
White Freedom and the Lady of Liberty

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According to a persistent rumor among African Americans, the sculpture that rises grandly from Liberty Island in New York Harbor is not the original Statue of Liberty. The true original was modeled after a black woman and had African features. In addition, the point of the statue was not to honor immigrants but rather the abolition of slavery in America by the Civil War, in particular the service of black Union soldiers. The statue carried broken chains to symbolize emancipation. Furthermore, the legend goes, the current white statue was substituted for the original when American politicians objected to portraying Liberty as a black woman. Some have even argued that the original black statue still exists, either in France or hidden somewhere in the catacombs of New York.¹

No evidence exists to verify this legend, but its mere existence underscores the racialized nature of America's most famous monument. Of all memorials to freedom throughout the world, none is more important or widely known than the Statue of Liberty. Towering majestically over the entrance to New York Harbor since 1886, the great statue has become, more than any other monument or physical site, the symbol of both human freedom and American national identity. Originally a gift from France to the United States, it also represents the historical ties between the two great republics and the significance of liberty as a global phenomenon. Endlessly reproduced as a tourist object, commercial symbol, and political icon, the Statue of Liberty is one of the great monuments of the modern world.²

Today I consider a little-explored aspect of the Statue of Liberty's history, its role as a symbol

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1. Rebecca M. Joseph, "The Black Statue of Liberty Rumor: An Inquiry into the History and Meaning of Bartholdi's *Liberté éclairant le Monde*," National Park Service, 2000; David Glassberg, "Rethinking the Statue of Liberty: Old Meanings, New Contexts," National Park Service, 2003; "Making the Case for the African-American Origins of the Statue of Liberty," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, Spring 2000.
 2. On the history of the Statue of Liberty see in particular Marvin Trachtenberg, *The Statue of Liberty* (New York: Penguin, 1986); Edward Berenson, *The Statue of Liberty: A Transatlantic Story* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012); Yasmin Sabina Khan, *Enlightening the World: The Creation of the Statue of Liberty* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010); Wilton S. Dillon and Neil G. Kotler, eds., *The Statue of Liberty Revisited* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2010); John Bodnar, Laura Burt, Jennifer Stinson, and Barbara Truesdell, "The Changing Face of the Statue of Liberty," unpublished paper, National Park Service, Indiana University Center for the Study of History and Memory, 2005.

of whiteness, and more particularly of the whiteness of freedom. In general, I contend that race and racism are not just central aspects of Western society, but that they have shaped and permeated the very idea of freedom as we understand it. Moreover, freedom has been closely entangled with ideas of whiteness and white racial identity in modern history, so that to be free has often meant to be white, and vice versa. The Statue of Liberty symbolizes this perfectly: most obviously the statue's European physical features, but also the lack (indeed, as we shall see, the suppression) of any markers identifying it with rebel or freed slaves give it a strong sense of racial identity. Moreover, the symbolic role played by the Statue of Liberty in allowing European immigrants to the US to claim white status underscores its racial character, as does its complicated but largely exclusionary or at best irrelevant relationship to African Americans and other peoples of color. In particular, the Statue of Liberty embodies both racial difference as well as an unparalleled representation of human liberation. It is thus the perfect symbol of white freedom.³

A Domesticated Vision of Republican Freedom in France

Conceived by French scholar and activist Edouard De Laboulaye and wrought by French sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, the Statue of Liberty represents not only the admiration of the people of France for America but equally illustrates the changing nature of liberty, including its racial dimensions, in French history. The idea of France as a land of freedom has been central to modern French identity, summarized by the famous slogan of the French Revolution, *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, in which liberty takes pride of place.⁴

In particular, the ideal of freedom has taken the political form of republicanism, emphasizing popular sovereignty and the rejection of aristocratic rule. Emerging out of the cauldron of the French Revolution, republicanism espoused a new vision of France, and indeed of all humanity, centered around individual liberty and political democracy. By the beginnings of the twentieth century republican ideology dominated French political culture, and continues to do so to this day.⁵ The creation of republican hegemony took decades, however, involving a series of tumultuous political struggles throughout the nineteenth century. The Statue of Liberty was conceived and constructed during this era of republican apprenticeship in France, eventually symbolizing not just freedom in America but also the triumph of the republican ideal in the land of Liberty's birth.

3. Sieglinde Lemke, "Liberty: A Transnational Icon," in Winfried Flock, *et. al.*, *Reframing the Transnational Turn in American Studies* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2011). Berenson; Joseph Klaitz and Michael H. Haltzel, eds., *Liberty/Liberté: The American and French Experiences* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

4. One important aspect of this, dating back to the medieval era, was the freedom principle, according to which all slaves brought onto French soil should become free. See Sue Peabody, *'There Are No Slaves in France: The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Regime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

5. Patrice Higonnet, *Sister Republics: The Origins of French and American Republicanism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic: Five Studies in Nineteenth Century French Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Edward Berenson, *et. al.* *The French Republic: History, Values, Debates* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011); Emile Chabal, *A Divided Republic: Nation, State, and Citizenship in Contemporary France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Throughout the 19th century republicanism in France struggled with its revolutionary heritage. French political history in the 1800s seems like a crazy quilt of republics, dictatorships, and empires, constantly interrupted by revolutionary upheavals: rebels overthrew the national government in 1830, 1848, and 1870.⁶ At the base of the turmoil, however, was the core tension between republicanism and liberalism, between the emphasis on democracy and the stress on individual freedom. Not for nothing did the liberal prime minister of the July Monarchy, François Guizot, scornfully dismiss those campaigning for universal suffrage by saying that if they wanted to vote they should get rich.⁷ How could the radical vision of democracy championed by the Jacobin republic and the *sans-culottes* of the French Revolution coexist with property rights, the rule of law, and civil liberties?⁸

The contrast between these two visions of republicanism formed part of the broader struggle throughout Europe and beyond to reconcile popular sovereignty and private property, one that would ultimately create the powerful compromise we know as liberal democracy. In order for republicanism to win the allegiance of the affluent bourgeoisie in particular and the majority of the French population in general, it ultimately had to shed its revolutionary trappings and come to terms with the nation's established order. The ideal of "the social republic", a republicanism that emphasized social equality and justice, had to be suppressed, by force of arms if necessary.⁹ Not until the creation of the Third Republic in 1870 did French republicanism succeed in making this key ideological shift, and not until the republicans' victory in the Dreyfus Affair at the end of the century did republicanism become the uncontested dominant political ideology and culture in France.

The idea of the Statue of Liberty took shape in this France wracked by empire, republicanism, and revolution. The life and politics of Edouard de Laboulaye, the man who more than any other conceived of the idea, illustrates the ways in which the political turbulence of mid-nineteenth century France shaped the statue that would come to dominate New York harbor. Laboulaye was born in 1811, at the end of Napoleon's First empire, and spent his childhood and youth under the Restoration, the July Monarchy, and the Second Republic. An ardent republican whose hero was the Marquis de Lafayette, Laboulaye was in his early forties when Louis Napoleon smashed the French republic, replacing it with the Second Empire.¹⁰

Bitterly disappointed by this new turn to despotism in France, Laboulaye focused on the United

6. Jardin and Andre-Jean Tudesq, *Restoration and Reaction, 1815-1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Maurice Agulhon, *The Republican Experiment, 1848-1852* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

7. Sarah C. Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 148.

8. William H. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

9. Michel Borgetto and Robert Lafore, *La république sociale: contribution à l'étude de la question démocratique en France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000); Tyler Stovall, "The Myth of the Liberatory Republic and the Political Culture of Freedom in Imperial France," *Yale French Studies*, #111 (2007).

10. On the life of Laboulaye, see Walter D. Gray, *Interpreting American Democracy in France: The Career of Édouard Laboulaye, 1811-1883* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994).

States as a successful example of republican government and popular sovereignty. A professor of law at Paris' prestigious Collège de France, he became one of the nation's first and most prominent specialists in the study of the United States. Like a fellow Frenchman who he greatly admired, Alexis de Tocqueville, Laboulaye saw in the United States a successful example of moderate and stable republicanism that could serve as a model for France and the rest of Europe.

The 1865 triumph of the North in the American civil war was followed five years later by the collapse of the Second Empire in France and the advent of the Third Republic. The defeat of the Confederacy removed Laboulaye's one major criticism of the United States, slavery. Like many French liberals a strong abolitionist, Laboulaye had struggled to understand how a regime as noble as the American republic could tolerate such an abomination against human rights. During one of his celebrated lectures at the Collège de France, Laboulaye commented "Why is it that this friendship [between France and America] has cooled? Why is it that the name of American is not so dear to us as it was in those days? It is due to slavery."¹¹ For Laboulaye, the civil war and the emancipation of America's slaves reaffirmed his faith in that nation's republican vision. The overthrow of the Second Empire brought the end of a regime that had antagonized the United States and made France once again a republic. As a result, Laboulaye ardently hoped for an alliance of the two great sister republics, one that would bring liberty and enlightenment to all the peoples of the world.¹²

By the beginning of the 1870s Laboulaye had developed the idea of a giant statue symbolizing liberty that France would give to the United States in honor of the centennial of the American Revolution.¹³ At the end of the 1860s he met Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, an ambitious young French sculptor devoted to monumental public art who would make his vision a reality. Bartholdi had long been interested in larger-than-life sculptures, influenced by classical works like the Colossus of Rhodes and the great statues of Thebes in Egypt. In the late 1860s he had designed a great statue, "Egypt Bringing Light to Asia" for the Egyptian viceroy, Ismail Pasha, to stand at the entrance to the new Suez canal. The project never came to fruition, but in many ways it represented a first exploration of the themes that would culminate with the Statue of Liberty. Most important, the image of a female colossus symbolizing liberty and progress inspired Bartholdi's creation of the American statue.¹⁴

Why would one give the ideal of liberty a female form? There is a long history of female

11. Édouard Laboulaye, *Paris in America*, translated by Mary L. Booth (New York: Charles Scribner, 1863), Translator's Preface, v.

12. Lawrence C. Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery: The Movement for the Abolition of Slavery in France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Françoise Vergès, "The Slave Trade, Slavery, and Abolitionism: The Unfinished Debate in France," in W. Mulligan and M. Bric, eds., *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); John Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

13. Historians have long contended that Laboulaye and Bartholdi first conceived of the Statue of Liberty at an 1865 dinner party in Laboulaye's home. This idea has since been refuted. Joseph, *op. cit.*

14. Khan, *op. cit.*, 53; Berenson, *op. cit.*, 16-23.

representations of nations and political ideas, one which, as many feminists have trenchantly noted, has often coincided with the political exclusion and suppression of women in real life.¹⁵ The ancient Romans celebrated the goddess *Libertas*, and during the early modern era in Europe the idea of freedom as a woman challenged the masculine authority of kings. The French Revolution gave birth to the idea of Marianne as the great symbol of the Republic, and throughout the modern era she has represented both republicanism and the nation of France in general.¹⁶ No painting of modern liberty is better known, or more powerful, than Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*. Created in the year that the 1830 Revolution overthrew the Restoration monarchy, Delacroix's great work portrays Liberty as a powerful woman, armed and bare-breasted, leading the insurgents of Paris in the fight for freedom.¹⁷

Marianne is the direct ancestor of the Statue of Liberty, but the American monument incorporated some very important changes, symbolizing a different vision of freedom. Most notably, the classic image of Marianne united republicanism and revolution, emphasizing the overthrow of oppression. Key to this vision was the presence on so many Mariannes of the Phrygian cap, the ancient Roman symbol of the freed slave. Throughout the modern era in Europe, as the *Marseillaise* itself demonstrates, the struggle against monarchism and capitalism often adopted the metaphor of the slave uprising.¹⁸ Marianne thus represented not just resistance to oppression but more specifically freedom as the end of slavery. As in Delacroix's painting, many Mariannes also bore weapons, emphasizing that the fight for liberty was a violent struggle. Finally, Marianne often bore a torch of some sort, symbolizing both illumination and also the fires of revolution.

One of the most dramatic (and for its opponents, horrific) images of the Commune was the *pétroleuse*, or female incendiary; persistent rumors suggested that working class Parisian women would fill empty bottles with gasoline and use these homemade bombs to attack the forces of order and set fires throughout the city.¹⁹ The *pétroleuse* was Delacroix's *Liberty* come to life, a revolutionary woman holding a flame in her hand. She symbolized everything bad about republicanism, and the French troops that suppressed the Commune summarily executed women

15. Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of Female Form* (New York: Atheneum, 1985); Barbara A. Babcock and John J. Macaloon, "Everybody's Gal: Women, Boundaries, and Monuments," in Dillon and Kotler, *op. cit.*

16. See Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle: Republican imagery and symbolism in France, 1789-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

17. Gilles Néret, *Eugène Delacroix, 1798-1863: the prince of Romanticism* (Köln: Taschen, 1999).

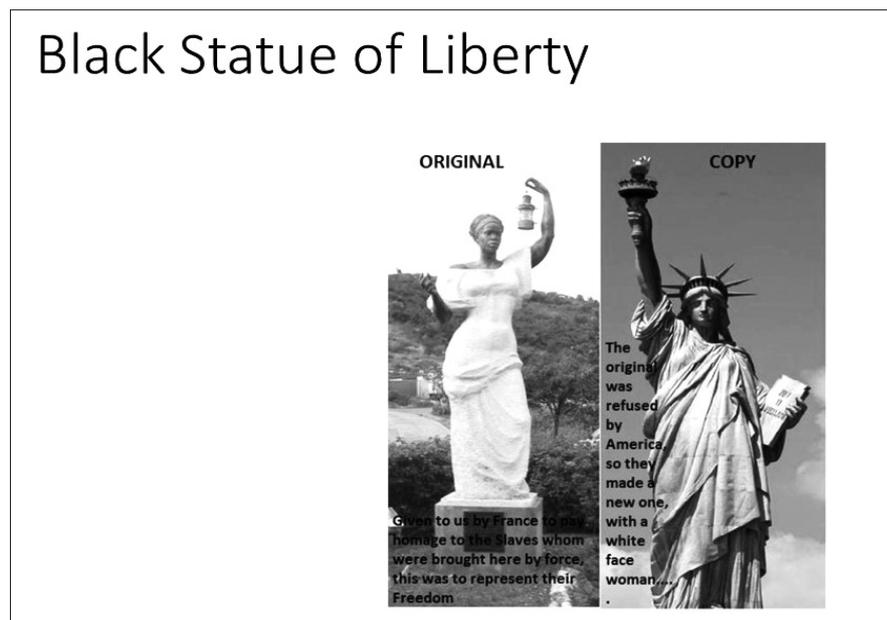
18. For example, the little-known second verse of *The Marseillaise* runs thus:

“What do they want this horde of slaves
Of traitors and conspiratorial kings?
For whom these vile chains
These long-prepared irons?
Frenchmen, for us, ah! What outrage
What methods must be taken?
It is us they dare plan
To return to the old slavery!

19. The *pétroleuses* were in fact a myth, no convincing evidence of their existence ever came to light.

throughout the city suspected of being *pétroleuses*.²⁰

The new Third Republic sought to craft a more peaceful, less revolutionary image of Marianne after 1870; like the Second Empire before it, it sought to ban the Phrygian cap as part of this symbol.²¹ More important for the purposes of this study, the turmoil of the 1870 revolution and the Paris Commune reinforced the belief of Laboulaye and Bartholdi in moderate republicanism and the need to represent it in a monumental symbol. For them, the French civil war underscored the dangers of the revolutionary republic, which must be suppressed symbolically as well as in actual combat. Their vision of the Statue of Liberty consequently emphasized freedom's moderate virtue. The statue is fully clothed, both majestic and modest, unlike the radical harridans of Paris. It also does not bear a Phrygian cap: as we shall see, the suppression of any links with anti-slavery also had an important American dimension, but in the French context it represented the rejection of freedom as insurrection, so violently embodied by the Paris Commune. In addition, the Statue of Liberty's torch is carefully contained, a light and not a fire, or as Laboulaye put it, "a torch and not a flame", to illuminate, not destroy.²² The French vision of the Statue of Liberty thus represented a domesticated version of the *pétroleuse*, weaponless and shorn of all revolutionary intent.²³ [FIGURE 1]



The evolution of the image of Marianne, and the contest between moderate and radical visions of republicanism, formed part of the struggles around social class that so profoundly shaped life

20. Carolyn Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades: Women in the Paris Commune* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Gay L. Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Edith Thomas, *The Women Incendiaries: The Inspiring Story of the Women of the Paris Commune* (Chicago: Haymarket Publishers, 2007).

21. Agulhon, *Marianne*, *op. cit.*, 158-159.

22. "She is not liberty with a red cap on her head and a pike in her hand, stepping over corpses," Laboulaye, cited in Don H. Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 311.

23. See Maurice Agulhon, "Bartholdi's *Liberty* in the French Political Context," in Klaitis and Haltzel, *op. cit.*

and politics in nineteenth century France. The moderate republic was to an important degree a bourgeois republic, whereas the ideal of the social republic often symbolized by Marianne wearing a red Phrygian cap played an important role in working class politics and culture. French officials after 1870 struggled against popular and working-class desires for a Marianne with a Phrygian cap on the official buildings of the republic.²⁴

At the same time, such conflicts based in social class and class ideologies had an important racial dimension. Differences of race and class have often interacted in modern history, so that working-class Europeans have frequently been racialized as Other.²⁵ During the nineteenth century many leftists portrayed workers as slaves, and their struggles as a kind of slave uprising; Karl Marx himself called the Paris Commune a revolt against “the would-be slaveholders of France!” and compared it to the American Civil War.²⁶ Others considered the Communards savages, viewing them and Parisian workers in general as unfit for civilization and liberty. For Count Arthur de Gobineau, France’s most prominent racial theorist, the Commune and French workers in general represented racial degeneration and debasement analogous to blacks and other peoples of color.²⁷

Perhaps most important, the triumph of bourgeois republicanism in France coincided with imperial expansion overseas. It is one of the ironies of French history that the regime which overthrew the Second Empire would foster the nation’s greatest period of imperial expansion. The Third Republic created a massive new empire, expanding and consolidating colonies in Africa, Indochina, and the Pacific, and it did so in the name of republicanism. It presented the strange contradiction of a republican empire without an emperor. The essence of this contradiction was of course racial difference, so that republican France became an empire of black and brown natives ruled over by white citizens²⁸

The great statue France bequeathed to the United States in 1886 was therefore far more than a straightforward symbol of liberty. It represented the changing view of republicanism, and freedom in general, in France during the 19th century. In particular, it underscored the triumph of a new view of freedom, one which increasingly rejected the concept’s more radical history in favor of the rule of law and respect for the rights of property. This bourgeois vision of liberty also had a significant racial component, especially noteworthy because the Third Republic would not only emphasize conservative republicanism but also go on to create the greatest overseas empire in French history,

24. Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne, op. cit.*

25. See Catherine Hall, *et. al., Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, and Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

26. Cited in Katz, *op. cit.*, 98.

27. Michael D. Biddis, *Father of Racist Ideology: the Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970); George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: a History of European Racism* (New York: H. Fertig, 1978).

28. On race and colonialism in France, see among many studies Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: the Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

When Liberty came to America's shores, this racial dimension already prefigured in France would become more important than ever.

Republicanism and Race in the United States

The America that welcomed the Statue of Liberty stood poised on the edge of global prominence, while at the same time haunted by the shadows of the recent Civil War. To an even greater extent than in the case of France, the political life of the United States centered around republicanism: the birth of the American nation constituted a definitive break with monarchy, and the United States had always been a republic. As in France, however, there were different visions of republicanism in America. America also faced a choice between more and less inclusive visions of the republic, radical versus conservative republicanism. In America the key issue dividing republicans (which is to say political thinkers in general) was slavery, and behind it, racial difference.²⁹

Unlike France, the United States began not just as a republic but as a slave republic, and the intimate entanglement of freedom and race lay at the heart of the American experience from the beginning. The 1790 Alien Naturalization Act limited citizenship to whites, a legal tradition reinforced by the Dred Scott decision of 1857 which held that even free blacks could not be US citizens. The conflict over slavery led directly to the Civil War, the greatest military conflict in American history which cost the lives of 600,000 Americans, more than any other war before or since. The importance of the war to American history cannot be overstated: in a sense the true American Revolution, the Civil War made the United States one nation, and set the stage for the unprecedented economic growth of the late nineteenth century and the world dominance of the twentieth.³⁰ Most notably for our purposes, in abolishing slavery and making the freed slaves American citizens, the victory of the Union spelled the end of the white republic.³¹

Or did it? The Republican Party had been founded in 1854 as a political movement opposed to slavery, yet as became clear such opposition could take different forms. For many, including the first Republican president Abraham Lincoln, opposition to slavery meant hostility to the presence of blacks, slave or free, on American soil. The republic must reject slavery, but the best way to do so was to get rid of the slaves themselves.³² Lincoln and many other Republicans had only come to support the abolition of slavery reluctantly, and the Emancipation Proclamation provoked furious

29. Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Scott J. Kester, *The Haunted Philosopher: James Madison, Republicanism, and Slavery* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2008)

30. For a general history of the Civil War see Allen C. Guelzo, *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

31. On nineteenth century black struggles for equality and citizenship, see Stephen Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom: Fighting for Black Citizenship in a White Republic, 1829-1889* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

32. One result of this attitude was the practice of freeing slaves by settling them in Africa. See Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008); Claude Andrew Clegg, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

hostility throughout the North during the war.³³ By 1865 the Republicans were clearly divided not only as to how to rebuild a bitterly divided nation, but more generally about the shape of the American republic in the future. Moderate and conservative Republicans, like Lincoln's successor Andrew Johnson, wanted not only to reconcile with the defeated South but also to prevent social or political equality for African Americans. In contrast, the Radical Republicans insisted on a thoroughgoing political overhaul of the South, one that would give the freedmen full status as American citizens based on the principle that all Americans were equal regardless of race.³⁴

The conflict between these two perspectives haunted the Reconstruction era, and ultimately brought it to its end. During the decade after the end of the Civil War the Radical Republicans controlled the US Congress, using that control to pass sweeping legislation (including the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the US Constitution) that sought to empower the former slaves as equal citizens of the republic. Most important, they deployed Federal troops throughout the former Confederacy to ensure the freedmen's right to vote, so that during Reconstruction black legislators often controlled the state governments of the South. These efforts were fought tooth and nail not only by white Southerners and the Democratic Party which represented them, but also by Andrew Johnson and other moderate Republicans. Resistance to Reconstruction frequently turned violent, especially after a group of ex-Confederate soldiers founded the Ku Klux Klan in 1866, unleashing a wave of white terror against black and white Republicans throughout the South. In 1873 white vigilantes massacred some 150 blacks in Colfax, Louisiana. Two years later similar terrorists killed hundreds of black men in Mississippi as the Democrats retook control of the state by force.³⁵

1877, the year that saw the triumph of the moderate Republic in France, also witnessed the end of the radical Republican Reconstruction in the United States. In 1876 the moderate Republican Rutherford B. Hayes won a very closely contested presidential election, partly on his promise to stop meddling in the affairs of the South. He won southern Democratic support by agreeing to withdraw Federal troops from the region, a promise he kept in 1877. With their departure, little prevented white Democrats and the racist terrorists who supported them from ending Reconstruction and the promise of an egalitarian Republic. Blacks continued to exercise their right to vote for a while, but starting in the 1890s southern state legislatures passed new constitutions using the poll tax and other means to effectively disenfranchise them. By the first decade of the

33. Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010)

34. Hans L. Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans: Lincoln's Vanguard for Racial Justice* (New York: Knopf, 1968); Philip B. Lyons, *Statesmanship and Reconstruction: Moderate vs. Radical Republicans on Restoring the Union after the Civil War* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2014); Deborah Beckel, *Radical Reform: Interracial Politics in Post-Emancipation North Carolina* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

35. On the history of Reconstruction see Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction* (New York: Harper, 2015); A. J. Langguth, *After Lincoln: How the North Won the Civil War and Lost the Peace* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015); Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); David Roediger, *Seizing Freedom: Slave Emancipation and Liberty for All* (London: Verso, 2015); Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

twentieth century white supremacy had destroyed Reconstruction and the dream of an inclusive republic.³⁶

The end of Reconstruction was perhaps the most obvious example of the increasingly racialized nature of American republicanism in the late nineteenth century. In 1882, little more than a decade after laborers from China had helped build the nation's first transcontinental railroad, America passed the first of several Chinese Exclusion Acts, making it a crime for workers to immigrate to the United States from China.³⁷ The decades after the Civil War also witnessed the final stages of the American wars against Native Americans in the Great Plains, culminating with the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890.³⁸ The Civil War and Reconstruction had brought the hope that republicanism in America could embrace all peoples, but by the dawn of the twentieth century it was clear that America would remain a racialized white republic for the foreseeable future. Racial difference no longer existed as a function of slavery, but now assumed center stage in American political and social life. As a result, by the turn of the twentieth century liberty in America was to an important extent for whites only.³⁹

The nation that welcomed the Statue of Liberty in 1886 was thus one that had embraced its own version of conservative republicanism, one even more than in France grounded in racial difference. The image of a Marianne shorn of references to insurgent politics found a ready audience in America. Correspondingly, while Laboulaye and Bartholdi personally supported the abolitionist cause, they designed the statue not to irritate what had become increasingly a sore subject in the United States. By the 1880s the Confederate narrative of the Civil War and Reconstruction, viewing them as an unfortunate mistake at best, a crime against civilization at worst, had gained traction throughout the country and remains influential to this day.⁴⁰

During his tour of the US to explore support for the statue, the new political context became clear to Bartholdi and influenced his design of his magnum opus. He had originally planned to have the statue hold broken chains in her hand as a symbol of slave emancipation, but replaced them with a book of law. The Statue of Liberty does in fact include broken chains at her feet, but they are effectively hidden both by her robe and by the pedestal on which she stands. Like the Phrygian cap, therefore, the effective absence of the broken chains distanced the statue not only from slave emancipation but from radical Republicanism in general.⁴¹

36. C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

37. Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

38. Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Bantam, 1972); Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon, 2015).

39. Roediger, *op. cit.*; Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (London: Verso, 1991).

40. David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Belknap Press, 2002).

41. Khan, *op. cit.*, 104-109.

Political dynamics in both France and the United States thus served to distance the Statue of Liberty from republican egalitarianism, and in doing so gave it an important racial meaning. The resplendent white lady standing above New York harbor turned her back on the racialized working masses of Europe and the increasingly marginalized blacks and other peoples of color in America. When Americans celebrated the inauguration of the Statue of Liberty in 1886 they celebrated a racialized vision of liberty; the original statue may not have been black, but the one they embraced was certainly white. Right from the beginning of its history in America, therefore, the Statue of Liberty was a powerful representation of white freedom.

White Woman on a Pedestal

As is well known, the United States met France's gift of the Statue of Liberty by funding and building a giant pedestal upon which to place it. Funded by a popular subscription launched by American newspaper magnate Joseph Pulitzer, the massive pedestal and base rise 154 feet from the soil of Liberty Island, slightly taller than the statue itself. The lady of liberty thus stands high above New York harbor, lifting her torch to a height of over 300 feet and to this day dominating the maritime approach to America's largest city.⁴²

This image of the woman on a pedestal corresponds to increasingly conservative images of gender and womanhood during the nineteenth century, in America and throughout the world. We have already seen how the design of the Statue of Liberty represented a more conservative vision of Marianne, illustrating the shift in republicanism in both the United States and France. This shift corresponded to a broader transformation of the image and reality of women's lives during the nineteenth century, one historians have characterized as the rise of domesticity. Briefly stated, with the spread of industrial society and bourgeois culture middle class women found themselves removed from the world of paid labor and increasingly relegated to the home. While this new idea of femininity certainly did not reflect the lives of working class women, the bourgeois standard of female behavior and status increasingly characterized what it meant to be a woman in the modern age.⁴³

The image of the woman on a pedestal closely corresponded to the new model of domesticity. It was the image of a woman prized and cherished, even venerated, but also controlled and fixed firmly in place. Many feminists thus saw in this image an attempt to masquerade the oppression of women in a gentle guise, praising them as symbols instead of recognizing them as human beings.⁴⁴

42. *Ibid.*, 147-176; Berenson, *op. cit.*, 69-89.

43. Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida City, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1831* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

44. As Gloria Steinem famously quipped, "A pedestal is as much a prison as any small, confined space." "Gloria Steinem Tells Health Experts: Reproductive Freedom Called Most Basic Liberty, Kathy Duncan, *York Daily Record*, April 12, 1977.

They thus rejected arguments of men like Senator George Vest of Missouri, who in 1887 declared on the floor of the Senate that:

“It is said that suffrage is to be given to enlarge the sphere of women’s influence. Mr. President, it would destroy her influence. It would take her down from that pedestal where she is today, influencing as a mother the minds of her offspring, influencing by her gentle and kindly caress the action of her husband toward the good and pure.”⁴⁵

Scholars have commented on the ambivalent appearance and symbolism of the Statue of Liberty. Perhaps most famously, historian Marvin Trachtenberg observed that not only did it represent a powerful, monumental image of woman, a “great lady,” but that at the same time “for a fee she is open to all for entry and exploration...”⁴⁶ This incongruity corresponded more generally to new bourgeois ideas of femininity which rendered the ideal woman sexless and subservient, while at the same time struggled to repress sexual desire. Freud’s madonna-whore complex, a powerful representation of this ambivalence about women, thus found expression in the great statue dominating New York harbor after 1886.⁴⁷

As many feminist historians have noted, these new ideals of domesticity often intersected with and were mutual reinforced by the new racial hierarchies and racism. In both Europe and America, the proper lady was a white woman who not only kept her distance from subaltern classes and races, but whose presence could also foster the hegemony of white bourgeois civilization. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries European colonial regimes began promoting the emigration of white women to their empires as wives and mothers. They would not only prevent the need for interracial liaisons between European men and native women, but also domesticate colonial society by centering it around white family life. Creating white domestic life meant, among other things, segregated white neighborhoods and social spaces in colonial cities. Imperial life thus placed the European woman on a pedestal, coming in contact with the natives below only as a benevolent but distant mistress.⁴⁸

In the United States as well the presence of the white woman stood for bourgeois domesticity and freedom. Very similar to the European colonies, white pioneer women in the American

45. Cited in Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *et. al.*, *History of Women’s Suffrage...1883-1900* (1902), p 107.

46. Marvin Trachtenberg, 196.

47. Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995).

48. Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Margaret MacMillan, *Women of the Raj: The Mothers, Wives, and Daughters of the British Empire in India* (New York: Random House, 2007); Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, eds., *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

West were seen as crucial to transforming the region from a wilderness populated by savages into a settled and domesticated part of the United States. Wives and mothers, farmwomen and schoolteachers, not saloonkeepers, prostitutes, or cowgirls, were instrumental to the civilizing of the West.⁴⁹ In no area did the racialized cult of domesticity prove more important than the American South, both before and after the Civil War. Rendered famous by *Gone with the Wind*, the cult of Southern womanhood has a complex history, involving both the embrace of patriarchal society and the emphasis on white women's empowerment in a variety of spheres ranging from the church to the plantation. The ideal of the Southern plantation mistress in particular underscored how white women created and symbolized civilization in a society dependent upon the labor of enslaved black women and men.⁵⁰

The image of the lady on the pedestal was crucial for white Southern women; their gentility depended on an isolation from the realities of slave society. Above all, it meant the complete absence of sexual relations between white women and black men. During the late nineteenth century this emphasis on white biological and sexual purity became a key component of the form of racial terror known as lynching. White segregationists lynched black men and women as a way of reestablishing white supremacy throughout the South. It soon, however, also became linked to a defense of white womanhood against the threat of black rapists. As South Carolina Senator Ben Tillman argued,

“We of the South have never recognized the right of the negro to govern white men, and we never will. We have never believed him to be the equal of the white man, and we will not submit to his gratifying his lust on our wives and daughters without lynching him.”⁵¹

Although, as contemporary anti-lynching activists like Ida B. Wells pointed out, most lynchings had nothing to do with sexual contact at all, let alone attempted rape, the idea that white men lynched black men to preserve the honor of white women became a central theme of Southern life under Jim Crow. At a time when the image of liberty was enshrined in New York harbor as a white woman on a pedestal, racial terror became an important means of preserving that ideal in the states of the former Confederacy. Freedom and racial segregation, and the violence needed to preserve racial segregation, went hand in hand in the idealized female white body.⁵²

49. Linda Peavey, *Pioneer Women: The Lives of women on the Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); Julie Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: “Civilizing the West?” 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

50. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mother's of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

51. Cited in Bob Herbert, “The Blight That Is Still With Us,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 2008. See Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

52. Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*, edited by Jacqueline Jones Royster (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996); Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

As the ultimate representation of the white woman on a pedestal, the Statue of Liberty could thus symbolize not just freedom but also racial conflict, the pure female needing protection from the black rapist and at the same time standing for retribution against black men in general. In one instance a replica of the Statue of Liberty did play a role in an actual lynching. In the early years of the twentieth century a series of racial assaults forced many of the African American residents of Missouri's Ozarks region to flee for their lives. These culminated on April 14, 1906, when an enraged mob of thousands of whites lynched three black men, Horace Duncan, Fred Coker, and Will Allen, for having sexually assaulted a white woman, Mina Edwards. The crowd dragged the three men to the Gottfried Tower, one of the city's tallest structures topped by a replica of the Statue of Liberty, and hung them from it. An editorial cartoon in the *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch* entitled "O Liberty, What Crimes Are Committed In Thy Name!" commemorated the grisly event.⁵³

As the cartoon's title suggests, the use of the Statue of Liberty in a lynching prompted widespread outrage among both black and white Americans. There was a sense that the very notion of freedom had been defiled. The governor of Missouri not only condemned the crime but also argued that the statue should be removed from the Springfield public square until justice was done.⁵⁴ At the same time, the incident corresponded to a certain symbolic meaning of the Statue of Liberty, notably the role played by ideals of white womanhood in violence against black men. The image of three black men lynched by the Statue of Liberty dramatically underscored the racialized dimension of America's greatest monument.⁵⁵

Immigration, Race, and the Statue of Liberty

For most Americans, the Statue of Liberty symbolizes above all the history of immigration to the United States, particularly immigration from southern and eastern Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the classic narrative of American history, it represented the nation's welcome to the oppressed from throughout the world, and its ability to turn them all into loyal citizens grateful for the freedom they had found on its shores. As an article for the National Park Service has put it, "Between 1886 and 1924, almost 14 million immigrants entered the United States through New York. The Statue of Liberty was a reassuring sign that they had arrived in the land of their dreams. To these anxious newcomers, the Statue's uplifted torch did not suggest "enlightenment," as her creators intended, but rather, "welcome." Over time, Liberty emerged as the "Mother of Exiles," a symbol of hope to generations of immigrants.⁵⁶ In a sense, the Statue of

53. *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 17, 1906, p. 12.

54. See the discussion of this incident in Bodnar, *op. cit.*, 186-188.

55. Jenny Fillmer, "1906 lynchings grew from tensions, racism – Thriving black community died," *The Springfield News-Leader*, April 14, 2006; Harriet C. Frazier, *Lynchings in Missouri, 1803-1981* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland Press, 2009); Kimberly Harper, *White Man's Heaven: The Lynching and Expulsion of Blacks in the Southern Ozarks, 1894-1909* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2010).

56. "The Immigrants Statue", National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/the-immigrants-statue.htm>

Liberty was herself the most famous immigrant in American history.

A closer analysis of the famed statue's relationship to American immigrants reveals a somewhat different story. In the late nineteenth century many Americans viewed and portrayed the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of anti-immigrant sentiment.⁵⁷ Those Americans who embraced Nativism and saw the immigrant masses as a religious, racial, and political danger to the Republic feared they would overwhelm not only the statue but the country as a whole. Not until well into the twentieth century did the idea of the statue as a welcoming beacon to immigrants become dominant in American society.

In exploring the reasons for this transformation, I focus on the racial identity of the Statue of Liberty, its representation of the ideal of white freedom. Historians of whiteness have studied the ways in which European immigrants were gradually accepted as white in America, and their relationship with the Statue of Liberty is part of this history.⁵⁸ In sum, the Statue of Liberty became a welcoming symbol of immigration when European immigrants became white. Those immigrants who gazed rapturously at the magnificent statue upon their arrival in New York harbor may have seen a symbol of freedom and prosperity, but they also saw a vision of whiteness, ultimately one of what they could become in America.

From the 1880s until the First World War the United States witnessed a wave of immigration unprecedented in both size and origins. During this period over twenty million immigrants journeyed to America: whereas in the early 19th century roughly 125,000 arrived per year, by the 1880s and 1890s the number jumped to nearly half a million. In 1907 alone almost 1.3 million came to the United States.⁵⁹ Moreover, they came from different places. Before the late nineteenth century most American immigrants were natives of the British Isles (including Ireland), Germany, and Scandinavia. The new immigrants still came mostly from Europe, but starting in the 1880s they mostly left the eastern and Mediterranean parts of the continent. Some four million Italians journeyed to America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; between 1910 and 1920 alone, over 3.5 million came from the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires. Many of these latter were Jews, some 2 million of whom came to the United States from the 1880s to the 1920s.⁶⁰

Thanks to her location in New York harbor, the Statue of Liberty had a front row seat to witness this massive human drama. Most European immigrants traveling to America by steamship first

57. Berenson, 104.

58. David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (London: Routledge, 2008); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks, and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

59. John Higham, *Coming to America*, 124; Berenson, 105.

60. On the history of European immigration to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: Harper, 2002); Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Vincent J. Cannato, *American Passage: The History of Ellis Island* (New York: Harper, 2010); Marianne Debouzy, ed., *In the Shadow of the Statue of Liberty: Immigrants, Workers, and Citizens in the American Republic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

came to New York. In 1892 federal authorities turned Ellis Island, just upriver from the statue's home on Bedloe's Island, into the nation's largest immigrant processing center. The immigrant ships passed by the Statue of Liberty en route to Ellis Island where they would formally enter the United States. The sight of the great monument to the left was for many their first sight of America, and one of the most dramatic and enduring.

“To the immigrants who battled tough times and rough seas, the Statue of Liberty was a welcoming beacon, a mystical madonna who made the homeless newcomers weep, pray and dance for joy.

Swathed in a morning's mist, the mesmerizing lady of the harbor appeared off to the left of their ships, hailing their entry to the new world. For many, it was the first time they dared to hope.

‘The people were screaming and some of them were crying. It was all kind of a joyous feeling of coming to the land of freedom and a land of love,’ recalled Clara Larsen of New York City who came from Russia in 1911 at age 13.⁶¹

By no means all Americans considered the Statue of Liberty a symbol of welcome to the new immigrants, however. As historian Peter Schrag has pointed out, if America is a land of immigrants it is also one of anti-immigrant hostility and prejudice.⁶² The massive new waves of immigration horrified many Americans, who frequently looked down upon the newcomers as ragged, dirty, ignorant, criminal, and in general unfit to be citizens of the United States. Many turned to Nativism, a tradition of hostility to foreigners and immigrants that experienced a major rebirth during this era. Led by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, the Nativists sought to keep foreigners out of the United States, seeing them as a mortal danger to the country.

World War I and the Russian Revolution increased fears of immigrants, now also suspected as dangerous Communists and anarchists. In 1924 Nativism triumphed with Congress' passage of the Johnson-Reed Act sharply limiting immigration to America.⁶³

Nativists, like many others in American history, adopted the Statue of Liberty to represent their own ideas. If the statue did in fact symbolize America, then it could not belong to the despised immigrant masses thronging into New York. Many argued that in fact Liberty stood opposed to the immigrants, struggling to protect the integrity and purity of the American people. A series of cartoons in the late nineteenth century portrayed Liberty as under siege by motley hordes of foreigners, violent anarchists, or other undesirables. In 1895 Thomas Bailey Aldrich published the poem “Unguarded Gates, summing up the Nativist fear of the immigrant threat:

61. Eileen Putnam, “Immigrants Wept for Joy As They Saw The Statue,” *The Dispatch*, Lexington, North Carolina, June 18, 1986.

62. Peter Schrag, *Not Fit for Our Society: Nativism and Immigration* (Berkeley: University of California, 2010), 1.

63. *Ibid.*, see also John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (Westport CT: Greenwood Publishers, 1981).

“Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,
 And through them presses a wild motley throng...
 Flying the Old World’s poverty and scorn...
 Accents of menace alien to our air,
 Voices that once the Tower of Babel knew!
 O Liberty, white Goddess! Is it well
 To leave the gates unguarded? On thy breast
 Fold Sorrow’s children, soothe”⁶⁴

In this interpretation, and from the perspective of the Nativists in general, the Statue of Liberty did not welcome the new immigrants but in contrast sought to protect America against them.

So how did “the white goddess” end up embracing the immigrants from Europe in the twentieth century? In answering this question, it is important to note that southern and eastern European immigrants were never entirely bereft of white status or privilege. Albeit reluctantly, until 1924 they were allowed into the United States in large numbers, unlike the Chinese, for example. The Johnson-Reed Act imposed strict limits on them, but even stricter ones on hopeful immigrants from Asia or Africa. Nonetheless, it took several decades before European immigrants were fully accepted as Americans, worthy of the benevolent gaze of the Statue of Liberty.

The immigrants themselves, and their descendants, played a key role in this symbolic transformation. Starting with that first spectacular view of the statue rising above New York harbor, many took it as a symbol of all that America had to offer, and those that succeeded in their new land remembered this initial vision of Liberty with gratitude. Joseph Pulitzer, who had arrived penniless in New York during the Civil War and become a leading newspaper publisher, took the lead in launching the campaign to raise funds for the statue’s pedestal, calling it “the people’s statue.”⁶⁵ The descendants of the immigrants would in their own turn champion the statue; Lee Iacocca, the chairman of the Ford Motor Company and the son of Italian immigrants, led the planning of the one hundredth anniversary celebration of the Statue of Liberty in 1986.

Nothing more famously symbolizes the idea of the statue as “Mother of Exiles” than the famous poem by Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus.” Lazarus herself came from a well-established German Jewish family in New York, and by her early thirties had carved out a substantial reputation as a poet. Starting in the early 1880s she became aware of and horrified by the anti-Semitic pogroms in eastern Europe and the flight of many Russian Jews to America. Their plight inspired in Lazarus a new attention to her own Jewish identity as well as a determination to do what she could to aid her impoverished co-religionists in New York. Asked by friends to contribute to an art exhibition raising funds for the Statue of Liberty’s pedestal, she responded by writing the sonnet

64. Thomas Bailey Aldrich, “Unguarded Gates,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1895.

65. Cited in Khan, *op. cit.*, 172.

that would both become her most famous work and firmly link the statue to the history of European immigration.

“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
 With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
 Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
 I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

“The New Colossus” received little attention at the time, and played no role in the formal inauguration of the Statue of Liberty in 1886. In 1903, however, it was engraved on a bronze plaque and mounted on the base of the statue.⁶⁶

Emma Lazarus’ great sonnet, and the fond memories of millions of new Americans who passed through New York harbor, would ultimately turn the Statue of Liberty into the Mother of Exiles, a symbol of the United States as a nation of immigrants. It took decades, however, before this new vision of the statue would become dominant; Lazarus’ poem was largely ignored by the American public until the late 1930s.⁶⁷ By then major changes in national life had facilitated this transformation. During World War I the Statue of Liberty became more popular than ever, competing with Uncle Sam as the symbol of American national identity. Pictures of the famous statue were featured prominently on Liberty bonds, at times appealing directly to former immigrants. In August 1918 thousands of American soldiers in Iowa posed for a picture as a living Statue of Liberty before being shipped off to the war in France.⁶⁸ With the onset of the Second World War the desperate plight of Jewish refugees from Nazi Europe brought new attention to “The New Colossus” and America’s welcome of an earlier group of immigrant Jews. With the US entry into the war, the idea of welcoming the tempest-tossed huddled masses once again became important to American identity.

Most important, however, was the change in the immigrants themselves. John Higham has argued that the transformation of the Statue of Liberty only became feasible with the end of mass immigration in 1924.⁶⁹ Americans could only romanticize European immigration once it had largely receded into the past, and was no longer present in the shape of millions of people speaking strange languages, eating strange foods, and crammed into miserable slums. By the 1930s, a nadir of immigration into the United States, not only were there few newcomers in America’s cities

66. On Emma Lazarus see Esther Schor, *Emma Lazarus* (New York: Schocken, 2006); Daniel Marom, “Who Is the ‘Mother of Exiles’? An Inquiry into Jewish Aspects of Emma Lazarus’s ‘The New Colossus.’”, *Prooftexts*, vol. 20/#3 (Fall 2000). My thanks to Bruce Thompson for this reference.

67. See Esther Schor, *Emma Lazarus* (New York: Schocken Books, 2006).

68. Reproduced in Tony Allan, *Paris, The Glamour Years, 1919-1940* (New York: Gallery Books, 1977), 24.

69. *Cite John Higham

and mill towns, but those who had come earlier had adjusted to American life politically, socially, and culturally. Many had learned English, and most of their children had grown up speaking the language fluently. World War II brought new opportunities for national service, and acceptance as equal citizens. By the war's triumphant end in 1945, the former immigrants were now Americans.⁷⁰

To an important extent, as Matthew Frye Jacobsen and other historians of whiteness have observed, that meant being accepted as white.⁷¹ This new acceptance of immigrants, and of the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of immigration, took place as a part of the process in which immigrants from Europe were gradually accepted as and transformed into white Americans. In 1941 the *Detroit Free Press* published a cartoon, "Americans All!" about the statue. The cartoon, by Arthur Pronier, shows a maternal, smiling Statue of Liberty embracing a variety of happy children identified as coming from different immigrant backgrounds. Strikingly, all the children are of European origin and white. In this interpretation, Lady Liberty would welcome immigrants, and consider them Americans, as long as they had white skin.⁷²

The years after World War II reinforced both the broad acceptance of the descendants of European immigrants, now known as white ethnics, and the centrality of their history to the Statue of Liberty as a national symbol of freedom and American identity.⁷³ In 1956 Congress changed the name of the statue's site from Bedloe Island to Liberty Island, and began planning for a national museum of immigration.⁷⁴ In 1965 the federal government passed a new immigration law overturning the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 and removing that laws racial and geographical restrictions. President Lyndon Johnson signed it into law on Liberty Island at the base of the Statue. During the early 1980s the statue underwent a massive facelift and cleaning, which included equipping it with electric lights, in preparation for its one hundredth anniversary in 1986. That year the Reagan administration orchestrated a huge four-day celebration, "Liberty Weekend," in honor of the centennial. The theme of immigration occupied pride of place during the ceremony, highlighted by Chief Supreme Court Justice Warren Burger's naturalization of 16,000 immigrants *en masse*.⁷⁵

Some commentators at the time and since noted that these celebrations took place in a period when the United States was debating new restrictions on immigration, calling into question the symbolism of the statue as the Mother of Exiles. To call this hypocrisy is, however, to miss the point, for in a very real sense the Statue of Liberty never celebrated immigration. Rather, as the 1941 cartoon made clear, it honored the descendants of immigrants who had become Americans,

70. David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, *op. cit.*

71. Matthew Frye Jacobsen, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

72. *Detroit Free Press*, June 19, 1941. Ironically, the cartoon appeared on Juneteenth, the African American holiday celebrating the end of slavery.

73. David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: the Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

74. That museum opened on Liberty Island in 1972, then closed in 1991 following the opening of the Ellis Island immigration museum in 1990.

75. Richard Stengl, "The Party of the Century," *Time*, July 7, 1986. See the discussion of Liberty Weekend in Berenson, *op. cit.*, 181-193.

not the immigrants themselves. The centennial apotheosis of the Statue of Liberty took place in a time when most immigrants were coming from Asia and Latin America, not Europe. The statue saluted those of European immigrant background who had achieved whiteness in America while at the same time turning a cold shoulder to those who had not. No one proposed building similar statues on the US/Mexican border, in Miami, or on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, to mark these new waves of immigration, and certainly no one suggested building a similar memorial in Charleston South Carolina or other ports (including New York itself) involved in the Middle Passage. As a symbol of both liberty and European immigration, the Statue of Liberty has to this day remained America's leading icon of white freedom.

Conclusion

Nothing compares to the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of freedom in the modern world. In many different contexts, from the French struggle for republicanism to American debates about immigration, it has stood for human liberty and prosperity. Standing in New York harbor, at the gateway to the United States from Europe, it has become the quintessential representation of American national identity while equally exemplifying America's transnational and global presence. The Statue of Liberty has been instrumental in underscoring the belief that liberty is the essence of America's national life as well as its promise to all the peoples of the world.

In this article I have argued that this promise is shaped by race and racial difference. The Statue of Liberty throughout its history has represented a white vision of freedom, one shaped by developments in France, the United States, and elsewhere. In France Laboulaye's vision of the statue emphasized a rejection of revolutionary politics in favor of a moderate republicanism that largely excluded a racialized working class and embraced an imperial vision of the nation-state that created a massive new colonial empire structured by racial difference. In the United States the statue's roots in antislavery were largely hidden, and it became a symbol of European immigration once, and only once, the descendants of those immigrants had won acceptance as white Americans. The fact that the Statue of Liberty completely ignores what was arguably the greatest freedom story in American history, the struggle to abolish black slavery, is telling. In both countries the very idea of freedom had a racial component, one that helped shape its most monumental representation. In a sense, the Statue of Liberty's European facial features were no accident, expressing instead the racial aesthetics and politics of liberty in the modern world.