

## Columbia the Goddess of Liberty and Slave-Trade Abolition (1807–1820s)

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In the revolutionary era, cultural producers performed the Goddess of Liberty in her Temple as an Atlantic symbol of civic polity with Enlightenment and abolitionist signification in paintings, prose, song, and theatre. Artists painted the Goddess of Liberty emancipating slaves from the throne of her Temple, poets waxed eloquent about her liberatory qualities, street-corner balladeers regaled passersby with songs extolling her democratic ethos, and thespians performed dramatic, dance, and allegorical performances of the Goddess in her Temple on the theatrical stage to celebrate principles of natural rights and liberty. The Goddess had her origins in the Roman figure of Libertas, who personified changing meanings of liberty.<sup>1</sup> In the early Roman Republic, Libertas stood for personal freedom in relation to the manumission of a slave, but in the later Roman Empire she came instead to represent political liberty and constitutional government.<sup>2</sup> These competing meanings of liberty persisted in the revolutionary-era symbol of the Goddess of Liberty, who was variously recreated as the English Britannia, the American Columbia, and the Gallic Marianne, anthropomorphic symbols of competing civic ideologies and geopolitical spaces.

This essay traces how eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American thespians, balladeers, and artists used representations of Columbia to stage Enlightenment precepts of natural rights, liberty, and anti-slavery in the American revolutionary era but gradually elided the figure's abolitionist signification in the early republic. During and immediately after the American Revolution, the Temple of Liberty was a particularly potent symbol of civic polity, one in which constitutional and personal liberty were fused. The Temple of Liberty was a recognizable metaphor for liberty from Great Britain's imperial rule, but was also inextricably associated with the 'inalienable right' to liberty Thomas Jefferson inscribed into the Declaration of Independence, with its obvious implications for the personal liberty of enslaved African Americans. Following the American Revolution, anti-

slavery sympathizers in the early republic thus staged Columbia as a symbol both of independence from Great Britain and of humankind's natural right to liberty in engravings, plays, and ballads that depicted her bequeathing freedom to supplicant Africans from the throne of her Temple. But in reaction to the Saint-Domingue Revolution and to slave-trade abolition – Great Britain's 1807 legislation and the United States' parallel ban in 1808 – a schism developed between personal and constitutional freedom in popular iterations of Columbia. Anti-slavery sympathizers still upheld her as an iconic syncretism of political and personal liberty to critique slavery. Increasingly, however, those who feared the threat slavery posed to national harmony staged Columbia to represent political but *not* personal liberty. Thus, just as the slave-trade ban went into effect, Philadelphia's New Theater staged Columbia in her Temple of Liberty in allegorical dances, pantomimes, and set pieces that fêted political independence but in which slaves were nowhere to be seen. This erasure of Columbia's emancipationist signification reinforced whiteness as the defining qualification of American citizenship. Indeed, Columbia's post-abolition Temple of Liberty, which was performed in print, visual media, and theatre, excluded blacks from her civic benefits and was constructed on newly rigidified edifices of racial codification.

In North America, the Goddess of Liberty's anti-slavery signification was forged in the American revolutionary years, during which she wore a variety of iconographic faces – Indian princess, plumed Greek goddess, and classical republican deity – before metamorphosing into Columbia, who came to symbolize political freedom from British imperial 'tyranny' grounded in Enlightenment precepts of natural rights.<sup>3</sup> Columbia made her first appearance as a European-American wielding a pole topped with the liberty cap on a coin created to commemorate American victories in 1776.<sup>4</sup> But in addition to her numismatic celebration of the nascent nation's fight for political liberty, Columbia was also simultaneously being used as a potent symbol of *personal* liberty. Thomas Paine made this clear in a poem published in the *Pennsylvania Magazine* in 1775. The Goddess of Liberty, Paine declared, 'had descended [...] from the heavens' to summon 'a fraternity of brothers [...] from the east and the west ... unmindful of names or distinctions [...] whose Temple was Liberty.'<sup>5</sup> Set to the popular tune 'The Gods of the Greeks', Paine's widely reprinted ballad conjured up the Goddess to extol a democratic egalitarian ethos with potent implications for anti-slavery. Paine imagined this emancipatory Goddess just as anti-slavery gained momentum. For on the eve of the Revolution, anti-slavery patriots insisted that slavery was a hideous and glaring contradiction with American revolutionary and Enlightenment ideals of rights and liberty. Indeed, Paine was one of the ten patriots who founded the

first ever anti-slavery organization, the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, in Philadelphia in 1775, well before the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was founded in Great Britain in 1787 and the Société des Amis des Noirs was established in France in 1788.<sup>6</sup> Other anti-slavery patriots also began liberally using images of Columbia freeing her slaves to celebrate republican ideals of natural rights.

Samuel Jennings's *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences; or, The Genius of America Encouraging the Emancipation of the Blacks*, provides an arresting visual counterpart to Paine's poetical imagining of the Goddess. (Image 1) Jennings was a Philadelphian who began the painting in England in 1789 just as parliament was seething with its first-ever debate on the question of abolition. He completed it in 1790 after returning to Philadelphia, where the fledgling anti-slavery society founded in 1775 had just been incorporated as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and Pennsylvania's abolition bill of 1780 had recently been passed, which facilitated the gradual abolition of slavery in Pennsylvania. Stirred by the revolutionary rhe-



Image 1: Samuel Jennings, *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences; or, The Genius of America Encouraging the Emancipation of the Blacks* (1790). Courtesy Library Company of Philadelphia.

toric of liberty from the tyranny of Great Britain, Pennsylvania's state legislature promised in the bill's preamble to extend to slaves a 'release from that state of thralldom' to which they themselves had recently been 'tyrannically doomed'.<sup>7</sup> All the other northern states passed similar abolition bills in the wake of the revolution. Jennings thus painted his anti-slavery allegory for the Library Company of Philadelphia, some of whose directors were members of the Abolition Society, at a high-water mark for revolutionary-era anti-slavery activity.<sup>8</sup> The directors asked him to paint 'the figure of Liberty (with her Cap and proper insignia) [...] [with] a Broken Chain under her feet [and] a Groupe of Negroes [...] in some attitude expressive of Ease and Joy'.<sup>9</sup> They also requested that the painting include 'striking Symbols of Architecture, Mechanics, Astronomy, Agriculture, Commerce, [and] Philosophy'.<sup>10</sup> The eponymous 'Genius of America' thus depicted the young nation through Enlightenment symbols of art, science, and abolitionist Liberty.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to Jennings's encomium of America's republican principles in his painting of the Goddess of Liberty in her Temple, in the fevered debates leading up to the United States' 1808 ban on the slave-trade, anti-slavery sympathizers began to perform Columbia as an ironic critique of America's republican practice. Thomas Branagan did so in anti-slavery prose and David Edwin in striking images that accompanied Branagan's written appeal. The Philadelphian Branagan was a former slave-trader who had come to believe slavery was antithetical to American liberty. His protest hinged on the fact that slavery, rather than being expunged as a result of revolutionary-era anti-slavery, had instead vastly expanded after the invention of Eli Whitney's cotton gin in 1793, which had made the cultivation of cotton by slave labour unprecedentedly profitable. The United States Constitution of 1788, however, had stipulated that the foreign slave-trade should end twenty years hence in 1808. In his poem *The Penitential Tyrant; or, Slave Trader Reformed*, published in 1807, Branagan sought to agitate against slavery just as congressional debate about the proposed slave-trade ban reached its zenith.<sup>12</sup> To this end, he highlighted the discrepancy between America's boast of political liberty and denial of personal liberty to African slaves through a sardonic depiction of Columbia in her Temple.<sup>13</sup>

David Edwin's frontispiece illustration for Branagan's *Penitential Tyrant*, titled *Practical Slavery and Professional Liberty*, boldly attacked the discordance between Columbia's political and personal liberty. (Image 2) The engraved image depicted a slave trader and newly imported slaves arriving on shore, with the slave-ships in the background, to greet Columbia. Columbia was seated in her Temple in front of a column on which was inscribed 'Liberty, Virtue, and Independence', which,

as Branagan explained, was the motto of Pennsylvania. Branagan made pointedly clear his and Edwin's anti-slavery intent in his remarks on the frontispiece:

The Goddess ... is looking majestically sad on the African Slaves, landed on the shores of America, who are brought into view in order to demonstrate the hypocrisy and villainy of professing to be votaries of liberty, while, at the same time, we encourage the most ignoble [practice of] slavery.

He concluded by pointing out that Pennsylvania's motto, 'Liberty, Virtue and Independence', should serve as an instructive contrast between the gradual emancipation laws of Pennsylvania, an exemplar of 'professional liberty', and the reality of the expansion of 'practical slavery' in the nation. Branagan thus used the motif of Columbia in her Temple to indict what he deemed to be the nation's 'hypocrisy and villainy'.



Image 2: David Edwin, *Practical Slavery and Professional Liberty*, frontispiece for Thomas Branagan's *The Penitential Tyrant* (1807). Courtesy Library Company of Philadelphia.

But Edwin's image and Branagan's poem also transmitted the idea of a national Temple of Liberty in which black Americans had no voice or place, and were, in fact, a threat to the American republic. Unlike Jennings's abolitionist allegory featuring Africans inside the Temple petitioning the Goddess for their liberty, Edwin's frontispiece showed a white man appealing to Columbia on behalf of the slaves, who were themselves positioned outside the Temple. The fight to end slavery was thus a matter for the white Sons of Columbia. Moreover, Branagan insisted that 'The slave trade in the American republic [...] is to the body politic what the yellow fever is to an individual. Every slave ship that arrives at Charleston is to our nation what the Grecians' wooden horse was to Troy. The fate of St. Domingue will abundantly demonstrate this hypothesis'.<sup>14</sup>

For Branagan, then, the threat of black revolt meant that the republic would only be safe if the threatening population was removed from the body politic. Indeed, he had already proposed that free blacks be resettled outside the republic in an 1805 pamphlet. In prurient language, Branagan dwelled on the horrors of miscegenation bound to arise, he believed, if free black men, whom he characterized as hyper-sexed, remained in the northern cities to 'prey' on white women and produce 'mongrels and mulattoes'. He also argued that the free black presence constituted the threat of 'the revengeful negro in the city'.<sup>15</sup> He concluded that after being freed 'blacks [should be] sent ...out of our territories altogether' and proposed they be banished to the Louisiana territory that Jefferson had purchased from the French in 1803. The American republic, he demanded, should end its 'contradiction in republican terms and ideas,' but *not* by extending the Temple's shelter of liberty and rights to black Americans. Rather, the only way to reconcile the contradiction in the polity was for the Goddess's Temple, which he termed 'the glorious palladium', to be 'purged of the contamination which is sacred to liberty'.<sup>16</sup>

Civic parade performances of the Goddess in her Temple were yet another barometer of these fraught contradictions regarding race and citizenship. For Branagan was not alone in his desire to purge blacks from the white body politic. In the early nineteenth century, his fellow white Philadelphians began prohibiting black Philadelphians from civic performances in which they had previously always participated. They had, for example, participated in the Grand Federal Procession held on 4 July 1788 to celebrate the ratification of the federal Constitution. Indeed, they were highly visible in a float that Charles Willson Peale designed for the parade, which featured the Goddess of Liberty in her Temple. Peale, who freed his own slaves and opposed slavery,<sup>17</sup> intended the float, which he named the *Temple of Immigrants*, to stress Columbia's inclusive liberty.<sup>18</sup> The *Temple of Im-*

*migrants* featured thirteen Corinthian columns to represent the thirteen states, with Columbia seated on top of a dome 'bearing her liberty pole'.<sup>19</sup> According to a contemporary observer, free and enslaved black Philadelphians, alongside white, accompanied the float on its triumphal parade, thus participating in a civic performance of citizenship. Thereafter, these processional performances of Columbia and her Temple were a regular part of Independence Day celebrations, in which blacks fully participated until 1805.<sup>20</sup>

But in 1805 white mobs forced black would-be participants out of the Independence Day parade. This violent ousting of blacks from the festive public sphere was in part retaliation for an episode that had taken place in Philadelphia the previous year. On 4 July 1804, several hundred black Philadelphian youths formed military-style groups with elected officers, and marched through the streets beating up whites. The following day, they reassembled and threatened a group of whites that they would 'shew them San Domingo'.<sup>21</sup> Philadelphians thus feared that, as Branagan had put it, 'the fate of St. Domingue' would spread to 'the revengeful negro in the city'.<sup>22</sup>

White Philadelphians' forcible expulsion of black Philadelphians from Independence Day celebrations was one reason why the black Episcopal minister and abolitionist, Absalom Jones, called for the establishment of what would become known as 'Freedom Day' celebrations, some of which featured performances of the Goddess of Liberty in prose and song. 'Freedom Day' celebrations were a counter-theatre of sorts to commemorate Congress's abolition of the slave trade, which went into effect 1 January 1808. Preaching at St. Thomas's African Episcopal Church, Jones hailed the legislation and also Great Britain's parallel ban of 1807 as a step toward African American deliverance, and announced that from then on, 'the first of January, the day of the abolition of the slave trade in our country, be set apart in every year, as a day of publick thanksgiving for that mercy'.<sup>23</sup> Michael Fortune, a parishioner at St. Thomas's, wrote a hymn that was published along with Jones's 'thanksgiving' sermon in which he conjured up the Goddess of Liberty to echo Jones's emancipatory hopes. The hymn's chorus concluded: 'Britannia kindly sets us free/Columbia tears the galling bands/And gives the Sweets of Liberty.'<sup>24</sup> In reality, Columbia's 'Sweets of Liberty' had not been given at all. But Fortune's invocation of the Goddess illustrated his clear belief that the principles of justice and liberty on which her Temple had been founded would ultimately be extended to black Americans. It was, presumably, in this spirit that the congregation performed Fortune's hymn.

In contrast, however, to the black community's jubilant celebration of slave-trade abolition and of emancipationist Columbia, when white Philadelphian thes-



Image 3: Henry Dean, *Untitled* (1807). Etching and engraving with stippling sheet. Courtesy Yale Art Gallery, Mabel Brady Garvard Collection.

pians performed *Columbia* in her Temple on the theatrical stage on the very eve of the abolition legislation they did so with no mention of slavery or the ban on the slave trade. On 26 December 1807 the Chestnut Street Theater in Philadelphia staged a Christmas extravaganza titled *The Spirit of Independence*. The piece featured a large-scale backlit painting, or transparency, of *Columbia* in her Temple that served as the stage set. Although playbills for the *Spirit of Independence* did not name the painter, an untitled contemporaneous etching by the artist Henry Dean bears considerable similarity to the transparency (Image 3). In Dean's 1807 engraving, the Goddess of Liberty, adorned by her liberty cap and pole and holding a portrait of Thomas Jefferson, gazes admiringly at a portrait of George Washington.

According to the playbill, the performance of *The Spirit of Independence* included 'singing, dancing, and recitation, in which will be introduced a grand emblematic-



cal transparency of the GENIUS OF AMERICA [...] [on] 180 square feet of canvas. In the centre of the picture is the GENIUS OF LIBERTY, environed by a portico of her Temple [...] On the right side is the Goddess of Wisdom, [...] on the left Justice.' The transparency also featured portraits of Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, and advertisements described the *Spirit of Independence* as 'a Eulogium on the American Worthies'.

To be sure, evidence from playbills indicates that the transparency, songs, and dances for the piece had previously been performed as part of a popular play by William Dunlap, *The Glory of Columbia; Her Yeomanry* (1807), which he wrote in honour of George Washington and Independence Day. According to the playbills, the set for the play featured 'an emblematical transparent painting, representing LIBERTY, COLUMBIA, and JUSTICE'. Moreover, performances of both the Independence Day debut of *The Glory of Columbia* and the Christmas production of *The Spirit of Independence* ended with 'a characteristic dance in the TEMPLE OF LIBERTY' as well as 'The Standard of Freedom', either recited or sung 'in the character of the Genius of Liberty'.<sup>25</sup> *The Glory of Columbia* featured George Washington and the infamous turncoat, Benedict Arnold, who fought first as a patriot for the American Revolution before betraying the patriots and going over to the British side. The play culminated with the American victory at Yorktown, which precipitated American independence. *The Glory of Columbia* harnessed the revolutionary watchwords of political liberty from enslavement to British tyranny. Washington's final battleground speech thus called on his countrymen to ensure that 'the spirit [of liberty] which has animated the sons of Columbia [will] remain pure and unimpaired'. As Washington spoke, the transparency of the 'GENIUS OF LIBERTY' descended.<sup>26</sup>

Hence, when audiences saw the *Spirit of Independence* in December 1807, the transparency and entertainment pieces were already indelibly associated with patriotic pride in the American Revolutionary War and the 'liberty' of independence. On the eve of the abolition bill, *The Spirit of Independence* thus sidestepped altogether the contradiction between slavery and the democratic rights enshrined in the Declaration by visually erasing black Americans and Columbia's powers to emancipate them. In the theatre in 1807, the Goddess was emblematic of political independence but not personal liberty.

*The Spirit of Independence* also implicitly endorsed black exclusion from the polity, associated as it was with the celebration of independence. For Philadelphians would have been keenly aware that blacks had recently been violently expelled from offstage civic celebrations of Independence Day. Moreover, the piece would have had a strong association with the Capitol in Washington, which was being

built as the play opened. The new nation's Capitol under construction had earned the widespread moniker 'The Temple of Liberty' after the publication of James Trenchard's proposed architectural design of the same title. Additionally, the design for the Capitol included a proposed sculpture of Columbia, the Goddess of Liberty, at the building's fore. Washington and his fellow founders inaugurated this real-life Temple of Liberty, but it was slaves who constructed it, brick by brick.<sup>27</sup> As James Madison's secretary disgustedly complained in 1809, seeing 'gangs of Negroes' building a capital for a nation founded on liberty was 'a revolting sight'.<sup>28</sup> Quaker abolitionist Jesse Torrey echoed these sentiments when he decried the contradiction of 'erecting and idolizing this splendid fabric as the temple of freedom and at the same time oppressing with the yoke of captivity [...] their African *brethren*'.<sup>29</sup>

By the early nineteenth century, the meanings of Columbia in her Temple of Liberty had shifted far from the revolutionary-era Goddess Paine and Jennings had imagined as a triumphal emblem of American republicanism whose liberty was both political *and* personal. The shift had been twofold. First, for some anti-slavery sympathizers like Branagan and Edwin, the Goddess in her Temple became a bitterly ironic indictment of the dichotomy between republican rhetoric and reality. The Saint-Domingue Revolution in conjunction with expanding North American slavery fostered racist fears that were exacerbated by slave-trade abolition, which raised the possibility, however Pyrrhic, of the eventual emancipation of the ever-increasing slave population. In response, Branagan and others simultaneously embedded into Columbia their desire not only to end slavery but also to banish blacks from the body politic. Second, and even more ominously, other cultural interlocutors, like the Chestnut Street thespians, began performing visual and theatrical representations that erased the slaves altogether from the Temple in order to celebrate a roseate picture of national harmony in which these thorny tensions over race and slavery were rendered invisible. These popular reconfigurations of Columbia excluded blacks from their rights to citizenship and freedom – a far cry from the Enlightenment foundations of liberty, rights, and equality Paine had envisioned for the American revolutionary Temple of Liberty.

## Notes

1. Michael Koortbojian, 'A Painted Exemplum at Rome's Temple of Liberty', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 92 (2002), pp. 33–48. See especially pages 40–42 for a description and

explication of the painting that Gracchus the younger installed in his father's Temple of Liberty.

2. Vivien Green Fryd, *Art and Empire: The Politics of Ethnicity in the United States Capitol, 1815–1860* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 185.

3. E. McClung Fleming, 'From Indian Princess to Greek Goddess: The American Image, 1783–1815', *Winterthur Portfolio* 3 (1967), pp. 37–66, p. 37.

4. For a reproduction of Duprés' *Libertas Americana* and an account of its creation, see Cornelius Vermeule, *Numismatic Art in America: Aesthetics of the United States Coinage* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 9.

5. Thomas Paine, *LIBERTY TREE. A New Song*. The full lyrics of Paine's poem can be found at <http://www.libertytreedfr.org/originaltree.php>. Quoted in Arthur M. Schlesinger, 'Liberty Tree: A Genealogy', *The New England Quarterly*, 25, no. 4 (December, 1952), pp. 435–58, 436n.

6. Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005), p.152

7. *Act of the Legislature of Pennsylvania For the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, Passed march 1<sup>st</sup>, 1780. Enacted into a Law, at Philadelphia, on Wednesday, the first day of March, Anno Domini, 1780*. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Cox-Wharton-Parrish Collection.

8. Robert Smith, 'Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences: A Philadelphia Allegory by Samuel Jennings', *Winterthur Portfolio* 21 (1965), pp. 84–105, p. 88.

9. 'Minutes of the Proceedings of the Library Company of Philadelphia', III, pp. 195–197. Quoted in Smith, 'Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences', p. 89.

10. 'Minutes of the Proceedings of the Library Company of Philadelphia', III, 206–207. Quoted in Smith, 'Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences', p. 89.

11. Smith, 'Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences', p. 100.

12. His other writings on slavery include *Avenia; or, A Tragical Poem, on the Oppression of the Human Species and Infringement on the Rights of Man* (Philadelphia: Printed for Silas Engles and Samuel Wood, New York, 1805); *A Preliminary Essay, on the Oppression of the Exiled Sons of Africa* (Philadelphia: Printed by J. W. Scott, 1804); and *Serious Remonstrances addressed to the Citizens of the Northern States, and their Representatives [...]* (Philadelphia: Printed and published by Thomas T. Stiles, 1805). All quotes from these texts are from the editions listed here.

13. Thomas Branagan, *The Penitential Tyrant; or, Slave Trader Reformed: A Pathetic Poem, in four Cantos*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Printed and Sold by Samuel Wood, 1807). All citations are from this edition.

14. Branagan, *Penitential Tyrant*, Preliminary Remarks, p. 51.

15. Branagan, *Serious Remonstrances*, pp. 17–18, 73.

16. Branagan, *Serious Remonstrances*, pp. 17–18, 22–25, 36–37, 51–52.

17. The Charles Willson Peale Family Papers, <http://www.npg.si.edu/exh/peale/papers2.htm>.

18. Scott, *Temple of Liberty*, 45.

19. Francis Hopkinson, 'Account of the Grand Federal Procession in Philadelphia, July 4, 1788', *American Museum* 4 (1788), pp. 57–75.
20. Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808–1915* (Amherst and Boston MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), p. 25.
21. Quoted in Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 176 and quoted in Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 25. My brief recounting of the events of 4 and 5 July 1804 also comes from these two sources. See Nash, pp. 175–177 and Kachun, pp. 25–26.
22. Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 166–168, 190–194. In a chapter titled 'To Abolish the Black Man', Melish discusses the American Colonization Movement and the impulse to define the republic and citizenship as white in relation to broadsides and cartoons aimed at denying and deriding black citizenship and civic rights.
23. Absalom Jones, *A Thanksgiving Sermon, Preached January 1, 1808, in St. Thomas's or the African Episcopal Church, Philadelphia: On Account of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade. On that day, by the Congress of the United States. By Absalom Jones, rector of the said Church* (Philadelphia PA: Printed for the congregation, Fry and Kammerer, printers, 1808).
24. Michael Fortune, *New Year's Anthem* (1808). In Jones, *A Thanksgiving Sermon*, p. 1.
25. See playbills in *Aurora General Advertiser* dated 5 July 1807; 23 July 1807; 30 January 1808; 12 December 1808; and 22 February 1809.
26. William Dunlap, *The Glory of Columbia; her Yeomanry. A Play in Five Acts* (New York: Published in *Washingtoniana*, by David Longworth, at the Dramatic Repository, Shakspear-Gallery, 1817). All citations are from this edition.
27. Sarah Luria, *Capital Speculations: Writing and Building Washington, D. C.* (Durham NH: University of New Hampshire Press; Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2006), p. 32.
28. Quoted in Constance McLaughlin Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capitol* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 33; Orlando Ridot, *Building the Octagon: Octagon Museum, August 1, 1989–September 30, 1989* (Washington DC: American Institute of Architects Press, 1989), p. 98; and Luria, *Capital Speculations*, p. 33
29. Jesse Torrey, *Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States... And, A project of a Colonial Asylum for Free Persons of Colour* (Philadelphia PA, 1817), p. 37. Italics in original.

## Summary:

*Columbia the Goddess of Liberty and Slave-Trade Abolition (1807–1820s)*

Eighteenth-century American thespians, balladeers, and artists used performances of Columbia, an anthropomorphic metaphor for the body politic, to animate Enlightenment precepts of natural rights and liberty. Following the American Revolution, anti-slavery sympathizers staged Columbia as a symbol both of political liberty from Great Britain and of personal liberty in engravings, plays, and ballads that depicted her bequeathing freedom to Africans from the throne of her Temple. But in reaction to slave-trade abolition—Great Britain’s 1807 legislation and the United States’ ban in 1808—cultural producers began bifurcating constitutional from personal freedom in their iterations of Columbia. Anti-slavery advocates still used Columbia as an iconic syncretism of political and personal liberty to critique slavery. Others, however, threatened by the possibility of black freedom associated with slave-trade abolition, staged Columbia to represent political but *not* personal liberty. Thus, just as the slave-trade ban went into effect, Philadelphia’s New Theater performed Columbia in dances, songs, and allegorical set pieces that fêted political independence, but in which slaves were absent, an erasure that reinforced whiteness as the defining qualification for American citizenship. Post-abolition performances of Columbia in her Temple of Liberty, constructed on rigidifying edifices of racial codification, banished blacks from the civic polity—a far cry from Enlightenment precepts of liberty and rights.

*Keywords:* Columbia, the body politic, natural rights, liberty, American Revolution.