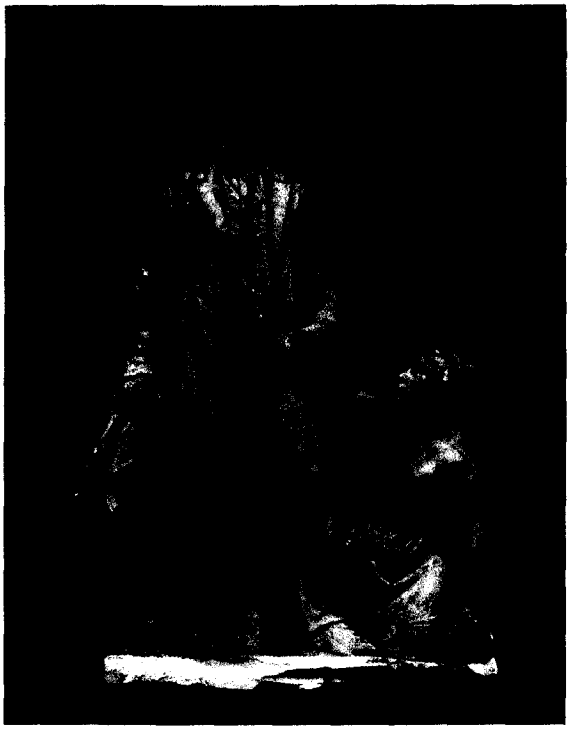


3.10 Randolph Rogers, *Lincoln and the Emancipated Slave*, circa 1866, plaster.

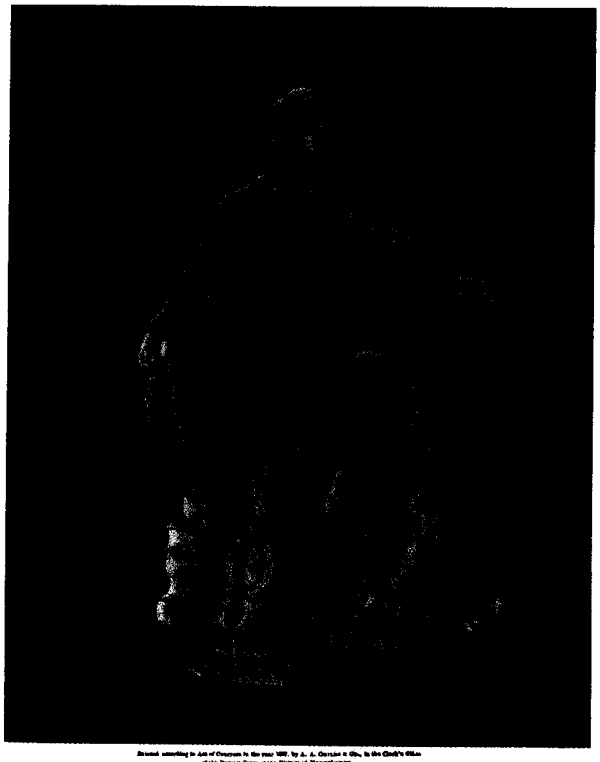
left by Brown's composition is the inscription of radical inequality, infantilized dependence on the part of the slave and the black race he represents and masterly benevolence on the part of Lincoln and the white race he represents.

While Brown reinforced this opposition between the two figures by contrasting age and maturity, expatriate sculptor Randolph Rogers devised a polarity on the axis of gender. The design he proposed in 1867 for the Philadelphia monument to Lincoln is the only known example of a female slave paired with the president. The design has been lost but a related plaster model does survive which, in the particulars of the two figures, is probably very close to the Philadelphia version[53] (fig. 3.10). This model features a standing Lincoln gazing down upon a crouching, seminude woman whom he is lifting by the wrist with his left hand. Wearing a bandanna wrapped in the shape of a liberty cap (the *pileus* worn by manumitted slaves in Rome), she gazes back up at Lincoln as she steadies herself with her left hand. The physical touch between the two figures is extremely significant. His hold of her wrist—rather than her hand—

erases any suggestion of romantic gallantry, which Rogers surely wanted to avoid; it places the action outside the familiar rubric of lady-gentleman contact. The gesture suits more the interaction of parent and child. Lincoln's clutch in effect replaces the manacle still visible on the woman's left wrist, the hold of the slaveowner exchanged for the hold of the emancipator. The other significant feature of the model is the drapery. The sculptor arranges Lincoln's coat and his limbs in a series of crisp, gently undulating verticals, while the slave's skirt is disposed in a repeating pattern of V-shaped folds, which visually anchor her to the ground. Hence the oppositions suggested by gender, pose, and gesture are extended to the costume and its abstract sculptural patterns.

Rogers's design insists even more blatantly than Brown's on the subordination of freed slave to emancipator qua manumitter. While the relationship is neatly condensed in the extraordinary hand gesture at the center of the composition, the controlling fact of the design is the juxtaposition of gender. No longer is the pairing a sculptural rumination on black manhood and its possibilities for development. The slave's nudity, for example, now takes on a new meaning. Her exposed breasts add a dimension of sexual allure and vulnerability absent in Brown's design. The narrative of elevation also has a new cast. The black woman could not become even in theory Lincoln's equal since women as a class were stripped of political rights. Even if we imagined the group transformed by the slave's rising to a "civilized" status—which means refusing to accept the closure already enforced by pose, gesture, and dress—the free black would still remain outside the polity by virtue of her gender alone. By deflecting the narrative from the complex of issues surrounding black masculinity and its social and political rights, the sculptor seriously undermines the prevailing abolitionist rhetoric of elevation.

One more design of note was proposed for both the New York and the Philadelphia projects, this one by another expatriate in Italy, Thomas Ball[54] (fig. 3.11). Ball's slave is once again male, stripped to just a loincloth and a liberty cap. The figure is bound by manacles but the broken chains that had connected them lie near his feet. Behind him, on Lincoln's left, is a whipping post, the archetypal sign of slavery's cruelty. The original plaster model, which was reproduced in studio photographs and stereographs, departs in a few interesting respects from the designs of Brown and Rogers. Lincoln does not touch the slave but reaches his left hand out over the man's body in a sort of benediction gesture; his right hand grasps a shield resting on the Emancipation Proclamation.[55] The slave does not look back up at Lincoln but stares out into space. Ball's slave is a man, fully grown, and his muscular presence in the composition foregrounds the issue of black masculinity. More than any of the other models, Ball's seemed to pose the problem this way: would the slave stand up and



THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL.

From the Bronze Statuette Group, by Thomas Ball.

"And upon this act I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God."

Published Aug. 28, 1867, by A. A. Childs & Co., 127 Tremont St., Boston.

3.11 Thomas Ball, stereograph of plaster model for monument to Lincoln, circa 1866.

become a man and, if so, what kind of man? Would he come to hold the conventional prerogatives that defined white manhood—in other words, would the sameness of his gender overcome the difference of race—or would both his rights and his manhood be called into question?

These were the very questions that underlay the whole legislative agenda of Reconstruction: they defined the problem of equality. Ball had to supply the answers in the peculiar language of sculpture, embedded as it was in the form and action of the human body. His design seems to embody the abolitionist ideal of uplift, with its tantalizing promise of manhood and equality. But his narrative is less straightforward than

either Brown's or Rogers's, and the meaning of the slave's body is more difficult to read. In particular the slave's pose is quite peculiar, as anyone would soon find out by trying to hold it. Ball himself, according to his recollections written several decades later, took the pose and modeled the group in clay from a kneeling position by the use of mirrors. By so doing he "could appreciate exactly the position I required, and could not only see, but feel the action of each muscle."[56] If we as viewers follow the same procedure and try to approximate this uncomfortable position, we discover at once that the body is not in the process of standing up, as casual observers might assume. The figure crouches uneasily, leg muscles tensed, the left arm steadying his balance instead of pushing the body upward. To arrive at this strange and complicated pose, Ball must surely have studied two widely known prototypes on display in Florence, where he lived and worked. One was Bandinelli's group of *Hercules and Cacus* from 1534, located outdoors near Michelangelo's *David* in the Palazzo Vecchio. The figure of Cacus, who is about to receive a death blow from the hero above, also crouches on one knee, his head strained upward and his right arm steadying himself in a similar gesture. Of course the narrative energy of the group is entirely different, and Cacus's pathetically twisted torso has no parallel in Ball's design. Yet it is worth noting that this extreme image of lethal domination could supply much of the basic body language of Ball's solution.

The other prototype is the *Arrotino*, the one classical model of any relevance to Ball's problem (fig. 3.12). Often identified as a slave figure in the mid-nineteenth century, the *Arrotino* also appealed to racial theorists like Blumenbach as an example of a barbarian, an ethnic other.[57] Thus Ball had many reasons for appropriating the figure, but what is striking is how he has revised it. In the *Arrotino* the distribution of the body's weight is much different: the figure sits back on his right heel and stabilizes himself with his left foot planted in front; neither knee touches the ground. Ball's slave, with his weight thrown more forward on the knee and his back more horizontal, must exert considerable strain just to hold the head up as he does. The narrative thus shifts subtly but crucially. Unlike the *Arrotino*, Ball's slave must have been in abject misery, his face dropped toward the ground, only an instant before. What we see is the moment after, when the man has just raised his head as if awakening to the new fact of his freedom. It seems that Ball was trying to represent, in the language of the body, the very first moment of emancipation, that precise instant when the slave, still in an abject position, realizes his chains have been broken—sundered magically from above—and lifts his head in recognition. Needless to say Lincoln is the agent of this transformation: the slave is acted upon rather than acting in his own right. Yet the

3.12 *Arrotino*, Hellenistic marble, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

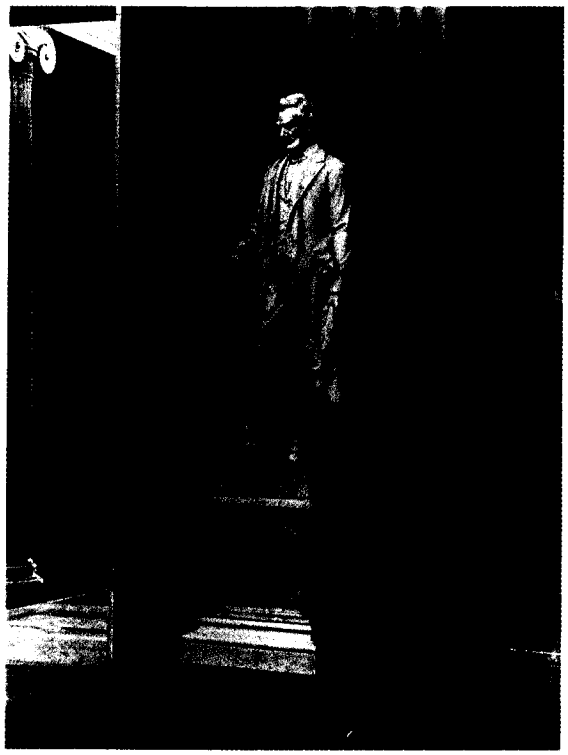
slave does not respond to Lincoln but instead to his own new state of being. It is a narrative of coming to consciousness, of rebirth, set into motion by the unseen action of the white savior above.[58]

In one crucial respect Ball's design departs from the traditional manumission formula. The model does not represent a personal relationship between emancipator and slave; there is no direct interaction based on gratitude or patronage or dependence. As commentators then pointed out, the design is meant to be more poetic or ideal.[59] Lincoln's act of abolition and the slave's initial awakening are really two separate narratives brought together here to suggest cause and effect, yet without recourse to the realist fiction of an interaction between great man and lowly slave. The idealization of their relationship allows the slave figure a small internal space for self-consciousness, whereas the other designs forced the slave figures to direct their attention entirely to Lincoln. But that idealization also magnifies the unbridgeable distance between the two figures: Lincoln becomes a messianic figure of total consciousness while the slave is reduced to a newborn, just on the threshold of being. In the abolitionist narrative of degradation and elevation, the slave's ascent has hardly begun, only hinted by the lifting of the head.

Some observers later remarked that the slave figure itself was ideal, which was their way of observing that the physiognomy was less noticeably Africanized.[60] The old notion that the African body was intrinsically anti-ideal died hard. It is true that Ball began with a life model, presumably black, but rejected him in favor of self-modeling; the resulting physiognomy has some of the conventional cues of blackness familiar from visual representation (tightly curled hair, broadened nose and lips) but still remains racially indistinct. Ball in his autobiography recounted that the original model "was not good enough to compensate for the unpleasantness of being obliged to conduct him through our apartment. . . . As I did not require an Apollo," Ball explained, he used himself.[61] Ball's nonchalant reference to Apollo—accepted standard of male beauty—betrays the real distance between his conception of the black body and Ward's for the *Freedman*: for Ward the ancient canon and the black body occupied the same universe. Ball's visceral discomfort with the living black model is repeated by other white sculptors working on the African American subject for public sculpture. Brown referred to his model for the Lincoln group as "that thriving 'nigger' " and wrote his wife that he did not expect him to "show his miserable muzzle here again."[62] These comments point to an obvious disparity between the artists' informal characterizations of real black people and the formal narratives of elevation in which the black subject was supposed to take part. But the attitudes betrayed here were common even among dedicated abolitionists, and they help account for why each design insisted so systematically on the opposition between Lincoln and the freed slave.

Despite the great ambitions of these local monument campaigns to represent the whole historical era, in the end all the local projects through the 1880s resorted to the traditional single-figure portrait statue. None of the monument committees chose the designs we have been discussing, even though these designs were obvious attempts to connect Lincoln with the broader historical phenomenon of emancipation. In both the New York and Philadelphia projects the final designs represented emancipation merely as an attribute of Lincoln's fame. Brown's monument has a standing Lincoln, in the role of statesman, holding the scroll signifying the Emancipation Proclamation. This formula would be used over and again, most notably in the Vinnie Ream statue of Lincoln commissioned for the U.S. Capitol in 1866 (fig. 3.13)—the only truly "official" Lincoln statue of the nineteenth century. Rogers's work instead has a seated Lincoln, in the role of creative genius, as if composing the celebrated document.

The precise reasons for the dismissal of the earlier designs are now obscure. We have it on the authority of Brown's son and biographer that the kneeling-slave design "was rejected by the committee because of fear that the figure of a negro in a public monument would arouse the resent-



3.13 Vinnie Ream [Hoxie], *Abraham Lincoln*, 1871, marble, U.S. Capitol.

ment of the Irish citizens."[63] If the story is true it shows that, despite the clear subordination of the black figure to the white one in the design, the sheer power of the medium of public sculpture to honor and ennoble its subjects overwhelmed the formal aspects of this composition. It should be remembered that, except for the obscure case of the Avery Monument, the figure of the black had not appeared anywhere in American public sculpture, and the mere appearance in any pose or guise was therefore enormously significant and threatening. This was precisely the point in time when white ethnic groups were beginning to mobilize and sponsor monuments representing themselves and their place in American society. The Irish in New York could point to an absence of Irish figures in public sculpture; the idea that their city might erect a monument to African Americans before erecting a monument to Irish Americans might well have galled them.

Although the information about Brown's design is uncorroborated, it would seem to speak volumes about the severe obstacles facing any kind

of black representation in public sculpture—even when the subject seemed to cry out for it and even when the sculptor was careful to install a racial hierarchy in the representation. If even the manumission narrative, with its reinscription of the power relations and racial order of slavery, could not win the approval of a white public, what could? How much safer for sculptor and sponsor alike simply to include a small device like a scroll signifying the act of emancipation. Besides, the emancipated themselves could easily be imagined without actually being represented. In Vinnie Ream's version for the Capitol (fig. 3.13), a slight downward tilt of Lincoln's head was all that was required to suggest the presence of passive slaves. In the most widely reprinted description of the statue, the writer imagines Lincoln looking down "with anxious solicitude," ready to use his ample cloak to protect the now invisible bodies of "the defenceless beings who are to receive the inestimable boon of freedom."[64]

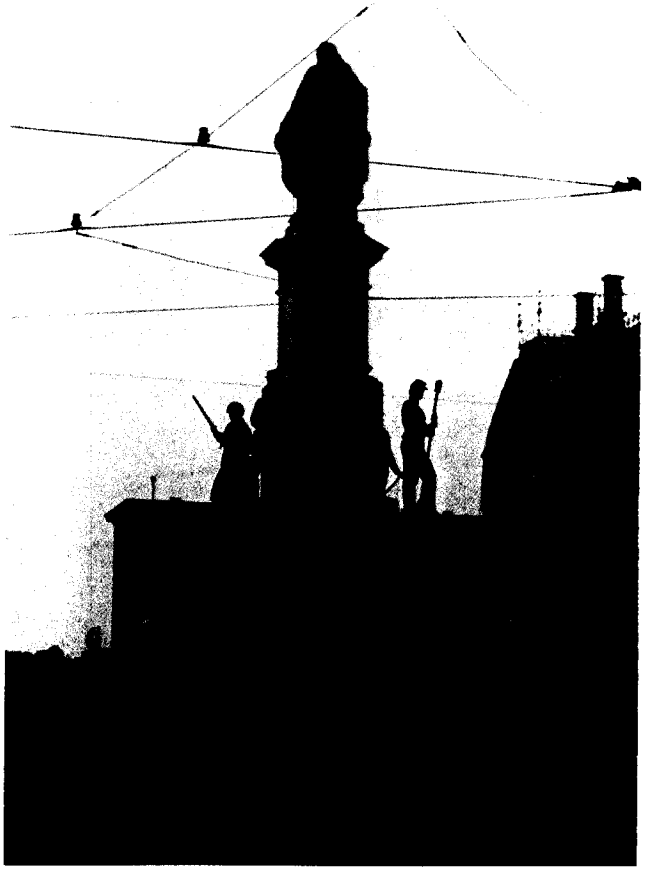
We know that the African American body represented a fundamental threat to public sculpture. But it was still possible for monument sponsors to contemplate African American representation if it was suitably subordinated to the claims advanced for white heroism. The Philadelphia case, which is the most amply documented of the local projects, is the best example. The committee there originally invited a few chosen sculptors to submit two designs, one for a conventional single-figure monument and the other for a two-figure group consisting of Lincoln and an allegory, the whole to represent Lincoln "as the defender of our nationality, or as the author of the Emancipation Proclamation."[65] There is no reason to believe that the committee at this point was even contemplating a black figure. Yet the only two designs the committee received, by Randolph Rogers and Thomas Ball, both substituted a slave figure in the place of the allegory. Ball's design came recommended by none other than Hiram Powers, and had already gotten some favorable publicity in the New York press and elsewhere.[66] We do not know why the committee rejected Ball's model, for only its response to Rogers's design survives (in draft form). But here the committee made clear that even though a black figure hadn't originally been contemplated, it was "entirely satisfied" with his crouching female slave figure and "would not have any of its details or its relation with [the] principal figure altered."[67]

This response is all the more striking given that the letter criticized almost everything else about Rogers's design—the stiff pose of Lincoln, his narrow shoulders, the tightly buttoned coat, and especially the inclusion of a demon being crushed beneath Lincoln's right foot to represent the vanquishing of rebellion. The committee thought it important to represent the strength of the Union "particularly as it is shown by the destruction of slavery when slavery threatened its dissolution." But it wanted the idea embodied in a form less likely to cause offense to the

defeated side since the monument was to last for ages and the time was coming, it hoped, when "fonder feelings" between the two sides would reemerge.[68] This argument is notable for two reasons. First, the achievement of abolition is subsumed under the achievement of Union, a priority that Lincoln himself maintained. More important, it recognizes the potential for disparity between a permanent image and the changeable social conditions and sentiments surrounding that image. The white South and its many "Copperhead" sympathizers in the North (Philadelphia included) would not want to see themselves forever represented as demons ground beneath the martyr's feet. What might do for a popular print created in the passion of the moment would not do for a monument meant to last in perpetuity. Of course the same logic is not applied to the figure of the black. Would the emancipated like to see themselves forever represented stripped and subservient, even as they were supposed to be raising themselves up through education and free labor? Wouldn't the time soon come when the representation became obsolete, and didn't that outcome deserve as much hope as "fonder feelings" between victor and vanquished? The unqualified approval of Rogers's freed slave indicates two interrelated attitudes: first, that within the committee's notion of the "public" for the monument, African Americans had much less standing than their white political enemies; second, that the idea of black subordination was so deeply rooted in their minds that a future equality could not even be imagined.

In the end it is not clear why the committee settled for a single-figure design. Money may have been a factor, since the dual-figure design obviously would have cost more. Rogers apparently proposed the seated Lincoln himself after the severe reaction to his first design. One of the committee members later expressed regrets; after visiting Ball's studio in Italy, he wrote back enthusiastically about Ball's model, which had been revised somewhat and cast in bronze, but by then the decision to accept Rogers's new design had already been made.[69] Whatever the specific reasoning was, it almost certainly did not turn on the question of the black figure. The committee seemed to understand and to accept without question the opposition of Lincoln and the slave, along with the complex of attitudes that opposition implied.

Unexpectedly, then, the first image of emancipation appeared not in a monument to Lincoln but in a soldier monument—the very type of memorial Howells had had in mind for the *Freedman*. Yet when the image did appear, it was not the primary focus as Howells had intended, or as the Lincoln sculptors had envisaged in their projects. It was a subsidiary relief panel embedded within a huge multifigured monument which the state of Rhode Island erected to its soldiers in 1871 in the capital city of



3.14 Randolph Rogers, Rhode Island Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, 1871, Providence.

Providence (fig. 3.14). The sculptor once again was Randolph Rogers, and he initially proposed a design in 1866 shortly before he began working on the Philadelphia project.[70] That initial design laid out all the elements of the final monument—the figure of America triumphant at the top, the four servicemen around the middle, the allegorical bas-reliefs and name plaques below—except that none of the four reliefs dealt with emancipation. By 1870 the subject of one of the reliefs had changed from "History" to "Emancipation," and Rogers had sent a photograph of a preliminary version in plaster (fig. 3.15).[71] The figure was a female slave, nude from the waist up, identifiable as African American by the full lips and tightly curled hair. Displaying with open palms the manacles and

3.15 Randolph Rogers, model of emancipation relief, 1870, plaster (now lost).

broken chains still clinging to her wrists, she looked upward, as if to meet the gaze of God or some other unseen higher authority. She was, in effect, a standing version of the crouching figure Rogers had contemplated for Philadelphia. Distinguished from the other three allegories by her "color," she represented a unique interjection of racial difference into the most conventionalized kind of sculpture there was—the allegorical. In the final version, erected a year later, Rogers moderated the nudity and changed the face slightly, but retained the same pose and content. When the monument was dedicated, the high-relief figure on the back of the pedestal was the first figure of an African American on a monument outside a cemetery. Despite its exceptional status, it has received virtually no attention, local or otherwise, and it was still misidentified as "History" in the most recent guide to the city's public sculpture.[72]

Rogers went on later to create one more subsidiary image of emancipation, in a soldier monument erected in Detroit (1872–81).[73] As in Providence, emancipation was one of four female allegorical figures, the only one made to look African American. In Detroit, the figure is in the round

and therefore more difficult to ignore. She is not a slave but in every respect the equal of the other three allegories who, like her, hold out wreaths above soldier figures below. It is only her hair and physiognomy that distinguishes her and that associates her allegorically with emancipation. This figure was so exceptional that its allegorical status was even called into question. African American audiences reappropriated it as a portrait of escaped slave Sojourner Truth, who had lived and died in Michigan. According to *Ebony* magazine, "the sculptor denied that he intended to portray Sojourner, but the public seized on the 'African-type' figure as a fitting monument" in itself. For many years the figure was reproduced in black publications, one of the only works of public sculpture they could claim as their own.[74]

African American audiences could also admire a work by Austro-Italian sculptor Francesco Pezzicar that was sent by the Austrian government to the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. It was a bronze figure of a standing black man, chest swelling and arms outstretched, holding in one hand a crumpled sheet signifying the Emancipation Proclamation. The figure was based on a European prototype, a commemorative medal struck in England in 1834 to celebrate the British act of emancipation. In freestanding sculpture such a work had never been seen before: a vital, active, erect black man reveling in his own freedom. There was no subtlety about it; it was a one-dimensional historical fantasy, unmarked by the ambiguity and uncertainty of Ward's *Freedman*. But it was also a bold assertion of political and spiritual independence. Made by a foreign sculptor for temporary exhibition, it had little chance of finding a permanent home on a public monument in the United States.[75]

THE burgeoning new interest in public monuments, which had seemed to promise a vast space for the representation of emancipation, yielded little in the end beyond the conventional formulas of heroic representation. The experiment of the *Freedman* proved impossible to emulate in monumental sculpture. We know that the logic of commemoration imposed heavy constraints on the subject of emancipation. To imagine emancipation, for the most part, was to imagine Lincoln. But even within this narrow compass sculptors still tried to innovate, to transcend the prosaic domain of portrait statuary and create an image that would speak to what the nation was in the process of becoming. Their most common innovation—the pairing of a standing Lincoln with a kneeling slave in what I have described as a narrative of manumission—turned out to be more of a look backward than a look forward; it embodied deeply paternalistic aspects of abolitionism. Ultimately even this solution was bypassed in favor of safer, and more conventional, signifiers of emanci-

pation located on the body of the white hero; the black body melted back into invisibility. The image of Lincoln with a scroll or a pen in hand carried no commentary on the status of blacks in America or on the future of race relations in an emancipated world. Out of all this sculptural activity only one major monument to emancipation came to be erected, and the long history of how it emerged in public space is the subject of the following chapter.