

Remembering and Commemorating
the United States Colored Troops:
The African American Civil War Memorial
in Washington, DC



*"This was the biggest thing
that ever happened in my life.
I felt like a man with a uniform on
and a gun in my hand."*

—ELIJAH MARRS, 1885

RENÉE ATER

MONUMENTS HELP INDIVIDUALS and communities remember the past and preserve important historical events, heroes, personal or collective triumphs, even moments of conflict. Marking the landscape in highly visible ways, monuments are located in front of civic buildings, in town squares, in plazas and parks, in cemeteries and memorial gardens, and in specially designated areas set aside for remembrance and tribute. People visit such spaces for private reflection and or public commemoration. Monuments can offer redemption, recognition, pride, and belonging. But the past sometimes meets the present uneasily, reflecting varied interpretations of whose history matters. Thus public monuments can also arouse intense anger, feelings of exclusion, as well as dissension among communities, local governments, and special interest groups. People throw paint on monuments, scribble graffiti across their surfaces, physically destroy them, attempt to reroute mainstream narratives, hold protest rallies to call attention to omissions and distortions of the past and present.

Many monuments force public conversations about what is important to communities and to the nation. They galvanize public opinion in unpredictable ways. They are not static: each individual, neighborhood, and new generation encounters and interprets the meaning in ways that are as fluid as time and space. Although people may become desensitized to the significance of monuments in their daily lives, those who build them often start from a storehouse of deep emotion and want to celebrate or correct some aspect of history — glorifying or reinventing the past, or revealing a part of it that has remained unacknowledged.¹

The commission and creation of the African American Civil War Memorial (1998) in Washington, DC (fig. 1), offer insights into both monument building and shared remembrance and commemoration in relation to public space. As an active “site of memory,” this memorial sought to rectify the nation’s failure to recognize African American participation in the American Civil War and to encourage visitors to extract new meaning from the past.² It now stands in the nation’s capital as a significant commemoration of the Civil War, acknowledging the active participation of African American men in restoring the nation. It also relates to other Civil War monuments in Washington, DC — including three equestrian statues arrayed along Vermont Avenue and Thomas Ball’s *Freedmen’s Memorial to Abraham Lincoln (The Emancipation Group)* (1876) on Capitol Hill. And while the African American Civil War Memorial took some inspiration from Augustus Saint-Gaudens’ *Memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Regiment* (1897), one of the preeminent monuments of the Civil War (see p. xx, fig. xx; pl. xx), it also gave the artist who created it a chance to rethink the content and interpretation put forward a century before. The resulting memorial places African American men at the forefront of the story of American freedom, recognizes their contributions to the young nation, and highlights their presence, commitment, and strength. It gives material witness to the real names and units of the United States Colored Troops and represents their bravery and loyalty despite the trauma of slavery, racism, and the denigration of black manhood during the nineteenth century.

Significantly, the architects and design committee chose to place the African American Civil War Memo-



Fig. 1 The African American Civil War Memorial, with *The Spirit of Freedom*, 1998, Washington, DC

Fig. 2 Map of Washington, DC, showing the African American Civil War Memorial in relation to other monuments in the nation's capital

rial outside the monumental core of the National Mall (fig. 2). Located at the convergence of Vermont Avenue with 10th and U Streets NW, the new memorial occupies an extended, triangular urban space, which is landscaped on the east side and adjacent to the historic Prince Hall Masonic Temple on the west. The plaza is composed of rose and gray granite, laid out in an array of squares and rectangles that are bisected by angled lines that form a regular pattern of large isosceles triangles. At the center of the plaza and resting on a two-foot-high granite base, the nine-foot-tall bronze *Spirit of Freedom* depicts three African American infantrymen and one sailor. On the reverse of the semicircular sculpture, a multigenerational family gathers around a soldier who stands ready to depart for war. Etched on the surface of the granite base are the words, "Civil War to Civil Rights and Beyond." A series of four curved and progressively higher granite walls form a mirroring semicircular niche immediately behind the sculpture. On this composite "Wall of Honor," 157 burnished stainless steel plaques are engraved with the names of more than two hundred thousand African American soldiers and sailors as well as their white officers. Carved near the top of the outermost wall are the words of Frederick Douglass, the nineteenth-century abolitionist: "Who would be free themselves must strike the blow. Better even die free than to live slaves."³

ENVISIONING THE MEMORIAL

On July 2, 1991, the Council of the District of Columbia passed a resolution that endorsed the creation of an African American Civil War Memorial. A month later Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton presented a resolution in the House of Representatives to authorize the government of the District of Columbia to establish a memorial to honor African American soldiers of the Union army in the Civil War. At a meeting on August 8, 1991, city politicians, educators, and black leaders envisioned the memorial as "a way to claim the black soldier's rightful place in American history, provide inspiration for a new

generation of youth, and help to revive the U Street corridor."⁴ The United States Senate and House of Representatives passed Joint Resolution 320 on October 14, 1992, authorizing the government of the District of Columbia "to establish a memorial on Federal land in the District of Columbia or its environs to honor African-Americans who served with Union forces during the Civil War." No federal funds were allocated for the project, and the public law stated clearly that the government of the District of Columbia was "solely responsible for payment, from official funds or charitable donations."⁵

Under the leadership of Frank Smith Jr., then a Ward 1 city councilman, the African American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation was formed in 1992 to raise the necessary monies to realize the memorial. In partnership with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, the National Planning Commission, the National Park Service, and the National Archives and Records Administration, the foundation eventually raised \$2.6 million from public and private sources to landscape the site, construct the Wall of Honor, and commission *Spirit of Freedom*.⁶

Washington architects Paul S. Devroux and Edward D. Dunson Jr. designed the site for the African American Civil War Memorial, transforming the unwieldy triangular site in front of the U Street/ Cardoza Metrorail station into a broad and attractive plaza for commemorative activities and community gatherings. They set the two-toned plaza back from the street and Metrorail station and placed the semicircular niche at the narrowest point of the triangle to allow easy access and direct engagement with the Wall of Honor and *Spirit of Freedom*. And they specified crepe myrtle trees and plantings at the corner of U Street and along Vermont Avenue to provide greenery at a busy city intersection.

With its long side parallel to Vermont Avenue, the memorial lines up with three significant Civil War bronze equestrian monuments in the city: Major General John A. Logan (1901) at Logan Circle; Major General George Henry Thomas (1876) at Thomas

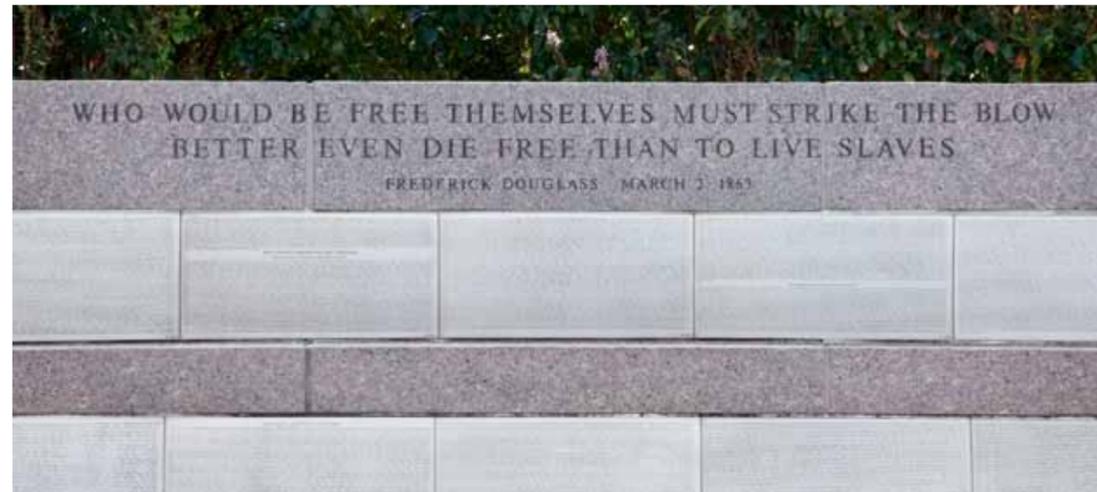


Fig. 3 Detail of the "Wall of Honor" from the African American Civil War Memorial with quotation from Frederick Douglass

Circle; and Major General James Birdseye McPherson (1876) at McPherson Square (see fig. 2). All three generals face south atop massive bronze horses, seemingly on a perpetual march of conquest. Vermont Avenue ends at Lafayette Square and H Street NW, immediately in front of the White House. At the center of that square is an equestrian statue of General Andrew Jackson (1853) with an inscription on the base that reads, "Our Federal Union It Must Be Preserved." This quotation, taken from Jackson's toast at a Democrat Party dinner honoring Thomas Jefferson's birthday on April 13, 1830, related to the South Carolina nullification crisis of the early 1830s.⁷ Whether or not a visitor is fully aware of the geography, architects Devroux and Dunson exploited the city's monument tradition by locating the African American Civil War Memorial in relation to these older hero statues. Yet they also added a new element to their space, orienting the new memorial to the north — the symbolic place of freedom.

The Wall of Honor is an essential component of the African American Civil War Memorial, inspired by Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982), with its two black granite walls inscribed with the names of 58,272 men and women who died in that war. "This listing of names," according to scholar Marita Sturken, "creates an expanse of cultural mem-

ory, one that could be seen as alternately subverting, rescripting, and contributing to the history of the Vietnam War as it is being currently written."⁸ The planners of the African American Civil War Memorial wished to commemorate the men who served in the United States Colored Troops in a similar fashion, using their names to rewrite Civil War history. In collaboration with the National Archives and Records Administration, the foundation retrieved 209,145 names from the compiled service records of the Bureau of Colored Troops. Each stainless steel plaque lists the names alphabetically within each regiment, starting with the men from the 1st Regiment, United States Cavalry (fig. 3). Permanently inscribed in the burnished steel, the names bring into presence the thousands of African American men who served in the Union army. The names are also points of reference for descendants to delve deeper into genealogy and history, and they are physical reminders of the loyalty these men showed to the Union cause and the nation.

The African American Civil War Memorial Foundation and architects considered locations on the National Mall but decided to propose a site significant to the African American community: the historic U Street district and the Shaw neighborhood, one of the city's oldest.⁹ Beginning in the 1860s, the

neighborhood shifted from a mostly rural area to a thriving urban core. Several Union army camps and hospitals were located there, including Camp Barker, Wisewell Barracks and Hospital, and Campbell Hospital, which attracted formerly enslaved men and women (contrabands) who sought shelter and safety within the city's boundaries.¹⁰ During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the area became a thriving center for African American intellectual, cultural, and civic life. The neighborhood's name, adopted in the 1960s, derived from the local junior high school named for Robert Gould Shaw, the leader of the all-black 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry.

In October 1992 the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities issued a call for proposals, directed specifically to African American artists, for a commemorative figurative statue for the African American Civil War Memorial. By December 1992 the commission along with the foundation and the architects had narrowed their selection down to four sculptors: Eddie Dixon, Ed Hamilton, Jerome Meadows, and James Earl Reid. The architects were primarily concerned with finding "an artist who would work as part of the design team to insure that the sculptural element will be integrated into the overall design."¹¹ On May 26, 1993, Dixon, Hamilton, Meadows, and Reid gave formal presentations of their work, showing examples of their previous public monuments and discussing their proposed memorials for the U Street site. Unable to decide between Dixon and Hamilton, the commission invited both artists to return to Washington, DC, in July 1993. To enhance the presentation of his sculpture, Hamilton placed his maquette within a scale model of the memorial plaza.¹² His plaster maquette featured four Union soldiers and two sailors standing at parade rest, with the figures emerging from a semicircular wall, its concave side shielding members of a family.

On the strength of this model, Hamilton won the contract for the project in a unanimous vote. The commission wrote Hamilton in August 1993, stating: "[the design team] felt that your proposal combined their interests and concerns in a manner and style

that would be appropriate for the memorial. They commented that your work displayed a profound unity in placing representatives from the armed forces on the outer side of the semicircle, essentially protecting a family on the inner circle. The selection committee agreed that this conveys the sense that they 'were fighting for the protection of their families from the slave trade, unjust treatment, and equal protection under the law.'" The commission specifically commented on the style of Hamilton's design as well, saying: "your proposed work goes beyond many of the other memorials and monuments in Washington through the use of the bas relief semicircle. They agreed that it was an original and unique approach. Its relationship to the walls of the memorial where the names will be placed is also very important."¹³ Sixteen months later the commission awarded Hamilton an "Arts in Public Spaces" grant to realize a "permanent art in public spaces installation" for the African American Civil War Memorial.¹⁴

In commissioning Hamilton to create the central figurative statue for the memorial plaza, the selection committee had found a sculptor well versed in the art of public monuments. Hamilton was responsible for several important public artworks, including the Booker T. Washington Memorial (1984) at Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia; the Joe Louis Memorial (1987) for Cobo Hall and Arena in Detroit, Michigan; and the Amistad Memorial (1992) in New Haven, Connecticut. Born in 1947, Hamilton grew up in Louisville, Kentucky. He is a graduate of the Art Center School (later known as the Louisville School of Art and eventually absorbed by the University of Louisville). Hamilton writes that he was interested in creating three-dimensional objects from a young age and discovered sculpture upon entering the Art Center School: "I walked into the sculpture studio and caught sculpting fever. I saw modeling tools and smelled the clay. I felt an inner glow that spread throughout my body. Somehow I knew sculpting would allow me to use all my creative energies and I was hooked. Sculpture to me was physical. It had dimension. An artist can't fake form in three-dimen-



Fig. 4 Ed Hamilton, *The Spirit of Freedom*, 1998, bronze, 9 1/2 feet high



Fig. 5 Detail of bearded soldier from *The Spirit of Freedom* by Ed Hamilton

sions. Suddenly it all made sense and clicked with the way I viewed objects.”¹⁵

Upon graduation in 1969, Hamilton found employment teaching art at a local high school and later at the community college. A chance meeting in 1973 with Louisville sculptor Jephtha Bernard “Barney” Bright changed the course of Hamilton’s career. Bright hired Hamilton as a full-time assistant to work with him on several local commissions, including the River Horse (1973) and the Louisville Clock (1976). Hamilton’s work with Bright expanded his sculptural skills and knowledge of the dynamics of public art. After his apprenticeship with Bright ended in 1977, Hamilton established his own studio, sculpting liturgical pieces for Catholic churches in the Louisville area and working on a series entitled “Junkology” in which he used scavenged pieces of steel, tin, rock, feathers, chicken and fish bones, and other materials to create abstract sculptures.¹⁶ When Hamilton received the commission for the Booker T. Washington Memorial in 1983, he returned to creating large-scale sculpture and began a career as a full-time builder of monuments.

Hamilton commenced work on *Spirit of Freedom* in the fall of 1995, modifying his design to include three soldiers who grip the barrels of their rifled muskets and one sailor who holds a ship’s wheel (fig. 4). He began the process by fashioning a cardboard frame to establish the scale of the memorial and making paper forms of each of the figures to determine their overall relation to one another. Over several months, he replaced the cardboard frame with a metal frame made from water pipes onto which he applied water-based clay, pushing and moving the wet material to create swirls and undulations suggestive of movement. He then modeled the life-size bodies of the soldiers in high relief, making them “appear as if they were walking out of the wall of clay.” Hamilton paid careful attention to the details of physiognomy and focused on their hands. The faces are a fusion of the faces of black men he knew growing up around Louisville. One depicts a bearded older man (fig. 5), who seems a more experienced soldier leading the two younger men into battle. Hamilton wanted “their faces, hands, and feet to be real enough to touch.” While sculpting the individual faces, he played the

soundtrack from *Glory*, the epic Civil War movie that immortalized the bravery of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry at the Battle of Fort Wagner; both its original score by James Horner and the voices of the Boys Choir of Harlem inspired his work.¹⁷

In finalizing his design, Hamilton was aware of two earlier memorials dedicated solely to deceased African American troops: the West Point Monument (1909–1920) in West Point Cemetery in Norfolk, Virginia; and the Colored Soldiers Monument (1924) in Greenhill Cemetery in Frankfort, Kentucky. The West Point Monument (fig. 6 and pl. xx) is a large granite shaft supporting a bronze statue of Sergeant William Harvey Carney, a native of Norfolk, member of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, and the first African American to be awarded the Medal of Honor (see pl. xx). The statue is surrounded by the graves of one hundred African American men who served in the American Civil War and the Spanish-American War. The Colored Soldiers Monument (fig. 7) is a gray limestone tapered plinth inscribed

with the names of 142 African American men from central Kentucky who served in the Civil War. Early efforts at remembering the United States Colored Troops, these two monuments have fallen into obscurity in their respective locations.

Instead of the memorial form of the obelisk, Hamilton’s multifigure statue focuses intently on the details of the uniform and rifled musket. To ensure historical accuracy, the artist purchased William C. Davis’ *The Fighting Men of the Civil War* (1989), a large book filled with photographs of Union and Confederate soldiers and illustrations of uniforms, weapons, and a range of personal items. He obtained a copy of William A. Gladstone’s *Men of Color* (1993), and his daughter gave him a subscription to *Civil War Times*.¹⁸ He also read Frederick Douglass’ Philadelphia speech from 1863, which maintained that the Union uniform held the potential for transformation and for building self-confidence. In reference to the Emancipation Proclamation and the new right of African American men to fight in the Union army, Douglass



Fig. 6 West Point Monument (Norfolk African American Civil War Memorial), 1909–1920, West Point Cemetery, Norfolk, Virginia



Fig. 7 Colored Soldiers Monument (Kentucky African American Civil War Veterans Monument), 1924, Green Hill Cemetery, Frankfort, Kentucky

stated: “Never since the world began was a better chance offered to a long enslave and oppressed people. The opportunity is given to us to be men. With one courageous resolution we may blot out the handwriting of ages against us. Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned his right to citizenship.”¹⁹

Wearing the United States Army uniform was an important moment for African American soldiers, and Hamilton wanted to capture the dignity of the uniformed men in his *Spirit of Freedom*. According to historian Joseph T. Glatthaar, “The uniform was a tacit recognition of their importance to the country and to the war effort, as well as a chance to demonstrate to the white race that they could stand on their own and contribute significantly to the United States in its time of need.”²⁰ Wearing the Union blue symbolized this fight for self-emancipation and signaled the personal investment of African Americans to end slavery in the United States.

African American soldiers’ government-issued rifles were also associated with this real change in status. One popular song from the period, sung by the 8th United States Colored Infantry, emphasized the connection between arming African American men and manhood:

*They look like men, they look like men,
They look like men of war,
All arm’d and dressed in uniform,
They look like men of war.*²¹

Once African American men joined the Union army, the uniform and rifle became essential markers of their manhood and citizenry.

Hamilton took careful note of this pride and belonging through his attention to the uniforms and rifles in *Spirit of Freedom*. He clothed his soldiers in the blue wool uniform of the Union army, rendering with precision the fatigue blouse, a light wool coat with four brass buttons, and the wool trousers with inset

stripes. Each man wears a forage cap — a hat with a round flat top and leather visor — and blackened leather boots with thick leather soles and heels (see fig. 8). Hamilton included other important details: the leather sling with the leather cartridge box, the eagle button attached to the center of the sling (see fig. 9), the U.S. brass buckle on the wide leather belt, the leather cap box attached to the right side of the belt, and the scabbard for the bayonet, which hung on the belt at a soldier’s left hip. The soldiers also wear tin canteens draped to their left side.

On the back of each soldier, Hamilton modeled the Union-issued knapsack that held personal belongings and a rolled blanket tied in place at the top. He made a mold of a reproduction .58 caliber 1861 Springfield rifled musket borrowed from a reenactor in the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, as he wanted to render the firearms “true” to those the army would have issued to the United States Colored Troops. Each soldier strides forward and carries this Springfield rifled musket pointing outward, hammer cocked at the ready.

The sailor is rendered with equal veracity. He wears the federal navy “flat hat” made of dark blue wool and the blue wool frock and trousers. With his hands on a ship’s wheel, he stands with his legs wide apart as if balancing himself against the water’s movement. At his feet rest three rows of small cannon balls.²²

In the concave arc of the reverse of the statue, Hamilton shaped in low relief six members of a multigenerational family, interconnected through touch and glance (fig. 10). To the left, a young wife holds a newborn in her arms, her head held high and eyes closed in reflection or perhaps in fear at the potential loss of her spouse. Hamilton used the features of his wife, Bernadette, and the hands of his daughter as models for this figure. The woman’s soldier husband, fully dressed in his Union uniform and resting the butt of his rifle on the ground, stands beside her and extends his right arm behind her to hold her steady. Two young children hold hands: a girl grasps tightly her burlap doll, and a boy reaches across to his grandmother.

Fig. 8 Detail of soldier from *The Spirit of Freedom* by Ed Hamilton



Fig. 9 Detail of Union eagle button from *The Spirit of Freedom* by Ed Hamilton



Fig. 10 Obverse of *The Spirit of Freedom* by Ed Hamilton

The grandparents mirror the position of the young husband and wife, with the grandfather holding his son's left wrist and the grandmother staring stoically forward. Just out of the fields, the latter wears a cotton bag draped on her left shoulder and a necklace of cowry shells indicating her connection to Africa.²³

The family group is integral to *Spirit of Freedom*—the wife, children, and grandparents are the reason the soldier is heading to the battlefield. Hamilton hints at the sacrifices such families made during the Civil War through the closed eyes of the wife and long-suffering expressions of the grandparents. Many African American families faced particular hardships when their men went to war, especially around the issue of equal and timely pay for black soldiers. Some women followed their husbands to the front lines, working as laundresses and cooks in camps. Many stayed behind and continued to work the land, growing crops and supporting themselves and their children. Still others fled to towns and cities working as maids, seamstresses, and day laborers.²⁴ At the end of the twentieth century Hamilton wanted visitors to be deeply aware of these sacrifices and emphasized both the soldiers' and their families' perseverance in the face of the overwhelmingly difficult conditions surrounding the war.

Once Hamilton had finished the figures for the monument, he turned to the bare space above the soldiers' heads. Some years earlier, in 1991, he had stopped in Boston to see Saint-Gaudens' *Memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Regiment*, also known as the Shaw Memorial. In his words, he was "blown away" by the powerful scene of marching black soldiers and the angelic figure floating above them, though he felt the soldiers were subordinated to the figure of Shaw riding high above the regiment on his horse. Wanting to fill the blank space in his own sculpture, Hamilton recalled Saint-Gaudens' memorial as the "face of a protector emerged" in his mind. He conceived the image of a shrouded winged figure whose face tilts upward with closed eyes and whose crossed hands rest at the chest (fig. 11). As Hamilton worked to resolve the placement of this figure, his



Fig. 11 Detail of the "Spirit of Freedom" in the background of *The Spirit of Freedom* by Ed Hamilton

former pastor visited his studio to discuss the emerging spiritual nature of the memorial. She suggested that Hamilton read Psalm 91:4: "He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler." Once Hamilton read this passage, he felt confident that he had realized his vision and that the figure with closed eyes unified his concept for the sculpture: not as an angel of death, but as an angel of protection leading the soldiers into battle.²⁵

RESPONDING TO THE PAST

The full significance of Hamilton's sculpture comes into focus when compared to Thomas Ball's *Freedmen's Memorial to Abraham Lincoln* (1876) and Saint-Gaudens' Shaw Memorial (1897). The African American Civil War Memorial is in dialogue with these nineteenth-century memorials, with both their representations

and their content. The most noted and notorious sculpture to commemorate emancipation, Ball's memorial is installed in Lincoln Park and aligned with East Capitol Street, which leads directly to the Capitol Building. Free African Americans raised the monies to pay for the monument, first conceived by committee in 1866 and completed a decade later, but they had no say in its conceptualization. The work was the most visible attempt in public sculpture to capture the ideals of the Emancipation Proclamation. Yet it failed miserably and served as the antithetical model of emancipation.

Ball subordinated a partly dressed African American male to the fully clothed Abraham Lincoln (fig. 12). Although based on a portrait of a former slave named Archer Alexander, the image is one of obsequiousness, with the liberated black male crouching at Lincoln's feet and encumbered by broken manacles still attached to his wrists. Lincoln stands tall and erect, his right hand holding the Emancipation Proclamation, his left bestowing freedom on the former slave. Ball depicted Lincoln as the noble and commanding head of the nation, while he showed the African American male as a non-citizen, uncultured and childlike, stripped of his dignity and potency. The monument was ultimately not about emancipation but about domination and the continued paternalistic power of the white nation.²⁶ Ball's statue visually anchored the park until the National Council of Negro Women commissioned a statue of Mary McLeod Bethune for the east end of the park in the mid-1970s, changing the focus from Ball's statue to the modern rendering of the well-known African American educator.

If Hamilton's *Spirit of Freedom* stands in stark contrast to Ball's *Freedmen's Memorial*, its relationship to Saint-Gaudens' work is more complicated, reflecting both his admiration for and his criticism of the earlier memorial. Hamilton appreciated the powerful emotional charge and material beauty of the Shaw Memorial and the way Saint-Gaudens captured the psychological drama of men marching to their deaths in time of war. Saint-Gaudens conveyed this drama through his

modeling of the physiognomies of the infantrymen (although the faces were idealized likenesses of anonymous models in his New York studio) and faithful rendering of the soldiers' Union uniform. Hamilton, too, created idealized portraits of African American men for his *Spirit of Freedom* and depicted them in accurately detailed Union uniforms and weapons. He seemed to make a visual connection between the bearded older man who marches in front of Shaw's horse and his own bearded man. In both the Shaw Memorial and Hamilton's *Spirit of Freedom*, the somber expression and greater maturity of this figure add gravitas to the portrayal of the African American soldier.²⁷

Yet Hamilton also believed that Saint-Gaudens' sculpture emphasized the disparity between the white officer, Shaw, sitting high atop his horse and the African American soldiers striding below him. From the beginning, Hamilton envisioned a memorial that focused exclusively on African American

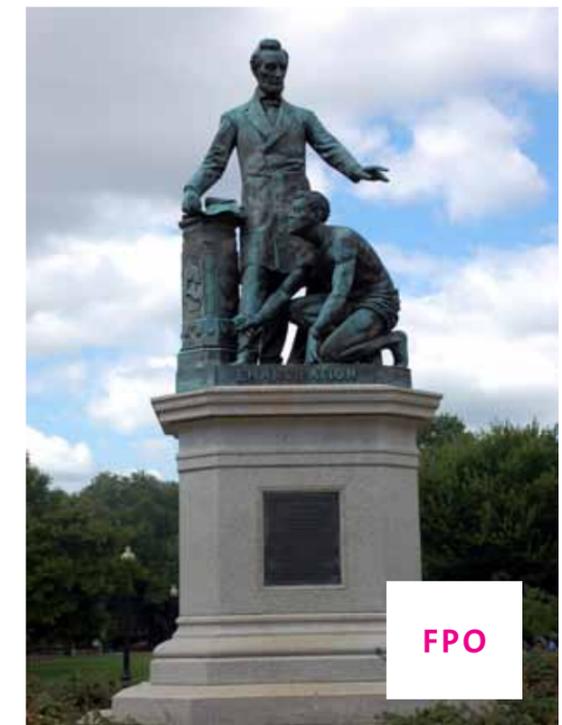


Fig. 12 Thomas Ball, *Freedmen's Memorial to Abraham Lincoln* (Emancipation Monument), 1876, Lincoln Park, Washington, DC

soldiers and sailors rather than the white officers who led them, reversing the narrative content of Saint-Gaudens' memorial. Equally important in considering the relationship between the two memorials is that they occupy radically different public spaces. Saint-Gaudens' memorial resides on Boston Common facing the Massachusetts State House, the oldest park in the United States, an important civic location for the nation, and a marker of Boston's Brahmin identity.²⁸ The architects and planners of the African American Civil War Memorial consciously placed it within the context of U Street and the Shaw neighborhood, affirming African American identity in the context of a historic black section of the city. The Shaw neighborhood is not the grand, sedate green of Boston Common, but a bustling urban district filled with apartment buildings, restaurants, and theaters. Importantly, visitors to Washington, DC, can now go to the National Gallery of Art to see the plaster cast of the Shaw Memorial as well (see pl. xx). Separated by only a few miles, the two memorials offer viewers an opportunity to consider the way in which two artists, separated by one hundred years, responded visually to African American participation in the Civil War.

In its final form, *Spirit of Freedom* stands nine feet at its highest point and curves six feet along its horizontal axis. Integrating the traditional soldier monument with an evocation of family and the embodiment of an abiding spirit, Hamilton's memorial to the United States Colored Troops is about the strength of character of African American men who volunteered to do battle in the Civil War, and it presents the cohesiveness of the African American family even in times of duress. It is also about motion and coming change. Influenced deeply by the French sculptor Auguste Rodin's fluid handling of his materials, giving expressive rendering of the psychological state of his subjects, Hamilton pushed the clay with his hands to suggest wind, movement, and the ethereal propelling the men forward. His soldiers are protected by the righteous presence of his angel and thus able to fight for freedom to ensure the end of centuries of enslavement.

REMEMBERING AND COMMEMORATING THE PAST

At the end of the Civil War, the role of African American soldiers and sailors in the war faded from public memory. Weeks after the surrender of Robert E. Lee and the Confederate army at Appomattox, Virginia, the Grand Review of the Armies took place in Washington, DC, celebrating the Union victory. On May 23 and May 24, 1865, approximately 150,000 men of the Army of Tennessee, the Army of Georgia, and the Army of the Potomac marched up Pennsylvania Avenue to great fanfare and passed a reviewing stand in front of the White House with President Andrew Johnson and his cabinet in attendance. As historian Stuart McConnell writes, "The Grand Review was the visual embodiment of a reunified nation." Yet this event excluded African Americans. Not one of the 166 regiments of the United States Colored Troops was invited to participate. The only African Americans involved in the Grand Review, McConnell notes, were "pick and shovel brigades" or former slaves used as comic relief.²⁹ In the post-Civil War era, former African American soldiers faced discrimination and violence, fighting for pensions and recognition of their service.³⁰

In 1913, as the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg approached, profound differences crystallized between how blacks and whites remembered the war. In a move intended to amalgamate an official account of the Civil War, both southern and northern whites celebrated reconciliation and white solidarity. But they ignored slavery and emancipation as critical to the meaning of the war. A national amnesia set in, with people willfully forgetting the service of African American soldiers. This move to a reconciliationist memory of the Civil War was exemplified in the celebration at Gettysburg from July 1 to 4, 1913. Funded and supported by the federal government, Union and Confederate veterans participated in ceremonies that emphasized the Civil War as a battle of brothers that forged greater national unity. Organizers actively excluded African American veterans from the reunion and refused to acknowledge their importance to the

outcome of the Civil War, ultimately ensuring the whitewashing of this history. The fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg was a segregated event, with African Americans on the periphery, employed as laborers and camp workers.³¹

Not until seventy-six years later with the film *Glory* (1989) did a popular art form give mass audiences a glimpse of the role of African American soldiers in the Civil War. It was both this film — despite its historical inaccuracy and romantic storytelling — and the profound erasure from historical memory of the service of black soldiers in the war that awakened people to the need for the African American Civil War Memorial. At the dedication of *Spirit of Freedom* in 1998, Frank Smith Jr., the founding director of the African American Civil War Museum, stated, "I consider it a grave oversight in American history that very little is known about the heroic contribution of these brave soldiers in ending slavery and keeping this country united under one flag."³² The historical suppression of the role of African Americans in the Civil War is tied to racism, the battle for equal rights, and attitudes of white supremacy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And the social organization of forgetting and exclusion was the impetus for the new memorial.³³ African Americans did not forget the United States Colored Troops, but the rest of the nation paid little attention to their military service. Only with Benjamin Quarles' *The Negro in the Civil War* (1953) and Dudley Taylor Cornish's *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861–1865* (1956) did historians begin to acknowledge the significance of African Americans to the American Civil War. Yet many years and scholarly books later, the general public still does not have good understanding of the war or of African Americans' participation in it.

Historical amnesia also extends to what we see in public spaces. If monuments signal the importance of historical events and individuals, then the absence of certain populations in monumental form implies that they are unworthy of public representation. Many monuments in American cities and towns are focused

solely on white male military and political leaders, "illustrious men" and their great deeds. Others are dedicated to perceived high points in U.S. history — marble and bronze statues that stress the ideals of heroism, freedom, and democracy. Writing about the monumental core of the National Mall, historian Kirk Savage argues: "Public monuments are an inherently conservative art form. They obey the logic of the last word, the logic of closure. . . . Traditionally, this means that monuments strip the hero or event of historical complexities and condense the subject's significance to a few patriotic lessons frozen for all time. Washington's monuments, in this conception, promise to immerse visitors in the 'essential' America, the 'soul of the nation.'"³⁴ With the African American Civil War Memorial, a long-ignored chapter of American history is reinserted into the landscape of the nation's capital. Visitors and residents of the city are asked to expand their understanding of the past and broaden their perceptions of national identity.

As a site of memory, the African American Civil War Memorial encourages people to take part in public acts of commemoration in the plaza. Historian Jay Winter writes in his work on World War I monuments: "Commemoration at sites of memory is an act arising out of a conviction, shared by a broad community, that the moment recalled is both significant and informed by a moral message."³⁵ Under the auspices of the Sons and Daughters of the United States Colored Troops, a group chartered to augment the African American Civil War Memorial Foundation's mission, several commemorative events occur throughout the year: including wreath-laying ceremonies on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Veterans Day; the Buffalo Thunder annual Memorial Day ceremony; and a national candle-lighting ceremony held in November.³⁶ At some events, African American Civil War re-enactors and current military servicemen participate along with the public. These acts of commemoration are often related to the "moral message" of remembering the contributions of all African American servicemen and women, not

just the United States Colored Troops during the Civil War. They are acts of profound acknowledgment and deep emotion in the public sphere.

The African American Civil War Memorial recognizes African Americans who have served their country despite the ongoing battle for emancipation, freedom, and civil rights, and it celebrates their bravery and loyalty within the context of the family and the nation. Importantly, the memorial exists in tandem with the African American Civil War Museum housed across Vermont Avenue in the historic Grimke Building. Through permanent exhibits and educational activities, including a wide-ranging series of lectures, the museum offers a historical overview of enslavement to freedom. It preserves artifacts, archival documents, photographs, and music that remind visitors of the integral role African American soldiers and sailors have played in the Civil War and beyond. The African American Civil War Memorial and Museum bring together the past and present in powerful ways. Visitors can search for the names of their ancestors on the Wall of Honor and find further information in the National Park Service's Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System database and in the National Archives' Bureau of Colored Troops Records, which collect documents and photographs that provide a physical reminder of African American presence in history. With a careful balance between heroic ideal and everyday concerns, the African American Civil War Memorial reinvigorates the meaning of the American Civil War within the memorial landscape of Washington, DC.

Remembering and Commemorating the United States Colored Troops: The African American Civil War Memorial in Washington, DC

RENÉE ATER

Epigraph Ex-slave Elijah Marrs quoted in Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1990), 79; and Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship During the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, 2009), 47.

1 See Alois Riegl, "Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origins," trans. Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions* 25 (Fall 1982): 20–51 (published in German as "Der Moderne Denkmalkultus: sein Wesen und seine Entstehung," 1903); Freeman Henry Morris Murray, *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture: A Study in Interpretation* (Washington, 1916), xvii–xxiv; Marianne Doezema, "The Public Monument in Tradition and Transition," in *The Public Monument and Its Audience* (Cleveland, 1977), 9–21; John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 1992), 3–20; Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham, NC, 1998); James E. Young, "Memory/Monument," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, 2nd ed., eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago, 2003), 234–247; Marita Sturken and James E. Young,

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2 For a discussion of "sites of memory," see Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7–24; and Jay Winter, "Sites of Memory," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, eds. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York, 2010), 312–324.

3 Frederick Douglass, "Men of Color, To Arms!" Broadside (Rochester, March 2, 1863). Rare Books and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress.

4 "Bill Summary and Status, 102nd Congress (1991–1992), H. J. Res. 320," THOMAS, Library of Congress, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/D?d102:11:./temp/-bdfW81::Y/home/LegislativeData.php?n=BSS;c=102> and "Memorial Planned for Civil War's Black Soldiers," *New York Times*, August 11, 1991.

5 *African-Americans Civil War*, 102nd Cong., October 14, 1992, Public Law 102–412, H. J. Res. 320.

6 "Memorial Planned for Civil War's Black Soldiers," *New York Times*, August 11, 1991; Mark E. McCormick, "Louisville Sculptor Has Designs on Washington," *Courier-Journal* (Louisville), August 20, 1993; and Kathryn Allamong Jacob, *Testament to Union: Civil War Monuments in Washington, DC* (Baltimore, 1998), 146.

7 James E. Goode, "Four Salutes to the Nation: The Equestrian Statues of General Andrew Jackson," *White House History*, 17 (2010): 13.

8 Marita Sturken, "The Wall, the Screen, and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *Representations* 35 (Summer 1991): 126.

9 Edward D. Dunson Jr., discussion with Renée Ater, October 24, 2012.

10 Camp Barker was at 1200 S Street NW, Wisewell Barracks and Hospital at 7th and P Streets NW, and Campbell Hospital at 6th Street and Florida Avenue NW. See Jane Freundel Levey and Paul K. Williams, *Midcity at the Crossroads: Shaw Heritage Trail* (Washington, 2006); and Kathryn S. Smith and Paul K. Williams, *City within a City: Greater U Street Heritage Trail* (Washington, 2001). For a brief overview of contraband camps, see Eric Wills, "The Forgotten: The Contraband of America and the Road to Freedom," *Preservation* (May/June 2011), <http://www.preservationnation.org/magazine/2011/may-june/the-forgotten.html>.

11 Pamela G. Holt (Executive Director, DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities) to the artist, October 1992; Pamela G. Holt to Ed Hamilton, December 7, 1992; and Alec Simpson (Assistant Director, DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities) to Ed Hamilton, March 9, 1993. All letters cited in this essay are in the Papers of Ed Hamilton, Louisville, KY.

12 Matt Radford (Coordinator, Art in Public Spaces, DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities) to Ed Hamilton, May 17, 1993; Matt Radford to

Ed Hamilton, June 8, 1993; and Matt Radford to Ed Hamilton, July 16, 1993.

13 Matt Radford to Ed Hamilton, August 6, 1993.

14 Pamela G. Holt to Ed Hamilton, December 22, 1994.

15 Ed Hamilton, *The Birth of an Artist: A Journey of Discovery* (Louisville, KY, 2006), 28–29.

16 Hamilton 2006, 49–66.

17 Hamilton 2006, 96–98; and Ed Hamilton, interview with Renée Ater, August 21, 2012.

18 Hamilton interview, 2012.

19 "Addresses of the Hon. W. D. Kelley, Miss Anna E. Dickinson, and Mr. Frederick Douglass at a Mass Meeting, Held at National Hall, Philadelphia, July 6, 1863, for the Promotion of Colored Enlistments," p. 7, *The Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

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21 Keith P. Wilson, *Campfires of Freedom: The Camp Life of Black Soldiers During the Civil War* (Kent, OH, 2002), 157–158.

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27 See Deborah Chotner and Shelley Sturman, *Augustus Saint-Gaudens' Memorial to Robert*

- Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts Fifty-fourth Regiment (National Gallery of Art, 1997); Savage 1997, 192–208; David W. Blight, “The Shaw Memorial in the Landscape of Civil War Memory”; and Kathryn Greenthal, “Augustus Saint-Gaudens and the Shaw Memorial,” in *Hope and Glory: Essays on the Legacy of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment*, eds. Martin H. Blatt, Thomas J. Brown, and Donald Yacovone (Amherst, MA, 2001), 79–93, 116–129.
- 28** See Katie Mullis Kresser, “Power and Glory: Brahmin Identity and the Shaw Memorial,” *American Art* 20, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 32–57.
- 29** Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1992), 1–17. A separate and modest Grand Review of United States Colored Troops took place on November 14, 1865, in which the all-black regiments from Pennsylvania and Massachusetts marched through the streets of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.
- 30** Glatthaar 1990, 231–264; Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 165–215; and Kate Masur, *An Example of All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010).
- 31** David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 381–397; and Cecilia Elizabeth O’Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton, 1999), 194–205.
- 32** Frank Smith Jr. quoted in Richard W. Stevenson, “Civil War Regiment Receives Capital Tribute,” *New York Times*, July 12, 1998.
- 33** Peter Burke, “History as Social Memory,” in *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind*, ed. Thomas Butler (Oxford, 1989), 108.
- 34** Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley, 2009), 10.
- 35** Winter 2010, 313. See also Edward Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN, 2000), 216–257.
- 36** Bill Broadway, “Honoring a Past of Blacks in Uniform: Bikers Celebrate Heroic Heritage in Face of Racism,” *Washington Post*, May 26, 2003. In 2009 President Barack Obama began an annual tradition of sending a wreath to the African American Civil War Memorial on Memorial Day. See Sheryl Gay Stoullberg, “‘They Answered a Call,’ Obama Says of Veterans: A Traditional Tribute, and a New One,” *New York Times*, May 26, 2009.