto," now widely acknowledged as the first black to die for the patriot cause, although there is no noticeable difference in skin color among those felled by the British. The second illustration, "An East View of M'Neal's Ferry at Saratoga," depicts visitors to the sacred ground of a major Revolutionary battle site as they rest and are waited on by a black servant (Figure XXII). In this case, the central figure has a distinctive skin color; he is a servant or slave, someone who did not benefit personally from the Revolution.

Revere's engraving of the street battle, copied from an engraving of the same subject by Peter Pelham, presents Crispus Attucks, a free black, in humble trousers and loose jacket, lying face down in a pool of blood. Nearby, British soldiers with leveled muskets advance in a line as if on the battlefield, while a grieving woman shrouded in black, reminiscent of Mary in European paintings of the Deposition of Christ, watches as individuals in the crowd carry off the casualties. The sacrifice of Attuck's life in the meaningful encounter is viewed as equal to that of the others who died, as is graphically shown on the broadside where Attucks's coffin stands side by side with those of the three other slain patriots.

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[32] "Color," in Allen C. Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1987); "Black" and "Colors," in George A. Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (New York, 1962), 1:444, 657, 658. See also John L. Johnson, *The Black Biblical Heritage: Four Thousand Years of Black Biblical History* (Nashville, Tenn., 1990).

FIGURE XXI

An Account of a Late Military Massacre at Boston (Boston, 1770). Engraving. Collection of The New-York Historical Society.

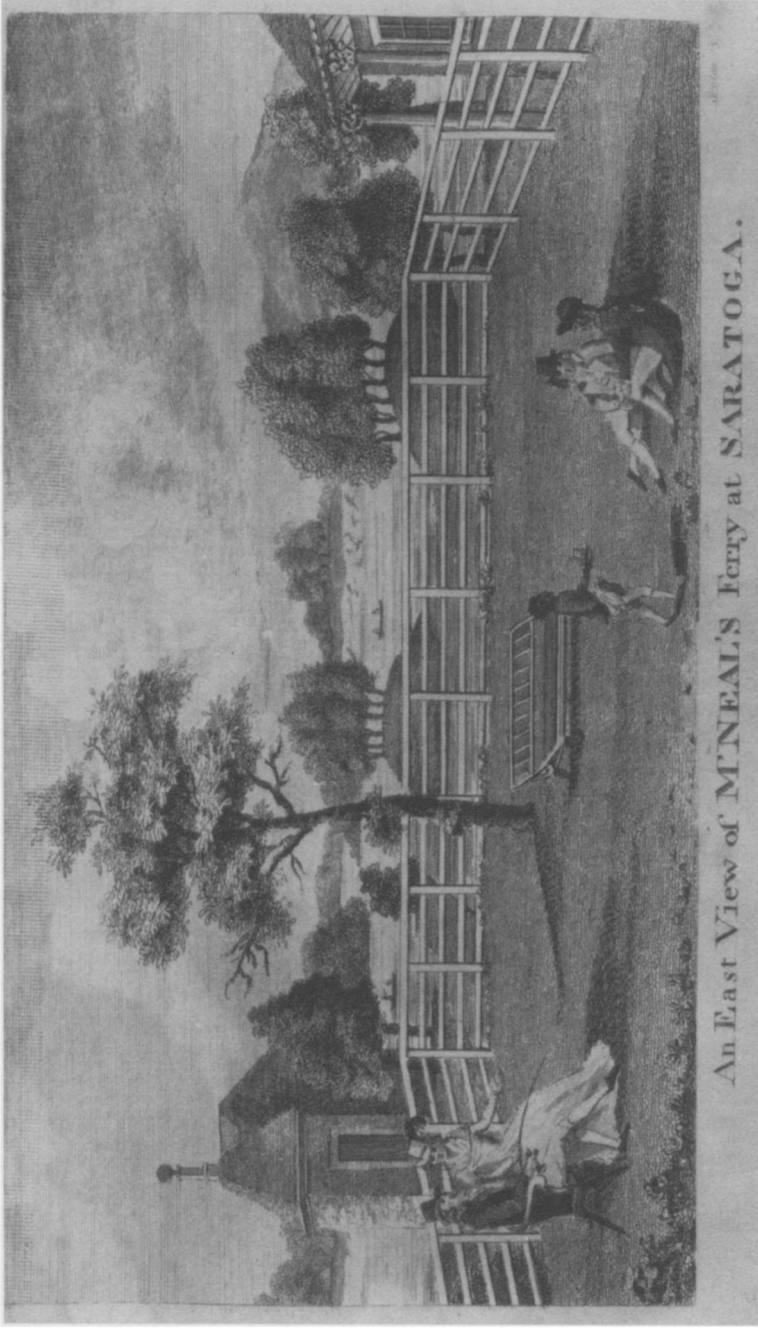An East View of M°NEAL'S Ferry at SARATOGA.

FIGURE XXII

The New-York Magazine; or, Literary Repository (December 1794). Engraving. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

Many historical inaccuracies in the engraving have been pointed out by scholars, using the testimony of trial witnesses.[33] Troops did not stand in a straight line firing simultaneously while an officer raised his sword behind them in a gesture of defiance; in fact, muskets shot off almost at will, and the commanding officer ordered neither a halt nor a volley. As Josiah Quincy, Jr., defense lawyer at the trial, observed concerning the illustration's accuracy, "The prints exhibited in our houses . . . have added wings to fancy; and in the fervour of our zeal, reason is in hazard of being lost."[34] The print depicting the Boston Massacre is patriotic propaganda, but it represents the scene as patriots saw it and convinced others to see it. It conveys the important idea that ordinary men, without regard for skin color, are to be honored for the heroism and self-sacrifice that eventually resulted in the creation of a new nation.

Revere's heroic depiction of ordinary men, including a mulatto, at the Boston Massacre, contrasts with an engraving composed around the image of a dark-skinned servant or slave at Saratoga, the site at which General John Burgoyne in 1777 attempted to cross the Hudson River on a bridge of boats before he was captured. "An East View of M'Neal's Ferry at Saratoga," engraved by John or Isaac Scoles for *The New-York Magazine; or, Literary Repository,* is an early landscape with figures that presents a "beautiful prospect." The scene has historic associations as well as a "romantic appearance," and both could be employed to encourage patriotic feeling.[35]

In the foreground, a yard enclosed by a rail fence creates a rectangular stage to display a man and women in travel costume who sit on a short bench; two well-dressed men recline on the ground in a posture of studied informality, while one extends his left hand toward a solitary servant. The boy in livery, with dark skin and curly hair, is the central figure; he holds a bottle in one hand and supports a tray with two glasses in the other. A parallelogram created by the shadows of the travelers and the solitary tree frames the servant at its center.

The viewer looks from the servant to the empty bench behind him and then to the central tree that repeats the boy's isolation and singularity. The eye moves back to the river, glancing in and among the trees, noticing the two small pleasure boats and continuing along the pleasing lines of the distant riverbank and

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[33] See Hiller B. Zobel, *The Boston Massacre* (New York, 1970); Clarence S. Brigham, *Paul Revere's Engravings* (New York, 1969); Kenneth Silverman, *A Cultural History of the American Revolution: Painting, Music, Literature, and Theatre in the Colonies and the United States from the Treaty of Paris to the Inauguration of George Washington, 1763–1789* (New York, 1987), 146–48; and John Agresto, "Art and Historical Truth: The Boston Massacre," *Journal of Communication,* 29 (1979), 170–74. John Trumbull's oil portrait of George Washington accompanied by a turbaned, black groom, with a sea battle in the background, was engraved and published in England and France; W. S. Baker, *The Engraved Portraits of Washington, with Notices of the Originals and Brief Biographical Sketches of the Painters* (Philadelphia, 1880), 147, 151.

[34] Zobel, *Boston Massacre,* 279.

[35] *The New-York Magazine; or, Literary Repository* (December 1794), 717. This work may be compared to that by Ralph Earl, who, in the 1790s, was "one of the first native-born American artists to focus on regional landscape subjects"; Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser et al., *Ralph Earl: The Face of the Young Republic* (New Haven, 1991), 57. See also Edward J. Nygren, ed., *Views and Visions: American Landscape before 1830* (Washington, D. C., 1986); E. P. Richardson, "Charles Willson Peale's Engravings in the Year of National Crisis, 1787," *Wint. Port.,* 1 (1964), 166–81; Hans Huth, *Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes* (Berkeley, 1957).

clouds. The pleasant scene of spring is also a site of the Revolution, evoking memories of war and dramatic action. Furthermore, the travelers have just arrived and are at leisure, but it is not clear how they have entered the enclosure nor how they can get out; their confinement in the foreground increases the feeling of contrast with the airy, spacious landscape in the background.

The viewer may conclude that the two halves of the illustration are complementary, providing a metaphor of work and leisure, isolation and belonging, spaciousness and constriction. By contrasting liberty with servitude, "Saratoga" stands appropriately as an icon evoking the Revolution, when the specter of slavery, or subordination to the British, was often marshaled as an argument for American independence. Yet the serving boy's status does not stir the conscience of the travelers in the engraving, since black slavery still acceptably enabled white Americans to enjoy the beauty, wealth, and freedom of their new nation. With its elements of restriction, the engraving of Saratoga is less idyllic than other pastoral works of the time yet more inclusive; it acknowledges the presence of blacks and servitude even at the center of republican society.[36] Given its innocuous title, the picture could easily be mistaken for a neutral depiction of a landscape, but, because of its unusual composition, the image is potentially subversive, perhaps a subtle hint from the artist to New Yorkers about the human rights of blacks.

The engraving of the Boston Massacre, then, offers a view of a free black man, not very different from others, who died in the cause of American freedom, whereas "Saratoga" is a reminder that, after the war, the condition of most blacks as slaves remained the same.

The last group of images to be considered, portraits, contains the most positive, complex, and individualistic representations of blacks.[37] Hundreds of portraits were painted and engraved in the eighteenth century, and several examples of the art of black portraiture can be found in frontispieces or on book covers.[38] Those of Olaudah Equiano, Phillis Wheatley, and Benjamin Bannaker are realistically represented, whereas the black Man of Signs is a

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[36] The inclusiveness of the magazine illustration is appropriate for a publication promoting republican values among subscribers drawn from a relatively broad spectrum of the city's social classes; David Paul Nord, "A Republican Literature: Magazine Reading and Readers in Late-Eighteenth-Century New York," in Cathy N. Davidson, ed., *Reading in America, Literature and Social History* (Baltimore, 1989), 114–39. See also Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741–1850* (1930; reprint Cambridge, 1966), 114–16.

[37] Gates, *Facing History*, xxix; Douglas Henry Daniels, "Visual Documents and Race Relations," *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 7 (1979), 1–22; Honour, *Image of the Black*, iii.

[38] On colonial portraiture see Ellen G. Miles, ed., *The Portrait in Eighteenth-Century America* (Newark, 1993); Richard H. Saunders and Ellen G. Miles, *American Colonial Portraits, 1700–1776* (Washington, D. C., 1987); Wayne Craven, *Colonial American Portraiture* (Cambridge, 1986); David M. Lubin, *Act of Portrayal: Eakins, Sargent, James* (New Haven, 1985). For important theoretical considerations about "likeness" see Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge, 1991). Portraiture and the attendant biographical work are complementary and can be viewed as an example of the "sister arts," in that the function of the two, the impulses that lie behind them, some of their methods, and many of their effects are often strikingly similar; Richard Wendorf, "Ut Pictura Biographia, Biography and Portrait Painting as Sister Arts," in Richard Wendorf, ed., *Articulate Images: The Sister Arts from Hogarth to Tennyson* (Minneapolis, 1983), 98–124.

FIGURE XXIII

Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (New York, 1791). Engraving. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

neoclassical idealization of a black man. Portraits usually were undertaken after sitter and artist had determined how the individual wished to be represented with respect to expression, pose, and accompanying goods. Thus, when analyzed, frontispieces can reveal important elements of black self-construction.

Olaudah Equiano's autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, contains a signed engraving of the black author holding an open text in his lap (Figure XXIII).[39] Equiano, born an Ibo, was kidnapped and enslaved at the age of eleven. He later recalls a cross-cultural encounter with the world of his captors on observing a portrait in the ship master's cabin: It "appeared constantly to look at me. . . . I thought it was something relative to magic; and not seeing it move, I thought it might be some way the whites had to keep their great men when they died, and offer them libations, as we used to do to our friendly spirits."[40] In this passage, Equiano articulates the vague awe felt by both African and European when the painted form seems to come alive, when the dead are, through the image, transformed into the living, transcending its inert materials.[41]

The frontispiece in the New York edition of Equiano's autobiography, a half-length study engraved in line and stipple by Cornelius Tiebout, shows the author dressed in a vest with standing lapels, open double-breasted jacket, and a shirt with a modest ruffle.[42] Equiano gazes calmly at the viewer, who can carefully observe the expressive, heavy-lidded eyes, the broad nose with small curved nostrils, and short, curly hair pulled back slightly over one ear. The viewer's eye then moves down the zigzag of the collar to the hand holding an open Bible, with the text from Acts 4:12 as the apothegm: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, but only Jesus Christ."

This beatific calm contrasts with the adventurous but harsh life revealed in the autobiography. Apart from Equiano's physiognomy and his self-definition as "the African," there is little else in the frontispiece that reflects his origins.[43] The portrait has no background and little symbolic content beyond a gaze that is bold, the costume of a reticent merchant, and the offered page

[39] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *The Classic Slave Narratives* (New York, 1987), xiv; Charles T. Davis and Gates, *The Slave's Narrative* (Oxford, 1985), xxiii.

[40] Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, in Gates, *Narratives*, 39.

[41] Equiano's rhetorical strategies are discussed by Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford, 1988), 152–57. On the "apparent ominvoyance" of images see Freedberg, *Power of Images*, 51–53.

[42] Cornelius Tiebout (c. 1773–1830), line and stipple engraver, made maps, portraits, and subject plates for books, magazines, Bibles, and banknotes; "Cornelius Tiebout," *DAB*, vol. 18 (New York, 1936), 530–31.

[43] Concerning the continuing debate on whether Africans retained aspects of their earlier spiritual life after converting to Christianity, see Edward Franklin Frasier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York, 1963), who argues that there is no such continuity. Those who see elements of continuation include Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South* (Oxford, 1978); Sobel, *Trabel' On*; Margaret Washington Creel, *"A Peculiar People," Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullahs* (New York, 1988); and John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (Cambridge, 1992).

of a Biblical text.[44] The author has chosen to have himself represented as a reserved, literate, and religious member of the English middle class.

The frontispiece helps to locate the autobiography within the larger culture and its world of print. At this time, according to Henry Louis Gates, blacks narrated and wrote autobiographies and poetry, declaring the existence of the black voice, by imitating, revising, and perfecting literary forms taken from various American and English authors. According to spiritual autobiographies, many turbulent lives were comforted by a calm inner voice, and their recorded experiences became models of how others could structure their lives.[45] In Equiano's case, the experience of introspection, religious reading, and conversion enabled him to construct a self in the radical Wesleyan Methodist tradition, expressed both in his writing and in active involvement with the British abolitionist movement.[46] The portrait in the frontispiece, then, establishes the idea that the person depicted can be equated with what he reads, or "What I see (or read) determines who I am."[47]

Phillis Wheatley is another black author whose portrait, as well as her writing, reveals her inner self. Kidnapped in Senegal and brought to New England in 1761, she was purchased by John Wheatley as a gift for his wife Suzanna. As a slave she was a commodity, but soon the "object" acquired a voice. Under the tutelage of the Wheatleys, she learned English and Latin, studied biblical literature, and began to write poetry.

Her elegy "On the Death of Rev. George Whitefield" brought her to the attention of Selina Hastings, countess of Huntington, an avid supporter of revivalism and humanitarian causes, who arranged for the publication in London in 1773 of a collection of Wheatley's verse. The frontispiece portrait in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* is believed to be based on the work of black painter Scipio Moorhead, a member of the household of the Reverend John Moorhead of Boston and a friend of Phillis Wheatley (Figure XXIV).[48] Published fifteen years earlier than Equiano's, the image is a pathbreaking work in black portraiture.

The frontispiece shows a slim young woman seated in a curved-back chair at an oval table with a quill pen, inkwell, book, and writing paper. She is writing but has stopped and lifted her head to compose the next lines. Her

[44] Houston A. Baker, Jr., jettisons the religious passages in the autobiography for an economic interpretation of the text, in *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago, 1984), 31–39. For a critique of the Baker thesis see Joseph Fichtelberg, "Word between Worlds: The Economy of Equiano's Narrative," *American Literary History*, 5 (1993), 461, 480.

[45] Daniel B. Shea, Jr., *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America* (Princeton, 1968), 87–90; Adam Potkay, "Olaudah Equiano and the Art of Spiritual Autobiography," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 27 (1994), 677–92.

[46] Wilfred D. Samuel, "Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa)," in Trudier Harris, ed., *Afro-American Writers before the Harlem Renaissance, DLB,* vol. 50 (Detroit, 1986), 3–29. On Equiano's work for abolitionism see Paul Edward, "Three West African Writers of the 1780s," in Davis and Gates, *Narrative,* 175–98. For an early assessment of Equiano's treatment as an African-American author by scholars see Vernon Loggins, *The Negro Author, His Development in America to 1900* (1931; reprint Port Washington, N. Y., 1964).

[47] Wolf, "All the World's a Code," 334. This idea is developed by Roger B. Stein, "Thomas Smith's Self Portrait: Image/Text as Artifact," *Art Journal,* 44 (1984), 317–27.

[48] Saunders, *Colonial Portraits,* 309–10.

FIGURE XXIV

Phillis Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (London, 1773). Engraving. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

eyes look off but not at the world around her; she is inwardly directed, read-
ing her thoughts. Yet the inscription on the portrait's border identifies her as
"Phillis Wheatley, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston." She is
presented to English readers as a woman of refinement, a poet, and a servant—
an improbable, thought-provoking combination of roles.[49] The American
response to this frontispiece appeared in 1782 on the cover of *Bickerstaff's
Boston Almanack*, crowded below a description of the almanac's contents
(Figure XXV).[50] In translating the engraving into a woodcut, the image has
been simplified: the chair is gone, the table reduced, and the inkwell moved to
the far side of the table. The lines are more mechanical and the shade of skin
darker, yet she still is thinking as she writes. Below her portrait are several lines
of verse by Ovid, translated by John Dryden, on the subject of "Time"; the
text is visually associated with her own composition. Over her head, the desig-
nation as servant of John Wheatley has been removed. Phillis Wheatley had
become, in her own lifetime, a New England icon.

The third portrait is of Benjamin Bannaker, a free black Maryland farmer
with exceptional computational abilities. Encouraged by Quaker neighbors who
loaned him books, he soon was able to calculate his own astronomical
ephemeris, which was published in almanacs that circulated in the mid-Atlantic
region. The cover of *Bannaker's Almanac . . . for 1795* displays his portrait, possi-
bly executed by John Fisher, the almanac's printer-engraver (Figure XXVI).

A rounded oval encloses a bust-length study of a man who looks young,
although Bannaker was then about sixty years old.[51] His costume is simple

[49] Wheatley's poetry contains few references to slavery, although there has been much specula-
tion by scholars over the years as to why this is so. See Benjamin Brawley, *The Negro in Literature
and Art in the United States* (New York, 1918); Loggins, *The Negro Author;* Julian D. Mason, Jr., ed.,
The Poems of Phillis Wheatley (Chapel Hill, 1966); James A. Rawley, "The World of Phillis
Wheatley," *NEQ,* 50 (1977), 666–77; Mukhtar Ali Isani, "The British Reception of Wheatley's
Poems on Various Subjects," *Journal of Negro History,* 66 (1981), 144–49; Kenny J. Williams,
"Phillis Wheatley," *DLB,* vol. 50, 245–59; David Grimsted, "Anglo-American Racism and Phillis
Wheatley's 'Sable Veil,' 'Lenth'ned Chain,' and 'Knittd Heart,'" in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J.
Albert, eds., *Women in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville, Va., 1989), 338, 446;
Sidney Kaplan and Emma Nogrady Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American
Revolution* (Amherst, 1989), 171–91; Helene Flanzbaum, "Unprecedented Liberties: Re-reading
Phillis Wheatley," *Melus,* 18 (1993), 71–81; John C. Shields, "Phillis Wheatley's Subversive
Pastoral," *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 27 (1994), 631–47. See also "Narrative, Memory, and
Slavery (for Hortense Spiller)," in Mitchell, *Picture Theory,* 183–207.

[50] A summary of comments made about Wheatley's portrait in recent literary criticism is included
in Walter Nott, "From 'uncultivated Barbarian' to 'Poetical Genius': The Public Presence of Phillis
Wheatley," *Melus,* 18 (1993), 21–32. For Betsy Erkkila, the portrait is "enchained with an inscription
of slavery" but expresses "potential danger," since it was exploring social order founded on notions of
racial difference; for David Grimsted, it is "an icon of the dignified, respectable, literary and espe-
cially thoughtful black," a quiet refutation of prejudice, a statement that blacks are capable; for
Walter Nott, the portrait constitutes the graphic representation of Wheatley's public presence.

[51] Remarks about Bannaker's portrait may be found in Silvio A. Bedini, *The Life of Benjamin
Banneker* (New York, 1972), 193, 275. Biographical information is also available in Loggins, *The
Negro Author,* 37–40; Henry E. Baker, "Benjamin Banneker, The Negro Mathematician and
Astronomer," *Journal of Negro History,* 3 (1918), 99–118; Marion Barber Stowell, *Early American
Almanacs: The Colonial Weekday Bible* (New York, 1977), 102–11; Robert J. Hurry, "An
Archaeological and Historical Perspective on Benjamin Banneker," *Maryland Historical Magazine,*
84 (1989), 361–69; and Kaplan and Kaplan, *Black Presence,* 132–51.

FIGURE XXV

Bickerstaff's Boston Almanack, For the Year of our Redemption, 1782 . . . (Boston, 1781). Relief cut. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.
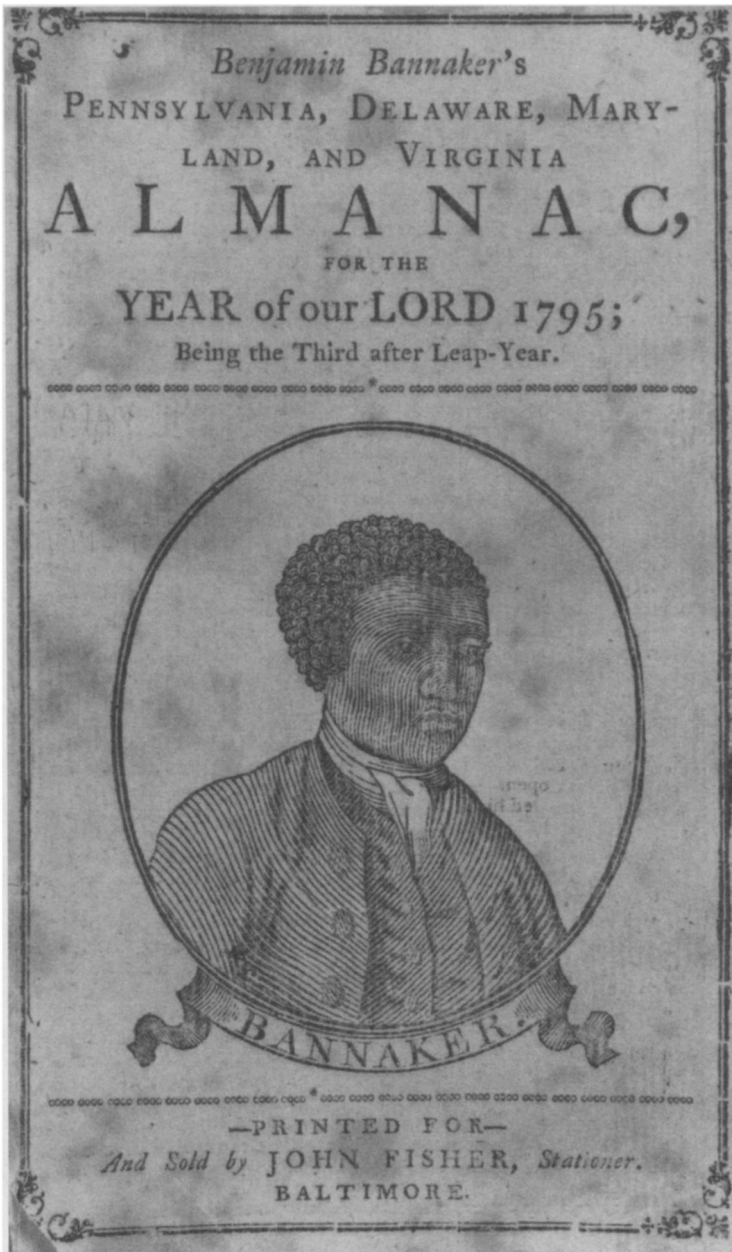
FIGURE XXVI

Bannaker's New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia Almanac (Baltimore, 1794). Relief cut. Collection of The Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

and unadorned; consisting of a jacket, vest, and simply tied shirt, it resembles Quaker garb. The white shirt underlines the quiet and thoughtful face, which, though difficult to see, is the focal point of the almanac cover. The eyes look out and downward, as if engaged in thinking rather than in regarding the viewer or the surrounding world; the disjunction in seeing prevents the viewer from intruding into the subject's space. Yet, by using the image for the cover and including his name beneath the portrait and again in the title, the presentation is a proclamation of Bannaker's identity. The reticent image and bold text create tension and reflect the circumstances; Bannaker regarded himself principally as a scientist, but his work was published only by Quakers, who used it to promote their abolitionist cause.

The portraits of Equiano, Wheatley, and Bannaker, taken together, give insight into black self-construction and its variations. Equiano's portrait is calm, spiritualized, and quietly confident. He regards the viewer fully in the eye, as did the portrait on board ship that he describes in the autobiography. He is in control of writing, presented as one who handles a book and who can successfully maneuver in a complex world. Wheatley's portrait shows her as more pensive than Equiano, with an upraised arm to put distance between herself and the spectator. She is protecting herself, as well as meditating, while she writes. Lastly, Bannaker's portrait presents a man with erect carriage, denoting self-respect, but with downcast eyes, as if avoiding close examination by the curious. He is unprotected; no well-placed arm creates psychological distance, no drapery softens the effect, no books or astronomical instruments deflect the viewer's intense scrutiny.

Each portrait shows the individual in isolation, because, in a hierarchical society based on color, the place of an accomplished black person was uncertain, and no social setting within the conventions of fine art was completely acceptable. Most American portraits were derived from English examples, with subjects who were aristocratic, formal, and wore the latest fashion; colonial interpretations of this model of gentility presented blacks in a secondary position, as a family servant or slave. Frontispiece portraits in books were derived from seventeenth-century English editions and usually employed the oval framing device, inscriptions, and the restrained dress of a minister who authored sermons. In departing from these conventions, the representations of Equiano, Wheatley, and Bannaker are revolutionary. In eighteenth-century America, as blacks gained literacy and set out to redefine who and what a black person was in opposition to already solidified stereotypes, they chose to be visually presented in portraits that show introspection and self-mastery, which were the hallmarks of black self-construction.[52] Publishing imprints with portraits of blacks may have been an unlikely choice for most printers, but those with evangelical ties hoped to find a wide audience that respected personal qualities not associated exclusively with a particular social class.

[52] According to T. H. Breen, black portraiture contrasts with white portraiture, which was a means of displaying wealth. The rise in demand for portraits after 1740 coincides with increased importation and representation of British consumer goods, such as china, fabrics, glassware, and some kinds of foods; "The Meaning of 'Likeness': Portrait-Painting in an Eighteenth-Century Consumer Society," in Miles, ed., *Portrait,* 37–60.

The final illustration, the black Man of Signs, will be considered as an idealized portrait, without the restraints of a sitter's prescription (Figure XXVII). The Man of Signs, or Anatomical Man, was a familiar feature in almanacs, usually located immediately after the title page, surrounded by astrological symbols (Figure XXVIII).[53] Given that the Man of Signs is traditionally white, nude, and sometimes has his internal organs revealed, the elaborate allegory representing the black Man of Signs, found in Benjamin Bannaker's almanac for 1795, invites extended analysis.

A black man with short curly hair, dressed simply in a long-sleeved shirt and breeches, is seated at a desk, with his right hand holding a pen that rests on a scrolled paper marked with writing and a diagram. His eyes gaze directly forward, and his left hand is raised and open, acknowledging and greeting the readers who are viewing him.

Each of the signs of the zodiac that surround the Man, used by astronomers to chart the mathematically calculated movements of heavenly bodies, is usually linked in almanac diagrams by means of a line to the part of the body that it governed: Aries, the Ram, for example, would be connected to the Man of Sign's head and face (see Figure XXVIII). But in the Bannaker almanac, the connection is broken; there are no lines from the signs to the parts of the body, suggesting rejection of the physiological deductions traditionally derived from astrological science.

The signs are large, decorative, and particularly prominent; a few have an unusual relationship to the seated man. The young girl, Virgo, for example, as placed, appears to hold out a flower to the black man. The archer, reminiscent of the stereotypical Indian made famous by Shem Drowne's early eighteenth-century Boston weathervane (Figure XXIX), seems to point a diminutive bow and arrow at the man's left leg. Aquarius, represented as a servant pouring water, is cut off below the waist, about to drop out of sight, perhaps suggesting that service or slavery would soon disappear.

Unlike other such diagrams, below the oval outline are the symbols of crossed scythes and an hourglass, the latter an attribute found in emblem personifications of astrology and also on Puritan gravestones and funeral notices, to represent the brevity of life.[54] The neoclassical rosette and the garland that drapes the top of the pictorial oval were also used in mourning pictures of the period. The two fish, Pisces, are not crossed, or crucified, at the man's feet; instead, one fish is hooked on a fishing line while the other swims about freely, thus representing baptism, Christianity, and freedom as well as a sign of the zodiac.

Thus chosen and placed, the astrological signs and Christian symbols form an allegory describing an ideal status for the black. Quiet and reserved, mindful of his mortality and his maker, he has been reborn and surrounded

[53] William D. Stahlman, "Astrology in Colonial America: An Extended Query," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., 13 (1956), 551–63; Herbert Leventhal, *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment: Occultism and Renaissance Science in Eighteenth-Century America* (New York, 1976); and Jon Butler, "Magic, Astrology, and the Early American Religious Heritage, 1600–1760," *AHR*, 84 (1979), 317–46.

[54] Ripa, *Iconologia*, 32.

FIGURE XXVII

Black Man of Signs from *Bannaker's Almanac*. Relief cut. Collection of The Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

FIGURE XXVIII

Man of Signs from *The North-Carolina Almanack* (New Bern, 1797). Relief cut. North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina Library at Chapel Hill.

by the symbols of learning; a practitioner of science, he also is familiar with the iconography of the arts. He is recognizable as an eighteenth-century gentleman by his graceful attitude, agreeable air, and genteel behavior.[55] Designed for an almanac that reached Quakers, this model of civility would have delighted the abolitionists but might have been considered by others as

[55] John E. Mason, *Gentlefolk in the Making: Studies in the History of English Courtesy Literature and Related Topics from 1531 to 1774* (Philadelphia, 1935), opposite 292; John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century Urban America* (New York, 1990); Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York, 1992), 434–40; Stephanie Grauman Wolf, "Rarer than Riches: Gentility in Eighteenth-Century America," in Miles, ed., *Portrait*, 91–101.

FIGURE XXIX

Shem Drowne. Indian Archer Weathervane. Sheet copper, gilded. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

an unbridled fantasy. In any case, it was short-lived, swept away by the economic expansion of slavery in the nineteenth century, when distinctions between free blacks and slaves were blurred, all blacks were made subject to repressive codes, and the widened gulf between blacks and whites resulted in an intensified racism manifested visually in the cruel, grotesque, and odious caricatures printed in illustrated periodicals.[56]

This study has identified and grouped about two dozen images of blacks found in early American imprints and indicated their relationship both to early American texts and to the discourses of social, cultural, and intellectual history. Clearly, blacks cannot be studied apart from whites, nor whites apart from blacks, since views of blacks were created by and for whites and the black view of self was forged out of resistance to the white view.[57]

[56] For the contrasting 19th-century view of blacks in the visual arts see Johns, *American Genre Painting*, 100–136.

[57] The implications are considered by Earl Lewis, "To Turn As on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas," *AHR*, 100 (1995), 765–87.

The analysis contributes to the discourse on racial attitudes both in its methodology and its conclusions. The methods of the art historian have been used to yield new insight into the status of blacks in early America. Whereas most art historians are concerned with the masterpieces of Western painting as sources, this study shows that the same approach can be used with the woodcuts and engravings found in the homes of a much wider audience and encourages new awareness of this kind of evidence both for art history and early American historical research.

The images considered here are concentrated in the 1790s and provide a snapshot view rather than a motion picture of change and development over time. Nevertheless, there is evidence that in the late eighteenth century, racial attitudes were relatively fluid and permeable, rather than fixed and solidified. Observers could view, respond to, and reflect on a wide range of imagery that showed blacks in many roles and conditions. Most important, being a black was not necessarily equated with being a slave. Although in fact most blacks in America were slaves, the two conditions were not seen or thought to be inevitably concomitant; free men could be enslaved, servitude could be revoked. Also, occasionally an African or African-American is not represented or shown by the color black. Whereas fifteen imprints present blacks as slaves, in eleven blacks are not shown as slaves. Even among those showing blacks as slaves, four to six were created by and for abolitionists to indicate that slavery was an abhorrent condition and should end. Runaway slaves were represented in countless newspapers by the icon of a fleeing man, making slavery seem omnipresent; yet the constant repetition of the image also served to impress on viewers the unstable nature of servitude, since it continually had to be policed and enforced.

These images of blacks were calculated to stir a variety of emotions including desire, awe, horror, fear, disdain, and remorse in order to promote commerce, stimulate thought, or encourage political action. They are not simply negative or racist; they are layered, multivariant, and frequently ambivalent because the image is in tension with the text. One black type does not prevail, blacks are rarely marginal, and dominance and subordination can be explicated by the way words and images are juxtaposed as well as by the assemblage of elements within the picture. These meanings are not self-evident, because pictures are as complex as words; they draw upon knowledge of allegories, emblems, and classical references, as well as medieval Christian symbolism. Not every viewer could read or understand every image, and not everyone read them the same way. Views of blacks as well as ideas about slavery developed out of a pastiche of images and words, added to and transformed by personal experience; in deciphering such evidence, the visual element cannot be ignored. By employing art historical scholarship and methodologies in an analysis of popular illustrated imprints, it has been possible to mediate between literary and visual modes and to situate the printed images of blacks into the larger context of early American social and intellectual history.