CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA originated as a slave society, holding millions of Africans and their descendants in bondage, and remained so until a civil war took the lives of a half million soldiers, some once slaves themselves.[1] This book explores how that history of slavery and its violent end was told in public space—specifically in the sculptural monuments that increasingly came to dominate public space in nineteenth-century America.

The shift from slavery to freedom precipitated by the Civil War was the cataclysmic event and the central dilemma of the century, one that continues to shape American society even today. That event reverberated throughout public space in countless ways, some obvious and others subtle. The war provoked the greatest era of monument building ever seen in this country, yet the role of the public monument in defining the war's legacy is a subject that has been considered only in fragments, if at all. The fragments tell us little because their significance depends on how they are put together. Doing that means interweaving three large themes: the meaning of race, the experience of war, and the function of the public monument. All three—race, war, and monument—were pivotal to the nation as it emerged from its long tradition of slavery. Passing through this epochal transformation, all three combined to reshape the American sense of its nationhood.

The Civil War did not simply emancipate four million individuals whose lives and histories had been shaped in slavery. That act of emancipation shook the life of the nation and everyone in it. The death of slavery required nothing less than "a new birth of freedom," to use Lincoln's famous phrase from the Gettysburg Address, a reinvention of the very meaning and practice of liberty. Slaves could not shed bondage like a suit of clothes; they had to find new identities, new ways of work, new routes into society. Nor could the larger society suddenly shed its tradition of slavery without facing fundamental challenges to its own institutions and identity. What would freedom come to mean in a society still attached to the very concept of racial difference used to justify slavery? Would new barriers between the races have to be erected, or could race itself be rethought, reimagined? Far from solving an ideological crisis, the abolition

of slavery precipitated a new one—a momentous struggle over the idea of race and the terms of citizenship in a nation supposedly dedicated to equality.

That struggle dominated the politics of the period we call Reconstruction. Yet Reconstruction was not merely a contest over public policy—voting rights, land distribution, and so forth. Change of that kind could not be realized without a more profound cultural transformation. Reconstruction demanded nothing less than that the nation and its people reimagine themselves. Public monuments were at the center of this highly abstract, and yet terrifying, conflict—a conflict that lasted long after Reconstruction's official demise.

Public monuments were meant to yield resolution and consensus, not to prolong conflict. The impulse behind the public monument was an impulse to mold history into its rightful pattern. And history was supposed to be a chronicle of heroic accomplishments, not a series of messy disputes with unresolved outcomes. Even now, to commemorate is to seek historical closure, to draw together the various strands of meaning in a historical event or personage and condense its significance for the present in a speech or a monument. It is true that the *process* of commemoration often leads to conflict, not closure, because in defining the past we define our present. Yet in choosing to remember "historical" events or heroes we still hope to plunge them into a past secured against the vicissitudes of the present.

Public monuments are the most conservative of commemorative forms precisely because they are meant to last, unchanged, forever. While other things come and go, are lost and forgotten, the monument is supposed to remain a fixed point, stabilizing both the physical and the cognitive landscape. Monuments attempt to mold a landscape of collective memory, to conserve what is worth remembering and discard the rest. Today public monuments are everywhere, so much a part of the landscape of our daily life that we hardly even notice them. But in the middle of the nineteenth century the public monument still meant something vital and precious. Public monuments were much rarer, and many of the types of monuments we now take for granted simply did not exist. Before the Civil War one could stroll through most streets or squares without ever encountering a bronze statue of a departed hero or even a simple stone shaft marking a historical event.[2]

The "new birth of freedom" proclaimed by Lincoln at Gettysburg in 1863 ushered in a new era of the public monument as well. The national soldier's cemetery Lincoln helped consecrate that day was the first of its kind, and the modern war memorial, dedicated to the ordinary soldier, originated around the same time. In the decades following the war, the number and variety of monuments erected throughout the country multi-

plied exponentially. Increasingly they commemorated the common man and, sometimes, woman. While monuments retained their traditional virtues of permanence and fixity, they became ever more popular—in more than one sense of the word. In an earlier century, public monuments had been part of a cult of rulership; now they claimed to be revelations of the popular will. Made of imperishable stone or metal, and erected prominently in shared civic space—parks, town squares, public buildings—public monuments were meant to be a genuine testimonial of the people's memory, an eternal repository of what they held most dear.[3]

Slavery constituted perhaps the single most difficult challenge facing "the people" as they struggled to build a democratic memory of their collective past. Slavery could hardly even be acknowledged in public space without exploding the myth of a democratically unified people from the very outset. The abolition of slavery after the Civil War did not solve the problem but only intensified it. Once abolished, slavery forced itself into the domain of memory, there to be reckoned with in one way or another—suppressed, integrated, romanticized. Emancipation introduced into national memory a new people (some four million ex-slaves) and a new history (*their* history of enslavement).[4] "The people" now included slaveowner and slave alike, multiple and opposing histories united under the same banner of the nation. While the democratization of monumental space tied it ever more closely to the image of the people, the question of who constituted the national people grew more divisive. Ultimately the war turned on the question of who belonged to the nation: who had a claim on the national possession of liberty, and what did the possession imply. The monuments of the war inevitably forced these issues to the surface; representational decisions had to be made, and they had public consequences. At the very time, therefore, that a resurgent nationality was sparking a new monumental era, the meaning of nationality was changing in dramatic and unpredictable ways. It is this conjunction of events—and the cultural and artistic problems arising from it—that my book investigates.

TODAY we are acutely aware of public space as a representational battleground, where many different social groups fight for access and fight for control of the images that define them. Recent controversies over the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, the John Ahearn bronzes in the Bronx, and the Arthur Ashe statue in Richmond—to name just three—have put the problem on the front page of newspapers and in the halls of government. Public space in the nineteenth century was also torn by conflict, though the terms of the conflict and the access to it were rather different. The battles fought and the decisions made in that era had a profound impact on the lives of people then and, at the same time, created an

enduring landscape of public monuments that continues to shape our public experience and expectations today.

In the expansive era of the nineteenth century, monuments were not bestowed by the state on the citizenry, or at least they weren't supposed to be. It was the reverse claim that animated the whole monumental enterprise: monuments were supposed to arise spontaneously by popular demand, only then to be donated to the state for safekeeping. What gave monuments their peculiar appeal in an era of rising nationalism was their claim to speak for "the people." Monuments were "true" only insofar as they seemed to display the people's heart. Most monuments therefore originated not as official projects of the state but as volunteer enterprises sponsored by associations of "public-spirited" citizens and funded by individual donations. These voluntary associations often had direct links to officialdom, but they achieved legitimacy only by manufacturing popular enthusiasm (and money) for the project. Sponsors usually worked hard to sustain the fiction that they were merely agents of a more universal collective whose shared memory the project embodied. For example, the sponsors of Lincoln's tomb monument in Springfield, Illinois, asked "to be regarded as only the *channel* through which the promptings of the popular heart may find expression,—the instrument to mould its offerings into forms of enduring strength and beauty."[5] Hence the importance of the "popular subscription," in which rich and poor, young and old, were canvassed alike for their financial contributions; and the rituals of cornerstone laying and dedication, where great crowds gathered and symbolically erected the monument. Sponsors had to publicize their enterprise from beginning to end; to marshal the resources and support needed to place a monument prominently in public space, they really did have to summon the symbolic and financial participation of a "public" that the monument would represent. The more widely the monument campaign appealed, the more enthusiasm it seemed to generate, the more convincingly its public would come to resemble the democratic vision of one people united by one memory.

Nowadays, in the academy at least, we are inclined to question this equation. We think of collective memory—and indeed the "people" who supposedly share this memory—as complicated fictions, manufactured to serve ideological ends. Monuments emerged within a public sphere that communicated between actual communities of people and the abstract machinery of the nation-state. Monuments were one space in which local communities based on geography or interest or both could define themselves and speak to or for the larger collective. The relationship between the local community and the more abstract collective was complex and at times, I will argue, quite strained. Monuments did not simply serve the official demands of the state. Nor did they simply channel spontaneous

popular sentiments, as the sponsors liked to claim in their standard rhetoric. The process of commemoration was in fact reciprocal: the monument manufactured its own public, but that public in turn had opinions about what constituted proper commemoration. In practical terms, the designers of public monuments—mostly sculptors, as it turns out—usually had to satisfy a committee of elite citizens who were themselves competing for popular approval with other philanthropic projects and even other monument proposals. The designer could not impose an official version of history but could only propose one possible version, which then had to win a place in this peculiarly competitive public arena.

In the process, elite and popular interests inevitably intertwined and reshaped one another. This was simply the nature of the public sphere in the nineteenth-century United States. A truly vernacular "folk" memory might be nurtured outside the public sphere, in quilts or tales or traditional rituals, but once memory turned public it became altogether different structurally: a composite creation of many different groups and voices acting and reacting in relation to one another. Some groups had more control over the process than others, but no one had enough mastery to set the agenda or dictate the result. The process included both the production of public monuments and their subsequent use. The public monument, after all, was not just a rhetorical space where people debated image and symbol, but was also a real physical space where publics could gather and define themselves at ceremonies and rallies. In the late twentieth century we are all too familiar with the competition among groups for representation in this public process. The difference is that now many groups openly stand for themselves and their own interests, while in the nineteenth century almost everyone claimed to speak for the people as a whole. Collective memory was just as much a brew, but it had to be presented as the product of a united people.[6]

There is good reason to believe that even in the nineteenth century people saw through this popular fiction of the public monument; they were not so naive as their rhetoric seems to suggest. They fought over the sponsorship and design of public monuments precisely because they knew what power the monuments had to define the will of a people. But a funny thing happened once a monument was built and took its place in the landscape of people's lives: it became a kind of natural fact, as if it had always been meant to be. The monument's rhetorical claims of popular status became self-fulfilling prophecy. Begun as a project designed by particular actors for particular political ends, the monument was transformed into the image of the people—even if some part of the people took the unusual step of contesting that image. Public monuments exercised a curious power to erase their own political origins and become sacrosanct, a power that is still evident today whenever people rise to defend

monuments from change or attack.[7] The individuals and interest groups that vied for representation in monumental space understood that there was a great deal at stake in the form and content of public monuments. They were competing not merely for the right to speak for the people but for the chance to etch the people's voice in stone, where it would remain forever.

The irony is that now, in the late twentieth century, we must work so hard to recover that voice once thought to be eternal. If many monuments from the past seem mute to us, they do still have stories to tell. But those stories are not necessarily what the monuments were intended to tell us. To make the monuments speak again we must question the often bland surface they show the world. We must investigate who were the people represented in and by monumental space, and how they competed to construct a history in the language of sculpture and in the spotlight of the public sphere.

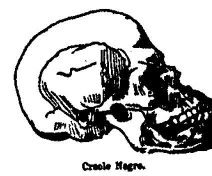
Throughout the nineteenth century, sculpture remained the public monument's central medium of expression. Monuments were architectural, of course, some more conspicuously than others, and the architecture was usually inscribed with texts, some laconic and others expansive. But the primary burden of the commemorative content fell on the sculptor, to condense the meaning of the monument into the deceptively simple language of human form. Collosal statues of heroes, bas-reliefs of great men in action, sleek female allegories for abstract principles—these were the stock in trade of the public monument.

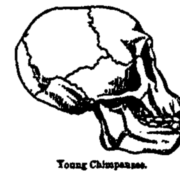
The medium's obsession with ideal human form made the whole subject of slavery extremely difficult for sculptors to represent. More than any of the other arts, sculpture was embedded in the theoretical foundation of racism that supported American slavery and survived long after its demise. For racism, like sculpture, centered on the analysis and representation of the human body. The concept of race emerged in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century natural science as a way of explaining visible differences between bodies. Certain differences, notably of skin color, facial structure, and hair type, came to be correlated with moral and intellectual capacities thought to be inherited and therefore shared by the "race." The invention of the scientific notion of race transformed the intellectual understanding—indeed, the very perception—of the human body.[8] Sculpture helped effect this transformation of the human body and was in turn transformed by it. Sculpture's relation to the human body had always been more direct and intimate than painting's: the sculptor's main task was not to create illusions on a flat surface but to reproduce three-dimensional bodies in real space. Sculptors could even create exact molds of the human face and body in plaster, which gave their art a unique scientific and documentary power that lasted even after the advent

of photography.[9] This helps explain why racial theorists looked to classical sculpture specifically as an empirical model of white racial superiority. Blumenbach, Camper, Cuvier, and other pioneers of the modern concept of race discussed and measured the ways in which the bodies and particularly the heads of darker races departed from the supposedly perfect lines and proportions of antique sculpture. The sculpture of antiquity thus became an authenticating document of a normative white body, a "race" of white men.[10]

One of the more notorious examples of the scientific appeal to classical sculpture appears in the most widely discussed racial treatise of the antebellum period, *Types of Mankind* (1854) by J. C. Nott and George R. Gliddon. At the end of the book, as a kind of coup de grace, the authors provided a "comparative series of likenesses" in which an engraved profile of a bust of Apollo was placed above a caricatured face of a "Negro" and a head of a chimpanzee (fig. 1.1).[11] The burden of the book and the image was to prove that mankind was divided into a hierarchy of racial types whose characteristics were permanent and unalterable. The image is a deck peculiarly stacked against the "Negro": the engraver has filled his face with a grotesque pattern of curving lines to represent its dark skin tone; and this caricatured head has been placed underneath an image not of an ordinary white man but of Apollo, a god. What is quite literally a comparison of god, man, and animal is nevertheless meant to be read as a comparison of white man, Negro, and animal.[12]

How was this semiotic sleight of hand possible? It has everything to do with the peculiar status of sculpture as definitive of the human body. The head of Apollo illustrated here is taken from what was perhaps the most celebrated classical sculpture of them all—the ancient statue in the Vatican known as the Apollo Belvedere (fig. 1.2). It is hard now to appreciate the power that this antique piece and a few dozen others like it once held in Western culture: this sculptural canon constituted nothing less than a benchmark in the concept of the human.[13] The Apollo in particular was a widely recognized standard of male beauty and, by implication, a lesson in the relationship of physical beauty to intellect and culture. As sculpture, this head managed to sustain a dual status. It was at once an ideal representation and the real thing, imaginary god and canonical measure of humanity. The viewer's ability to see the head as both at once (an ability the authors were certainly counting on) is testament to sculpture's peculiar power to invest stone or metal bodies with real living force. The "likeness" of the god therefore became an authentic document of superior physical form, and the label "Apollo Belvidere" brought with it the prestigious associations of high culture and classical civilization; all of these qualities were now regrouped not under the banner of antiquity but of whiteness—a whiteness emphasized by the engraver's minimally





1.1 J. C. Nott and George R. Gliddon, *Types of Mankind* (Philadelphia,1854), 458.

hatched rendering of the white marble out of which this head was actually made. The upshot of this complex, though instantaneous, act of viewing is that "white" and "man" become conflated, and the Negro drops to a liminal status, wavering between the realm of man and the realm of animals.[14]

Nott and Gliddon's illustration is far from an isolated example. It was in fact based on a similar illustration from an earlier French text by Virey, a student and popularizer of one of the pioneering racial taxonomists of the Enlightenment, Buffon.[15] The Virey illustration used a head of Zeus,

1.2 Apollo Belvedere, Roman imperial copy of a Greek bronze, Vatican.

which carried its own associations of naked might. The shift to Apollo subtly (and effectively) shifted the axis of comparison from brute power to more specifically aesthetic and intellectual qualities. In both cases, classical sculpture served as the benchmark of whiteness and, indeed, served that function over and over again in the writings of the racial taxonomists. The importance of the aesthetic dimension of racial theory cannot be overemphasized, and sculpture served as the aesthetic standard.[16] It hardly needs to be stated that these theorists did not generally apply the same rigorous standards of comparison to actual European heads and bodies, but this was because it was taken for granted that white Europeans were the legitimate progeny of the ideal classical type.

It is hard to fathom today how a canon of ancient sculpture could be used as scientific evidence, especially when that very canon has since been discredited by art historians and archaeologists as a collection of mostly inferior copies of lost originals. But such was the sway of this canonical sculpture that plaster casts of the most important pieces were

disseminated across the Western world in a wide variety of instructional contexts, even in medical schools.[17] The high-cultural understanding of the human body was, in part, an understanding of classical sculpture and its continuing tradition in the practice of modern sculpture. The phenomenon I am describing was dynamic. Natural philosophers used classical sculpture to visualize and articulate a new racial construct, but the resulting theory transformed the understanding of classical sculpture by racializing it. This had a significant impact on modern sculpture, for nineteenth-century sculptors, whether deliberately neoclassical or not, worked in the shadow of classical sculpture. They drew after plaster casts, they lifted famous poses or gestures, they strove to emulate the supposedly classical qualities of restraint and decorum. Broadly speaking, classical sculpture still served as the benchmark of the sculptural and thereby defined what was not sculpture—most fundamentally, the body of the "Negro," the black antithesis of classical whiteness.

For the most part, then, the black body was relegated instead to the "lower" realm of representation reserved for it in Nott and Gliddon's illustration, the media of graphic illustration and popular caricature. In the early nineteenth century, African Americans or their mimics became much more visible in these media. In political cartoons, songbook covers, and illustrations of blackface performance, the ragged "darky" of the plantation and the uppity "coon" of the city became stock figures. These stereotypical black bodies—whether they represented black Americans or whites masquerading as such—were still conceived and pictured as the grotesque inversion of what Bakhtin called the "classical" or "canonical" body.[18] The canonical body, in his formulation, is a closed contour, without holes or protrusions; this conforms to the ideal figure in sculpture, which sculptors would often say could be rolled downhill without breaking (a principle honored in the breach, as the extended arm of the Apollo Belevedere demonstrates). By contrast, the grotesque body is characterized by swaying contours, wildly scattered limbs, protruding buttocks, spread-eagle legs, all devices that break the erect, contained profile of the canonical body. One of the best illustrations of the canonical/grotesque polarity in popular culture comes from the world of minstrelsy, where a sheet music cover of the 1840s contrasts the ideal body language of the standing white gentlemen with the comic motions of their seated blackface impersonations (fig. 1.3). The principle of opposition used here is very similar to the principle operating in the "scientific" illustration, where the vertical profile of the canonical face is contrasted with the supposedly jutting jaw of the more animal-like Negro. The body codes distinguishing the two types can be traced as far back as ancient theater, where the comically swaying bodies of slave characters were contrasted with the erect postures of the hero.[19]

1.3 Sheet music cover for *Songs of the Virginia Serenaders* (Boston, 1844).

This connection between the caricatured black body and the slave types of ancient theater is a reminder that race alone does not account for the peculiar status of African Americans in American sculpture. The point becomes clearer if we compare the representation of African with native Americans. Although racial thought demoted both groups to inferior status, the two "races" played very different roles in science as well as sculpture. The cranial measurements Nott and Gliddon relied upon to document racial difference showed little difference in size between Ameri-

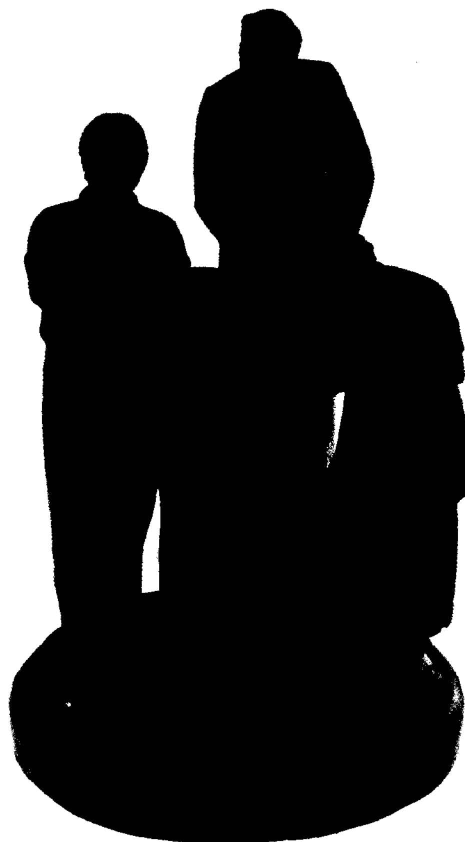
1.4 Henry Kirke Brown, *Choosing of the Arrow*, 1849, bronze statuette.

can Indian skulls and African or African American skulls, yet it is consistently the "Negro" who appears in the text as the definitive sign of racial inferiority and thereby the standard of comparison for the white man.[20] In antebellum sculpture, while the figure of the Negro almost never appeared, the figure of the Indian appeared regularly, and often in classicizing pose or appearance. When sculptor Henry Kirke Brown in 1849 modeled a small bronze figure of an Indian with an arrow, he based it on the pose of the Apollo Belvedere (fig. 1.4).[21] Nor was the Indian confined to the darker material of bronze; Indian figures appeared repeatedly even in white marble, despite all its associations of purity and antiquity. Thus the opposition of "lower" race and the classic did not apply evenly across racial types. Both the native American and the African American were marginalized but their social histories, and their representations in culture were quite different. The dividing line between them, of course, was slavery. The African American body was indelibly scarred by it, whether literally by the whip or figuratively by a racist culture that specifically singled out African bodies for enslavement.[22] Sculpture in the classical tradition was devoted to the human body in its most noble and divine form. The body, in effect, was a metaphor for mastery, and slavery was

the very antithesis of that ideal. This is why the Indian, though marginalized by civilized society, still had an ideal dimension. He could be represented as courageous and independent, a symbol of a vanished or vanishing American antiquity. The Negro as slave functioned more readily and more evenly as a sign of lack—lack of power, lack of decorum, lack of self-restraint, lack of humanity.[23]

Orlando Patterson's comparative study *Slavery and Social Death* usefully conceptualizes the slave as a liminal figure, poised on the boundary between society and chaos, between man and animal. The situation of the "Negro" in Nott and Gliddon's image perfectly illustrates this liminal status. The subject of slavery actually permeates their text and especially the anecdotal examples they use to buttress their cranial "data," so it is not surprising that his opposition of white and black stands equally well for the opposition of mastery and slavery. It is important to remember, however, that Patterson's idea is a theoretical schema, in a sense conceptualizing the master's point of view—which is why the comparison with Apollo could so well illustrate it.[24] In the varied textures of their actual existence slaves were not liminal; they were fully human of course and also part of society, important members of the master's household or of the overall plantation community. Patterson's theoretical schema perhaps helps account better for the representation of slavery than for its lived reality.[25]

The reason, then, that African Americans loomed as the unspeakable reality that sculpture barely dared to approach was not so much that slavery was politically divisive, even though "politics" in this partisan sense was certainly a factor.[26] The deeper reason is that the age-old status of the slave combined with the newer concept of race created an extremely powerful cultural formation that rendered the African American virtually the embodiment of what was *not* classically sculptural. In antebellum America, black slaves could sometimes be *imagined* as sculpture—for example, in Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist novel *Dred*, where she introduced the hero as "a tall black man, of magnificent stature and proportions" whose "skin was intensely black, and polished like marble."[27] Even more directly, in an essay on Sojourner Truth, Stowe likened the ex-slave to the *Negro Woman at a Fountain*, a now lost statuette executed in the 1840s by Charles Cumberworth, who was active in France and England.[28] In both cases she was describing escaped or fugitive slaves, heroic figures who had broken the bonds of the system that debased them. They were heroes insofar as they refused to allow slavery to define them, and the appeal to sculptural metaphors to describe them simply confirmed that heroism. But these remained metaphors, rather than actual works of sculpture: it was inflammatory enough merely to describe a figure like Dred, but far more so to make the figure into marble



1.5 John Rogers, *Slave Auction*, 1859, plaster.

or bronze where it would stand, legitimated by all the weight of classical sculptural tradition, as an incarnation of black humanity. Simply to represent black slaves in sculpture was in a sense to emancipate them.[29]

Before 1860 there are no known images whatsoever of African Americans, slave or free, in marble or bronze, the more permanent and prestigious materials of the sculptor's art. Portraits of African Americans did appear in simplified linear form on slate gravestones dating to the eighteenth century; three such images of slaves or servants exist in the African American section of Newport, Rhode Island's Common Burying Ground, and there may possibly be other examples in cemeteries that have not come to light.[30] One much better known work has survived in the form of a small-scale plaster, about twelve inches high. This is John Rogers's *Slave Auction* of 1859 (fig. 1.5).[31] The piece demonstrates well how sculptors could use an essentially colorless medium to represent racial "color." Since sculpture was understood then to be monochromatic,

sculptors could not represent skin color directly. But skin color was by no means a straightforward or consistent marker of racial identity; it was (and still is) shorthand for a whole array of racial characteristics encompassing face and hair, which the sculptor could exploit to the fullest. Thus in Rogers's work, the "black" man is identified not only by his position in front of the auctioneer's stand, but by the full lips and the compact curled hair. He stands erect, unbound and unchained, his trouser legs insistently vertical, his arms crossed defiantly, while separated from him by the auctioneer's stand is the softer, curvilinear grouping of mother and children, the mother characterized by conspicuously "whiter" hair and physiognomy. Like Stowe's Dred, the male figure embodies the idea of resistance, belying through the language of his body the debasement implied by the auctioneer's action; Rogers remarked about his model that "he would be a capital fellow in a Harpers ferry insurrection." The artist never intended the work for monumental sculpture. The piece belonged to a "lower" genre, that of the small-scale "image" as it was called, cheap desktop-scale works in plaster that were usually sold by Italian artisans who carried them around on trays from door to door. Rogers decided to have his hawked on the streets of New York by a "good looking negro" instead of an Italian, and by doing so the work attracted the attention of some local abolitionist newspapers and acquired a limited public reputation.[32]

Before the war one sculptor did expend a great deal of time and effort trying to introduce the figure of the slave into "high" sculpture in public space. This was Henry Kirke Brown, the modeler of Indians; his repeated efforts in the 1850s form the subject of chapter 2. Not until the 1870s did black slaves begin to appear on major public monuments in the United States. The sudden and unforeseen destruction of slavery brought about by the Civil War made this change possible, but it did not suddenly erase the dilemma slavery posed for sculpture. African Americans could not simply be included in sculpture once slavery ended; the very enterprise of sculpture would have to be reconstructed to make room for them and their history. The challenge facing sculpture paralleled the challenge facing society after the Civil War. Four million newly emancipated slaves could not just be absorbed into the preexisting fabric of society and culture: the fabric itself had to change. Yet in the immediate aftermath of the war, even that seemed possible. A new nation was born, and with it the promise of a new interracial order that would bury slavery forever. It was a time when the likes of William Dean Howells, writing in 1866, could actually suggest that the heroic image of an escaped slave be enshrined as a war memorial in the small towns of the nation's heartland.[33]

During this extraordinary moment in American history, the moment of "Reconstruction," many of America's most important sculptors did try to overcome the drag of accumulated tradition and fashion an interracial

order in sculpture. Their efforts to bring the African American body into public sculpture largely failed. Most of their designs were never erected in public space, and today survive only as photographs or written descriptions buried in archives. Some designs, however, were seriously considered and even heavily publicized. One was erected prominently, at the close of Reconstruction: Thomas Ball's notorious image of Lincoln standing above a freed slave, adopted for the Freedmen's Memorial to Lincoln in Washington, D.C., of 1876 (fig. 4.1) and later for a replica in Boston. In this bizarre monument to emancipation, the black man enters sculpture only to reencode the racial hierarchy established in "scientific" illustration. Kneeling on the ground, the African American once again becomes the foil by which we measure the superiority of the white deity above him. But if this outcome seems predictable, the decade-long process of experimentation that preceded it is surprising. As we will see in chapters 3 and 4, the proliferation of monumental schemes commemorating the end of slavery not only reveals a time of great sculptural ferment but also illuminates the larger cultural contest in which monumental sculpture played a key part. If the theme of black slavery and its abolition could not enter sculpture without sculpture's reconstruction, that theme could not enter monumental sculpture without reconstructing the very image of the people.

During these critical years following the war, emancipation became the single most important commemorative subject. But sculptors struggling to represent emancipation in public monuments were out on the cultural forefront, working to visualize what was still unfolding, still unwritten. They were coming to grips with a new social paradigm that seemed clearly defined in principle but was yet to be absorbed into the hearts and minds of the national citizenry. Their task was profoundly paradoxical, at once conservative and progressive. They were charged with conserving the memory of something that had not yet taken form, that might never take form. Meanwhile the ex-Confederates were engaged in an opposite, though equally paradoxical, quest. As we will see in chapter 5, they were trying to commemorate their slaveholding secession without commemorating slavery, as if their whole war had had nothing to do with it. If the winners were trying to rewrite the future into the past, the losers were trying to rewrite the past in order to change their future.

Out of all this ferment, sculpture and its image of the people were both ultimately reconstructed, but not in the way the politics of Reconstruction demanded or in the way critics like William Dean Howells envisaged. As I argue in chapter 6, the destruction of slavery bore fruit not in a genuine liberation of the black body but in a transformation of the *white* hero and the *white* body. It was the very failure to create a real interracial order in sculpture that enabled the rise of new forms of public sculpture

commemorating Anglo-American heroism. A whole new type of public monument emerged dedicated for the first time not to the illustrious hero but to the ordinary white man, the generic citizen-soldier who had fought in the war on both sides (see figs. 6.1–6.2). This redefined what commemoration was all about and what war memorials were meant to be. In 1866 Howells had proposed that the memorials of the war should be about emancipation; within a few years it was taken for granted that they were about soldiers—common white soldiers. While emancipation came to be inscribed not on the bodies of African Americans but on the body of Abraham Lincoln, so the moral imperatives of citizenship came to be inscribed on the bodies of white soldiers—profoundly reshaping the image of the soldier and the nation in the process.

The emergence of the common-soldier monument is part and parcel of the very process that has redefined race by making it the special property of minorities. To understand the far-reaching changes in nineteenth-century public monuments we must, in a sense, undo that process. We must no longer accept the standard histories of public sculpture in the United States that leave the issue of its racial content to the margins, to works like Ball's Emancipation Monument. The standard histories so completely accept the racial content of mainstream sculpture that they do not even see it. The history of the Emancipation Monument is indeed important—and it has never been properly told—but that history cannot be completed without the much larger story of how public sculpture itself failed to be emancipated.

To write this history, we must recognize, along with other recent scholars, that whiteness is itself a racial category. Whiteness, in Cornel West's words, is "parasitic" on blackness: the ruling category is unnecessary, even meaningless, without its negative counterpart.[34] Decades ago, Winthrop Jordan in his landmark study *White over Black* demonstrated how English colonists did not arrive in the New World as "white"; they gradually adopted this term to separate themselves from the "blackness" they had imported in the form of African slaves. More recently, David Roediger and Noel Ignatiev have examined the process by which nineteenth-century Irish immigrants overcame their identification with oppressed blacks and learned instead to be "white."[35] My study confirms that in the public sphere the creation and recreation of whiteness is inseparable from the creation and recreation of blackness. The marginalization of African America went hand in hand with the reconstruction of white America. African Americans could not be included *or* excluded in the landscape of public sculpture without changing the fabric of commemoration itself, without ultimately changing the face of the nation.

The story of the marginalized cannot therefore be understood without rewriting the history of what became dominant. This is why the current

literature that seeks to document exclusion—from public art, public sculpture—does not go far enough.[36] The recognition of the racist power relations that drive such exclusions is a necessary first step. But that recognition does not amount to an analysis of the racial formation of dominant culture. If the subject of race teaches us anything, it must teach us to revise the history of what is *included* in the dominant culture. Recent books such as Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* or Eric Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations* have put the issues of slavery and race at the heart of our national literature. It is high time that we do so with those forms of public art that have done so much to define the mission of the nation and the identity of its heroes.

A STUDY of this sort requires travel down many byroads, into military history, slave economies, art criticism, race relations, local politics, and so on. The documentary material I draw on is equally varied, offering information not only on artists but on the myriad cast of characters involved in public commemoration—politicians, ministers, intellectuals, veterans, activists of all kinds. If the nets of my investigation are spread wide, the results are nevertheless focused on the art forms of commemoration in the public sphere. By and large, these forms were sculpture—a medium with its own rules, idiosyncrasies, and possibilities. My working method therefore includes some detailed discussions of the medium and a few extended readings of particular works. Ultimately, the historical investigations of this book are successful only if they yield a new visual understanding of those concrete forms. It is my hope that, having gone through this process of historical and visual analysis, the reader will look with new eyes at the commemorative landscape that surrounds us and embodies our collective purpose.