

CHAPTER FOUR

FREEDOM'S MEMORIAL

ON THE NATIONAL STAGE, in the center of political power, a monument to "freedom" finally emerged. This was the Freedmen's Memorial to Abraham Lincoln, a project begun immediately after Lincoln's death and completed finally in 1876—neatly spanning the whole era of Reconstruction. Financed entirely by contributions from free blacks, the monument campaign was the most conspicuous attempt in public sculpture to capture the spirit of Reconstruction, to translate into the sculptural language of the human body principles of freedom that remained abstract and barely imaginable. While the nation attempted to redefine itself as a free interracial society, the Freedmen's Memorial—first on its own, then in concert with other national monument projects—sought to make the interracial nation a palpable reality in public space.

The commemorative projects discussed in the preceding chapter were more local in their scope, meant to boost the reputations of the big cities that sponsored them. The Freedmen's Memorial, and a few others like it, appealed explicitly to a larger collectivity, cutting across local and regional boundaries, and by doing so they opened up new possibilities for the imagination. The sponsors of national monuments were less likely to settle for a single-figure design and were more determined to realize grander ambitions, both in historical scope and artistic originality. It is in this arena that we see, for the first time, proposals for large-scale sculptural cycles devoted to African American history and emancipation. New possibilities opened up in part because locally defined constituencies like the Irish in New York had much less impact; the "public" was much bigger and more diffuse. Without the more clearly drawn parameters of local politics to fall back on, the makers of national monuments were forced in effect to invent their own public. But in that process of invention was the opening for real innovation. The right tactics could create room to nurture a public into existence that might bring something genuinely novel, something unpredictable, into public sculpture.

This effort was in itself a test of emancipation's strength. If historians have tended to focus on other tests, on measures of political or economic

rights, they have overlooked the more subtle structures that hold such measures in place. The task of imagining new forms of interracial sculpture and new national publics to legitimate them put direct pressure on the most profoundly embedded racial attitudes and concepts. Sculpture, as we have seen, mapped the racial terrain of the human body, where the hierarchy of difference clung most tenaciously. The question was whether a national monument to freedom could succeed in remapping the terrain of race in a genuinely liberating way. This monumental project was not simply an ornament to Reconstruction, but rather an enactment of the cultural change that the nation had to bring about. The grand designs of Reconstruction were unlikely to succeed without the fundamental change that emancipatory sculpture promised and demanded.

It is important to restore the sense of historical possibility at this moment in American sculpture because the final result of the Freedmen's campaign—Thomas Ball's monument in Washington, D.C.—seems so predictable in hindsight. An early twentieth-century photograph of it (fig. 4.1) hauntingly evokes the distance between the African American public and its monumental image, between the monument's claim to uplift and the condescension of its imagery. For the bronze freedman functions not as an exemplar for the ruffled youth staring up at it but as a foil through which white mastery is revealed. Ball's emancipated man is the very archetype of slavery: he is stripped, literally and figuratively, bereft of personal agency, social position, and accouterments of culture. Juxtaposed against the fully dressed, commanding figure of Lincoln, the black figure's nudity loses its heroic aspect and works instead as negation—most drastically a negation of the conventional markers of masculinity now monopolized by the white man above. Frozen forever in this unfortunate juxtaposition, the monument is not really about emancipation but about its opposite—domination. Ball's work hardly lived up to the great ambitions of the sponsors or to the even greater rhetoric of Reconstruction. Most disastrously, perhaps, the monument failed to speak to the experience of those who actually paid for it and made it possible. None of these failures was foreordained, however; no one in 1866 could have predicted that Ball's design would emerge triumphant from the profusion of schemes circulating at the time. By retracing the tortuous series of events—artistic, political, and sociological—that led unexpectedly to Ball's monument, we can recapture what was at stake at this pivotal point in national representation.

From its extraordinary and much-publicized origins, the campaign for the Freedmen's Memorial was mired in contradictions. The story begins after Lincoln's assassination with a five-dollar donation entrusted by an ex-slave named Charlotte Scott to her ex-master for a monument to the martyr-president. The local newspaper in Marietta, Ohio, instantly publi-



4.1 Thomas Ball, Freedmen's Memorial to Abraham Lincoln (Emancipation Monument), 1876, Lincoln Park, Washington, D.C.

cized the act, and others took notice. African Americans from the area apparently augmented Scott's gift and began to create a real fund, but this homegrown fund-raising effort was soon supplanted and erased by larger forces. Word of the original gift reached a Union general who thought "such a monument would have a history more grand and touching than any of which we have account," and he persuaded the Western Sanitary Commission of St. Louis—a volunteer war relief agency—to sponsor the project and "make it known to the freedmen."¹ The commission seized on Scott's offering as a model gesture of black gratitude, made doubly sentimental by its transmission through the bond of master and slave. In the first broadside for "Freedom's Memorial," the commission reported that an "old negro woman" gave the money "to build a monument to good Massa Lincoln."² That image of black deference to white patronage then became reproduced in the institutional structure of the

campaign—and ultimately in the monument itself. African Americans, mostly soldiers, contributed the cash, while the white sponsors collected the money and decided how to spend it. There was never any possibility that the donors themselves might influence the design; the sponsors made clear that it was “the friends of the freedmen” who would “determine the character of the monument.”³

After a few months \$20,000 or so had been deposited with the Western Sanitary Commission, enough for a modest bronze statue. But a modest statue was not what the commissioners wanted; they were determined to erect nothing less than a great work of art. The commissioners let it be known that they were now working for \$50,000 but actually hoping for much more, so that “the magnificence of the memorial may correspond to the distinguished excellence of the man.” Toward that end they asked every freedman in the country to donate “one week’s free work, or its equivalent.”⁴ They also redoubled their fund-raising efforts by appointing the distinguished black lawyer and activist John Mercer Langston to solicit contributions personally from African American communities in the South and Midwest. By this time, though, Andrew Johnson had vetoed the Freedmen’s Bureau bill, and pessimism was already beginning to hurt the campaign. This did not stop the commissioners from adopting an elaborate design by expatriate sculptor Harriet Hosmer late in 1866, which they had exhibited in Boston and proclaimed in a published circular to be “the greatest achievement of modern art.”⁵

As these few facts suggest, this was not a straightforward case of a monument to be erected by and for African Americans. The public for the monument was peculiarly fractured from the inception. The subscribing public—the black donors—were really addressing not their own but a separate public. They wanted to make a “dignified offering” (as Langston later put it) to the white public that constituted the civic realm; they wanted to demonstrate their own civic responsibility in a medium that brought notice and prestige. For them the grandeur of the design probably mattered little. As Frederick Douglass argued in the *Anglo-African*, no matter how humble the monument it “would express one of the holiest sentiments of the human heart.”⁶ The white sponsors, in turn, recast that “sentimental” civic project in the language of paternalism, making appeals to the freed slaves to “prove that they are capable of appreciating the greatness of their deliverance and of the sacrifice by which it has been sealed.”⁷ The sponsors, in other words, were not simply executing the wishes of their subscribing public. They were competing on a wider stage with other monuments to Lincoln, and they wanted theirs to outshine them all in artistic quality and emotional effect; their monument was supposed to capture the new era that seemed to be dawning with Reconstruction. And here is where the poor black donors played an indispensable

role. Driven by a gratitude the white audience could not match, they gave the sponsors' project a distinctive aura that ennobled and expanded the white artist's intention.

It is surprising that the Western Sanitary Commission came to sponsor the project at all because its members did not have credentials in the abolitionist movement. Any of the prewar abolitionist societies would have been a more likely choice. The project fell into the commission's lap because its relief work for the many thousands of black refugees in the western theater during the war had pushed the agency unexpectedly into dealing with freedmen's issues.⁸ The eminent men from St. Louis who promoted the commission's work lived and prospered in a slave state, and they had in one way or the other accommodated to the local institution. The most outspoken opponent of slavery among them was the founder, Rev. William Greenleaf Eliot, a leading Unitarian minister and college president. Yet, before the war, Eliot repudiated abolitionism as extremist and only favored gradual, compensated emancipation as a policy.⁹ Wayman Crow, who was in the commissioners' circle and one of the most active in the monument campaign, was himself a slaveowner until 1853 when he manumitted his domestic servants. Harriet Hosmer was a close family friend of Crow and in his household came to have a benevolent view of slavery, which was only tempered years later under the influence of female abolitionist friends like Lydia Maria Child. Hosmer threw her energies into the "darkey monument" (as she sometimes referred to it) because she thought there lay her best chances of securing a major Lincoln commission.¹⁰

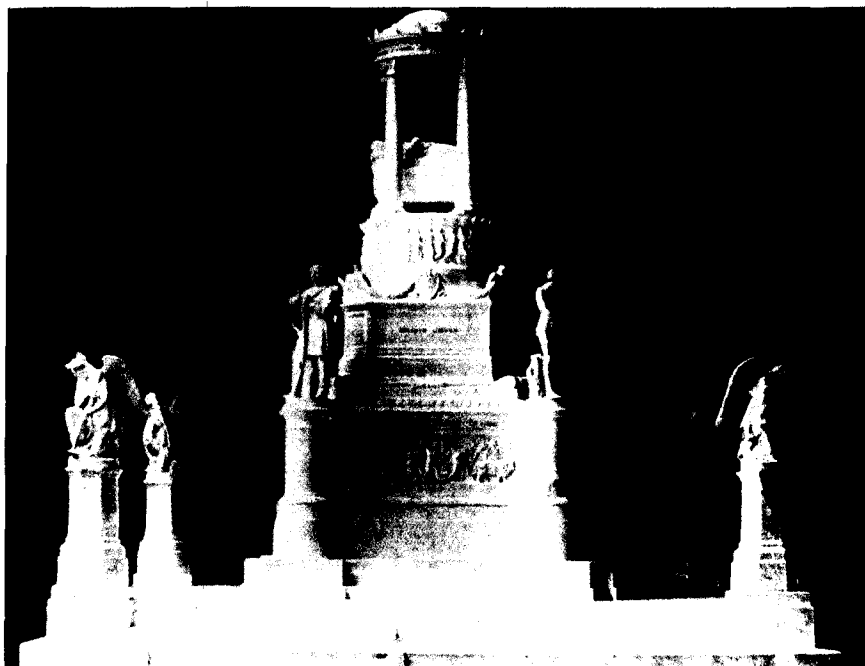
The structural division within the campaign between black donors and white organizers distinguished it from one other distinctively African American project for a national monument to Lincoln. This was the "Colored People's Educational Monument Association," led by Henry Highland Garnet, one of the nation's most famous black political activists. Garnet's group proposed to erect an alternative, utilitarian monument—a national school for freedmen in the name of Lincoln.¹¹ Though it enlisted contributions from everyone, black or white, the whole project was much more clearly embedded within the African American community, both in its institutional structure and in its goals and audience. But Douglass, longtime opponent of Garnet, still objected publicly. If African Americans wanted to build a monument to Lincoln to show the nation their gratitude, he argued in print, they shouldn't mix that civic project with their own pressing goal of self-education; it "*looks to me like an attempt to wash the black man's face in the nation's tears for Abraham Lincoln!*" [emphasis in original].¹² Douglass's opposition touched off a nasty exchange of letters between him and the monument managers printed in the *Anglo-African*. In that exchange Douglass broadened his

attack, condemning the very idea of enlisting the aid of whites for a separate "colored" monument. It smacked of officially sanctioned separatism, he suggested: "what new plan or scheme is brewing with a view to make separation a substitute for equality, a colored nationality a substitute for complete incorporation in the American body politic?"¹³ The debate is important because it shows what was at stake for African Americans in the whole monument business—nothing less than the terms under which they would enter civic space and find representation there in the body politic. We do not know what impact the debate had on actual African American communities but it surely must have hurt Garnet's campaign, for the project disappeared soon after the dispute was aired.

In 1865 there was one other national monument organization that tried to raise money in African American communities. This was the National Lincoln Monument Association in Springfield, Illinois, a group of prominent Illinois politicians who proposed a monument where Lincoln was buried. The association targeted African Americans and many other different groups for fund raising, in an effort to make the enterprise a legitimately "national" undertaking. Once again black soldiers contributed liberally, but other African Americans expressed a wish to build a monument by themselves or to have some portion of the tomb structure designated as their particular contribution. For them the whole point was to make their donation publicly visible; otherwise the act was lost and made meaningless.¹⁴

This seemed to be exactly the selling point of the Freedmen's Memorial, except that the adoption of Hosmer's design forced an abrupt change in the sponsors' strategy. Needing another \$100,000 or more to execute the design, the commission suddenly opened its appeal for funds to a much wider public. A circular of December 1866 asked the citizens of New England (where the commission had raised most of its funds for relief during the war) and most particularly "the women of America" to complete the work begun by Charlotte Scott and her African American compatriots.¹⁵ Shifting from race to gender, the new fund-raising appeal no doubt hoped to trade on the historic role played by women in the abolitionist movement; the sponsors were also simply trying to capitalize on the unique circumstances of a female founder and a female artist. The *Freedmen's Record*, organ of the New-England Freedmen's Aid Society, offered to help, but the commission's change of course received some damaging commentary elsewhere in the press.¹⁶ The new public that the commission envisaged—an alliance of freedmen and their white supporters—did not materialize.

Despite the vagaries of the commission's campaign, the design by Hosmer that emerged from it did depart radically from the formula estab-



4.2 Harriet Hosmer, model for Freedmen's Memorial to Lincoln, 1866, plaster (now lost).

lished by Brown, Rogers, and Ball. In the process, the design inspired at least some critics to think that it might be the one work that adequately responded to the challenge of representing the postabolition era. Hosmer's model fortunately survives in photographs and stereo form, and a revised version was later engraved and published in the London *Art-Journal*.¹⁷ The original model, the one exhibited in Boston, is a multi-tiered affair topped by a recumbent effigy of Lincoln on a sarcophagus within an open, circular temple (fig. 4.2). Above the columns of the temple is inscribed an edited version of the final words of the Emancipation Proclamation, leaving out the reference to its military necessity and invoking only the nobler considerations of justice and God. The drum supporting the temple carries a frieze of thirty-six female allegories representing the states of the Union during Lincoln's presidency. Below the temple, in the middle of the main structure, is the monument's most unusual element: a sculptural cycle of African American history, featuring four standing black male figures, one at each corner. On the base below the black figures are four bas-reliefs illustrating events in the life and death of

Lincoln, and on the four outside corners of the monument are "mourning Victories" with trumpets reversed, which return the viewer to the theme of martyrdom highlighted by the temple at the top.

The African American cycle is made especially conspicuous by its position in the center of the monument. From the front, the viewer sees the first and last figures in the cycle as they frame the memorial structure. On the right is a seminude slave, with head downcast and wrists manacled together, "exposed for sale" as Hosmer explained; on the left is a fully clothed soldier gazing straight out and holding a bayoneted rifle, as if at picket duty. Here in effect are the two poles of masculinity, as measured on the axis of power. The first figure has been stripped of clothes and power, bound so that his hands are immobile; he drops his head in shame. The last figure, his hands freed, holds a gun and wears the uniform of national power; his gaze can now meet the world's from a position of strength. Behind these figures are the two intermediate figures in the cycle, the second being a field slave who rests on a hoe and drops his head, and the third being a "contraband" type, or, as Hosmer put, "a guide and assistant to our troops," who carries a basket of food in one arm. There are some interesting nuances in the treatment of these intermediary figures (see fig. 4.3, a second version of Hosmer's design, for a clearer view of these figures). The field slave holds the hoe in much the same way the soldier holds his gun, a compositional rhyme that serves to underscore the irony and injustice of expropriating the slave's labor. The basket of food carried by the third figure represents that historic moment when the fruits of the slave's agricultural labor are no longer expropriated but turned by him toward his own liberation.¹⁸

As a composition Hosmer turned the whole monument into a kind of spatial pyramid, insisting at each level on the four corners so that they made continuous lines sweeping upward and inward. Within the pyramid there was considerable freedom to interweave the themes of emancipation, martyrdom, and Union. Emancipation is represented in the uppermost inscription and the cycle in the middle, martyrdom in the dead figure of Lincoln up above and the mourning figures at the bottom, Union in the frieze of allegories below Lincoln and the eagles and shields just beneath. For clarity of outline and internal harmony Hosmer repeated the poses of her figures: all the mourning figures kneel, all the black figures stand. This decision had important consequences, for it forced an even more decisive break with the iconography of manumission. Though Lincoln is represented up above the black figures to maintain the hierarchy of heroism, he is in the horizontal position while they stand erect. His power and agency have been drained from him by death, as if to reemerge in the emancipated slaves beneath him. In Hosmer's design, Lincoln's act of emancipation is not illustrated in an invented interaction but recollected in his

words, chosen to resonate in the present. The viewer is, of course, supposed to grasp the interconnections between Lincoln's acts, the Union victory, and the slave's liberation, but the decision to represent the hero in his tragic end allows the narrative of liberation to stand more forcefully on its own, in its own space, propelled by its own internal logic.

In choosing to juxtapose the figure of the slave and that of the soldier, Hosmer was embodying a trope by then quite familiar in the rhetoric of emancipation. During the war, when the Union command recognized the military advantage of arming slaves, blacks and whites immediately sensed that military service would profoundly change the social construction of black masculinity. "The black man is henceforth to assume a new *status* among us," one senator asserted in 1864.¹⁹ To be a soldier in battle was the ultimate test of manhood, because men battled men and battled to the death. For the male slave the test was even more profound since his masculinity had been denied from the outset. "If slaves will make good soldiers," one Confederate general declared, "our whole theory of slavery is wrong."²⁰ As we have seen, in the representations of the dominant culture, the male slave could demonstrate his manhood only insofar as he resisted or escaped slavery. To become a Union soldier, then, was not only to acquire conventional trappings of masculinity but to resist the very institution that suppressed his masculinity in the first place. As one slave turned soldier commented in 1863: "Now we sogers are men—men de first time in our lives. Now we can look our masters in de face. They used to sell and whip us, and we did not dare say one word. Now we ain't afraid, if they meet us, to run the bayonet through them."²¹ Remarkably, Hosmer's cycle seizes on many of the same elements in this juxtaposition—the alteration in the black man's gaze, the helpless exposure to violence transformed into power to return violence with violence, even the image of the bayonet as symbolic of that new power.

Wearing a uniform and carrying a gun did in fact give the former slave a sense of power and respect unimaginable under slavery. The annals of the war and its aftermath are full of anecdotes of former slaves, now soldiers, refusing to show deference to whites and sometimes even witnessing the spectacle of a former master crouching before them.²² The "before-and-after" images that became popular during the war made the change visible on the body itself by deliberately contrasting the slovenly dress and posture of the slave (often, it seems, posed as such in a studio) with the crisp uniform and erect stance of the slave-turned-soldier (see fig. 3.3).²³ The new black man in this pair embodied the stunning optimism of his era: in one simple change of outfit, he stepped out of one entrenched tradition of popular representation—the ragged, feeble, pathetic "darky" familiar from minstrelsy and caricature—and into a brave new world of civic display.

The dramatic transformation of the slave into the soldier served as a kind of visual rebuttal to the argument, sometimes heard, that the habits of obedience and subordination inculcated under slavery actually prepared slaves for life as soldiers. The image of self-transformation completed the work that officers like Thomas Wentworth Higginson, one of the first white commanders of black troops during the war, initiated. "The more strongly we marked the difference between the slave and the soldier," he recalled later, "the better for the regiment. One half of military duty lies in obedience, the other half in self-respect. A soldier without self-respect is worthless." The image of the slave-turned-soldier made that self-respect palpable in the trappings of the body itself.²⁴

In embodying this opposition of slave and soldier in a sculptural cycle, Hosmer claimed to be representing no more than "the condition of the negro as it actually existed at different periods of the President's four years of office."²⁵ This formulation reduces the cycle to a properly commemorative image, illustrating the history of Lincoln's era. Yet the figures could not help but read as a statement about the future, about the promise of emancipation. By the end of the cycle the black figure is not trapped in an everlasting posture of debasement, as the freed slaves are in the manumission imagery. He is erect, intact, unwounded, alert but not rigid. He has acquired manhood (the level gaze), power (the gun), and legitimacy (the uniform)—all three reinforcing and requiring one another. His "elevation" is already complete. If Ward's *Freedman* posed a question about the black man's fate, Hosmer's narrative supplies an answer by giving the black man a clear social identity, the image of the citizen-soldier keeping vigil. This was the very image that would become the accepted icon of manhood in the white soldier monuments erected over the next several decades.

The implications of Hosmer's narrative are clear enough, especially so in 1865–66 when the political struggle over the legacy of the war was turning increasingly on the definition of the rights of the freedmen. In her cycle the figure of the black man has done everything he can to make his body and his action conform to the standards of citizenship. He has labored, even without reward; helped the Union when opportunity arose; become a model soldier himself. If his emancipation remains incomplete, it is only because white culture refuses to grant it, refuses to acknowledge the "progress" defined by and in Hosmer's sculpture. Hosmer's design envisions not only a new African American man, but a new American society in which he can find acceptance.

Hosmer's decision to install this imagery at the heart of her memorial structure—the black figures occupy the center of the imaginary pyramid of space—was a radical proposal for it insisted on the centrality of the African American subject, when only a short time before that subject was,



4.3 Harriet Hosmer, design for Freedmen's Memorial to Lincoln, in [London] *Art-Journal* 7 (January 1, 1868): 8.

sculpturally speaking, invisible. Critics who saw the model or photographs of it did not fail to appreciate the significance. Before Hosmer, wrote the *Independent*, "sculpture [of Lincoln] remained silent, or only feebly articulate. It has spoken at last—to a negro woman whom Lincoln emancipated—by Harriet Hosmer, the New England artist." It was of course the "negro" connection that gave her design voice, made it speak for the age. The monument was "Hosmer's masterpiece" and "our greatest work of art." Critics singled out the African American statues as the best part of the design, and *Harper's Monthly* hoped Hosmer would execute them whatever the fate of the monument.²⁶

Despite the praise Hosmer tinkered with the placement of the African American cycle, and actually made a second design in which the same cycle occupies the outermost corners while the allegories shift inward and become standing figures passing wreaths of victory down toward the black men (fig. 4.3). In this design, published in the London *Art-Journal*, Lincoln is a standing figure holding a broken chain, and the allegories therefore serve as intermediary figures linking him with the African American; we read down from his emancipatory act through the

allegories to the achievement of black liberation. The whole design returns the center of agency and responsibility to the active figure of Lincoln. Hosmer then rejected this revised design and returned to her original, except that she tried simply reversing the placement of the mourning figures and the black figures. She was trying to solve a formal problem, which was how to lead the eye downward through the composition. The mourning figures, with their diagonal trumpets, created a graceful link between top and bottom, while the emancipation cycle tended to catch the eye and hold it there. "For point of sentiment" she preferred the black figures in the center, but "for the general outline" she preferred the mourning figures there.²⁷

By the time Hosmer was considering these changes, the Western Sanitary Commission had come to realize that it could not muster the huge sums needed to carry out Hosmer's project. But her design had acquired a life of its own, and in the commissioners' minds it became more important to erect it than to preserve the original idea of the fund. Hence, in the summer of 1868, they made the extraordinary offer of merging their resources with those of the National Lincoln Monument Association in Springfield. There was just one condition: Hosmer's design had to be chosen. This proposal would have further diminished the importance of the original black donors, as their contributions would simply disappear into the much larger fund already collected for the tomb. Ultimately the move failed, but out of it came one extremely revealing document—a letter written on Hosmer's behalf, with the commission's approval, by the distinguished Henry Bellows, president of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, the major war relief agency for the Union.²⁸

Bellows's letter, an elaborate defense of Hosmer's design addressed to the governor of Illinois, is one of the most learned essays on monuments written in the nineteenth century, but quite apart from its general interest it demonstrates how even such a clear program as Hosmer's could be dissociated from the freedmen and reinterpreted to fit the demands of a new monument and a new public. Bellows begins his exposition by arguing that the preservation of the Union was the "object" of the war, while emancipation, however noble a result, was merely the "condition" of the war's success. This distinction then determines how the commemorative attention of the monument should be distributed. It is fit for the freedmen's monument to make emancipation its leading idea, but "in a *National Monument*" the theme of emancipation must remain subsidiary to the dominant theme of Union. Implicit is the idea that emancipation—and the shift from slave to free society it entailed—was less a shared "national" interest than the maintenance of Union. Bellows claims that Hosmer's design lays the stress on Union where it belongs—in the upper part of the structure, the temple. As for the inscription from the Emancipation

Proclamation on the temple, which seems to undercut his argument, he points out that the word slavery does not occur in it. Slavery is represented instead on the lower level, on a platform of its own—"as if detaching Slavery and all its works from a Union, which was foreign in all its purposes and in its very spirit from that historical accident and incubus." While it should be remarked that this interpretation rests on some dubious claims—that slavery was foreign to the national spirit, that Hosmer's design reflects that foreignness—it is especially notable that the argument turns the earlier praise for Hosmer's model on its head. For the *Independent* the "negro" theme is what made the design "articulate" to the public; the critic even suggested that there should be black figures among the allegories in the Union frieze. But for Bellows blackness must be contained, made secondary, to the point that it remain outside the very structure representing nationality. In rhetorically detaching the idea of slavery from this structure, Bellows must detach the emancipated as well. He concedes that the four statues do give the idea of emancipation an appropriately conspicuous place in the monument, but emphasizes that it is a lower place, representing emancipation as "a blessing, which being *deprivative*, leaves the Union itself without any mark of its late accursed presence." Hence the emancipation cycle, in this reading, shifts from a narrative of liberation and creation, social death and rebirth, to a mere sign of negation, a reminder of the *absence* of slavery from the newly unified nation.

We cannot know whether Bellows's letter represents Hosmer's intention. It does represent one way of rewriting her design without having to change the design itself, and she may well have approved of that rewriting. But Bellows's effort came to nothing. The Springfield association had already committed itself to a design competition, and although Hosmer's design was entered it was not even among the top vote-getters in the jury's balloting. The association ended up choosing a design by Larkin Mead which minimized the issue of emancipation much further than Bellows ever could with Hosmer's design. Mead returned to the formula of a standing Lincoln holding a scroll, on which was inscribed "Emancipation." This was the only reference to the subject. The subsidiary figures were not African Americans but white soldiers disposed in four combat groups; the sculpture turned the commemorative focus to the idea of warfare.

The Springfield competition is important to us because it was the only open competition for a monument to Lincoln held in the nineteenth century.²⁹ In fact the competition was held to publicize the project and legitimize it as a truly national undertaking. The dozens of entries received, mostly from sculptors and architects, represent in a fragmentary way the possibilities of the collective imagination; they show the range of

solutions that could be advanced even within the restrictive forum of a professional competition effectively open only to white artists who could command significant resources. What is interesting is that a substantial number of designs did propose to bring the African American body into representation, and—even more strikingly—the association looked seriously at them. Unfortunately, except for Hosmer's design and two others, the visual records of these entries have disappeared and we can imagine them only through written descriptions.³⁰

Overall at least a quarter of the entries did include figures of freed men or women. The two designs submitted by sculptor Leonard Volk, for example, included statues of a freed slave and a Union soldier (presumably white) flanking the entrance to the tomb structure. One of the two designs incorporated a highly unusual allegory of emancipation: the figure of a slave woman holding a tablet bearing the Emancipation Proclamation. A few entries even tried to situate African American figures outside the conventional domains of allegory or documentary history. While Hosmer's model ostensibly recorded the past achievements of African Americans under Lincoln's administration, some designs actually took the emancipation theme out of the commemorative framework of "history" and situated it frankly in the contemporary context of debates over freedmen's rights. C. G. Volk's design included a group "representing the white and black boy building together, symbolizing the present position of the two races"; the board deciding the competition apparently discussed the design with the artist and left a note saying that it "considers past present and prospective of slavery."³¹ However the design may have looked, it seemed to be a serious attempt at an interracial image, clearly departing from the commemorative norm. That it received any serious notice—and it did earn a few votes in the first balloting—indicates a surprising degree of openness to new racial representations never before seen in sculpture.

The most radical proposal came from Philadelphia sculptor A. E. Harnische; it deliberately set out to represent Lincoln's act of emancipation as "the introduction of a new era in [American] history."³² In this multi-tiered assemblage of sculpture, with Lincoln holding the Emancipation Proclamation at the top, a cycle of conventional allegorical figures is coupled with a cycle of emancipation groups that address some of the central issues of Reconstruction. Next to last in the emancipation cycle is a figure of Power paired with a group representing education, in which male and female figures read a book; finally there is the figure of Justice to whom a freedman "with unshackled hands appeals for his rights as such." Here Harnische's design abandons the commemorative conceit entirely and becomes an open plea for the future. Lincoln's proclamation reads as the catalyst for a train of events whose final outcome is unresolved. This ap-

peal for education, power, and justice for the former slaves—none of which had yet been realized, despite Reconstruction—must have seemed too hot to handle, and the entry received no votes.³³

With the Springfield group's eventual decision to avoid any representation of emancipated figures, whether secondary or not, the efforts on behalf of Hosmer's proposal came to an end. At this point the Western Sanitary Commission's campaign took one final surprising turn. Still lacking sufficient funds for what it considered to be a worthy monument, the commission decided to throw its money to yet another National Lincoln Monument Association and another design. This was the proposal, sponsored by leading Republicans in Congress and the administration, for an immense national monument to Lincoln and his era, to be erected on the Capitol grounds in Washington. Although it was to be funded by private donation, it was virtually an official project of the federal government, with the funds even managed by the U.S. treasurer.³⁴ *

Of the two National Lincoln Monument Associations, this one was certainly the more logical home for the freedmen's fund. Unlike the Springfield monument, the Washington project was driven by the rhetoric of radical Reconstruction, with its platform of universal male suffrage and equal rights. Congress initiated the project in March 1867, shortly after it had passed the first Reconstruction Act, which required states in the South to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment (equal rights) and guarantee Black male suffrage. The same coalition in Congress that passed this act also passed the bill sponsoring the national monument. The bill created "the Lincoln Monument Association, for the purpose of erecting a monument in the city of Washington, commemorative of the great charter of emancipation and universal liberty in America."³⁵ The dominant theme of the monument was thus fixed from the outset, and it looked forward more than backward. Note how the language slips from Lincoln to emancipation to universal liberty; by the end of this sequence the commemorative program encompasses the radical Republican agenda of racial equality under the law encoded in the term *universal* liberty. Under this formulation Lincoln himself is reconstructed, no longer simply the Civil War president but the founder of a new nation-state empowered to complete the "charter" he initiated with the Emancipation Proclamation. Ostensibly authorizing a monument to Lincoln, the bill really called for a monument to a newly emergent ideal of an interracial nationality. ✓

The original fund-raising appeal of the association published in 1867 made that ideal explicit in the very first sentence, addressing "the loyal people of the United States of all classes, without distinction as to race or color."³⁶ This formulation is noticeably different from the fund-raising appeals of the Springfield association, which tended to treat African Americans as a separate constituency; here the emphasis is on one people,

united across divisions of class and race. Frederick Douglass had been appointed to the board of managers, and this first fund-raising appeal seems to bear his imprint.³⁷ At the end of his acrimonious exchange two years earlier with the "Colored People's Educational Monument Association," he had declared that he was never opposed to the idea of "mixing" white and black contributions to build a suitable monument to Lincoln, as long as the final result was not labeled a "colored" monument. In fact, for Douglass an all-black project was worthy if carried out honestly, but he preferred a mixed project, "a People's monument to Abraham Lincoln without distinction of color." He even suggested that the Colored People's Educational Monument Association turn over its money to a common fund for a people's monument because it "would be in harmony with our demands not for special privileges but for common rights and common equality before the law."³⁸

It was perhaps in this spirit that the board of managers approached the Western Sanitary Commission in 1868 and began to negotiate for the freedmen's fund. By the end of the year the managers and the commission had worked out a deal, but the terms of the agreement betrayed the ideal that Douglass had promoted and the managers themselves had embraced in their first appeal for contributions. The commission agreed to transfer its \$20,000 in funds to pay for the upper portion of the monument containing an effigy of Lincoln, that portion to be officially designated the freedmen's contribution.³⁹ The designation was obviously meant to preserve, at least in part, the integrity of the original freedmen's fund. But at the same time that designation dramatically altered the larger Reconstruction project: it created a monument within a monument, a color distinction built into the very fabric of the whole.

Moreover, the design that the Western Sanitary Commission bought its way into was problematic from the beginning. Chosen without competition in early 1868, the design by the sculptor Clark Mills made Hosmer's look simple and sparse by comparison [fig. 4.4]. A densely packed pyramid of sculpture, the model included over two dozen portrait statues of famous men in addition to a seated Lincoln on top, posed in the act of signing the proclamation and surrounded by allegories of justice, liberty, and time. In addition it included, on the next to lowest tier, an elaborate emancipation cycle, the only other besides Hosmer's that was approved and published in an adopted design. But Mills's cycle, though it was organized around the same basic idea of a progress from slavery to freedom, departed significantly from Hosmer's example. Here is the description taken from the stereo photograph distributed to subscribers:

The first . . . presents the slave in his most abject state, as when brought to this country. Here we behold him nude, deprived of all which tends to elate the heart with any spirit of pride or independence.



4.4 Clark Mills, model for National Lincoln Monument, circa 1868, plaster (now lost).

The second represents a less abject stage. He is here partly clad, more enlightened, and hence, realizing his bondage, startles with a love of Freedom.

The third . . . is the ransomed slave, redeemed from bondage by the blood of Liberty, who, having struck off his shackles, holds them triumphantly aloft. The slave is pictured gratefully bowing at her feet.⁴⁰

We do not know whether this description came from Mills or from the sponsors, but in either case it betrays an unshakable condescension toward the people it represents and supposedly commemorates. The African arrives abject, without self-pride or any notion of freedom or independence. These are acquired, paradoxically, by the enlightenment made possible under slavery (an assertion very close to the proslavery arguments made before the war); only then does the slave belatedly "realize his bondage" and feel "a love of Freedom." Of course, despite that new-found love, the slave cannot break his own shackles but must kneel to an allegorical Liberty, symbolic of the nation that paid his "ransom" in blood.

The groups as they appear in photographs of the model do represent a substantial departure from Hosmer's imagery. The two groups that frame the front side of the monument are not the first and last in the cycle but the first and second, so that the image of emancipation ends up on the very rear of the monument facing away from Lincoln. All three groups pair a standing figure with a sitting or kneeling figure, and all three, even the last, adopt the conventional slave postures of abasement or obeisance. In the second group, for example, where the slave "startles" to a love for freedom, the seated pose recalls the traditional emblem for suffering (as did Brown's slave figure for the Washington pediment) and the standing recalls Michelangelo's writhing slave figures, now in the Louvre. In the final group the manumission imagery reasserts itself, made ideal by the abstract agency of the allegorical figure. Yet the slave figure is even more obeisant than in the other designs we have seen, with his head still bowed and his hands reaching up to touch the proffered arm of his savior.

When the cycle is viewed within its sculptural context, the African American figures read even less as historical persons and more as signs of the nation's moral achievement. The cycle is sandwiched between two massive tiers of portrait statuary of great men, meant to represent the organizations and forces that "stood by" Lincoln and helped him triumph. Below the slaves are the great military heroes like Sherman and Grant striding forward on horseback; above are standing figures of representative cabinet officials, relief organizers, and ministers who helped advance the cause. In a monument that sought to materialize the history of an era in a vast array of heroic men, all represented standing or astride a horse, the black figures are conspicuous in their difference. In sculptural terms, they are shut out from the realist realm of the heroic likeness. It is not simply their anonymity, but their bodily self-absorption that is responsible. Bent over themselves or writhing to break free, their bodies have not yet attained the confident address to the world that would enable them to join the ranks of heroes and thereby enter the national chronicle of achievement. Their lack of historical identity and agency turns them into emblems rather than actors: their bodies define the moral cause for which the great white men on the monument struggled and fought.

It does seem peculiar that an association ostensibly dedicated to representing the new idea of universal liberty would choose such a paternalistic design, which despite the allegories of liberty and justice on top, reinscribed subservience in the black body and reaffirmed the black man's segregation from the civic realm of the hero. It is doubly peculiar when the personal history of the artist is considered. Mills was a slaveowner and used slave labor in his bronze foundry in Maryland until nearly the end of the Civil War; in one of the supreme ironies of Lincoln's era,

*M. T. S.
Slave owner*

Mills's slaves help cast the colossal statue of Freedom which was installed atop the Capitol dome in December 1863 and immediately hailed as an augur of emancipation.⁴¹ Mills had begun his career as a sculptor in South Carolina and retained strong ties with the region. In fact, in the spring of 1865, Mills was accused in the *New York Post* and the *Washington Star* of being a Confederate sympathizer (a charge that was actually corroborated by an informer), and at the same time he lost his studio inside the Capitol building.⁴²

Moreover, Mills had acquired an infamous reputation in the art establishment as a philistine who won public commissions by pandering to popular taste. He was in almost every respect the opposite of Hosmer as an artist. Whereas she formally studied anatomy and carefully absorbed the classical canon in Italy, choosing to practice there amid the examples of antiquity, he was a self-taught artist who ignored the canon and never stepped foot in Europe. His great feat was to build his own bronze foundry and, without training or experience, cast the first equestrian statue in the United States—the Andrew Jackson Monument erected in Washington in 1853. Flouting classical models, Mills took the pose and gesture directly from a popular print and received enormous public acclaim simply because he managed to balance the horse on its hind legs. Both critics and admirers treated Mills's work as a litmus of the popular, and indeed of the American—insofar as these two notions were so often conflated. He was either an authentic exponent of American individualism and “natural” taste, as Stephen Douglas claimed in his oration at the Jackson Monument, or the embodiment of American arrogance and tastelessness.⁴³

So why would an association of radical Republicans choose the design of a sculptor with so controversial a reputation, tainted by slavery and disloyalty? And why would the sponsors of the Freedmen's Memorial throw their chips in with a design and approach to design so different from Hosmer's? We cannot know for sure, since most of the relevant papers of both the association and the artist have been lost. But we may begin to find answers in an essay published in 1870 by Hosmer's supporter Henry Bellows, who turns out to be a link between the two projects. Bellows was chosen as one of the “representative men” included on Mills's pedestal, and he used his essay to promote the grand scheme. Although the design would have “a thousand defects of detail,” he wrote, “we expect a result, grand and majestic, with something of the vastness and roughness of this stage of the popular taste, but at least an honest expression of American largeness of feeling and grandeur of purpose.”⁴⁴ The terms of praise for Mills's design are entirely different from those he had applied to Hosmer's. Hosmer's was above all a work of art, to be compared with the great monuments of Europe. Art as understood in the

nineteenth century demanded formal unity, the subordination of details to the expression of a leading idea or ideas; as Bellows had put it in his Illinois letter, "the real test of the artist's genius" is not so much the choice of ideas but "the *management* of these ideas."⁴⁵ Hosmer had skillfully united the ideas of Union and emancipation in a harmonious whole. In defending the Mills design Bellows deliberately suspends his critical faculties. Mills's monument is not to be judged as a work of art but as an authentic expression of American character and sentiment. It is rough and defective in detail, but it is ambitious in its scope, accessible to popular taste, and honestly American.

Though both the designs by Hosmer and Mills are embedded in the mimetic tradition, centering on the imitation of the human figure, they nevertheless arrive at antithetical conceptions of the sculptural monument. For Hosmer mimesis is not an end in itself. Her model is really an allegorical monument, an exposition of ideas, with only one portrait effigy, that of the central hero. All her sculptural cycles—even the ostensibly "realistic" cycle of African Americans—are sign systems, meant to be read as the inscriptions are. They draw attention to their own act of historical interpretation, and in turn demand interpretation from the viewer. Mills is much more profoundly attached to realism. His design is above all an accumulation of effigies of great men, interspersed with some allegorical sculpture. Those effigies are not signs but likenesses, stand-ins for the real thing. They are not meant to interpret history but to duplicate it, to bring it back to life. Lincoln is not so much explained as he is surrounded by the men who helped him make history. The emancipation cycle appears anomalous amid these ranks of heroes above and below it. We can either see Mills's African American figures as "realistic," in which case they are pathetic historical specimens, or we can demote them to the secondary status of allegory. In Hosmer's design, by contrast, the emancipation cycle is central because it is vital to the monument's act of interpretation. For the critics, that self-conscious semiotic mediation was what made Hosmer an artist; Mills was "popular" or "natural" because he seemed to devalue that mediation.

If Mills's monument therefore did not conform to European models, that very disparity could be used to prove its authenticity. The association published a statement attributed to Lincoln's secretary of state, William Seward, who, having "seen the principal Monuments in Europe," asserted that "Europe could not have such a Monument for she has not such a history."⁴⁶ In this account Seward had been shown the design by Lincoln himself. According to the story Mills had actually conceived the monument while Lincoln was still alive (a claim that is indeed plausible) and had given a drawing of the design to Lincoln, who praised it but passed it on to Seward because he had traveled to Europe and was a

"judge of art."⁴⁷ The story capitalizes on familiar elements of the Mills mystique: first the popular appreciation from the untutored Lincoln, then the surprise judgment of the learned critic who is won over precisely because Mills has *not* emulated the art of Europe but directly captured American history itself.

In fact, contrary to the thrust of the story, Mills did look to Europe to mediate his representation of American history. For his vast pedestal he adapted a celebrated Prussian work, the equestrian monument in Berlin to Frederick the Great by Christian Daniel Rauch, completed in 1851. In this monument a colossal equestrian statue of the king rests on a multi-tiered pedestal that serves as a kind of scaffold carrying various combinations of equestrian statues, standing figures, allegories, and bas-reliefs—representing the great men and accomplishments of the king's reign. This work inspired three huge monument proposals by Mills, the first of which was an equestrian monument to Washington proposed in the mid-1850s, the second the Lincoln monument, and the third a monument to Lincoln's adversary Robert E. Lee, entered in an 1877 competition.⁴⁸ Rauch's design gave Mills a prototype for a vast all-purpose monument, a flexible framework to accommodate all sorts of sculpture (historical portraiture, allegory, myth) in all sorts of formats (pedestrian, equestrian, bas-relief). For each monument and each ideological program, Mills reshuffled the components and filled in the iconographical blanks. He could easily shift the scheme from Union to Confederate commemoration without altering the general principle of the design. That general principle might be described in a word as conglomeration. Mills crowded as much "history" as possible onto the sculptural scaffold—history being represented primarily by an accretion of individual men, and only secondarily by allegory that suggests their collective achievement. Inscriptions or texts played no significant part.

In her monument Hosmer had tried to create a coherent movement from top to bottom, not by recourse to the unifying gesture of Lincoln himself, who was disabled within the composition, but by unfolding and interweaving key historical themes at various levels. The themes of Union and emancipation thus read as historically interconnected, converging in the martyrdom of the single hero. In Mills's design, by contrast, we confront a cacaphony of gesturing heroes, distributed on various levels that have little to do with one another. Mills made no special effort to integrate his emancipation cycle into the larger framework. It is positioned arbitrarily between two levels of white heroes; the levels could easily be reshuffled and repacked, just as they were in the other monuments of this type he designed.

Predictably Mills's design was criticized in the press as a monstrosity,⁴⁹ but remarkably the very same formal qualities that made it an aesthetic

jumble proved useful to the sponsors who adopted it. The multiplicity and interchangeability of the elements in Mills's design turned out to be well suited to the strategy of the monument campaign as it evolved over time. The association, it seems, quickly abandoned the idea of raising the vast sums necessary for a major monument simply by a mass appeal to the "loyal people," without distinction as to class or race. Instead it reconceived its base of support as a patchwork of smaller, more specialized constituencies that would be willing to fund a particular element of the monument. Mills's design lent itself quite well to this strategy of fragmenting the public into interest groups. His assemblage could easily be broken down into subcomponents, each with its own target constituency and its own separate subscription fund. To begin with, the statues of the "representative men" were conceived virtually as independent monuments, chosen not by the artist but by the association itself as it tried to assemble a cross section of interests that would bring in maximum donations. There were separate funds established for Salmon Chase, General Grant, and Henry Ward Beecher among others, with the idea that their statues would be cast in bronze as soon as the fund filled up. Statues were also assigned to key supporters of the monument: Henry Bellows, as we have seen, and James Yeatman, president of the Western Sanitary Commission, who seems to have been chosen as thanks for the \$20,000 in freedmen's money his group promised.⁵⁰

For the sponsors, what Mills's design lost in coherence it gained in the malleability and reach of its representation. Figures could be added, subtracted, or replaced at will, in a relentless search for new sources of funds. This seemed to be exactly what the sponsors had in mind from the start: they adopted the design only in its "general features," and left control of the "details" to their own board of managers, "to be decided upon from time to time, as the Board may deem advisable."⁵¹

The point is not that the fragmentation of the design reflected some truth about the public. Rather, the sponsors used the design to fragment their public, and in the process ended up fragmenting the design even further. One of the first decisions the managers made, a few months after adopting Mills's model, was to make a critical change in the emancipation cycle. In place of the final group with the kneeling slave, the managers substituted a portrait statue of Frederick Douglass, "as the representative of the liberated race"—even though Douglass was still on the board of managers at the time! In one simple move the managers created a new subscription fund and answered two of the strongest objections to Mills's cycle. They got rid of the most blatant image of subservience and introduced a specific black historical actor, a man who had liberated himself from slavery. "Under the influence of American progressivism," the association's pamphlet explained, "[he] stands forth not only freed, but

cultured."⁵² This was indeed a dramatic shift from the still degraded figure of the anonymous freedman, although the statue of Douglass did not fully join the universe of heroes on the monument because it remained segregated from the white ranks above and below him. Nevertheless, the black man now seemed to enter the realm of national history as an agent in his own right. The managers' action did receive notice and praise in a national convention of "the colored men of America" held in Washington in January 1869: a resolution was offered thanking the association for "the unmistakable recognition of our citizenship, and the patriotism of our race, in the present struggle for national unity."⁵³ Also sometime during this early period in the campaign the managers seem to have replaced the allegorical figure of time with a figure of equality, a bold reference to the central policy goal of Reconstruction championed by Douglass and other radical Republicans. But this change is difficult to determine with certainty because there are contradictory descriptions of the monument. One of the consequences of the managers' design strategy is that no one could agree on what the design was at any given moment.⁵⁴

These changes may well have helped paved the way for the Western Sanitary Commission to join its funds to the campaign. The most decisive factor, though, was probably the organizational structure of the campaign and the monument itself. Unlike the Springfield association, the Washington managers had no trouble slicing off a portion of the monument and designating it as the contribution of the freedmen. This was simply the further fracturing of a project already conceived as fractured. Moreover, the freedmen's portion was the pinnacle of the monument, containing the statue of Lincoln. The sponsors of the freedmen's fund could therefore persuade themselves that they were applying the money in the interests of the original subscribers, by giving them a statue of Lincoln and a visible sign of their civic act on the structure of the monument.

When the managers were negotiating with the Western Sanitary Commission's president, James Yeatman, they made another dramatic change to Mills's emancipation cycle. They eliminated the remaining two groups and substituted two works altogether different in theme: a female figure of "America caring for her disabled soldiers," meant to represent the work of woman; and the figure of a common soldier.⁵⁵ Their logic was straightforward. Where only one constituency, the freed slaves, had originally been represented (and pitifully at that), there were now three constituencies—freedmen, women, and veterans. The impulse for the change apparently came from a request in December 1868 by the women of the Ladies' Union Aid Society of St. Louis, who, on hearing that their colleague Yeatman was to be included on the monument, asserted that the monument would be "incomplete" without representing the work of female relief agencies. They were right, in a sense, since the logic of

"representativeness" was by now intrinsic to the design. The women's organization wanted three statues of specific women—Dorothea Dix, Clara Barton, and Mary Bickerdyke—but the board of managers refused to grant them any such historical legitimacy and reduced them to the more traditionally female role of allegory, the maternal figure of America nursing the wounded.⁵⁶ The addition of the common soldier seems to have been the managers' own idea for expanding the monument's reference.

Substituting three separate sculptures in place of the one cycle fit the operative principle of both the design and the campaign, which was to maximize representational reach. Moreover, the managers could feel satisfied that they had enhanced the dignity of the African American representation even though they had reduced its presence. Nevertheless, this final change to the emancipation imagery confirmed the increasing distance between the operative principle of the campaign and its original mission. Without the allegory of racial freedom and "progress," however compromised that was, there was no substantial representation of a common moral purpose unifying the vast cross section of heroes the managers had assembled. The figure of Lincoln on top, quill in hand, could not rescue the pedestal below from its collapse into a representational hodgepodge of disparate and ever changing elements. Writing to Yeatman from Italy, Western Sanitary Commission founder William Greenleaf Eliot complained that it was "a stupendous pot-pourri, in honor of everybody and therefore nobody."⁵⁷ Eliot put his finger right on the problem: in the rush to expand its historical representation, it had lost whatever historical meaning it once had.

Despite the sponsors' radical ideal of a monument embodying a new interracial unity, they still saw the nation as fractured into separate and racially segregated interest groups, which needed their own particular incentives to cooperate in the collective enterprise. The original vision of a public united in the general interest of universal liberty gave way to a pork-barrel model of multiple constituencies acting in self-interest. Mills's design facilitated this fracturing of the public. The populist sculptor provided the structure through which the sponsors could channel their old-fashioned patronage, dispensing representational plums to those constituencies willing to pay for them.

Ultimately the strategy failed. The managers collected nowhere near the funds necessary, and the modest sums they did collect were bizarrely managed out of the U.S. treasurer's office. Mills received at least \$10,000 from the fund for models he made of the "representative men," and other expenditures bordered on embezzlement, including, as the *New York Times* reported, almost \$1,500 to replace fur coats stolen at the 1868 presidential inaugural ball (because it took place in the Treasury Build-

ing!).⁵⁸ There were several attempts to revive the project into the 1880s, and two of the figures were actually cast in bronze, one by Mills himself in 1880 and one posthumously.⁵⁹ But the grandiose scheme by this time had no real prospects.

While it is impossible to know with certainty why one monument campaign succeeds and another fails, the record here suggests that this monument to "national unity, based on universal liberty," failed because it could not overcome the contradictions embedded within it. These were not merely the contradictions in Mills himself, egregious as they were, but in the very politics of Reconstruction, which animated the whole project. The radical Republicans who conceived the monument as their signpost proclaimed a new era of racial equality in law without building the psychological and social structures that could support equality. Without those structures their political program was doomed. By the early 1870s the nation was clearly retreating from the Reconstruction agenda of equal rights, and, increasingly, whites who had championed the cause of the freed slaves were now accusing blacks of abusing their new civic privileges. The original rhetoric of the monument's sponsors must have seemed outdated within three or four years; indeed, Bellows's 1870 article betrays none of the initial enthusiasm for universal liberty. Yet to reduce the monument's failure to politics is a little like putting the cart before the horse. The demise of Reconstruction was a failure of the culture as a whole, not just a failure to write better legislation or send more troops. Reconstruction failed because it could not (or would not) reconstruct the cultural structures underlying slavery: the idea of race and the idea of a nation built on racial opposition. The same failure was enacted in the design of the monument and of the monument's campaign, well before the political momentum of Reconstruction waned. The sponsors proclaimed a monument to national unity and universal liberty without knowing how to build those ideals into their own project. Even within the relatively narrow compass of a work of sculpture and a fund-raising strategy to get it built, they could not install an imaginary conception of the public that corresponded to what they claimed the new nation was already becoming. How could they hope to establish interracial unity when they could not give it credible form in their own work? The nation's most ambitious proposal for a monument to emancipation collapsed, we can argue, because it was dedicated to a new order that it did not comprehend and could not visualize.

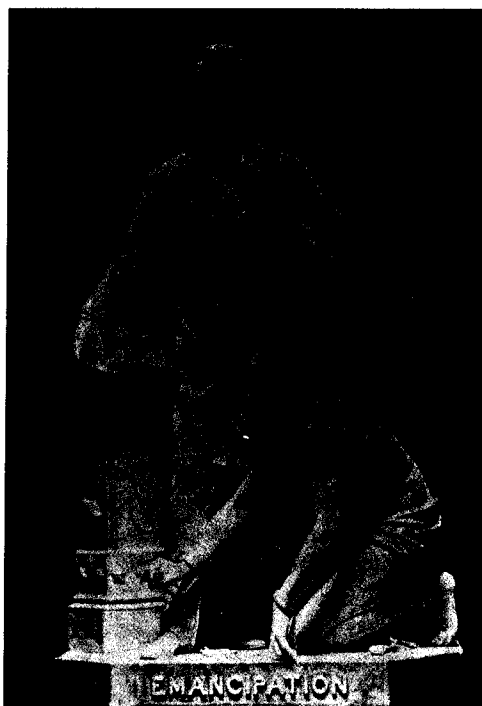
To this point, every attempt to introduce the emancipated body into national sculpture had failed. With the collapse of the campaigns behind Mills's and Hosmer's designs, the grand emancipation cycles vanished altogether, never to reappear.⁶⁰ The Freedmen's Memorial itself came close

to extinction, before being rescued and redirected to a design far more modest in scale.

The sponsors of the Freedmen's Memorial regretted their decision to join the National Lincoln Monument Association almost as soon as they had made it. Eliot's letter to James Yeatman of November 1869, complaining bitterly of the "Washington Folly," offered an alternative should the occasion ever arise. This was Thomas Ball's model of Lincoln and the kneeling slave, which Eliot had just seen and liked in Ball's Florence studio. Eliot did not give any extended analysis but merely remarked that "the African type is well maintained without over-doing" and that "the likeness of Lincoln is softened, but perfectly correct."⁶¹ Eliot, who evidently fancied himself something of a critic, was impressed with how Ball tempered the nonclassical features of both Lincoln and the African American in order to make them more conventionally sculptural.

Sometime after 1871 the Western Sanitary Commission withdrew from the moribund Washington project and commissioned Ball to execute a monument based on the group Eliot had seen. (The commission also fought off one last spirited effort to grab the freedmen's fund by the association in Springfield, which claimed to have more direct insight into the wishes of "the colored people.")⁶² The U.S. Congress agreed to pay for the pedestal and to set aside a site in a residential square on the eastern edge of Capitol Hill, at that time bordering on fields. The site was quite literally marginal, but it was directly on axis with the Capitol itself and did not suffer from the problems of the Mall, which was then a swampy overgrown mess. The monument was unveiled on the eleventh anniversary of Lincoln's death, April 14, 1876, with the president, Congress, and the Supreme Court all in attendance and with an oration by none other than Frederick Douglass.⁶³ It was a first in more than one respect. As Douglass remarked, it was the first time his "race" had ever erected a monument to a great American. It was also, as Douglass did not remark (for reasons that will become clearer), the first time his "race" had ever appeared in a national monument.

As finally executed the figure of the black man differed in a few respects from Ball's original. The commissioners saw the original figure (fig. 3.11) as both passive and idealized. Despite Eliot's original reaction that the "African type" was not overdone, they asked Ball for a more "representative form of a negro," without the liberty cap, and in a pose "helping to break the chain that had bound him."⁶⁴ As Yeatman later explained, this would "bring the presentation nearer to the historical fact, by making the emancipated slave an agent in his own deliverance."⁶⁵ It is interesting that the sponsors noted some of the basic defects of the manumission iconography, notably the way it deprived the freed slave of any agency in his own emancipation. The solution, as they saw it, was to transform the slave from the ideal figure sporting the liberty cap into a realistic portrait



4.5 Thomas Ball, model for Freedmen's Memorial to Lincoln, circa 1874, plaster (now lost).

figure, and to change his pose. The commissioners sent Ball photographs of a former slave named Archer Alexander, who was harbored by Eliot in 1863 while on the run from slavery and who then became his servant. Ball remodeled the facial features after the photos, and he made one slight change to the pose: he straightened the figure's bent right arm and made it culminate in a clenched fist (fig. 4.5). Yeatman asserted at the dedication that "the ideal group is thus converted into the literal truth of history without losing anything of its artistic conception or effect."⁶⁶

From our vantage point Ball's composition became an even stranger hybrid of allegory and realism. The new historical specificity of the black figure, insofar as it was recognizable at all, made the narrative conceit of Lincoln and the slave much more difficult to sustain. Putting the face of a real man on the allegorical slave not only made the figure's nudity nonsensical but also changed the dynamics of the piece entirely. It now became a group portrait of two historical figures who had never actually met, much less under the circumstances Ball's design suggests. Read as the "literal truth of history," the monument was bound to have troubling implications.

It is worth looking for a moment at the historical figure of Archer Alexander whose likeness was supposed to help guarantee that literal truth, especially since Eliot and the commission took every opportunity to emphasize Alexander's presence on the monument itself. Eliot published a narrative of the monument and its unknown hero some twenty years later.⁶⁷ This little volume is the best document we have of the mentality of the monument's sponsors, and it is a fascinating revelation of the ironies that pervaded the whole project. There is the irony that Alexander was Eliot's servant, and so the inevitably subservient relationship of the former slave to the monument's sponsor was in a sense reencoded in the design of the monument. But this is a rather superficial observation and does not begin to capture the complexities of Eliot's account. The book is largely the story of Alexander's escape in 1863 from a Confederate-sympathizing slaveholder in Missouri, and his subsequent travails as a fugitive in this border state where slavery was still legal but the institution was eroding under the pressure of military rule. Eliot's narrative confronted a basic problem from the start: since Alexander was owned in Missouri, he was not even indirectly freed by Lincoln's proclamation, which did not apply in the border states. If anything, the choice of Alexander underscored the real historical limitations of Lincoln's act. Eliot's book reveals that he was no strong fan of Lincoln's. Eliot had supported Frémont, the initial military commander in Missouri, who was fired by Lincoln because he issued a proclamation freeing all slaves of disloyal masters. (In fact, it was Frémont who authorized the foundation of the Western Sanitary Commission.) Lincoln, in Eliot's words, "unfortunately and unwisely revoked" Frémont's proclamation, so instead of declaring Alexander free Lincoln had actually declared him still a slave!⁶⁸

Alexander owed his freedom to his own escape and to the sympathetic policies of the military authorities in Missouri in early 1863, who were then allied with antislavery unionists. He found his way to Eliot's property on the outskirts of St. Louis in February, and Eliot obtained a military order giving protection to Alexander. Alexander was then kidnapped by bounty hunters, only to be recaptured dramatically by the military authorities and returned to Eliot's home. What Eliot does not report is that if Alexander had escaped a few months later his fate might have been different because Lincoln, under pressure from proslavery unionists, once again removed the military commander responsible for the liberal protection of fugitive slaves. Shortly after Alexander's rescue, Lincoln replaced both the Union commander and the provost marshal who had signed Alexander's protection papers.⁶⁹ As Eliot knew well but only suggested between the lines, Lincoln was really a hindrance to freedom in this particular narrative. Eliot's defense of the "truth" of the monument, at the end of the narrative, therefore rings hollow: "His freedom came directly

from the hand of President Lincoln, by provost-marshal authority, and his own hands had helped to break the chains that bound him."⁷⁰ Lincoln was only nominally in charge of the "provost-marshal authority" and he did his level best to prevent that authority from assisting the policy of emancipation.

Eliot concluded his narrative with an anecdote about Alexander's reaction to seeing himself represented on the freedmen's monument. Eliot writes that Alexander began to laugh and then, "he presently sobered down and exclaimed, 'Now I'se a white man! Now I'se free!'"⁷¹ The anecdote, as constructed by Eliot, is peculiarly double-edged. It is supposed to explain and indeed celebrate Alexander's inclusion in an honorific medium devoted to white men, while at the same time it points with a kind of paternal wink at Alexander's naiveté. The story cancels its own message; it confirms the distance between the high-cultural enterprise of sculpture and the low-cultural subject of the black man, the man whose dialect marks his blackness even as he asserts his whiteness ("Now I'se a white man"). So too does the monument cancel its own presumed message: it permits a space for the black man in national sculpture only by withholding the promise of a common masculinity, by insisting instead on the overarching opposition of whiteness and blackness.

The racial integration of monumental sculpture gestured toward what Frederick Douglass had demanded in 1865—the black man's "incorporation into the American body politic." With its three-dimensional presence, its attention to the human body in space, sculpture was ideally suited to realizing that corporeal metaphor of civic participation. As Eliot's anecdote presupposes, public sculpture was a promised land of sorts, offering not only representation in the symbolic space of nationality but "elevation" into the inner sanctum of white culture. Yet the logic of the medium betrayed its message of uplift, for it fixed its white and black figures in an immutable relationship. In bronze, Archer Alexander can never rise and stand, never come to consciousness of his own power. The narrative remains frozen in place, the monument perpetuating its image of racial difference for eternity.

It is no wonder, then, that Douglass in his oration did not draw attention to Alexander and his unprecedented appearance in the medium of public sculpture. According to the historian John Cromwell, who heard the speech at close range, Douglass referred to the black figure only once, in an ad-libbed aside which did not appear in the published version. As Cromwell later paraphrased it, Douglass objected to the monument's design because "it showed the negro on his knee when a more manly attitude would have been indicative of freedom."⁷² The concern here with "manliness" is consistent with Douglass's lifelong understanding of masculinity as the structural opposite of slavery, an understanding that

inevitably gendered emancipation as well. In the same oration Douglass claimed that under Lincoln's rule "we saw ourselves gradually lifted from the depths of slavery to the heights of liberty and manhood."⁷³ For Douglass entry into civic life meant that racial difference was subordinated to the common mantle of masculinity; as he argued in 1865, "the fact of my being a negro is far less important in determining my duty than the fact that I am a 'man,' and linked to all mankind as a man and a brother."⁷⁴ Emancipation, whether figured as the acquisition of whiteness or of masculinity, implied a rise to a position of dominance. Ball's black man was still mired in the depths of the dominated—neither white nor manly nor free.

The monument's sponsors would have us believe that Ball's changes had corrected this deficiency. It all hinged on the new right arm supposedly breaking the chains, and its ability to convey self-determination. Yet that tensed arm, with its clenched fist, is simply attached to the rest of the body, which in all essential respects retains the original pose. It seems that Ball tried to combine two incompatible narratives in one body's movement. The original narrative was one of recognition, that very first moment of emancipation when the slave realizes that his chains have somehow been broken and lifts his head in response. The second narrative is one of resistance, and it renders the first narrative nonsensical.⁷⁵ How can the slave just come to recognize his broken chains when he himself has been doing the breaking? It could happen only in an infantile sense, as when a baby comes to recognize something she or he has inadvertently accomplished. Resistance, the deliberate defiance of an external authority, really cannot be embodied in Ball's self-contained figure. His figure is all about coming to consciousness, the first internal awakening of a human being prostrated by oppression. Resistance belongs to a later (or earlier) stage in this figure's story. The narrative becomes even more contradictory when the second figure in the group is taken into account. Why is the slave straining against his chains when his deliverer hovers over him? It made some sense to join the two figures in this way when the conceit was that Lincoln had bestowed freedom on the unknowing slave, but now that the slave participates knowingly in his own liberation Lincoln must hover as a sort of anxious parent watching over the child trying to do for himself. The contradictions multiply simply because Ball did not rethink the slave's body as a whole. To do so would have required a drastic change in the relationship of the two figures—in effect, a new monument.

The changes the sponsors requested could not be accommodated meaningfully within the basic framework of Ball's design. Their request was, fundamentally, absurd, and Ball responded understandably by making the least change possible. For Douglass these minor revisions made

little difference. Whether his arm was bent or straight, whether he was Archer Alexander or not, the black man still kneeled, and so he forfeited his manhood. The pamphlet recording the dedication tried to gloss the pose by claiming that he was "represented as just rising from the earth," and indeed an approving notice published in the black journal from Hampton, *Southern Workman*, echoed this more optimistic description. There was enough ambiguity in the pose to permit many different narrative interpretations, from Lincoln "blessing" the slave to his "beckoning the slave to rise," but most contemporary viewers who wrote about the group followed Douglass and recognized that the slave was in the act of crouching, not rising. Aptly, the *New York Evening Post* just before the dedication described the slave figure as "almost prostrate."⁷⁶

Ball's design was a failure to imagine emancipation at the most fundamental level, in the language of the human body and its interaction with other bodies. This was the very language in which sculpture dealt, and in which the concept of race originated. That is why the outcome of this long monument campaign was so significant. The abstract goal of political equality, enshrined in the politics of Reconstruction, could not be achieved without a more profound rethinking of what equality meant in the experience and understanding of the body. At this basic level the Freedmen's Memorial offered a stark lesson. Instead of representing a new order, it reasserted the old racial structure and power relations of slavery. And insofar as it equated masculinity with power and domination, it held no future promise of emancipation for the black man at all. For in a masculine universe ruled by this logic of domination, not everyone can dominate. Some men must sink to their knees if others are to stand up and assume power. In Ball's world—which in many respects is still our world—equality is not simply a long way off; it remains outside even the imagination.

DOUGLASS made one more extraordinary assertion in his oration at the monument, cutting against the celebratory grain of the event. He argued that Lincoln "was preeminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men," and therefore the duty of commemorating him really belonged to those white men, not to the former slaves who were never "the special objects of his consideration." (How well the story of Archer Alexander would support his argument!) Nevertheless the freedmen had a right to build their monument and it would serve a purpose: it would defend black citizens against the "slander" of ingratitude. When "it is attempted to scourge us beyond the range of human brotherhood," Douglass concluded, "we may calmly point to the monument we have this day erected to the memory of Abraham Lincoln."⁷⁷ Douglass at once swept aside the paternalist argument that his race owed Lincoln a

special debt of patronage, as a manumitted slave would an old master, and reframed the monumental enterprise as a way of joining in a truly shared national memory. It was not the color-blind enterprise—the “people’s” monument—he had advocated in 1865 and later worked for, but it was a contribution to a common commemorative cause.

For Douglass this was above all a monument to Lincoln, which would take its place alongside other monuments to Lincoln in a shared civic space. But this is not what the monument became, in part because the design Douglass so disliked would not allow it. With its kneeling slave setting the work apart from all other monuments to Lincoln in America, the monument soon acquired special status as the definitive sculptural treatment of emancipation. First the nomenclature changed: the “Freedmen’s Memorial Monument to Abraham Lincoln,” as it was called in its dedicatory pamphlet, became known as the Emancipation Monument. A replica was erected in Boston in 1879 as “the emancipation group” (fig. 4.6), paid for not by freedmen but by the wealthy benefactor and abolitionist Moses Kimball; the inscription left no doubt of its purpose by declaring in the first line, “A Race Set Free.”⁷⁸ From then on the name seems to have stuck, appearing for example in an African American textbook of 1882 on emancipation.⁷⁹ By 1916 Freeman Murray acknowledged that the group had become the single most commonly reproduced image of emancipation, the very “exemplification” of the concept. Dismayed by its black figure, he made a spirited case for unfastening the work from this referent. As a monument to Lincoln, he had fewer objections to it (though he would prefer the figure of the slave removed altogether); as a monument to emancipation, he found it perverse, more the image of “a man who has perhaps escaped extreme punishment by commutation of sentence, than a man who feels that he is one of those who, as the Declaration of Independence expresses it, ‘are, and of right ought to be free.’”⁸⁰ This is the sharpest critical analysis we have of the narrative energy of the slave figure—one who is responding to salvation bestowed unexpectedly from above, rather than feeling the impulse for freedom from within—but it did not succeed in dislodging the canonical status of the work. The monument was reproduced on a three-cent stamp commemorating emancipation in 1940, and black historian Benjamin Quarles devoted the first chapter of his *Lincoln and the Negro* to its history (“Charlotte Scott’s Mite”). As late as the 1960s the monument was still prominently featured in magazine articles about African American landmarks, despite its popular epithet “Shine, sir?”⁸¹

Here is a rare case of a public sculpture creating a potent image that enters the culture at large. As that image travels from monument to book illustration to postage stamp, the honorific power and ideal status of the original medium drain away, and the image comes to seem natural, con-



4.6 Thomas Ball, *Emancipation Group*, 1879, Park Square, Boston.

densing as it does a whole historical mythology of emancipation. The fact that the emancipated themselves “erected” it—their total lack of participation in the design process glossed over by this conventional rhetoric—then serves as further confirmation of the image’s authenticity. As the image is reproduced and recirculated, ever more distant from the original context of its production, it becomes archetypal, lodged in the collective consciousness even of those who despised it.⁸²

With the idea of emancipation affixed indelibly to this one image, the monumental Lincolns of the future no longer needed to represent it. Once Lincoln had his kneeling slave, the slave could then disappear from the commemorative stage. Emancipation had become marginal: a black debt, a black theme, a black monument. The pressures of external events certainly played their part, helping to reinforce the internal logic of commemoration. Reconstruction officially ended the same year the Freedmen’s Memorial was dedicated, and with it the old dreams of political

equality were finally extinguished. The whole idea that emancipation might change the nation itself—and the very nature of freedom for both white and black—could now be forgotten. From here on out the Lincoln of commemoration could become the “white man’s President,” as Douglass had asserted, and emancipation could become the black man’s gift. Lincoln could reemerge as the mystical “preserver” of Union, rather than the creator of a new nation.⁸³

Ironically, then, Ball’s monument paved the way for a new “white” image of Lincoln, which the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens provided in his celebrated work of 1887, the only monument to Lincoln erected in the decade following the Freedmen’s Memorial (fig. 4.7, 4.8). Saint-Gaudens boldly dispensed with the conventional scroll and all other references to the Emancipation Proclamation. The sculptor was committed to a “realism” that eschewed artificial sculptural devices like the scroll which Lincoln would not actually have held or used. Saint-Gaudens’s problem was to make the ideal Lincoln (the soul, the moral stature) emerge from within the physical Lincoln, represented truthfully with the clothes and props of his own time.⁸⁴ This was the old chestnut of portrait statuary but Saint-Gaudens took it more seriously than any other sculptor before him (with the possible exception of Ward), thinking the problem through down to the smallest particulars of pose and the most subtle folds of drapery. Theatrical narrative conceits like Ball’s had no place in this rigorous project.

After experimenting with many different poses, seated and standing, arms crossed in thought or holding forth a document, Saint-Gaudens devised a brilliant synthesis.⁸⁵ He posed Lincoln standing before a chair of state, as if he has just risen to address an audience gathered before him; he tilts his head down in thought, while he rests his left hand on his coat lapel and holds his right hand in a fist behind his back. Here the narrative conceit of the monument meshes seamlessly with the physical act of viewing: we become Lincoln’s audience. The idea of associating a standing figure with an empty seat was entirely novel in public sculpture, and it served to amplify the combination of traits Saint-Gaudens sought to register in the figure itself. This was the man of decision and the man of reflection brought together in one body and one moment. Though paused in thought, the body projects vigorously in space, not simply in the advanced left foot but in the huge forward arc created by the swelling chest and the coat draping off of it. The perfectly still left hand we see from the front is counterbalanced by the repressed energy of the right, tensed behind his back; the continuous lines of the coat and the trouser seam are disrupted by the watch chain tumbling haphazardly down the vest. The modeling of the tousled hair and the creased clothing maintains this subtle equilibrium of superficial disorder and underlying structure, energy, and calm.



4.7-8 Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Stanford White, Lincoln Monument (*Standing Lincoln*), 1887, Lincoln Park, Chicago. *Below*: Detail of statue.



Although Saint-Gaudens toyed with the idea of putting a document in Lincoln's hand, perhaps a reference to the proclamation, in the end he decided to remove all referents to external achievements and, radically, to internalize the figure both in its composition and significance. Lincoln stands before an audience but concentrates on his own thoughts, gazing in on himself; we too gaze in on him and divine his character, not his accomplishments. We bring our knowledge of his act of emancipation to the figure, but in the process the specific historical act becomes transfigured into an eternal moral quality intrinsic to Lincoln's "ideal" self. For all Saint-Gaudens's fidelity to contemporary details, the figure stands apart from history and its messy irresolutions and becomes a pure embodiment of moral perfection. Whatever contribution Lincoln made to the destruction of slavery is thereby elided, absorbed instead into Lincoln's inner "essence."

With the omission of any sort of political iconography in the sculpture, a heavy burden fell on the inscriptions to situate Lincoln as a historical figure. These consist of quotable aphorisms on the exedra behind the statue, and two documents inscribed on small bronze globes that frame the steps in front: the Gettysburg Address and the so-called Greeley letter, in which Lincoln clearly explained that his paramount objective was to save the Union, with or without slavery. This was the very same document often used by apologists of the Confederacy to prove that the war had nothing to do with slavery. The inscription is easily overlooked since the sculpture is the overwhelming center of attention, but the message of retreat from the cause of emancipation is still unmistakable and surely deliberate (though the documents do not tell us who was responsible for choosing the texts).⁸⁶

Saint-Gaudens was invited to design the monument by a committee that did not have to raise any funds, the money having been given by the bequest of a wealthy Chicago benefactor. The committee actually corresponded initially with Thomas Ball, but eventually decided to go in a new direction, choosing Saint-Gaudens without even seeing a preliminary design from him. Both sponsor and artist had a free hand and did not need to strive for popular consent.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the final work became the most popular monument to Lincoln in America, achieving a reputation as the definitive portrayal.⁸⁸ The favorable criticism of the work, multiplying in the 1890s, tended to argue that Saint-Gaudens had made a "loftier" Lincoln by removing the historical onus of emancipation; the same critics applauded the choice of the Greeley letter (which they attributed to the artist) precisely because it put Lincoln in his "true" historical perspective. "Journey to Chicago and kneel before the bronze statue by Augustus Saint-Gaudens," wrote Charles Henry Hart, unwittingly recollecting the pose of Ball's slave, and you will discover that "it is not Abra-

ham Lincoln the liberator of slaves, but Abraham Lincoln the Saviour of the Union."⁸⁹ The most grandiloquent summation of its effect came from Lorado Taft, perhaps the most influential critic ever of American sculpture, who declared in 1896, "One stands before it and feels himself in the very presence of America's greatest soul."⁹⁰ Divorced from any specific history, Saint-Gaudens's Lincoln came to personify those qualities of moral order and decisive action essential to the postwar conception of America itself.⁹¹

Saint-Gaudens, in effect, emancipated Lincoln from emancipation, and thereby emancipated white viewers from its historical burden. However confused and degrading Ball's figure of the slave was, it did draw attention to the issue of the freed slaves' continuing presence in society. It was an interracial monument, making African Americans visible in a medium that had insisted on their invisibility, their imperviousness to sculptural representation. Faced with this slight opening, Saint-Gaudens decisively closed the door. By supplanting the Freedmen's Memorial with a newly definitive Lincoln, he helped to dissociate Ball's monument from the national memory of Lincoln and to consolidate that monument's hold on the now marginal theme of emancipation. By creating a "white" Lincoln purged of responsibility for the millions of emancipated, he helped make Ball's Lincoln the patron saint of an increasingly subcollective "black" memory.

At the same time that Saint-Gaudens solved the political problem posed by the commemoration of Lincoln, he solved the aesthetic problem that Lincoln seemed to typify. As critics like Marianna van Rensselaer argued, Saint-Gaudens's Lincoln revived the standard portrait monument, turning the most unpromising of contemporary figures into eloquent sculpture. Here was the "ideal" Lincoln embedded in the prosaic likeness, without any theatrical props or artificial narrative conceits.⁹² In effect Saint-Gaudens had finally realized, in a mainstream monument, the sculptural promise that some critics had seen years earlier in Ward's figure of the *Freedman*—a synthesis of the real and the ideal. But Saint-Gaudens managed this achievement without recourse to the black body, without its liberating indeterminacy. He achieved his synthesis by erasing the black body and instead devising a new sort of sculptural decorum for the contemporary white hero. Whereas the example of the *Freedman* ultimately could not be repeated, Saint-Gaudens's ideal could be and was. The new era of sculpture once promised by the *Freedman* was opened in his absence.

We can bring this story fittingly to a close by taking a brief look at the final efforts of Harriet Hosmer in the 1890s to carry out her lifelong dream of a monument to Lincoln and emancipation. Still active in her sixties, she pursued the commission for yet another monument to Lincoln

in Chicago, this also funded by a citizen's bequest. Hosmer was well aware of Saint-Gaudens's now celebrated statue, and she proposed a design intended not to "clash" with the work but to be its "complement."⁹³ Where his was a single figure, hers would be a group; where his was "realistic," hers would be frankly ideal; where his abandoned the representation of emancipation, hers would embrace it. She spent several years making and revising a model, and for awhile she seemed to have the inside track for the commission. But the sponsors, after paying her for the model, eventually became fed up with her endless reworkings of it and decided to give the commission instead to Saint-Gaudens.⁹⁴

Hosmer's basic scheme for the monument survives in descriptions published in contemporary newspapers. Again it was an ambitious pyramid of sculpture, but without the "realistic" central cycle of African American history that had defined the earlier monument's program. On top was a seated figure of Lincoln in meditation, poised above the inscription "God sent me a vision." That vision was represented on the level underneath, in the form of a seated "African Sibyl," dressed in a tiger skin, who twists up toward Lincoln while grasping an open book inscribed with Lincoln's words, "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." Clinging to the huge lower leg of this Michaelangelesque allegory of Africa is a nude black child with broken chains, who looks up toward the sibyl and Lincoln. (One drawing of this group does survive in a photograph [fig. 4.9].) Balancing the group on the other side of the monument was a female mourning victory of classical Greek features, meant to counterpoise the idea of Greek beauty and civilization to the idea of the primitive embodied in the African group.⁹⁵

It should be obvious by now how thoroughly Hosmer departed from her earlier representation of emancipation. The new design aggrandized the figure of Lincoln at the expense of the material and historical weight of the emancipated slaves. Lincoln here becomes not merely the agent but the prophet of emancipation, acting out of nothing less than divine inspiration. The African American representation now is entirely subsumed within the narrative of Lincoln's moral grandeur. Where the earlier representation had been an independent cycle, culminating in an image of martial manhood, the new group shrinks the emancipated body to one black putto, representative of a race in its infancy, still cleaving to its African origins. That allegory of Africa, while majestic and mysterious, functions at the same time as a sign of the primitive, contrasting with the civilized norm of the Grecian allegory on the right. The idea of racial backwardness is clearly encoded in the African group, leaving no room for reading African American agency into the historical process of emancipation or its aftermath.



4.9 Harriet Hosmer,
African Sibyl, design for
portion of Lincoln
Monument, circa 1890
(now lost).

Hosmer proudly announced that she had come up with a bold design that would revitalize the old neoclassical school of ideal sculpture, long since supplanted by the realism of Ward and Saint-Gaudens among others. She told the newspapers, "This I consider the triumph of my desire to incorporate classic beauty of outline and grace with a modern subject in a manner that will, at a glance, tell its own story. It is a foundation on which to erect the new school, which has been my constant dream."⁹⁶ She thought she had fashioned an ideal narrative on a pre-eminently modern subject; it was simple and unified, told allegorically but without the old neoclassical resort to piles of abstruse signifiers based on ancient mythology. Its poetic impact, she reported, was confirmed by no less than Browning and Tennyson. She also thought that political circumstances were now right for such a design. She had been working on it at least since the early 1870s, and now its time had apparently come. "Now that sectional prejudices have died away between what was the North and South, I believe it will be received in the spirit in which it was designed and executed—merely a work of modern art. A few years since it would not have been."⁹⁷

The problem was that Hosmer's monument was no longer modern at all. The new artistic "school" she hoped to exemplify had already been

pioneered, in much different form, by Saint-Gaudens, who had shown convincingly how to represent the ideal within the prosaic outer forms of contemporary man and contemporary life. The poetic mode favored by Hosmer and her British luminaries belonged to a different world, of expatriates living in the glow of antiquity, not of businessmen in New York and Chicago whose money and influence were becoming the driving force behind public sculpture. It must have been an especially bitter ending for her when, in 1897, the commission for the second Lincoln in Chicago went once again to Saint-Gaudens. The majestic seated figure he produced—which anticipated by several years Daniel Chester French's much better known effigy for the Lincoln Memorial in Washington—even further distanced the historical figure of Lincoln from the travails of emancipation, but neither he nor Hosmer lived to see the monument erected.⁹⁸

THE great contrast between Hosmer's original model for a Lincoln monument, designed for the Western Sanitary Commission in the summer of 1866, and her final design presented in the early 1890s tells us much about the historical distance traveled in between. When Hosmer devised her slave-to-soldier cycle, black men were serving as federal soldiers in the Reconstruction South. Emancipation was still in progress: the possibilities seemed bright, or at least open-ended. Hosmer's model did not so much commemorate emancipation as bring a vision of it to life. By the 1890s, however, emancipation was over. It now belonged to history, and it already had its definitive commemorative image in Thomas Ball's monument to Lincoln. Accordingly Hosmer's final work "remembers" emancipation as if across a vast stretch of historical time. The subject enters the realm of myth: Lincoln becomes prophet, Africa becomes sibyl, slaves regress to a mythical infancy.

Hosmer's temporal retreat—from the contemporary world of the soldier to the mythological realm of the sibyl—coincided with a broad political retreat from the goals of Reconstruction. By the turn of the century, the last remnants of the political gains created by Reconstruction had been overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court, which sanctioned the Jim Crow regime of "separate but equal." In this climate, a monument to emancipation was hopelessly old-fashioned. Hosmer's only choice was to push memory backward, into a past even more remote from the present. Had her monument been erected, it might have seemed passé to many critics but its retreat from the living struggle of emancipation probably would not have troubled them. The optimistic fervor of the 1860s lay dormant, never entirely forgotten but no longer acknowledged publicly. Many decades would pass before its memory could be effectively revived.