

Rethinking the Statue of Liberty: Old Meanings, New Contexts

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The Statue of Liberty is among the best known monuments in the world. Between three and four million people visit it each year, and millions more see its image in pictures of New York harbor or in advertisements for a variety of commercial products and non-profit organizations. The Statue of Liberty has been a tourist destination, a backdrop for political speeches, and played countless other roles in its 118 year history.

Although the intentions of the creators of the Statue of Liberty have been well documented, how various generations since its dedication in 1886 have understood the Statue is less well known. Meanings for the Statue of Liberty have changed over time, and each new meaning has tended to obliterate those of earlier generations. In rethinking the Statue of Liberty in 2003, the National Park Service seeks to investigate those earlier meanings, incorporate them into its research and collections strategies, and present them to the public in interpretive programs. Essays by scholars Albert Boime and John Tuaranac discuss the significance of the Statue in the history of the visual arts and building technology. This essay discusses the significance of the Statue of Liberty in the history of American politics and popular culture. It suggests research strategies and secondary historical literature that will help researchers and interpreters to situate the Statue in its changing political and cultural contexts.

Among the secondary literature useful for understanding the place of the Statue in American politics and culture is the scholarship on collective memory, the social organization of tradition, and the political processes through which a particular version of the past or interpretation of a work of art becomes institutionalized and accepted as the public one.² Why, given the many meanings for the Statue of Liberty, did some prevail in a particular historical period, while others fail to catch hold? Following this line of investigation, the recommendations for new research on the Statue of Liberty focus less on the Statue itself and more on the meanings that various groups have given it over time, and the relative power these groups had to establish their meaning for the Statue in public.

Part I: The Statue as a Public Monument

Perhaps most important for future research and interpretation are the changing political meanings of the Statue. This section of the essay analyzes six such political meanings,

¹ Thanks to Margo Shea for her research assistance, in particular the discovery of several new primary sources mentioned below.

² For a critical overview of recent scholarship on collective memory, see David Glassberg, "Public History and the Study of Memory," *Public Historian* 18 (Spring 1996): 7-23, and Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12 (June 1995): 214-39. For an example of this approach applied to the changing meaning of a public monument, see David Glassberg, "Remembering a War," in *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2001), pp. 23-57.

overlapping and coexisting, yet each more or less prominent in different historical eras. The six meanings are: 1) as a monument to political cooperation between France and the United States; 2) as a monument to the end of slavery in America; 3) as a monument to American national unity; 4) as a monument to immigration and economic opportunity; 5) as a monument to political liberty and freedom around the globe; and 6) as a monument to the character and resilience of New York City and its residents.

The first meaning for the Statue of Liberty, and seemingly the most straightforward one, is as a monument to political cooperation between France and the United States. This is the meaning stated by the Frenchmen who originated the idea for the Statue in 1865 and developed it in the 1870s, that the Statue was a gift of the French people to America on the centennial anniversary of American independence. But the meaning of this gift at the time deserves further investigation. How common was it for nations in the late nineteenth century to present one another with gifts and giant statues? As Akira Iriye notes, most diplomatic histories focus on formal relations between governments, rather than on the connections between groups of private citizens acting together in international organizations like the Franco-American Union, the official name of the French Committee in Paris and the American Committees in New York City, Boston, and Philadelphia that raised money for the Statue.³ What did this Statue, and this act, mean to the people of France and the United States? Researchers might gain new insights into this question by investigating not only the papers of the individuals who were members of the Franco-American Committee, but also the reaction in the press on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Statue of Liberty gains additional meaning as a gift between nations in the context of the many world's fairs and international expositions held in the late nineteenth century. The conception and dedication of the Statue in the 1870s and 1880s coincided with the staging of prominent trans-Atlantic extravaganzas such as London's Crystal Palace Exposition of 1851, Paris's Universal Exposition of 1867, Philadelphia's Centennial Exposition of 1876 (where Liberty's arm and torch were on display), Paris's International Exposition of 1889, and Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. A comprehensive history of these and other world's fairs of the period can be found in John Findling's Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions, but a more analytical approach, especially to the foreign exhibits at these expositions, is Robert Rydell, All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916. Rydell identifies the importance of such events for promoting international trade and cultural exchange, as well as reinforcing a white European-American identity in contrast to that of non-white peoples around the globe.⁴

³ Akira Iriye, "Internationalizing International History," in Rethinking American History in a Global Age ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley: U California Press, 2002), pp. 47-62.

⁴ Historical Dictionary of Worlds Fairs and Expositions ed. John Findling (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990); Robert Rydell, All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

Besides the general political context of gifts between nations, there is also the specific context of French-American cultural, diplomatic, and trade relations.⁵ The United States in the 1880s was an emerging global economic power, while French economic influence in the United States was on the wane. At the same time that the Statue was crossing the Atlantic to New York, the American and French governments were unable to negotiate a general trade agreement between the two nations. Between 1881-91, France and the United States were in the midst of a tariff war, with the French fighting to limit the import of American agricultural products, including a total ban on American pork. Americans retaliated with high duties on French art imports, the value of which dropped from \$1.8 million to \$600,000 between 1882-84. The men on both sides of the Atlantic responsible for the Statue thus might have viewed it as a peace offering in what had become a stormy relationship.⁶

Finally, in considering the political meaning of the Statue of Liberty as a gift of the French people, there is the particular political situation within France in the late nineteenth century that gave rise to the Statue. This context is explained in Walter Gray's biography of Edouard Laboulaye, whom historian Barry Moreno calls "the ideological father of the statue."⁷ In the 1860s and 1870s, Laboulaye and his circle in France struggled to establish a liberal democratic republic against the absolutist rule of Napoleon III on the one hand and the revolutionary threat of the Paris Commune on the other. Art historians Albert Boime and Maurice Agulhon, among other scholars, have noted the staid visage of the Statue of Liberty contrasts with more revolutionary images of liberty common earlier in French history.⁸ Tied in with this moderate politics in reaction to the upheavals of the 1870s is the effort among French backers of the Statue

⁵ On the statue as part of continuing pattern of cultural and economic exchange between France and the US, from aid during the American Revolution to the Marshall Plan, see Wilton S. Dillon, "The Ultimate Gift," in The Statue of Liberty Revisited ed. By Wilson S. Dillon and Neil G. Kotler (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), pp. 135-57. On cultural exchanges between France and the US outside official channels, see Henry Blumenthal, American and French Culture, 1800-1900 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1975).

⁶ Henry Blumenthal, France and the United States: Their Diplomatic Relations, 1789-1914 (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina, 1970), p. 167-80. Blumenthal offers a brief synthesis of Franco-American diplomatic relations, with discussions of the US and the Franco-Prussian War, French Colonialism, and economic relations. See also Marvin Zahniser, Uncertain Friendship: American-French Diplomatic Relations through the Cold War. (New York: John Wiley, 1975).

⁷ Barry Moreno, The Statue of Liberty Encyclopedia (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2000), pp. 57; Walter D. Gray, Interpreting American Democracy in France: The Career of Edouard Laboulaye, 1811-1883 (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1994). See also Seymour Drescher, "Liberty and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century France and America," in The Statue of Liberty Revisited ed. by Wilson S. Dillon and Neil G. Kotler (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), pp. 17-26. Essays on Laboulaye and French liberalism also appear in a volume that grew out of a Woodrow Wilson Center conference commemorating the centennial of statue, Liberty/liberté: The American and French Experiences ed. By Joseph Klaitz and Michael Haltzel (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

⁸ Albert Boime, The Unveiling of National Icons (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 82-135; Maurice Agulhon, Marianne Into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880 trans. J. Lloyd (NY: Cambridge U. Press, 1981).

to recall more general Enlightenment philosophical concepts, evident in the formal name for the Statue, “Liberty Enlightening the World.”

The political concerns of the French moderates found resonance among the American upper and middle classes. The Statue project unfolded in the 1870s and 1880s amid severe economic depression and labor unrest in the United States. At the Statue’s dedication in 1886, the same year as the Haymarket uprising in Chicago and radical Henry George’s unsuccessful campaign for mayor of New York City, speakers pointed to the Statue as evidence of the endurance of American political institutions. Further research into the political affiliations of its American and French backers could make even more concrete what the Statue project meant to them.⁹

At the same time that the Statue of Liberty’s creators celebrated a universal idea of liberty and freedom made possible by the evolution of democratic political institutions under constitutional government, a second, more particular meaning became associated with the Statue, as a monument to the end of American slavery after the Civil War. In their 1948 history of the Statue of Liberty, Herta Pauli and E.B. Ashton described the Statue as “the Abolitionists’ triumphal column.”¹⁰ Although Pauli and Ashton noted that this meaning had long since faded by 1948, it is likely that for the first fifty years of the Statue’s existence, while the Civil War was still in living memory for many Americans, at least some of those Americans might have associated the Statue of Liberty, breaking chains under her feet, with emancipation. Before the Civil War, a Congress deeply divided over the future of slavery rejected a statue by Hiram Powers depicting liberty trampling the chains of bondage for this very association.¹¹

The Statue’s meaning as a public monument to the emancipation of slavery in the United States is embedded in its origins. Laboulaye was a strong supporter of the Union cause and head of a French antislavery society.¹² Frederic-Auguste Bartholdi raised funds for the Statue from Laboulaye’s American friends in the Union League and other groups associated with memorializing the moral superiority of the Union cause. Future research could delve more deeply into these fund-raising campaigns in America, in particular the papers of individuals and organizations that supported the statue

⁹ Many histories document the social and political upheavals of America in the 1870s and 1880s. The best short synthesis is Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982). An excellent, but much more detailed account of working-class politics is David Montgomery, The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Herta Pauli and EB Ashton, I Lift My Lamp: The Way of a Symbol (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), p. 285.

¹¹ On Congress rejecting Hiram Powers’ statue of “Liberty” in the 1850s because of its association with abolitionism, see Jean Fagan Yellin, “Caps and Chains: Hiram Powers’ Statue of ‘Liberty’,” American Quarterly 38 (Winter 1986): 798-826.

¹² On Laboulaye and American abolitionists, see Mercer Cook, “Edouard Lefebvre de Laboulaye and the Negro,” Journal of Negro History 18 (July 1933): 246-55.

project in France and in the United States--what did they think they were doing? How many of these individuals in fact were former abolitionists?¹³ Were there significant sectional or racial differences in support for the Statue project? How was the Statue project received in the former Confederate states? Was there a special interest in the Statue among African-Americans?¹⁴ Evidence from the African-American press at the time of the Statue's dedication suggests that they might have seen it as representing both the triumph over slavery and the distance blacks still needed to travel to obtain political freedom in America. An editorial in the African-American paper, the Cleveland Gazette, declared:

"It is proper that the torch of the Bartholdi statue should not be lighted until this country becomes a free one in reality. 'Liberty enlightening the world,' indeed! The expression makes us sick. This government is a howling farce. It cannot or rather does not protect its citizens within its own borders. Shove the Bartholdi statue, torch and all, into the ocean until the 'liberty' of this country is such as to make it possible for an industrious and inoffensive colored man in the South to earn a respectable living for himself and family, without being ku-kluxed perhaps murdered, his daughter and wife outraged, and his property destroyed. The idea of the 'liberty' of this country 'enlightening the world,' or even Patagonia, is ridiculous in the extreme."¹⁵

Dedicated in 1886, the Statue of Liberty joined a public landscape dense with monuments commemorating the Civil War. Recent books by David Blight and Kirk Savage successfully locate these Civil War monuments in the politics of Reconstruction and Redemption, and can help the Park Service to understand how the Statue of Liberty might have been interpreted at the time as a monument to emancipation. David Blight's

¹³ A lengthy list of American and French backers of the Statue project appears in "The Statue of Liberty: Preparing to Receive the Gift of the French Nation," NY Times, December 28, 1881, p. 5. See, for example, the papers of William Maxwell Evarts at the Library of Congress (National Union Catalogue Manuscript Collections (NUCMC) MS 60-125); Levi Parsons Morton at the NY Public Library (MS-76-1530); American Committee of the Statue of Liberty at the NY Public Library (MS 68-1022). Particularly interesting might be the papers of Samuel Henry Lockett (1826-91) at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (MS 78-2111). Lockett, a native of Marion, Alabama, was a former Confederate Army officer who supervised the building of Confederate defenses at Vicksburg and other Mississippi River sites, taught engineering at Louisiana State University and University of Tennessee, and wound up involved in construction work for the Statue of Liberty's pedestal. Lockett's NUCMC record states that the bulk of the collection is correspondence with his wife; what, if anything, did he say to her about the Statue's symbolism?

¹⁴ This question is explored in Rebecca M. Joseph, with Brooke Rosenblatt and Carolyn Kinnebrew, "The Black Statue of Liberty Rumor: An Inquiry into the History and Meaning of Bartholdi's Liberté éclairant le Monde," unpublished report prepared for Northeast Ethnography Program, Boston Support Office, National Park Service, September 2000.

¹⁵ Cleveland Gazette, November 27, 1886, p. . I quoted this source in full because it does not appear in Joseph or any other secondary source on African-Americans and the Statue of Liberty. This same newspaper carried extensive and favorable coverage of the dedication ceremonies of the previous month, and joined in the campaign to raise money for the pedestal. Joseph, "The Black Statue of Liberty Rumor," pp. 64-7.

Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory and Kirk Savage's Standing Soldiers and Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth Century America discuss not only the institutionalization and dissemination of the memory of emancipation in public monuments, but also the subsequent forgetting of those emancipation meanings at the turn of the twentieth century in the effort among white Americans to heal the divisions between North and South.¹⁶ The history of the political meanings of the Statue of Liberty seems to follow this pattern, with racial and sectional meanings likely present at the time of its dedication all but forgotten in the first years of the twentieth century.

By the 1920s a very different political meaning for the Statue, as a monument to American national unity amid ethnic diversity, came to overwhelm earlier ones. The third meaning for the Statue of Liberty, a meaning heavily promoted by the federal government, was forged in the national mobilization during World War I. The Statue became a focal point for campaigns to promote immigrant loyalty to the war effort, and was featured prominently in Liberty Bond drives and especially posters in which various immigrant groups demonstrated their loyalty to the Allied cause. Among the many secondary works on World War I mobilization in America, particularly useful to researchers are studies of the Committee of Public Information, headed by George Creel.¹⁷ Also useful is Cecilia O'Leary's To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism, which examines the rise of patriotic organizations in the era, with particular attention to veterans, women, and African-Americans.¹⁸

In 1924, the Statue of Liberty joined the system of national monuments administered by the War Department. Nine years later, responsibility for the Statue was transferred with other historic sites and monuments to the Department of the Interior, National Park Service. There are many histories of the national park system, but the two most useful for understanding the politics behind the dramatic growth in the number of patriotic shrines in the interwar years are Michael Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory and John Bodnar, Remaking America. Both consider the National Park Service network of

¹⁶ David Blight, Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 2001); Kirk Savage, Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth Century America (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1997); See also Paul A. Shackel, Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2003), and Mitch Kachun, Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African-American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915 (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2003). On the larger political context of Reconstruction and Redemption, see Eric Foner, Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-77 (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

¹⁷ See George Creel, How We Advertised America: The First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information That Carried The Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe (New York: Harper Brothers, 1920) and Steven Vaughan, Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

¹⁸ Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary, To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1999). See also the essays in Bonds of Affection: Americans Define Their Patriotism ed. By John Bodnar (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

historic sites and monuments as instruments through which the federal government continued to communicate the nationalistic ideology that it promoted during the war years.¹⁹

By virtue of its setting in New York harbor, the Statue of Liberty represented a particularly pluralistic kind of American nationalism, one tied to immigration and opportunity more than nativism and exclusion. During the 1930s and 1940s, this fourth meaning for the Statue, as a beacon for immigrants seeking economic opportunity and freedom from persecution, became stronger. The association with immigrants had been implicit from the Statue's inception, when Emma Lazarus wrote her poem, "The New Colossus," as part of the fundraising campaign for the pedestal. Rudolph Vecoli notes that several popular publications in the late nineteenth century associated the Statue in the harbor with welcoming immigrants.²⁰ But as John Higham demonstrates, this meaning really did not take off until after the passage of immigration restriction legislation in the mid-1920s. In the 1930s, images associating the Statue with immigration and opportunity became part of a campaign by journalist Louis Adamic to persuade teachers to acknowledge immigrant contributions to American history, as well as unsuccessful efforts to loosen immigration restriction laws so that Jews and other refugees fleeing Nazi Germany and elsewhere could enter the United States.²¹ Lending official confirmation to this meaning, in 1945 the National Park Service moved the plaque bearing Emma Lazarus' poem identifying the Statue as the "Mother of Exiles" from a second story landing in the pedestal to the Statue's main entrance. The association of the Statue with immigration grew throughout the postwar years with the proposal in the 1950s to create a national museum of immigration in the base of the Statue, which opened in 1972; President Lyndon Johnson's use of the Statue as a backdrop for signing a major change in immigration law in 1965, the same year that the immigration station at Ellis Island became part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument; and the celebration of the centennial of the Statue in 1986, when the committee in charge, chaired by Lee Iacocca, emphasized the immigrant economic opportunity meanings of the Statue to exclusion of all others.²²

¹⁹ Michael Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture (New York: Knopf, 1991); John Bodnar, Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1992). On the role of the federal government in making patriotic shrines, see the essays in Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape ed. by Paul A. Shackel (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

²⁰ Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Lady and the Huddled Masses: The Statue of Liberty as a Symbol of Immigration," in The Statue of Liberty Revisited ed. by Wilson S. Dillon and Neil G. Kotler (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), pp. 39-69. In the mid-1980s, Vecoli chaired the History Committee of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Commission.

²¹ John Higham, "Transformation of the Statue of Liberty" in Send These To Me: Jews and Other Immigrants in Urban America (New York: Atheneum, 1975), pp. 78-87.

²² The history of the immigration museum in Statue's base appears in Barbara Blumberg, Celebrating the Immigrant: An Administrative History of the Statue of Liberty National Monument, 1952-1982 (Boston: National Park Service North Atlantic Regional Office, 1985).

The Statue of Liberty's association with immigration coincided with the rise of immigration history within the historical profession. In interpreting this meaning to the public, the National Park Service can connect changing historiographical trends to the changing political contexts in which the larger American society viewed recent immigrants.²³ An emphasis on assimilation in the 1930s and 1940s gave way to a focus on distinctive ethnic identities by the 1970s, when the Museum of Immigration opened in the Statue's base. In the 1980s, as the nation celebrated the centennial of the Statue, historians debated how best to represent the historical experience of immigrants to America, a debate reflected in John Bodnar's charge that the entire Statue of Liberty centennial perpetuated a rags to riches myth to the exclusion of the true story of immigrant hardship and exploitation.²⁴

As in the 1910s, when the federal government advanced the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of national unity, the promotion of the Statue as a public monument to immigration and opportunity in the 1980s had reactionary political overtones. Various ethnic nationalist groups in the 1960s and 1970s had used the monument as a site for political protests, and there is a sense in which the immigrant loyalty to America meaning promoted by the federal government, while acknowledging ethnic diversity, helped to minimize these political and ideological differences.

To understand the Statue as a changing political symbol, the Park Service could conduct more in-depth research into the history of the various political movements and protests that have been performed there, from women's groups at its dedication in 1886 to take-overs by Vietnam veterans and other activists in the 1970s and 1980s. Barbara Blumberg summarizes these dramatic actions in her administrative history of Statue of Liberty National Monument. Since many of these movements and demonstrations occurred within living memory, they could be a focus of the Park's future documentary and oral history collecting projects.²⁵

Investigations of the political meanings of the Statue should include more extensive research in the graphic arts. The Statue of Liberty has figured prominently in politically inspired art, including many political cartoons in which the Statue image, representing "America" or "Freedom," has been used to call attention to the absence of freedom and

²³ On the historiography of American immigration, see John Bodnar, The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) and Roger Daniels, Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life (New York: Harper Collins, 1990).

²⁴ John Bodnar, "Symbols and Servants: Immigrant America and the Limits of Public History," Journal of American History 73 (June 1986): 137-51. Another critical appraisal of the centennial is F. Ross Holland, Idealists, Scoundrels, and the Lady: An Insiders' View of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Project (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

²⁵ For an early example of the political use of the Statue to contrast ideals of liberty with reality, see "A Protest from a Hebrew," NY Times, November 5, 1894, p. 8. On women's rights, see Alice Duer Miller, "An unauthorised interview between the Suffragists and the Statue of Liberty," in Women are People (1917) (Martinsville, IN: Helaine Victoria Press, 1977).

liberty for certain groups in the United States and around the world. A Soviet poster from 1963 in the collections of the Library of Congress juxtaposed the Statue of Liberty with an image of abuses suffered by African-Americans in the United States.²⁶

From its inception in France, the Statue of Liberty has been given meanings by people living outside the United States as well as by those residing within. Soon after the dedication in 1886, Hindu philosopher Babu Mohini Chatterjee declared that the Statue of Liberty reminded him of the Hindu idols of India.²⁷ Foreign visitors constitute a significant proportion of all visitors to the Statue, and it is important to research through guidebooks and memoirs how these visitors, past and present, might have understood the Statue. Unlike the U.S. flag, the Statue of Liberty has come to stand for more than one nation; in an era of global mass communication, more than ever it is a symbol to peoples around the world, representing abstract ideals of freedom and liberty, much as its creators in France predicted over a century ago.

This fifth meaning for the Statue, as a monument to liberty and freedom around the globe, has gained prominence in the past twenty years through widely circulated images such as the “Goddess of Democracy” erected by Chinese students at Tiananmen Square in 1989, the monument to fallen Vietnamese at Song My (My Lai) in Vietnam, and a photograph of refugees in Liberia impersonating the Statue in 2003.²⁸ It is also evident in the growing appeal of the Statue as an international tourist attraction. Between 1986-2001, visitation at the Statue doubled, with many visitors coming from overseas. To many of these visitors, the Statue represents not only freedom in America but also the idea of freedom in their home countries. But what particular political meanings have these overseas visitors attached to these general concepts?

In understanding the Statue as a global symbol of freedom, and the changing meaning of freedom around the world and over time, Eric Foner’s recent article “American Freedom in a Global Age” offers an especially useful context for future research. Foner observes that American ideas of freedom here and overseas were shaped in the nineteenth century by the presence of slavery, and in the twentieth century by the

²⁶ V. Koretskii, “Pozornoe kleimo amerikanskoi ‘demokrati’ (1963), in Library of Congress, Russian Posters, 1960-70. For more examples, see Taking Liberty With The Lady by Cartoonists Around the World (Nashville: Eagle Nest Publishing, 1986), and Roger A. Fischer, “Oddity, Icon, Challenge: The Statue of Liberty in American Cartoon Art, 1879-86,” Journal of American Culture 9 (Winter 1986): 63-81.

²⁷ “A Hindu Philosopher,” NY Times, November 23, 1886.

²⁸ See Tsao Hsingyuan and Fang Li Zhi, “Chinese Perspectives: A Beijing Chronicle and Chinese Views of Liberty, Democracy, and the Pursuit of Scientific Knowledge,” in The Statue of Liberty Revisited ed. By Wilson S. Dillon and Neil G. Kotler (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), pp. 101-14. See also Sauman Chu, “Cross-Cultural Comparison of the Perception of Symbols (China, US),” Ph.D., Minnesota, 1996. The picture of a refugee from Liberia wearing a headdress of palm leaves intended to resemble the Statue of Liberty appears in Richard W. Stevenson, “Powell Sees Decision Soon on Sending GIs to Liberia,” NY Times, July 11, 2003, A7.

presence of totalitarian regimes on the political right and left during World War II and the Cold War.²⁹

As in mid-century, when the Statue served as a symbol of American opposition to fascism and communism, Americans came to think more about the liberty and freedom meanings for the Statue in the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Center in September 2001. But this time the Statue of Liberty appeared not only as a symbol of the United States versus totalitarian regimes overseas, but also in the public debate over whether new government security measures threatened Americans' traditional freedoms at home. A political cartoon by Jeff Danziger in June 2002 depicted the Statue of Liberty imprisoned by Vice President Cheney as part of the Homeland Security Program.³⁰ Heightened security measures put in place since 2001 have dramatically changed the visitor experience at the Statue of Liberty, offering the National Park Service a unique interpretive opportunity. While visitors are waiting in line to go through security checkpoints, the National Park Service can offer interactive public programs and exhibits that invite them to consider the changing meaning of freedom versus security after 9/11. The challenging public programs would fit well with the National Park Service's new "Civic Engagement" initiative.³¹

The September 11 attack also brought into prominence a sixth political meaning for the Statue of Liberty as a public monument, that of the resilience of New York City, and by extension, of humanity, in the face of destruction. The Statue had been publicized as a New York City tourist attraction since the early twentieth century, and, like the Empire State building, its fate identified with that of the city. The Statue's survival as a visual reference point in contrast to the devastation across the harbor in lower Manhattan on September 11, and the particular role the Statue played as a temporary refuge in the evacuation on that day, may have added another layer of political meaning worth investigating. While there is not yet an extensive historiography of the September 11 attack, the Park Service's ongoing research program documenting contemporary visitors' beliefs and experiences might reveal new political meanings for the Statue.

The Statue of Liberty's place in American political culture comes from its status as a national monument owned by the federal government; its association with political ideals such as freedom, public order, emancipation, and national unity; and the efforts of various dissenting groups to link the Statue to their particular political causes. The prevailing meanings for the Statue reflected changes in American politics, whether the "forgetting" of the emancipation meanings for the Statue among whites in the era of Jim Crow and sectional reconciliation at the turn of the twentieth century, or the emphasis on national unity in the 1980s after the political protests of the 1960s and 1970s.

²⁹ Eric Foner, "American Freedom in a Global Age," *American Historical Review* 106 (February 2001): 1-16. Reprinted in Foner, *Who Owns History? Rethinking the Past in a Changing World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002). See also Foner's book, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: 1998).

³⁰ Jeff Danziger, "Safeguarding Our Freedoms," published by Tribune Media Services, June 24, 2002.

³¹ See *The National Park Service and Civic Engagement: Report of the Workshop Held December 6-8, 2001 in New York City* (Philadelphia: National Park Service Northeast Regional Office, 2002).

Part II: The Statue of Liberty in Popular Culture

The Statue of Liberty has occupied an important place in American popular culture as well as political culture over the past 120 years. Although popular culture is not without political content, for the purposes of this section of the essay popular culture refers to representations and meanings for the Statue of Liberty not explicitly associated with particular political ideals or group aspirations. Scholarship on the history of American popular culture can help the National Park Service to place four aspects of the Statue's history in context: 1) the Statue as a staple of advertising and commercial art; 2) the Statue as a figure in popular entertainment; 3) the Statue as a popular tourist attraction; and 4) the Statue as a favorite object of imitation in folk art, dramatic reenactments, and souvenirs. As in the earlier section identifying six political meanings for the Statue as public monument, these aspects of the Statue in popular culture have overlapped and coexisted over time, though also appeared more or less prominent in different historical eras.

From its beginning, the Statue of Liberty was featured in advertising and commercial art. Sculptor Auguste Bartholdi licensed the image for use in advertising in both Europe and the United States, and if this was not the first such instance of licensing it was an early one. While commercial art contained a variety of images, how many other art works in the nineteenth century, if any, were licensed with fees paid to the artists rather than purchased outright?³² Books by Michele Bogart, Jackson Lears, Peter Marzio, and Neil Harris that explore the use of art in advertising at the turn of the century could help the National Park Service to answer this and other questions, and place the Statue of Liberty as an advertising image in historical context.³³ Another useful work for thinking about the Statue's place in American popular culture is Lawrence Levine's Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America. Although the Statue was a product of the elite on both sides of the Atlantic, it also had a large popular following in the United States and was subject to parody. Levine's book could help the National Park Service to understand the shifting boundaries between educated taste and popular amusement in the late nineteenth century.³⁴ Finally, as Kathy Jo Evertz

³² A large collection of advertising images appears in Christian Blanchet and Bertrand Dard, Statue de la Liberté: Le Livre du Centenaire (Paris: Edition Comet's, 1984). Translated from the French by Bernard Weisberger and published by American Heritage Press in 1985.

³³ Michele Bogart, Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995); Jackson Lears, Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America (NY: Basic Books, 1994); Peter Marzio, The Democratic Art: Pictures for Nineteenth Century America, Chromolithography, 1840-90 (Boston: DR Godine, 1979). Neil Harris, Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

³⁴ Lawrence Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988).

shows, there is a long history of complaints over the commercialization of the Statue, dating back almost to its construction.³⁵

The Statue also has appeared in popular art, music, and film throughout the twentieth century. The Statue of Liberty National Monument has an extensive collection of these mass media products, many of which are mentioned in librarian Barry Moreno's Statue of Liberty Encyclopedia.³⁶ While in most instances the producers simply sought to associate their creation with a well-loved American icon, sometimes their use of the Statue had a political message as well. Singer Michael Jackson danced around the Statue to comment on the status of contemporary American race relations in his "Black or White" music video of 1992.³⁷ And the Statue's presence in the film Planet of the Apes signaled a devastated New York in the aftermath of nuclear war, and in the film Al a flooded city in the aftermath of global warming.

Once the Statue of Liberty was built, it slowly became a tourist attraction. Apparently no one planned for visitors to ascend the Statue, yet soon after its dedication in 1886 the public wound its way up stairs built originally for the workmen. Being on a fort in New York harbor limited public access to the Statue in its early years, and an infrastructure to accommodate tourists seems to have been slow to develop. In 1904, one tourist complained about the dilapidated condition of Bedloe's Island and the Statue: "The enclosure walls are being allowed to tumble, the grounds are unkempt, the wooden approaches rickety, the bronze tablets in the entrance hall disfigured. One soldier was on duty last Saturday, and as a side issue he sold souvenirs."³⁸ It would be useful to look more closely at the experience of soldiers stationed at Fort Wood on Bedloe's Island in the early years of the Statue's existence both for their own experiences and for what they might have said in their diaries and letters about tourism. Additional information on the tourist experience at the Statue might be found in memoirs of visitors to New York City and early tourist guidebooks.

To place the visitor experience at the Statue in historical context, besides general histories of tourism in America, such as John Sears Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century, there is growing historical literature focusing

³⁵ Kathy Jo Evertz, "Selling the Lady: Commercialization and the 1986 Statue of Liberty Centennial" (PhD, University of Minnesota, 1992); see also Evertz, "The 1986 Statue of Liberty Centennial: 'Commercialization' and Reaganism," Journal of Popular Culture 29 (Winter 1995): 203-34.

³⁶ Moreno, The Statue of Liberty Encyclopedia, p. 169. For a general overview of American popular culture in the first half of the twentieth century, see Russell Lynes, The Lively Audience: A Social History of the Visual and Performing Arts in America, 1890-1950 (New York: Harper and Row, 1985) and A Handbook of American Popular Culture ed. By M. Thomas Inge 2nd Edition. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

³⁷ The performance appears on the videocassette Michael Jackson: Dangerous: The Short Films (Epic, 19V 49164, 1993). The politics of Jackson's performance is analyzed in Eric Lott, "The Aesthetic Ante: Pleasure, Pop Culture, and the Middle Passage," Callaloo 17 (Spring 1994): 545-555.

³⁸ "Liberty Statue Neglected," NY Times, September 3, 1904, p. 6.

specifically on urban tourism. Catherine Cocks, Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850-1915 looks at the tourist experience in New York City at the turn of the century alongside that of San Francisco and Chicago.³⁹

Finally, the Statue of Liberty holds a prominent place in American, and global, popular culture as an object of imitation. It is often reproduced in folk art. The museum collections at the Statue of Liberty National Monument include many examples of this, including quilts and replica Statues made from commonplace materials such as Lego blocks or popsicle sticks. What is the appeal of making by hand an object that has endlessly been mass-produced? Folklorists such as Michael Owen Jones have studied this phenomenon of handicraft, while general treatments of the place of folk arts and crafts in American life appear in essays written for the catalogue of an exhibition at the National Heritage Museum in 1988. In the introduction, curator Jane Becker observes that since the early twentieth century folk arts and crafts have flourished as an alternative to, and in some cases a protest against, modern industrial mass production.⁴⁰

The Statue has also been imitated through impersonation in pageants and reenactments. Images of various individuals impersonating the Statue of Liberty appear in Rudolph Vecoli's essay on immigration and the Blanchet and Dard centennial commemorative volume, as well as in David Glassberg's American Historical Pageantry, which offers a context for considering the particular appeal of pageants and reenactments in the early twentieth century.⁴¹

Imitations of the Statue of Liberty have also entered popular culture through mass produced souvenirs and reproductions. Models of the Statue were sold to raise money for the pedestal in 1885, and by 1891 souvenir miniature spoons featuring the Statue were readily available.⁴² There is a growing secondary literature on the phenomenon of

³⁹ John Sears, Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century (NY: Oxford U. Press, 1989); Catherine Cocks, Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850-1915 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). Neil Harris, "Urban Tourism and the Commercial City," in Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World ed. William R. Taylor (New York: Russell Sage, 1991), pp. 66-82.

⁴⁰ Samuel G. Freedman describes a Statue of Liberty image appearing on hand-woven silk rug from Armenia in 1890. Freedman, "Liberty at 100: Symbolism is Ever Fresh," NY Times (date, 1986), p. A1. On folklore in general see Folk Roots, New Roots: Folklore in American Life ed. Jane S. Becker and Barbara Franco (Lexington, MA : Museum of Our National Heritage, 1988). Michael Owen Jones, The Hand-made Object and its Maker (Berkeley: University of California, 1975).

⁴¹ Vecoli, ""The Lady and the Huddled Masses," Blanchet and Dard, Statue de la Liberté; David Glassberg, American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1990).

⁴² "Souvenirs of the Statue," NY Times, June 5, 1885, p. 5; "More Souvenir Spoons," NY Times, July 20, 1891, p.2. Researchers could trace the appearance of new Statue of Liberty souvenirs by examining the regular "In the Shops" columns in local newspapers. "In the Shops," NY Times, February 10, 1903, p. 9; June 30, 1903, p. 7 both list new Statue of Liberty souvenirs on sale.

souvenirs and collecting that the National Park Service can consult to put this worldwide collecting behavior in historical context.⁴³

Addendum: The Statue and Liberty Island

With visitation to the Statue of Liberty almost doubling between 1986 and 2001, the National Park Service has sought to provide visitors to Liberty Island with more varied experiences than simply getting off the boat and climbing up the Statue. This need became even more acute after September 11, 2001, when the experience of climbing up the Statue was no longer available to the public. Among the additional interpretive opportunities that might be developed on the Island are the history of Fort Wood and the defense of New York harbor; the Native American presence on the Island; and various aspects of the Island's natural history, especially the ecology of the harbor and the history of the oyster industry. It is beyond the scope of this essay to address the particular historiographies that would support these research and interpretive initiatives, but they should be pursued along with the research and interpretive themes mentioned above that focus specifically on the Statue.

⁴³ Among the works that could help place the collecting of Statue of Liberty souvenirs and replicas in context are Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); M. Csikszentmihalyi & E. Rochberg-Halton, "What Things are For," and "The Most Cherished Objects in the Home," in The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self (NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 20-89; J. Baudrillard, "The Systems of Collecting" and J. Windsor, "Identity Parades," in The Cultures of Collecting ed. by J. Elsner & R. Cardinal (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 7-24, 49-67; B. Danet & T. Katriel, "No Two Alike: Play and Aesthetics in Collecting," R. Belk & M. Wallendorf, "Of Mice and Men: Gender and Identity in Collecting," and R. Belk, "Collectors and Collecting," in Interpreting Objects and Collections ed. by Susan M. Pearce (NY: Routledge, 1994), pp. 220-53, 317-26.

