

Not the Only Story in "Amistad": The Fictional Joadson and the Real James Forten

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The movie "Amistad" did not sink like a rock when it debuted at American movie theaters in December, 1997, but it was nearly swallowed by a whale of attacks. First, author Barbara Chase-Riboud charged producer Stephen Spielberg and Director Deborah Allen with plagiarizing her novel of the heroic uprising of Africans in 1839. Next, reviewers lamented everything from John Williams' overwrought score to the lack of accurate character portrayals. Finally, African-American critics worried about the lack of Oscar nominations for a film about black history. While "Titanic" cruised to one of the biggest box-office draws in American movie history, "Amistad" virtually sank at the theaters.¹

Despite its lack of popular appeal, the movie did create a lively scholarly debate about "Amistad's" portrait of antebellum society and black history. *The New Republic*, *History Today*, *The Nation* and other journals enlisted scholars to comment on the film. On the internet, historians engaged in a weeks-long debate over issues ranging from the film's undertone of "anti-Spanish bias" to its masking of America's own racist past.²

Historians have a vital interest in the debate over "Amistad" (which was released on video in June, 1998), for the film will surely be used in future classroom discussion of slavery, the Middle Passage, and race in the western world. Will students be able to look at the film, and the history it depicts, with a critical eye? To what issues must teachers pay particular attention? What topics must they take pains to correct or illuminate?

Perhaps no subject in "Amistad" better addresses such questions than does the character "Joadson," an admittedly fictional black abolitionist designed to illustrate African Americans' contributions to the movement for racial justice in antebellum society. Audiences have wondered if the character (played superbly by Morgan Freeman) was based on an historical person, or was a composite of several antebellum black figures. Critics have chastised "Amistad" for playing make-believe. In a piece decrying the film's historical inaccuracies, *Commentary* editor Gary Rosen has argued that the producers bowed to the dictates of our multicultural age by inserting a black reformer where none existed in the real Amistad trial. In fact, Rosen claims that the Joadson character distorts the true nature of black/white relations in the era, and falsely implies that black reformers were as important as white ones. "Amistad" is a major artistic offensive in the current debate over race," he observes. "It is, in fact, an extraordinary example of racial preference, giving blacks a promi-

nence and importance they did not have while distorting or denying the role of whites." Combined with the "educators' learning kit" sent out by Spielberg's Dreamworks Company (and the movie's future role in Black History Month commemorations), Rosen fears that "Amistad" will provide generations of students with a deceitful history lesson. "By this means and others," he wearily concludes, "[the] film will long contribute to making it harder and harder for us to tell the truth, either about our history or ourselves."³

In a similar shot, Eric McKittrick in *The New York Review of Books* has stated that "Spielberg and his collaborators, perhaps in compensation, have...concocted another kind of abolitionist...Theodore Joadson." "Any historian," McKittrick writes, "cannot help knowing...that no such person of the bearing and dignity depicted by Mr. Freeman would have been allowed to exist in the America of 1840...." Unlike Rosen, McKittrick wanted to draw readers' attention to the even harsher realities of antebellum American race relations (even William Lloyd Garrison would rebuff Frederick Douglass as "uppity," he reports). Yet like Rosen, he thinks that history proves "Amistad" wrong: there was NO real-life counterpart to Joadson. The producers should have known better.⁴

These critics are certainly right to be concerned about distorting a historical event. But they have not stopped there — their concern is with "history" writ large. A movie which will be used for pedagogical purposes, they claim, must not willfully neglect the broader history (or spirit) of the time. Joadson's creation belies the realities of antebellum life. African Americans did not — and could not — have existed as Joadson does, nor could they have influenced white reform tactics in the ways that he does.⁵

Yet if this is the true concern — the broader historical accuracy of themes presented within the film — the reverse is true: the movie "Amistad" actually provides an opportunity to examine the often neglected black role in expounding democratic principles and in influencing white reformers of the 1830s and 1840s. By the time of the Amistad trial c. 1840, black activism had become a prominent feature of northern protest culture. African-American leaders in many northern states staged protest rallies and raised money for the Amistad captives.⁶ In Philadelphia, for example, long-time reformer Robert Purvis headed a fund-raising meeting and solidarity gathering in December of 1840. As one abolitionist newspaper reported, the meeting in Philadelphia's "Little Wesley Church" was a most vigorous and spirited affair.⁷ More generally, African-American reformers helped create a set of public protest tactics and strategies which had come to define American abolitionism. In the years between the founding of the republic and the mid- antebellum period, black activists skillfully developed one of the few political weapons they had: the press. Seeking to enter the public sphere, black writers contributed columns to newspapers, published their own pamphlets and narratives, and encour-

aged African-American communities to value the word and establish literary societies for the benefit of the race. While often ignored as important public agitators by the first generation of white abolitionists, black reform writers became critical figures to younger generations of white abolitionists in the 1820s and 1830s, including a young Massachusetts printer named William Lloyd Garrison.

Unfortunately, neither the Spielberg movie nor Howard Jones' authoritative book, *Mutiny on the Amistad*, examines in any depth the tactical contributions of black abolitionists in early national America. Nonetheless, the character "Joadson" provides students and scholars with an opportunity to consider more closely the meaning and impact of black written protest during this period. For Joadson bears an uncanny resemblance to one of the most significant black activists and writers before 1840: Philadelphia's James Forten — successful businessman, race leader and, in a small but important sense, a founding father of American democratic practice.

The scholarship on black activists has exploded in recent years. Scholars know more about such prominent figures as Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, and more about a pantheon of less-well-known figures too: Bostonians Charles Remond and James Barbadoes, for example, who helped organize a critical reform organization in that city in the mid-1820s, providing funds for protest speeches against slavery and racial injustice; Baltimore's William Watkins, an early leader in the fight against colonization; New Haven's Hosea Easton, preacher, essayist and popular travelling lecturer in New England during the 1830s; John Mercer Langston of Ohio, New York's David Ruggles, and on and on.⁸ Before all of them came James Forten. Who was he? Why do his literary tactics deserve closer study? And why should he be credited as the spiritual guide to Joadson? The following pages attempt to answer these questions for those studying African-American protest, in general, and the movie "Amistad," in particular.

1. The Background: A Description of the Character Joadson

Just who was "Joadson"? Alex Pate's novelized version of "Amistad" describes him as an ex-slave from Georgia who migrated to New Haven to "assist in the publication of a newspaper." Joadson is characterized as a "well-dressed, obviously well-educated black man" who moved "deliberately" and confidently among whites. "[He] presented an imposing picture of a black man who did not fear the power of white men. Indeed, he often carried himself as if he was unaware that others might treat him differently....He was a free black American man and he wore his freedom large and unabashedly."⁹

An associate of New York merchant and reformer Lewis Tappan, Joadson is also described as "an important member" of the American Anti-Slavery Society. In "Amistad," it is Joadson who updates Tappan on the plight of the

“Amistad” revolutionaries. Tappan is portrayed as more distant from such worldly events; he relies on Joadson to provide the critical early details about the captured Africans—where they are actually from, their physical appearance, their demeanor. Joadson does not feel himself inferior to his white reform colleagues (at least as portrayed by Morgan Freeman), as for instance when he interrupts a Tappan business meeting to inform Tappan about the Amistad trial schedule. “Joadson started right in,” Pate writes, telling Tappan that the black men were probably not plantation slaves and that they would be arraigned in a New Haven court in two days. Tappan replies that abolitionists must make sure that the rebels have “good counsel.” As the newspaper headlines in Tappan’s and Joadson’s antislavery paper indicate (“FREEDOM FIGHT AT SEA”), abolitionists would also use the case to raise public consciousness about racial oppression. Cinque’s freedom comes first; but by using the case to shape public opinion, abolitionists use it as a microcosm of American slaves’ on-going freedom struggle.¹⁰

Despite his lack of lines and screen time, Joadson brings both inherent passion and eloquence to the cause of the Amistad captives. No matter how far he has travelled from slavery, his life is framed by its continued existence and far-reaching effects in American culture. The Amistad case is thus an intensely personal one to him. On screen, the camera focuses on Morgan Freeman during crucial trial scenes, with Freeman-as-Joadson betraying occasional wincing or creaks in the face. In one of the most affecting moments of the film, Spielberg has Joadson getting entangled in the slave shackles of the ship Amistad. While searching for a manifest which would prove that the free Africans had been illegally captured and sold, Freeman finds himself ensnared by ropes, cobwebs, and human cargo holds. Thus, like the Amistad captives, he too is enslaved by the lingering effects of the middle passage.

Joadson turns his personal history into abolitionist activism. When Tappan and Joadson visit John Quincy Adams to ask him to serve as a lawyer for Cinque and his comrades, it is Joadson who talks to Old Man Eloquent about the nation’s still-evolving freedom struggle. Although the film captures some of this startling exchange, the book goes just a bit further by explaining that it is the black reformer who really pushes the aging statesman — much to the dismay of both Tappan and Adams. As Adams and Tappan bicker about the case and (briefly) Adams’ credentials as an abolitionist, Joadson jumps in to help clarify the meaning of the pending trial:

Tappan: “As an advocate of the abolitionist cause, will you help us?”

Adams: “I’m neither friend nor foe of the abolitionist cause. I won’t help you.”

Text: "Tappan was about to respond when Joadson interrupted. 'Sir, I know you. I know as much about you and your presidency as any man. And your father's....You were a child at his side when he helped invent America. You in turn have devoted your life to refining that novel invention. But there remains one task still left undone....Your record confirms you're an abolitionist, President Adams,' Joadson finished. 'Whether you want to admit it or not. You belong with us.'"¹¹

Adams, of course, initially refuses to join the abolitionists' defense of the Amistad revolutionaries. But he remains impressed with Joadson, even when he replies that Joadson must learn to combine bravery with tact in his fight for black freedom. Tappan, "though a little put off by Joadson's fervor and the fact that...a black man would dare to lecture a white man, decides not to say anything." Later on, when Adams does join the defense team, he meets both with Joadson and Cinque—two black men.¹²

The message here is clear: while Tappan and white reformers can provide critical resources for the black fight for justice in America, Joadson (and Cinque) will provide a first-hand knowledge of racial oppression. This black voice — especially in the form of slave narratives, which poured out of the abolitionist press during the 1840s and 1850s — would in a sense drive the abolitionist movement. Joadson is the vehicle for illuminating that Afro-American presence on the antebellum stage.

2. The Real Life James Forten

Frederick Douglass comes to mind as the obvious model for Joadson: he was an ex-slave who escaped bondage (in Maryland), travelled North and became the pre-eminent black abolitionist of the Civil War era.¹³ Yet Douglass was still an obscure figure when the Amistad case reached American courts in 1839. Before Frederick Douglass, however, there was James Forten, the premier black reformer of the early republic. Businessman, philanthropist and early black abolitionist, Forten lived from 1766 to 1842 — a period in which America (like Forten himself) grew from humble roots into a position of power and respect. This was also a period of remarkable transformation for African Americans. Just before the American Revolution, the overwhelming majority of black people in America were enslaved; only a small number of African Americans enjoyed freedom. By the 1840s, however, strong free black communities existed throughout the Northeast, as well as in selected cities of the South (due to gradual abolition laws passed in northern states and private emancipations — some of which blacks forced upon their masters — in southern ones). Diverse and themselves beset with internal divisions over class, reform tactics, and relations with white America, free black populations nevertheless became an important part of antebellum American society's expanding

debate over slavery, race, and freedom. James Forten was an early and influential part of this dynamic world of black activism.¹⁴

Forten was born to free parents in Philadelphia. Like young Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams, Forten's life and public career would be shaped by the American War for Independence — or, more precisely, the values and ideals of the Revolutionary age. These included not just American independence itself but a focus on the very meaning of freedom, human rights, and citizenship in representative governments. Looking at his activist life leads almost inexorably to the conclusion that (with the exception of his free birth) Forten was Joadson: a fearless advocate for black freedom whose activism helped broaden the definition of American liberty as beyond racial categorization.

According to his first biographer (fellow black Philadelphian Robert Purvis, who prepared a history of Forten's life for his eulogy), Forten fought in the American Revolution at the age of 14 after signing on as "powder boy" aboard the "Royal Louis." Forten's belief in young America was early evidenced in an encounter with a British captain who captured the young lad but then offered Forten a chance to study with the captain's son. "I am here a prisoner for the Liberties of my country," Purvis quotes Forten as replying. "I never, never shall prove a traitor to her interests." No sentiment could be more exalted, Purvis observed; "indeed, with him, it was 'America, with all thy faults, I love thee still.'"¹⁵

Liberty would be the great project of Forten's life — not explaining liberty but expanding its meaning for Americans of all colors. He embodied America's limits and possibilities: on the one hand, Forten built himself up from a position of nothing to one of great prominence; on the other hand, Forten could not entirely transcend the limits of race in American culture. First the success, for Forten's rags-to-riches story parallels that of Ben Franklin, America's original go-getter. After gaining release from the prison ship "Jersey" during the Revolution, Forten returned to the United States "in a wretchedly bad condition...his hair nearly entirely worn from his head." But by the time he was 20, Forten had been apprenticed to a Philadelphia sailmaker, Robert Bridges. And "he was not long at his trade," Purvis reported, "when his great skill, energy, diligence and good conduct commended him to his master," who speedily promoted Forten to shop foreman. Forten then assumed control of Bridges' business in 1798, his continued "capability and industry" drawing in new clients and patrons. He became wealthy enough to buy a house for his mother and sister. For the next four decades, in fact, his business provided Forten with a genteel existence—he dressed snappily and enjoyed leisure time. Indeed, Forten had the bearing of American nobility: he was "so courteous, polished and gentlemanly...that no one knew but to admire him." But for the color of his skin, Forten was an exemplar of American economic mobility. Work hard and you will succeed.¹⁶

Yet as a black man in early national America, Forten hit the wall of race early and often. As he remarked during a period of particular frustration in 1817, "neither riches nor education could put [black Americans] on a level with whites. [In fact,] the more wealthy and better educated they became, the more wretched they were made. For [African Americans] felt their indignation more acutely."¹⁷ Forten was speaking from a life's worth of experience trying to gain the most basic citizenship rights. In 1800, for example, just a few years after he had assumed control of the respected Bridges' sailmaking business, Forten discovered that he could not even petition the Federal government to end slavery. "He" was not included in America's great definition of national citizenship. Forten joined over seventy Philadelphia blacks who had written a petition asking the national Congress to consider ways to gradually end both the overseas slave-trade and slavery itself. Congressmen were aghast. As one southern representative put it, "We the people" did not include "them." The petition was rejected (without even being considered) by a vote of 84 to 1.¹⁸

Forten refused to give up that easily, tracking down the lone Congressman who supported black petition rights: Massachusetts' George Thatcher. "Sir," he wrote in gratitude, "when the hand of sorrow presses heavy on us...and one appears who feels for and Commiserates our situation, and endeavors all in his power to alleviate our condition, our bosoms swell with gratitude." As Forten put it, "though our faces are black, yet we are men and are anxious to enjoy the birthright of the human race": freedom. In Forten's eyes, "700,000 of the human race" (roughly the number of enslaved persons in the United States then) "were concerned in our petition. Their thanks, their gratitude to you they now express." Until his death forty-odd years later, Forten tried to expand the meaning of liberty in American culture by protesting in the public sphere. The petition, his letter, his reprinted speeches and pamphlets — all of these documents aimed (as he put it) to "unfetter" black thoughts and give "full energy and scope to their minds." Like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and multitudes of black writers after him, Forten understood the power of words in shaping public opinion America.²⁰

3. Forten's Tactics: Utilize the Pen

Between 1800 and the late-1820s, Forten would become one of the most active black reformers of the early republic. He produced petitions, wrote letters and memorials to statesmen and political leaders, and published pamphlets and newspaper articles. Forten realized that the pen was one of the few political means by which African Americans could fight racial oppression. Although some African Americans voted in state elections between the 1780s and 1830s, they were prohibited from voting in federal elections by the Naturalization Act of 1790. Forten tried to use his pen as a weapon which forced whites to see black views. As he cogently wrote in 1800, "unprejudiced per-

sons who read the documents in our possession will acknowledge that we are miserable, Humane People who wish our situation alleviated." He hoped that "powerful people" would then "carry [blacks' critical suggestions] into execution."²¹

Forten was at the head of a generation of black reformers who viewed the written word as a critical part of the African-American struggle for justice. Before the American Revolution (and in the South during much of the nineteenth century), African-Americans created a hidden culture to shield their thoughts and actions from white eyes. Speaking of the matrix of song, metaphor, and symbolism which defined the enslaved's world, Frederick Douglass used the phrase "within the circle" when referring to blacks' often coded behavior. Those inside the circle understood that the song "Steal Away," for example, might refer to an escape attempt; those outside the circle would hear only sweet words and sounds.²² This world of coded messages thus allowed enslaved blacks to create a cultural space secure from whites.

Following America's first emancipation during the Revolutionary era, free black activists sought to project black protest into the nation's public sphere.²³ "I cannot read nor use the pen/But yet can think with other men/A clerk to pen my thoughts I have/That you may read my narrative/I had a wish that you should see/The effects of Aristocracy."²⁴ Thus did one former slave in the Western Reserve put it to white abolitionists in 1790. He hoped to focus attention on racial oppression by enlisting the help of a clerk. In that way, white Americans could see black testimony like his and protest clearly and unmistakably before the world. In this vein, black writers began producing pamphlets, letters, and memorials; church organizations took up collections to reprint orations inveighing against slavery, the slave trade and civil rights abuses; literary societies and debating clubs formed to emphasize the significance of writing to younger generations of black activists. As Philadelphian William Whipper would proclaim in 1828, African Americans had to master the literary arts, for their salvation depended very much on the "Pomp of Words." When black reformers in New York City established the first black-run newspaper (*Freedom's Journal*) in 1827, they marked the culmination of the first generation's focus on written protest.²⁵

Forten's strategy of using the press as a weapon was most fully realized in his 1813 pamphlet, "Series of Letters by a Man of Color," one of the longest single works produced by an African American before the publication of David Walker's "Appeal" in 1829. After its initial publication in Pennsylvania, "Letters" was republished by subsequent generations of black activists. In 1829, for example, *Freedom's Journal* reprinted it as a model for younger reformers.²⁶

"Letters" set its sights on two objectives. Most immediately, Forten hoped to stop a bill before the Pennsylvania General Assembly which would have forced black emigres to register within six months of entering the Quaker

State, lest they be sold into southern slavery. Following Pennsylvania's adoption of America's (and the world's) first gradual abolition law in 1780, blacks from surrounding states sought refuge there. Abolitionist lawyers were routinely overwhelmed by requests from free blacks who had settled in Pennsylvania but were threatened by kidnappers, or by slaves who wanted to claim Pennsylvania as a sanctuary. (Forten served with other blacks as a go-between for white abolitionists and blacks.) The infusion of former slaves angered many whites, however, who urged the General Assembly to craft legislation restricting black entry into the state. The resulting bill sought to intimidate black emigres. White reformers worked behind the scenes with contacts in state government to repeal the law; Forten appealed to state leaders and citizens via the press. Thus "Letters of a Man of Color."²⁷

But Forten did not limit his views to Pennsylvania's racial politics; he used the nation's Revolutionary language to attack the notion that blacks and whites were different anywhere in America, and thus deserved different levels of constitutional protection or natural rights. "We hold these truths to be self-evident," Forten opened, quoting verbatim "The Declaration of Independence." The notion that "all men were created equal," he observed, "is one of the most prominent features in the "Declaration of Independence" and in that hallowed fabric of collected wisdom, our noble Constitution." Although many Americans would like to limit these documents to "whites," Forten claimed that they had an all-encompassing character, a definition of equality which "embraces the Indian and the European, the Savage and the Saint, the Peruvian and the Laplander, the white man and the African." "And whatever measures are adopted subversive to this inestimable privilege," he charged, "are in direct violation of the letter and spirit of our Constitution, and become subject to the animadversion of all."²⁸

Forten argued that the Pennsylvania registration law was an unjust measure. For not only did it restrict black immigration, it deprived black Pennsylvanians of their equal rights before the law. "Many of us are men of property," Forten observed, not to mention patriotic, pious, sober, industrious and benevolent citizens. "People of Pennsylvania," he wrote, "doom us not to the unhappy fate of thousands of our countrymen in the Southern United States and West Indies." Forten betrayed his Republican-era sensibilities by claiming that he was not looking for protection of black criminals or paupers ("There are a number of worthless men belonging to our color"), who like whites of the same class should be justly punished by current laws on vagrancy. If not for race, he would believe that men's lives were their own — they could succeed by being industrious and pious or fail by being apathetic and shiftless.²⁹

Yet Forten made clear that Pennsylvania's proposed immigration law smacked of a broader American racial hypocrisy. "Are we not to be considered men?" he asked. "Has the God who made the white man and the black left any record declaring us a different species?"

Are we not sustained by the same power, supported by the same food, hurt by the same wounds, wounded by the same wrongs...and propagated by the same God? And should we not enjoy the same liberty, and be protected by the same laws?

Although black Pennsylvanians could vote at this time (though not many did, due often to intimidation), Forten played to white paternalist feelings by claiming a desire “not [to] legislate.” Rather, in legislation, he hoped to be treated as an equal with whites. After blacks attained a knowledge of laws and politics, then they could seek political power; until then, he wanted white legislators “to look on us as protectors.”³⁰

To firm up his claim to equal rights within both Pennsylvania and America, he asked readers to consider the Revolutionary War. Was this merely a war to free Americans from Britain or a war to establish “the foundation of the only reasonable republic upon earth?” The Pennsylvania Constitution, like the “Declaration of Independence,” supplied the answer: Article Nine of the state’s governing document stated that “All Men are born equally free and Independent, and have certain inherent and indefensible rights, among which are those of enjoying life and liberty.” Again, the proposed bill ignored these words, for it did not consider blacks “men,” intending “to exclude us from its blessing and protection.” The authors of the Pennsylvania Constitution, Forten claimed, had not sought to prevent blacks from enjoying their inalienable rights within the state. Indeed, those men “felt they had no more authority to enslave us, than England had to tyrannize over them.” Thus they enacted a gradual abolition law and adopted a state Constitution that recognized no differences between black and white. And they hoped that both actions would be replicated by statesmen throughout America. In short, Pennsylvania embodied the true heritage of American freedom, for its founding generation “adopted the glorious fabric of our liberties, declaring ‘all men free.’”³¹

One of the particular strengths of black protest in the antebellum period would be its use of personal stories of oppression to stir outrage and reform. Forten attempted to personalize his analysis of “the evils arising from the bill before our Legislature.”³²

Let us put a case, in which the law in question operates peculiarly hard and unjust. I have a brother, perhaps, who resides in a distant part of the Union, and after a separation of years, actuated by the same fraternal affection which beats in the bosom of a white man, he comes to visit me. Unless that brother be registered 24 hours after...he is liable...to a fine of twenty dollars, to arrest, imprisonment and sale.³³

“Let the unprejudiced mind ponder upon this,” he called out, “and then pronounce it the justifiable act of a free people if he can.” Indeed, so “fatal”

was the bill to a free people that Forten called it “characteristic of European despotism.” Forten returned to this grand theme again and again: “inalienable rights belong to black men” as well as white men. Reformers’ protests (including Forten’s) closed off consideration of the immigration bill, which never became law in the Quaker State.³⁴

After “Letters,” Forten continued his quest for racial justice within America by becoming a sharp critic of the colonization movement. Although white as well as black reformers had flirted with colonization schemes — resettling black Americans on foreign shores — since the 1790s, the cause gained unprecedented popularity during the 1820s and 1830s, particularly in northern states. Indeed, the advent of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1817 presented a bold challenge to the nation’s racial reformers, for it brought northerners and southerners into a new anti-black coalition. Headed by wealthy slaveholders, prominent reformers, and high-profile statesmen (including James Madison, Edward Everett, Daniel Webster and Henry Clay), the ACS sought to rid America of its free black population as the first step toward gradual southern emancipation. With the threat of free black communities removed, slaveholders could emancipate the nation’s still-growing slave population secure in the knowledge that those freed would be exported — or so the ACS proclaimed. By the 1830s, local ACS auxiliary societies had swelled: over two hundred organizations existed in places like Springfield, Massachusetts, and Easton, Pennsylvania. Northerners like Edward Everett (who was governor of Massachusetts during the 1830s) believed that free blacks were as much a threat to the nation’s well-being as slavery itself: as he put it, they committed a disproportionate number of crimes in northern cities and drained public resources. Although long-standing abolitionist organizations repudiated such stereotyped assertions (the Pennsylvania Abolition Society reported that that state’s free black population was more industrious and pious than many of its whites), the abolition movement as a whole faltered during the 1820s precisely because it did not publicly rebuke the ACS.³⁵

Free blacks worked to fill the void left by older abolitionists, holding public demonstrations condemning the ACS, publishing anti-colonization tracts for public consumption, and (by 1830) holding national meetings to discuss strategies and tactics. In 1817, Forten co-authored a seminal anti-colonization pamphlet asking white Philadelphians to disavow the colonization juggernaut. Arguing that the ACS would seek merely to banish free blacks — and not attack southern bondage in any real way — Forten and printer Russell Parrott expressed black Philadelphians’ firm commitment to racial redress within the American nation. Ironically, Forten had favored back-to-Africa schemes during the 1810s. He wondered aloud if black Americans could secure true equality in America. Yet a phalanx of his free black compatriots in Philadelphia refused to countenance such thoughts; Forten listened to their

pleas at a mass meeting and wrote an anti-colonizationist appeal which would become a model for others both in its tact and allusion to America's founding beliefs of equality for all.

"It is with painful Solicitude," he began, that "we have seen a plan for colonizing the free people of color of the United States on the coast of Africa, brought forward under the auspices and sanction of gentlemen whose names...are certainly among the wisest, the best and the most benevolent men, in this great nation."

But, Forten argued, this plan would in effect solidify southern slavery. For "those among their bondmen who feel that they should be free, by rights which all mankind have from God and Nature, and who thus may become dangerous to the quiet of their masters, will be sent to the [Colonizationist] colony." Forten stated that the nation's free Black population would "never...separate ourselves voluntarily from the slave population in this country."³⁶

He "humbly, respectfully" but also "fervently" asked white Americans to condemn colonization as a betrayal of their own founding creed. Yet even Forten had grown weary of white apathy. Southern slavery by the 1820s had grown substantially (thanks to a cotton boom during the 1790s and early 1800s, and geographic expansion into sugar-growing regions of the Southwest following Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase). Now, during the 1820s, even northern citizens supported colonization schemes. Americans needed a slap in the face to reverse such trends. But how?³⁷

4. James Forten and the Black Influence on William Lloyd Garrison

During the late 1820s and early 1830s, Forten would help produce answers by creating a coalition with a younger, more strident generation of white abolitionists.³⁸ Indeed, while most people think of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* as ushering in a new phase of radical abolitionist propaganda virtually by itself, it was in fact black writers like Forten who heralded a new age and turned Garrison into a radical reformer. Garrison himself was a gradual abolitionist (even quasi-colonizationist) until he read a collection of black writings condemning colonization as racist and foolhardy. Garrison subsequently created a pamphlet out of these writings entitled *Thoughts on African Colonization*, illustrating (as he put it in his long introductory essay) that black reformers' views on American race prejudice should convince Americans to confront their psychological and social phobias relating to blacks. Release the enslaved and then provide free blacks with equal citizenship rights, black activists argued. Without Forten's collection of such documents, Garrison might not have had the epiphany he did. Indeed, Garrison's book reprinted over twenty of the black memorials. One foe of Garrison's later radical abolitionism admitted that this early pamphlet was striking not for Garrison's words

but for its black foundation: the African-American writers, he asserted, had more effect on me “than all the rest” of Garrison’s pamphlet.³⁹

In this sense, Garrison was the nation’s first Elvis: he brought “black” thoughts into white households. When Garrison started his own radical newspaper, *The Liberator*, he consciously sought to meld the black tradition of public protest with white reformers’ resources. To take just one example: nearly twenty percent of the articles appearing in his paper during 1831 came from black authors — a phenomenal number for the time! For his part, James Forten provided inspiration, advice, and support to the young white reformer: he put Garrison in contact with black and white activists in Philadelphia, secured subscriber lists (black patrons provided the majority of monetary support to *The Liberator* in its first year), and encouraged Garrison to speak loudly and clearly to the American public and in effect to trumpet black claims further than ever before.⁴⁰ “I am extremely happy to hear you are about publishing a paper in Boston,” he wrote in 1830 to Garrison:

I hope your efforts may not be in vain, and may *The Liberator* be the means of exposing, more and more, the odious system of slavery, and of raising up friends to the oppressed and degraded People of color, throughout the Union.⁴¹

Forten closed by offering apologies to Garrison for not having replied more speedily (“owing to a multiplicity of business”) and enclosing “Money for twenty seven [new] subscribers.”⁴²

Forten could not help but express a sense of frustration with Americans’ blindness to black activism. Although he told Garrison he was happy to see “[white] American [like you] becoming more determined on the subject of slavery,” he lamented their inattention to his own writings, *Freedom’s Journal*, or the work of any other number of black activists.⁴³

Nevertheless, Forten understood that Garrison offered a new platform and audience for black protest. Indeed, the 1830s was an age of interracial struggle against slavery. Until Garrison’s day, even many white reformers segregated black activists like Forten. The earliest abolition societies in America did not seek (or accept) African-American members. In fact, for all their important activism in northern states like Pennsylvania (where they helped secure those gradual abolition laws between the 1780s and early 1800s), white reformers felt that blacks were not legitimate activists. Forten’s son-in-law Robert Purvis would later deride the nation’s oldest abolition group, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (founded in the mid-1770s) as paternalistic and tainted by racialism — they liked aiding blacks but not working with them for final freedom.

Moreover, early white abolitionists favored conservative and legalistic tactics when fighting slavery. Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) lawyers would pursue fugitive slave cases selectively — and they would rarely utilize black stories of racial oppression to win cases. Early abolitionist legal work rested only on the law. Thus, the PAS did not publish early black testimony about kidnapping, slave trading, and harsh physical treatment. According to early abolitionist leaders, slavery was a touchy issue in white politics. Black narratives on suffering might provoke either civil or servile war. The cache of testimony collected by whites would not be used to fight racial oppression in any significant tactical way until Garrison's day.

African Americans were co-creators of a new interracial abolitionist movement during the 1830s. The colonization crisis had convinced many black activists to search for new allies during the 1820s; they found sympathetic reformers among younger evangelical whites. And so a wave of idealism swept through American abolitionism in the early 1830s. Older groups such as the PAS were bypassed by young Turks like Garrison, who spoke of black reformers as friends, allies and “co-adjutors” of the movement. In Boston (now the center of American abolition), no sooner had Garrison and a small band of local activists inaugurated the first immediate abolition society in 1832 than they invited members of the city's General Colored Association to join in. The American Anti-Slavery Society was formed the next year in Philadelphia, with black and white activists serving as delegates. Interracial abolitionist organizations were not the only breakthrough: black and white reformers “intermingled” in abolitionist crowds (much to the dismay of Northern communities), and black speakers addressed white audience members (which often included white women). In the early 1830s, Forten often addressed interracial crowds in and around Philadelphia, including the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society.

Forten and his cohorts in Philadelphia's black community maintained contacts with white reformers throughout the 1830s. But dissatisfaction eventually grew among many other black abolitionists: their work still seemed slighted by the new generation of white activists, and only a few black reformers worked in leadership positions within the anti-slavery movement. By 1840, while Forten and his son-in-law Robert Purvis argued that black and white reformers must constantly work together, other black activists removed themselves from the American Anti-Slavery Society in protest. Forten's view of a society of equals (among abolitionists if not among Americans) came under withering attack.

5. Giving Way to New Generations of Black Activists after 1830

Indeed, Forten would soon see a host of new black activists emerge, men (and women such as Boston preacher and reformer Maria Stewart) who sought

to appeal not to white audiences for redress but to the black masses — including southern slaves. In 1829, David Walker would issue his famous *Appeal*, which told blacks that they could take only so much more American hypocrisy before they violently rebelled:

I will ask one question here — can our condition be any worse? ...The whites want us as slaves, and want us for their slaves. But some of them will curse the day they ever saw us. As true as the sun ever shone in its meridian splendor, my color will root some of them out of the very face of the earth. They shall have enough of making slaves of, and butchering, and murdering us in the manner which they have. No doubt some may say that I write with a bad spirit and that I, being black, wish these things to occur.⁴⁴

Whites' racial hostility had only grown since the nation's founding. According to Walker, "men of colour" must take stock of this situation — embracing militant confrontation, if need be.

Walker's fiery appeal to the masses set the stage for new protest strategies. By the 1840s and 1850s, prominent reformers such as Martin Delaney, Henry Highland Garnet, and J. Theodore Holly adamantly emphasized racial pride, unity, and autonomy from white culture as the keys to black redemption. Garnet, a former slave turned minister and educator, called for a massive slave revolution as the way to achieve black justice in America. Speaking in Buffalo in 1843, Garnet famously proclaimed, "Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties....Let your Motto Be Resistance. Resistance. RESISTANCE." Polite public protest would lead blacks nowhere in America. African-American reformers would do better to follow the lead of slave rebels like Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner. "Let every slave throughout the land do this," Garnet thundered, let northern black leaders embrace calls for revolution, and "the days of slavery are numbered."⁴⁵

Delany and Holly became leading advocates of black emigration. According to Delany, black Americans could form their own powerful nation outside of the United States — indeed, they must reject American society altogether to attain any form of equality. White Americans would never share political power with blacks and would not grant black Americans equal protection of the laws. For Delany, this reality dictated a strategy of African-American independence and nation building.

In the decades leading to the Civil War, then, black abolitionism splintered, with African-American reformers clashing over tactics and strategies.⁴⁶ Some reformers followed the calls of black militants, seeking to remove themselves from white society and even contact with white abolitionists. Most northern blacks, as James and Lois Horton have recently written in their survey of free African-American life before the Civil War, rejected the most radical plans

of a Delany or Garnet.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, black militants' broader message that white Americans would not peaceably be reformed gained increasing adherents, particularly during the 1850s when the nation's racial climate hardened: 1850 brought the repeal of the Missouri Compromise (which had limited slavery's growth in the West), and 1857 saw the Dred Scott decision, in which Chief Justice Roger Taney declared, "a black man has no rights which a white man is bound to respect."

Thomas Morris Chester, a Pennsylvania activist whose father had worked alongside both James Forten and William Lloyd Garrison in the Quaker State's antislavery movement, illustrated the evolution of black protest thought. Born in the 1830s to an activist family in Harrisburg (his father sold antislavery papers, among other pursuits), Chester was destined to work in black reform circles. However, by the time he came of age during the 1850s, the younger Chester had distanced himself from his father's integrationist views, embracing instead a new race-consciousness. After removing to Liberia, where he had taught for a few years, Chester returned to America and served as captain of an all-black Civil War regiment. Yet even as the war decimated southern slavery, Chester called for black autonomy within the American nation. African Americans needed to "awaken self-respect and pride of race," he called out in an 1862 address to his brethren in Philadelphia. America would never be a true model for black youth, Chester concluded. Indeed, it would be up to the generation of post-war African-American teachers to produce a pantheon of black heroes — and a self-consciously black history — to train black youth adequately. "Remove as far as practicable," he roared, "from all observation and association, every influence which tends to weaken your self-respect. Take down from your walls the pictures of Washington, Jackson, McClellan [instead] let the gilded frames be graced with the immortal [Haitian slave rebel] Toussaint."⁴⁸

James Forten did not want discussions of slavery or racial injustice to turn into ammunition for physical battle. Nor did he reject American society in toto, or even the possibility of blacks and whites working together in reform organizations.⁴⁹ No matter how frustrated he became with white apathy, he was no revolutionary. Indeed, Forten's leadership in the Moral Reform Society during the 1830s further demonstrated his commitment to principles of racial justice and uplift *within* American society. The market revolution had created a broad urban working class during 1820s and 1830s, as factory systems and mass production techniques swept through American culture. As Walker-style appeals to the black masses (to organize against white racism *and* black elitism) went out, Forten called on African Americans to become evermore respectable, pious, and sober. As usual, Forten resorted to his pen. In 1837 and 1838, for example, he had some of his old writings on hard work, piety, and sobriety republished in *The Colored American*, a New York City

journal run by former *Freedom's Journal* editor Samuel Cornish. As James and Lois Horton observe in their recent survey of northern black life before the Civil War, black moral reformers like Forten continued to believe that racial progress could be achieved only through "education, self-improvement and moral uplift." As Philadelphian William Whipper put it, African Americans must focus on four main concerns: "Education, Temperance, Economy and University Liberty." In this manner, moral reformers would "facilitate the cause of universal and Immediate emancipation" by making the black masses exemplary Americans.⁵⁰

Forten himself would not live to see any resolution of debates over strategies of attaining black justice. He passed away in 1842. Yet amid a generational transition within northern black communities, he remained an icon of black reform — one who believed passionately in reforming American culture from within. According to one writer celebrating his memory, Forten was "that intelligent, ever faithful patriot."⁵¹ New York City's *Anglo-African* in 1859 hailed Forten as a "giant" whom all people of color could consider majestic.⁵²

Indeed, it is striking how many other black reformers claimed Forten's reform philosophy as their own. Frederick Douglass certainly retraced Forten's steps, bringing his predecessor's message that America could be reformed without a racial revolution to new generations of white as well as black Americans. As William McFeely argues, the bedrock of Douglass' ideology was a belief in using American rights to reform American society. "All we ask is to be treated equally," he would say over and over again. Or, as he summed up at the end of his life, "There is no race problem. The only problem is whether or not Americans will give to blacks what they give to all other citizens."⁵³ Although he never met Forten, Douglass borrowed this very concept from him. In 1849, Douglass told a New York City audience that Forten was one of his shining examples of black activism. "In the language of James Forten," Douglass exclaimed,

whose name I never mention but my heart swells within me—[in Forten's language] 'We have watered the soil of America with our tears, we have enriched it with our blood... We are American born citizens; we only ask to be treated as well as you treat your aliens...

"These sentiments," Douglas concluded, "are attributed to the venerated James Forten, a colored man...who bared his bosom in defence of this country." In our own time too, Forten's message has lived on. Martin Luther King talked of loving America "warts and all"; with only slight variation, Forten told black reformers that his motto was, "America, with all thy faults, I love thee still."⁵⁴

6. In the End: Forten's Legacy

By the time of the *Amistad* case, black protest in the person of James Forten and countless other African-American reformers had begun to shape the contours of political debate in antebellum American society. For the dominant question of the age — in Lincoln's words, was America to continue half-slave and half-free — automatically brought with it the question many black reformers like Forten had been asking since the American Revolution: were not African Americans citizens of the republic, and therefore entitled to America's coveted heritage of freedom and rights for all?

By creating a black character to highlight black activism, and then by not examining that character or issue in any depth, the film "*Amistad*" left viewers with the false impression that the freeing of the African captives by the Supreme Court in the 1840s was a singular blow for African-American freedom within the United States. It was not. Southern slavery expanded after 1840, and many northern free blacks had rights taken away from them (Pennsylvania had disfranchised black voters in a revised Constitution of 1838). The struggle that Forten helped create through his pen continued an often futile battle against American racial oppression into to the 1860s. Even white reformers, a small minority of citizens, were threatened with legal action or worse, subjected to mob violence for local speeches and antislavery rallies.

It would truly take the Civil War to topple slavery and force political leaders at all levels of government to devise ways of integrating African Americans into the nation's civic culture. And it would take the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution to establish (again in Lincoln's words) a "new birth of freedom" in concrete language, if still not in absolute reality. Yet although the Civil War was a Second American Revolution, as historians have labelled it, on behalf of liberty, it depended on decades of antebellum political and social struggle among black as well as white activists.⁵⁵ As James Forten's life and literary work wonderfully illustrates, the end of slavery was not a sudden creation of the Civil War era. Forten came of age as an activist during the Age of Jefferson — an age of democratic theory. He left a legacy which pointed the way towards the Age of Lincoln: a country dedicated to a more democratic practice.

In sum, to return to the "*Amistad*" debate, the critics are dead wrong that there was no Joadson in antebellum America — that no such person could have existed and that his very creation violates the historical record.⁵⁶ Black abolitionists contributed mightily to the nation's evolving discourse of racial justice. And James Forten — as an analog to Joadson — was a critical part of that struggle. His words can still be read in his own writings from the period between the 1790s and 1830s: *Freedom's Journal* (which reprinted "Series of Letters of a Man of Color") is now available on CD-Rom and on the Internet via Accessible Archives. Forten's "Letters," printed addresses, and memorials are collected in various other formats too.

Educators who use "Amistad" in the classroom should therefore expound upon Joadson's importance to the themes of freedom and justice presented in the film. But citizens should also celebrate a man named James Forten for what he undoubtedly was: a founding father of democratic citizenship.

Notes

I would like to thank Phil Lapsanky, Randall Miller, Jim Stewart, Don Yacovone, Patrick Rael, Robert Newman, and the reviewers of *Pennsylvania History* for their input. Also thanks to the folks at Spot Coffee in Buffalo, who inspired the essay a few years back.

1. Spielberg's making of "Amistad," see Caryl Phillips review, "Another Course Change Toward Seriousness," *The New York Times*, September 7, 1997.

2. See, for example, Sean Wilentz' piece in *The New Republic*, Dec. 22, 1997; The Massachusetts Historical Society's "Miscellany," 69 (Spring 1998); and John Thornton's review, "Liberty or License?," in *History Today* (March 1998). The historians' electronic debate can be accessed on H-Shear, moderated by Peter Knupper, at the following online address: repub@h-net.msu.edu. The journal *History Teacher* republished some of the debate in its May, 1998 edition, "About the Film and Its Use," 369-402.

3. *Commentary*, February 1998.

4. *The New York Review of Books*, April 1, 1998.

5. For film's uses in history courses, see Robert Brent Toplin, *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past* (Urbana, 1996), and Robert Rosenstone, ed. *Revisioning History* (Princeton, 1993), which argue that film offers not historical documentary, per se, but rather a particular vision (or interpretation) of history based on the historical record of an era.

6. In January of 1998, Philip Lapsanky at The Library Company of Philadelphia put on an exhibition which examined the role of Philadelphia's black community during the Amistad trial.

7. See *The Pennsylvania Freeman*, December 31, 1840, in an article entitled "Amistad Captives." The meeting occurred December 22, 1840.

8. In recent years, scholars have added new names to the roster of black figures in the early republic. See, for example, James Stewart's and George Price's forthcoming work on Connecticut preacher Hosea Easton, *To Heal the Scourge of Prejudice* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999); Donald Yacovone's biography of George E. Stephens, black activist and

Civil War correspondent for the New York City *Anglo-African*, *A Voice of Thunder* (Urbana, 1997); Marilyn Richardson's *Maria Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer* (Bloomington, 1994); William Cheek and Aimee Cheek, *John Mercer Langston* (Urbana, 1995); and Graham Hodges' edited volume on the works of Revolutionary War-era itinerant preachers John Jea and George White, *Black Itinerants of the Gospel* (Madison, 1993).

9. Alex Pate, *Amistad*, a novel based on the screenplay by David Franzione (New York, 1997).

10. *Ibid.*, 79-82.

11. *Ibid.*, 102-103.

12. *Ibid.*, 103.

13. Barbara Chase-Riboud, whose creation of a similar free black character in her rendition of the Amistad saga, *Echo of Lions* (New York, 1989), cites Douglass as her inspiration. See her "Acknowledgements" section, 375-376.

14. On slavery's end in the North and the creation of vibrant free black communities, see especially the following works: Gary Nash and Jean Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees* (New York, 1991); Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom* (Cambridge, 1988); Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite* (Philadelphia, 1991); Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent* (Athens, 1991); and Graham Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North* (Madison, 1997). On the threat free blacks posed to Southern slavery during the early republic, see Douglass Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion* (Chapel Hill, 1993), and Stephen Whitman's *The Price of Freedom* (Lexington, 1996).

15. Although no modern biography exists, Julie Winch of the University of Massachusetts at Boston is currently working on Forten's life (Oxford University Press). The first biography, in a sense, came from the pen of Forten's son-in-law, Robert Purvis, whose eulogy in March, 1842 was turned into a pamphlet: "Remarks on the Life and Character of James Forten, Delivered at Bethel Church, March 30, 1842" (Philadelphia, 1842).

16. *Ibid.*

17. Forten quoted in William Loren Katz's introduction, *Thoughts on African Colonization* (New York, 1968), viii-ix.

18. Gales and Seaton, eds., *The Debates and Proceedings of the United States Congress*, January 1, 1800, 6th Cong., 1st Sess., 229.
19. Forten to George Thatcher, c. January, 1800 in the Cox-Parrish-Wharton Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, ed. David Blight (Boston, 1993), quote at 47.
23. For a recent examination on African-American writing in general, and pamphleteering in particular, see Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, and Philip Lapsansky, eds., *Pamphlets of Protest: African-American Writing from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming). See also Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s introduction to his book *Classic Slave Narratives* (New York, 1987), which sets forth the distinctiveness of black writing in the Atlantic world context of enslavement.
24. The poem is found in the Cox-Parrish-Wharton Collection in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Afro-Americana Collection (which is being re-organized).
25. William Whipper, "An Address delivered in Wesley Church for the Colored Reading Society of Philadelphia" (Philadelphia, 1828), 107.
26. "Series of Letters by a Man of Color" (Philadelphia, 1813), reprinted in Herbert A. Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York, 1968), 59-66.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. See Everett's speech before a national meeting of the ACS in *The Fifteenth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society* (Washington, D.C., 1832), xii.
36. "A Voice From Philadelphia," written by James Forten and members of an anti-colonizationist committee in Philadelphia (including Richard Allen and Russell Parrott) in January 1817, reprinted in Katz, ed., *Thoughts on African Colonization*, 9-10.
37. *Ibid.*
38. I treat this theme extensively in my dissertation, "The Transformation of American Abolitionism" (SUNY Buffalo, 1998), particularly Chapters 4 and 5.
39. Garrison, *Thoughts on African Colonization* (Boston, 1832). See especially "Part Two: Sentiments of the People of Color," which reprints a host of black anti-colonizationist petitions. "Africaner," a pro-colonizationist writer, criticized Garrison for publicizing these African-American critiques in an article in the *Portland Christian Mirror*, March 7, 1833.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Forten to Garrison, December 31, 1830, in C. Peter Ripley, et. al. eds., *Witness for Freedom* (Chapel Hill, 1993), 47-48.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Standard works on Black abolitionism include: R.J.M. Blackett, *Building an Anti-Slavery Wall in the Abolition Movement, 1830-60* (Ithaca, 1983); Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York, 1969); John Bracey, et. al. eds., *Blacks in the Abolition Movement* (Belmont, 1977). A recent book treats interracial abolitionist activity in Boston after 1830. See Donald Jacobs, ed., *Courage and Conscience* (Bloomington, 1993).
44. David Walker, "An Appeal To The Colored Citizens of the World" (Boston, 1829 and 1830), 19-20. Sean Wilentz' reprinted edition (New York, 1995) offers a good introduction to Walker's work and its importance in the antebellum world. See also Peter Hinks, *To Awake My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park, 1997)
45. Garnet, "An Address to the Slaves of the United States" (pamphlet version, self-published by Garnet in 1848). The convention in Buffalo in 1843 refused to print it.
46. On black nationalism, see Wilson J. Moses' standard work, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism* (New York, 1996). See also Maria Stewart's militant speeches in the early 1830s in Sue E. Hochins, ed., *Spiritual Narratives* (New York, 1988).
47. James Horton and Lois Horton, *In Hope of Liberty* (New York, 1997), 261-2.

48. See Chester's pamphlet *An Address to the Colored Library Company of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1863), and R.J.M. Blackett, Thomas Morris Chester, *Black Civil War Correspondent* (Da Capo Press Edition, New York, 1989), 14.
49. As Cedric Robinson has pointed out in a recent book on black social movements, the mid-1800s witnessed a major division within African-American reformer circles: on the one hand, there were those like Delany who rejected American society as a model for African-American life and thought (in favor of African-centered and community-oriented concerns); on the other hand, there were reformers who followed Forten's lead by seeking to join American culture by adopting its economic and political values. See Cedric Robinson, *Black Social Movements* (New York, 1997), particularly his arguments on page 93.
50. See Forten as featured in *The Coloured American*, May 13, 1837 and August 25, 26, 1838; James Horton and Lois Horton, *In Hope of Liberty* (New York, 1997), 221.
51. *The Colored American*, May 13, 1837.
52. *The Anglo African*, October 1859.
53. William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York, 2nd edition, 1997), 371.
54. Douglass speaking at a New York lecture on Colonization, April 24, 1849, in John Blassingame et.al., eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series One, Vol. 2, Speeches, Debates, Interviews (New Haven, 1982), 165-66.
55. James McPherson is perhaps the foremost exponent of this view. See his book *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution* (New York, 1991), particularly 21-22.
56. The producers must shoulder some of the blame for their lack of historical perspective on the character of Joadson. The Educators Learning Kit sent out by Dreamworks does not include an in-depth character analysis of Joadson, nor does it provide any analogs to the fictional black abolitionist. The standard work on the Amistad affair remains Howard Jones' solid study, *Mutiny on the Amistad* (New York, 1987 and a newly reprinted edition in 1997). Yet even Jones' book provides little contextualization of black abolitionists' struggle against slavery during the 1820s and 1830s.