



Boston University
Department of the History of Art and Architecture
American & New England Studies Program

AM/AH 867 Material Culture

Notes on a Conference Paper Proposal

- 1) Make sure your name is on the page which includes the paper proposal (unless you are specifically told not to have your name on it).
- 2) Always include your institutional affiliation. Affiliations raise your status.
- 3) Make sure that the committee will have no problem contacting you should you be accepted. Use both belt and suspenders. Give them options, but don't confuse them with multiple emails or multiple phone numbers. If you have a choice, use an institutional email. Double check to make sure all of your contact information is correct.
- 4) Give your presentation the best title possible. It should both be catchy and intriguing and explain exactly what people can expect from your presentation. Abstraction does not necessarily convey sophistication. It can convey vapidness. Be sure that the audience will know what they are going to hear about.
- 5) Parrot back from the call for papers exactly what the committee is looking for. Be as specific as they are. If they ask for 20 minute papers, make sure that you tell them that you are proposing a twenty minute paper.
- 6) **MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE A CLEAR AND IDENTIFIABLE ARGUMENT !** A topic is not enough.
- 7) Indicate the kinds of sources upon which you are going to base your argument. You don't need to be super specific, but you do need to let them know that you are bringing something to the table.
- 8) Make sure that the committee knows that you have familiarized yourself with the secondary literature. No one wants to see a clueless researcher reinvent the wheel by stating arguments that other scholars have either already made or, even worse, discredited. Indicate that you recognize that your paper is part of a larger discourse.
- 9) Provide a statement of methodology so that the evaluator knows what kind of analysis you are going to offer. This is where you can introduce your five-dollar keywords as long as you use them correctly and they are not obfuscatory.
- 10) Give a limited amount of solid information about your topic, but don't go into great specifics. This is not the paper itself. You want to whet the committee's appetite without boring them.

- 11) If you are working in a visual topic, don't be afraid to include images that will both explain your work and intrigue the evaluators. However, be critical about what you are doing. Only use images that directly relate to the topic of your presentation; it is better not to have images than to include items that are simply pretty illustrations.
- 12) Know when to stop. More information is not always an improvement. Just because they have set a limit of 750 words does not mean you have to give them 750 words. 600 words might be better. Extraneous details can hurt you. Evaluators have to read a lot of these proposals.

Example

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Sic Semper Tyrannis: David Bowser's Flags for Pennsylvania's African American Civil War Regiments

In 1863, David Bustill Bowser, an African American artist from Philadelphia, painted battle flags for the troops raised by Pennsylvania's Supervisory Committee for Recruiting Colored Regiments. These flags provide insight into racial politics and national identity during a pivotal moment in American history. In creating these military standards, Bowser drew upon patriotic American emblematic traditions through the use of eagles, symbolic female figures, portraits of the founding fathers, and Latin mottoes. However, Bowser combined these elements with images of uniformed African American soldiers wielding swords, carrying muskets, brandishing bayonets, and subduing white Confederate officers that spoke of African American agency and empowerment. Broken shackles and abandoned plantations indicated the changes already wrought, while mottoes lettered upon scrolls, including "One Cause, One Country," "Sic Semper Tyrannis," "We Will Prove Ourselves Men," "Freedom for All," and "Let Soldiers in War Be Citizens in Peace," were meant to both inspire the men who would march behind these flags and present a vision of the new social order that Bowser and his cohort hoped would follow a Union victory.

By drawing upon visual, documentary, and artifactual evidence, this interdisciplinary paper will argue that Bowser's remarkable works, preserved in albumen photographs taken at the time, provide unique insights into the dynamics of how African Americans viewed their role in the nation during the Civil War. Although scholars, including military historian Richard Sauers and art historian Steven Loring Jones, have documented Bowser's contribution, the banners have not yet received adequate analysis. These flags are complex texts which resulted from the interactions of numerous individuals including the United States Government, patrician white Philadelphians, groups of African American citizens, and Bowser, the artist who produced them. By placing these regimental colors into a series of related but distinct frameworks, this paper will interpret the ideas concerning race, class, and citizenship encoded within these martial artifacts.

Comment [MW1]: Point 1

Comment [MW2]: Point 2

Comment [MW3]: Point 3

Comment [MW4]: Point 4

Comment [MW5]: Point 10

Comment [MW6]: Point 7

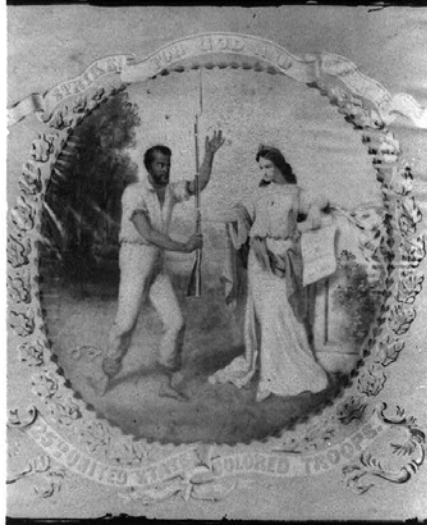
Comment [MW7]: Point 5

Comment [MW8]: Point 6

Comment [MW9]: Point 8

Comment [MW10]: Point 9

Comment [MW11]: Point 12



David Bustill Bowser, Flag of the 25th U.S. Colored Troops, 1863, Collection of the Library of Congress

Comment [MW12]: Point 11



David Bustill Bowser, Flag of the 22nd U.S. Colored Troops, 1863, Collection of the Library of Congress