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Vivien Green Fryd

## Reflections on Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave*

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### Abstract:

This article revises the author's original thoughts about Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave* published in the now-defunct *American Art Journal* in 1982. The author now argues that Hiram Powers became aware of Northern and Southern interpretations of *The Greek Slave* within the context of the antislavery movement as the statue traveled throughout the United States between 1847 and 1849, generating newspaper reviews that his agent Miner K. Kellogg collected, and to which Powers surely would have had access. These published responses, combined with his own shifting attitudes to slavery in his native country as revealed by his correspondence, led to his decision finally in 1869 that both *The Greek Slave* and his *America* allude specifically to slavery in the United States.

## Reflections on Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave* by Vivien Green Fryd

In reconsidering my first article on Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave* (fig. 1), published in the now-defunct *American Art Journal* in 1982, I realized that I also wanted to critique it from my current vantage point.<sup>[1]</sup> Looking back at my scholarship on Powers (1805–73) after more than thirty years, I have concluded that the arguments in that article could have been merged with those in my 1986 essay about Powers's *America* (1848–50; fig. 2).<sup>[2]</sup> Integrating the two essays here, with the benefit of developments that have taken place since the 1980s—in art-historical methodology and in scholarship on the history of race in America—allows me to illustrate more clearly Powers's changing attitudes towards slavery and American national identity. The first five versions of *The Greek Slave* (1844–50), which show the figure in chains, allude to the innocence and powerlessness of a young woman being sold into slavery by the Turks during the Greek War of Independence (1821–32). His final version (fig. 3), however, which depicts the figure in manacles, was completed in 1866—after the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), years of threatened Southern secession, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851), the extension of slavery to new territories through the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), the Dred Scott decision (1857), the Civil War (1860–65), and the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the enslaved people in the Confederacy (1863).<sup>[3]</sup> The substitution of manacles in lieu of chains, I argued in the 1980s and reiterate now, was made specifically to address the issue of slavery in the United States.



Fig. 1, Hiram Powers, *The Greek Slave*, 1847. Marble. Newark Museum, Newark. Courtesy of the Newark Museum. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 2, Hiram Powers, *America*, 1848–50. Plaster. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 3, Hiram Powers, *The Greek Slave*, 1866. Marble. Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn. [\[larger image\]](#)

This special issue represents a unique opportunity to revisit and revise my thoughts after a period of transformation in the field of American art history. My early articles contributed to this transformation, albeit in a hesitant manner. This changing scholarly context has, in turn, shed new light on Powers and *The Greek Slave*, leading to a more complex and nuanced interpretation of my original ideas. I thus argue more clearly that Powers became aware of Northern and Southern interpretations of *The Greek Slave* within the context of the antislavery movement as the statue traveled throughout the United States between 1847 and 1849, generating newspaper reviews that his agent Miner K. Kellogg collected (they can be found in Powers's papers at the Archives of American Art), and to which Powers surely would have had access. This, combined with his own shifting attitudes to slavery in his native country, which I explain now more clearly on the basis of his correspondence, led to his decision finally in 1866 that both *The Greek Slave* and *America* would allude specifically to slavery in the United States.

#### Manacles or Chains

In a footnote to my 1982 article on *The Greek Slave*, I quoted a significant letter dated November 29, 1869, which Powers wrote to his patron, Edwin W. Stoughton. I now foreground this quote:

"I regard the substitution of the regular manacles for the rather ornamental than real chain in former repetitions of the 'Greek Slave' as a decided advantage, since it distinguishes it from all others, and is really more to the purpose. The figure on this account can hardly be called a repetition, since it has a difference."<sup>[4]</sup> At the time, I speculated that Powers's decision to include the manacles was a response to criticism about the depiction of the chains in earlier versions.<sup>[5]</sup> Today I would add that, more importantly, the manacles better represented slavery—what Powers had called in 1853 the "peculiar institution," in reference to his statue *America*. As he wrote to Nicholas Longworth that year, he considered manacles an "allusion to the 'Peculiar Institution,'" while chains were "simply an emblem of despotism or tyranny."<sup>[6]</sup>

As I wrote in the 1980s, at least before the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, Powers did not overtly criticize slavery or identify with the abolitionist cause, which he viewed as politically dangerous.<sup>[7]</sup> The five earlier versions of *The Greek Slave* (with chains) referred, not to slavery in the United States, but to the tyranny that Powers saw overtaking his adopted country of Italy, and that he feared would be imposed on Greece as a result of its revolution against the Ottoman Empire. I suggested that the substitution of manacles for chains in his final version of the statue, created one year after the close of the American Civil War and three years after the Emancipation Proclamation, deliberately foregrounds American slavery while continuing to allude to the Greek War of Independence. The Kansas-Nebraska Act marked Powers's major shift in thinking, but emancipation and the Northern victory over the South were the precipitating events that led to his decision to create this final, altered version of *The Greek Slave*.

I now argue that Powers's decision to substitute manacles for chains was not simply a response to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Rather, it was also motivated by disparate audience responses to *The Greek Slave* as it toured the United States in the 1840s, and by Powers's own shifting attitudes to slavery in his native country. His remarks in correspondence concerning both *The Greek Slave* and *America*, in which he detailed his changing views on events in his adopted country of Italy and in the United States, are integrated in this essay to more clearly explain his opinions on Southern slavery and his intentions for the meanings of these two statues within a historical context.

### Interpreting *The Greek Slave*: 1982

Considering the history of *The Greek Slave* in 1982, I wrote that the response it received from the public, as evinced in contemporary periodicals and newspapers, frequently referred to both the Greek War of Independence and the controversy over slavery and abolition in the United States.<sup>[8]</sup> I examined the sculpture within the context of American philhellenic attitudes and the Turkish-Greek war.<sup>[9]</sup> I argued that Americans interpreted this conflict through comparison with their own Revolutionary War; in their minds, "the United States and Greece both had defeated tyranny and foreign oppression, established a republic, and revived ancient democratic ideals."<sup>[10]</sup>

As I noted, some contemporaries observed parallels between the situation of the Greek slave, sold at the slave market in Constantinople, and that of mixed-race slaves auctioned at markets in Southern states.<sup>[11]</sup> Among a multitude of supporting quotations I drew from Northern and Southern newspapers, as well as from Powers's vast correspondence, is the following, from the October 9, 1847, *Christian Inquirer*: "Let no one keep down the natural promptings of his indignation by the notion of wooly heads and black skins. Let him rather read the

advertisements of these slaves. Let him not shut his eyes and his heart to the fact that many who meet this fate are the daughters of white men, daughters brought up in luxury and taught to expect fortune. Let him not ignore the fact that white skins, fair hair, delicate beauty, often enhance the market value of his country women thus exposed for sale.”<sup>[12]</sup> The *Eastport Sentinel* on August 23, 1848, similarly noted that the statue “brings home to us the foulest feature of our National Sin; and forces upon us the humiliating consciousness that the slave market at Constantinople is not the only place where beings whose purity is still undefiled are basely bought and sold for the vilest purposes . . . while the accursed system . . . has . . . ceased in Mahomedan countries, it still taints a portion of our Christian soil.”<sup>[13]</sup>

*The Greek Slave* reminded viewers in both the North and the South of US slavery because of its evocation of the so-called tragic octoroon. In abolitionist novels and short stories, the tragic octoroon was a beautiful young woman, daughter of a slaveholder and a slave.<sup>[14]</sup> Raised as white, she is sold into slavery upon the death of her father. “The striking correlations among the tragic octoroon in literature, the nineteenth-century Southern slave auction, and Powers’s white captive,” I argued, “contributed to America’s interpretation of the *Greek Slave* as an abolitionist statement.”<sup>[15]</sup> Both the literary associations and Powers’s statue emphasize the captive’s Christian dignity and virtue in the face of degradation.<sup>[16]</sup>

*The Greek Slave* influenced some nineteenth-century novelists, as indicated by their emphasis on the whiteness of their octoroon heroines. Most notably, I wrote, William Wells Brown’s “visualization of tears on the ‘alabaster cheek’ of his heroine Clotel . . . undoubtedly derives from Powers’s figure.”<sup>[17]</sup> Brown’s novel *Clotel; or: The President’s Daughter* (1853) imagines the fictional slave daughters of Thomas Jefferson, centering on relationships that, until the 1990s, we did know were nonfictional. In 1998, DNA evidence proved that the third president of the United States, a slave owner and principal author of the Declaration of Independence, had children with his slave, Sally Hemings.<sup>[18]</sup> The mixed-race children in Brown’s novel, one of whom is Clotel, are born into slavery, like Jefferson’s six mixed-race children. Unlike Jefferson’s children, however, the mother and her two daughters in the novel are sold as slaves upon the death of the white father.<sup>[19]</sup>

“A fugitive American black slave and ardent abolitionist,” Brown attended the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations at the Crystal Palace in London on June 21, 1851, with the express purpose of inciting antislavery sentiments by juxtaposing Powers’s sculpture with *The Virginian Slave, Intended as a Companion to Power’s* [sic] ‘*Greek Slave*’, a cartoon featured in the satirical magazine *Punch, or the London Charivari* (fig. 4). Brown, then an English resident, proclaimed at the exhibition: “As an American fugitive slave, I place this Virginia Slave by the side of the Greek Slave, as its most fitting companion.”<sup>[20]</sup> (For more on this performance, [see the article by Lisa Volpe.](#))



Fig. 4, John Tenniel, *The Virginian Slave, Intended as a Companion to Power's [sic] 'Greek Slave'*, *Punch* 20, June 7, 1851: 236. [\[larger image\]](#)

As I concluded in 1982, *The Greek Slave* had a strong and many-layered impact on its audiences in the United States. Its reference to the Greek War of Independence spoke to American identification with the culture and democratic principles of ancient Greece. The “theme of captivity” reminded Americans that both dark- and light-skinned Christian slaves were sold at auctions in the South, prompting reflections on slavery in the United States. More generally, the statue evoked “the concept of freedom” on a global level; conflating the Greek revolution with American abolitionism, some Americans used *The Greek Slave* to argue that the United States must “fulfill its destiny as the preserver of liberty throughout the world.” Powers’s *Greek Slave* “inspired nationalistic and patriotic pride through its validation of liberty as the premier purpose of the United States.”<sup>[21]</sup>

### Interpreting *America*: 1986

During the 1840s, when Powers was carving his first five versions of *The Greek Slave*, he was working concurrently on *America*, an allegorical figure that he hoped either a European patron or the US Congress would purchase. He had conceived of this allegory in 1848 in response to a series of revolutionary uprisings in Europe. By the time of its completion in plaster by 1851, Powers had determined that it could make simultaneous references to two distinct political situations: the Italian Risorgimento and the fear of Southern secession and the resultant weakening of the Constitution in the United States.<sup>[22]</sup> A transatlantic artist living a liminal existence as an expatriate in Florence and an American citizen, Powers wanted this statue to embody the concepts of liberty for both Europe and the United States during a period of conflict over what he considered to be the issue of freedom and constitutional rights on both continents.

My article about *America* focused on its iconography within a historical context, arguing that it was a “pliable allegory” whose meanings changed with the shifting political contexts.<sup>[23]</sup> The statue, initially inspired by events in Europe, especially the Risorgimento, which Powers witnessed, was intended as a “grand allegory of Liberty behind which the insurrectionists could rally.”<sup>[24]</sup> As these revolutions waned, he changed the iconography of the sculpture to “America as Liberty,” to showcase his native country as a model because of its earlier, successful

revolution against Great Britain. Upon his realization, by the 1850s, that the European insurrectionists would fail, he chose to modify the figure's attributes so that the work would represent "America Triumphant as Liberty and Unity."[\[25\]](#)

Many symbols changed in these various alterations. Powers eliminated the liberty cap, added the fasces and a laurel wreath, and, more significantly, changed the object beneath the figure's left foot from a crown, to a crown and scepter (representing monarchical despotism), to a manacle, and finally to chains. "Unable to decide on an appropriate attribute until 1855," I wrote, "he vacillated for three reasons: he wanted *America* to refer to different nations, and to shifting political circumstances; he avoided offending prospective clients; and he could not make up his mind about his statue's relation to Southern slavery."[\[26\]](#) By replacing the manacles with broken chains beneath her foot as he carved the marble between May 1851 and August 1855,[\[27\]](#) Powers masked the work's potential abolitionist undertones in the hope of securing a congressional purchase. Only once the Civil War had ended did Hiram Powers claim that *America* foretold emancipation and the survival of the Union.[\[28\]](#)

### Historiography

The early 1980s arguably marked the beginning of social art history among Americanists.[\[29\]](#) My articles from 1982 and 1986 crossed the polarizing divisions between close reading, object-based formalism, and iconography, on the one hand, and a new, contextualizing approach, on the other. Close attention to the artwork and its history served many important scholarly and interpretative goals, as did using theory within a historical context. In considering race while engaged in a close reading of Powers's two statues, I was, along with some of my colleagues, exploring new territory, laying the groundwork for what would become a mainstream and more sophisticated approach. At the same time, the field of African American studies was just emerging. Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s formative study of African American literature and history, *Signifying Monkey* (1988), came out six years after my article on *The Greek Slave*.[\[30\]](#) And the pioneering books about images of African Americans by Hugh Honour, Albert Boime, and Guy C. McElroy were published in the following years.[\[31\]](#)

Iconography, a common methodology in other subfields of art history, had been underused in the study of nineteenth-century American sculpture, and filling that gap was another priority of my articles. Scholars instead focused on chronology, biography, subject matter, and aesthetics. American sculpture had been relatively under-studied; possibly art historians did not see the significance of these works' iconography within a historical and cultural context, since such contextualization was itself an emerging methodology. The only article published about *The Greek Slave* prior to 1982—Linda Hyman's "The *Greek Slave* by Hiram Powers: High Art as Popular Culture" (1976)—applied a psychoanalytic approach and held that Americans perceived the figure as the ideal Victorian woman, making her an outlet for men's repressed sexual feelings and for women's subconscious identification with her as a sex object and conscious empathy with her enslavement.[\[32\]](#)

Hyman's article had departed from more traditional ways of considering nineteenth-century sculpture, a field that was limited prior to 1982.[\[33\]](#) A few art historians had focused exclusively on Hiram Powers, most notably Richard P. Wunder in his forty-page *Hiram Powers, Vermont Sculptor* (1974) and Donald Martin Reynolds in his published dissertation *Hiram Powers and His Ideal Sculpture* (1977), as well as an article by Reynolds, "'The Unveiled Soul': Hiram Powers's

Embodiment of the Ideal" (1977),<sup>[34]</sup> in which he established a link between Swedenborgianism and Powers's *Greek Slave*. Besides Hyman's article, one further essay discussed *The Greek Slave*. Samuel A. Robertson and William H. Gerdt's "The Greek Slave" (1965) provided information about the patrons of the six versions of the sculpture, its subject matter, and some of the reviews it received as it traveled throughout the United States.<sup>[35]</sup>

Prior to 1982, others, including Hyman, had connected *The Greek Slave* with slavery in America.<sup>[36]</sup> Henry Morris Murray, for example, as early as 1916, called this statue "American art's first anti-slavery document in marble."<sup>[37]</sup> Carl Bode, in 1959, stated that the background to the work "was the realization that Negro slave women in the United States were at times . . . much at the mercy of their owners."<sup>[38]</sup> Robertson and Gerdt, quoting Murray's assessment, said the work "suggests anti-slavery feelings which were becoming strong at the time" and noted that Powers's "later sympathies with the Union cause during the Civil War testifies to this."<sup>[39]</sup> Gerdt elsewhere repeated Murray's claim, remarking that the statue was "made during a period of the antislavery controversy," albeit showing a "white rather than a black captive."<sup>[40]</sup> But these authors failed to support their claims, speculating about a possible connection without elaborating upon the historical context or citing Powers's letters, in which he addressed his shifting attitudes toward the "peculiar institution."

Some scholars examined Powers's *Greek Slave* and *America* either concurrently with me or shortly afterward. Jean Fagan Yellin published an article on Powers's *America* in 1982. Seven years later, she included a discussion of Powers's *Greek Slave* as a chapter in her 1989 book, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture*, merging it, as I do here, with a study of his attitudes toward slavery as manifested in his letters about *America*.<sup>[41]</sup> In her 1989 discussion of *The Greek Slave*, Yellin also addressed philhellenic attitudes in the United States in relation to the statue, focusing mostly on the comments of female abolitionists.<sup>[42]</sup> She too dealt with the iconography of *Libertas* and connected its different iconographic meanings to historical circumstances in the United States and Europe. Significantly, in her study of Powers's *America*, she quoted a few letters that I had overlooked. In one dated February 1856, Powers equated the chains with tyranny, explaining that they "could not be placed under the foot of the allegorical figure of a Republic" because it might "offend our Southern brethren."<sup>[43]</sup> And in 1861 Powers celebrated Lincoln's election, arguing on behalf of the Union's preservation.<sup>[44]</sup> Yellin also claimed that in abolitionist iconography, "chains signified slavery and broken chains signified emancipation."<sup>[45]</sup>

In this book about abolitionist art and literature, Yellin combined issues related to race and gender, the latter being an approach I did not generally consider until later in my career.<sup>[46]</sup> Joy S. Kasson, in *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture* (1990), elaborated on *The Greek Slave* and other nineteenth-century neoclassical statues of women subjects from a feminist perspective, analyzing viewers' interpretations within the context of women's roles at a time when "American society was undergoing momentous changes." In particular, she argued that these idealized statues promoted "an ideology of female passivity and vulnerability" as some women increasingly "transcended domestic boundaries."<sup>[47]</sup>

As far as I know, I was the first to include the *Punch* image *The Virginian Slave* in a scholarly publication. Yet it was Yellin who provided a complete stylistic and compositional analysis of *The Virginian Slave* in relation to abolitionist imagery and *The Greek Slave*. A famous abolitionist



image depicting a kneeling female slave with the slogan “Am I not a woman and a sister?” is highly relevant to this discussion (fig. 5). Yellin appropriately suggested that *The Virginian Slave* directly “mirrors the black skin, the African features, the clasped hands and the elongated links of chain that characterize the design of the abolitionists’ female supplicant.” She noted that “her hands are folded like those of the supplicant, and like the supplicant, she is partially draped,” although “she does not kneel in profile, . . . but instead stands in three-quarter view that reverses the posture of the *Greek Slave*.” Yellin also rightly asserted that the chains became a “shared cultural code . . . to signify both woman’s oppression and her struggle against that oppression.”<sup>[48]</sup> She further noted, “Powers’s female slave displays the Christian faith, the nudity and the chains of the antislavery emblem.”<sup>[49]</sup> Whereas the antislavery feminists “read the supplicant slave emblems as encouraging women to overthrow the despotisms of slavery, racism, and sexism through public struggle,” *The Greek Slave* was interpreted by “everyone who saw her as a victim.” Hence the work “appears as a companion piece to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom*.”<sup>[50]</sup>



Fig. 5, Gibbs, Gardner, and Co. (manufacturer); American Anti-Slavery Society (publisher), *Am I Not a Woman & a Sister?*, 1838. Copper, Anti-Slavery Hard Times Token. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, <http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/112837>. [\[larger image\]](#)

Yellin pointed out that the pedestal pictured in *The Virginian Slave* is decorated with “whips and chains” and inscribed with the words “E Pluribus Unum”; she concluded that this illustration “connects traditional British and American antislavery iconography with Hiram Powers’s sculpture” and “condemns as hypocritical both the American celebration of the *Greek Slave* as a moral statement dissociated from the issue of American slavery and the claim that America is the land of liberty.”<sup>[51]</sup> Her work also provided some important additional information about the *Punch* cartoon and Brown’s demonstration in front of *The Greek Slave* at the Crystal Palace.<sup>[52]</sup> In particular, she noted that a “fugitive slave woman participated” in it: Ellen Craft, a “light-skinned” woman who had escaped from Georgia with “her dark-skinned husband William by masquerading as a young planter while he played her servant.”<sup>[53]</sup>

Yellin’s chapter on *The Greek Slave*, moreover, considered an important historical context that I had ignored: the significance of Powers’s residence in Cincinnati, Ohio, between 1818 and 1837.<sup>[54]</sup> Yellin insightfully examined Cincinnati’s position “on the border between slavery and

freedom,” the tenfold increase of the African American population between 1826 and 1840, and the multitude of advertisements for fugitive slaves. Some white residents objected to the presence of these fugitive slaves in their city and formed the Colonization Society to send them back to Africa; others rioted against abolitionists and competition from black workers; still others formed antislavery associations and established schools for black children.<sup>[55]</sup>

Subsequent scholarship about Powers's *Greek Slave* has considered the issues of race and slavery in more sophisticated ways—most notably, Kirk Savage's *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth Century America* (1997) and Charmaine A. Nelson's *The Color of Stone: Sculpting the Black Female Subject in Nineteenth-Century America* (2007).<sup>[56]</sup> Savage examined post-Civil War public monuments in relation to slavery, race, gender, and public memory, focusing on both abolitionist monuments and memorials of the common Civil War soldier in the North and South. He called *The Greek Slave* “the only antebellum work in marble that came close to abolitionism” in American sculpture. He insightfully observed that its message “was the essential depravity of all slavery, which not even racial prejudice could completely obscure.” As I did, he noted that both Northerners and Southerners accepted the statue because the latter refused “to view the work as an allegory of their slave system” and instead focused on its evocation of a “higher spiritual truth.” Significantly, the profiled head “recalled the archetypes of whiteness used by racial theorists,” thereby removing the figure “from the popular conception of blackness.” For Savage, “the slave is the perfected image of the audience, while the slaveowner is the dark other”—a point that I had implied in my own study.<sup>[57]</sup>

The most extensive survey of race and *The Greek Slave* can be found in Nelson's 2007 text.<sup>[58]</sup> A scholar of African American art history, Nelson not only concentrated on how the whiteness of nineteenth-century neoclassical American sculpture veils the underlying racial and sexual meanings of the genre. She also employed postcolonial theory to argue convincingly that Powers inverted “slave/master and colonized/colonizer” in his navigation of “the quagmire of racial politics.”<sup>[59]</sup> More clearly, she stated: “By choosing to look at instances of slavery in the Greek War of Independence, Powers eclipsed the black female slaves who were, even as he labored in his Florentine studio, being sold naked to and publicly humiliated by white men and women in the slave markets . . . in his native America.”<sup>[60]</sup> She examined *The Greek Slave* within the context of American and European “Orientalism,” especially in terms of its real and imagined audiences: the “white, bourgeois, Victorian audience” and the “nonwhite, nonwestern, men,” thereby racializing its narrative.<sup>[61]</sup>

Furthermore, Nelson connected the chains on *The Greek Slave* with the topos of the kneeling black slave so central to the British abolitionist movement, as represented by the “Am I not a man and a brother?” slogan and accompanying emblem (fig. 6). Nelson correctly suggested that US Southerners distinguished themselves as “good’ slave drivers” from “the imaginary Turkish” men, whom they imagined as “bad’ slave drivers.”<sup>[62]</sup> She made two additional points not found elsewhere in the extant literature, both important. First, the manacle that appears in Powers's final iteration of the statue “was a fundamental tool of slavery” that “marked the symbolic transition of the black body from free to enslaved, human to commodity;” and, second, the chain, which appears in all of the other versions, does not suggest the same restriction of the bound hands that manacles represent.<sup>[63]</sup>



Fig. 6, Roger Dixon (artist), William Lutwyche (manufacturer), *Am I Not a Man and a Brother?*, ca. 1796. Copper, Anti-slavery Conder Token created for the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, <http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/112829>. [\[larger image\]](#)

Two more recent books contribute to understandings of these two statues. Maurie D. McInnis, in *Slaves Waiting for Sale: Abolitionist Art and the American Slave Trade* (2011), addressed the transatlantic slave trade through the visual and written records of Eyre Crowe, a young British artist who visited a slave auction in Richmond, Virginia.<sup>[64]</sup> McInnis's account provides more in-depth readings of eighteenth-century abolitionist images, including *Am I Not a Man and a Brother?* (fig. 6) and *Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?* (fig. 5), that could help inform the understanding of *The Greek Slave* as an abolitionist statue. Finally, Melissa Dabakis's *A Sisterhood of Sculptors: American Artists in Nineteenth-Century Rome* (2014) considers the American women artists who lived and worked in Rome, examining their struggles for suffrage and abolition and the gendered nature of their expatriation, and introducing Powers's *Greek Slave* as a point of comparison with works by his female colleagues.<sup>[65]</sup>

### **Powers's Shifting Appraisals of US Slavery: A Clearer Chronology**

Powers began work on *America* while his third version of *The Greek Slave*, under the guidance of Miner Kellogg, was traveling through major cities in the United States and eliciting comparisons with American slavery; for detailed accounts of this tour see the articles by [Tanya Pohrt](#) and [Cybèle T. Gontar](#). In the 1980s, while considering the lengthy explanations of *America*'s iconography in Powers's letters, I did not realize the significance of this fact. A re-evaluation of both my articles and their sources now prompts me to take a new look at the nonlinear evolution of Powers's abolitionist sentiments. The shifting meanings of *The Greek Slave* and *America* were based on historical circumstances in Europe and the United States and the artist's conflicted attitudes toward US slavery. Although this perspective was implicit in my work of the 1980s, I did not tease out its implications as I do now.

Powers did not write down his thoughts about the "peculiar institution" until 1848. Probably in response to reviews of the traveling *Greek Slave* as well as the political situation in the United States, he wrote to his patron Nicholas Longworth in October of that year: "I often think that if the Abolitionists and others who appear so willing to risk the blessings of our form of Government and our union upon the questions of Slavery and the Tarif [*sic*] could only come

here [to Italy]" or anyplace in Europe, "they would pray God to forgive them for the madness of their thoughts and acts." Slavery seemed to him, at this time, a "trifle" compared with the potential "political calamities" experienced in "the old world," clearly an allusion to the revolutions sweeping across Europe.<sup>[66]</sup>

Nearly a year later, in September 1849, Powers again expressed to Longworth his alarm over the conflict in the United States and the potential for civil war: "our blessed America" is threatened by "disunion"; events in Italy foreshadowed "an awful abyss which would open beneath . . . [the] ruins" of his homeland if it too experienced "nullification" and civil war.<sup>[67]</sup> Here Powers referred to the threat of secession by the Southern states, prompted by the debate over the extension of slavery to newly acquired territory. Two months later he predicted to another patron that if "the union dissolved upon the slave question . . . various [state] governments" would be unable to "agree as one body," resulting in war—"we should all be slaves, and have kings."<sup>[68]</sup>

Over a year later, despite his opposition to slavery, Powers again argued that although it was an evil, disunion would be worse. He believed the South had to address its own problems: "while the constitution exists, the south has the sole right to legislate upon the matter of slavery within its own limits—the evil is with the south, let the south provide for herself the remedy."<sup>[69]</sup> He cautioned that if the abolitionists won, the Constitution would be "broken—wholly and entirely broken." With the Constitution, he reasoned, "we have some three or four million slaves"; without it, we would "soon be thirty millions of subject slaves ourselves," a situation that would mirror "the good subjects of constitutional and despotic Europe."<sup>[70]</sup> That is, he feared that abolitionism would ultimately make both whites and blacks slaves under a tyrannical regime. For Powers, the history of "despotic Europe" and its failed revolutions served as a cautionary tale for his home country—a concern that, "after eight months of acrimonious debate, the Compromise of 1850 temporarily allayed."<sup>[71]</sup>

The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 marked a turning point for the artist. The bill was reported to the Senate on January 4, and the debate concluded on March 3 with a vote of 37 to 14. After using various stalling tactics to delay its vote, the House finally approved the measure by a close margin (113–100) in May, the same month in which the president, Franklin Pierce, signed it into law (May 30). As I have explained, Powers shared in Northerners' outraged response to the passage of the act, and this led him to reassess not only his attitude towards Southern slavery, but also the iconography of *America*.<sup>[72]</sup> The Kansas-Nebraska Act was the catalyst for Powers's shift from a neutral position to one of outright opposition to slavery. He foresaw that slavery "itself was the 'cancer' which would eventually destroy the United States' laws and institutions."<sup>[73]</sup>

Less than a month after the act was signed into law, on June 22, Powers expressed his increasing alarm: "The idea of assisting officers of a Republican Govt. in securing and handing back to bondage a slave has always been shocking to me. . . . But now that the government has broken faith with the people by the repeal of a solemn act limiting slavery within certain bounds, I think the time has come for a 2nd declaration of Independence, not a breaking up of the Union but the independence of all men within the Union."<sup>[74]</sup> Significantly, Powers elaborated on his reference to the Declaration of Independence by writing: "A declaration that all men are and shall be free and equal." Here he finally expressed unwavering abolitionist sentiments and

declared that “we must all be slaves or we must all be free.”<sup>[75]</sup> He was prescient in predicting a “terrible and bloody civil war . . . which once begun will not end until all men are free and equal.”<sup>[76]</sup> Less than one month later, on July 10, he explained that if left “limited to certain bounds in time the evil would die out of itself.”<sup>[77]</sup> But as he wrote in another letter on the same date, “I have become very spunky on the subject of slavery extension.”<sup>[78]</sup> Prior to “the Nebraska Bill,” he “was dead against the rabid abolitionists.” He explained his change of heart: “I thought that slavery should be left alone—but now that a step has been taken to extend it over more territory I think it is high time to oppose it tooth and nail everywhere.”<sup>[79]</sup> Nine days later, Powers sarcastically proposed revising *America* so that “the principal figure [would be] holding on high a banner [with] the words—all are born free and equal and in the other a cat-o-nine tails. The other figure—the ‘nigger’ kneeling at her feet imploring mercy.”<sup>[80]</sup>

In considering *America*'s iconography, Powers was concerned over patronage. He had always assumed that Congress would purchase the allegorical statue and worried about how Southerners in particular would interpret it. Powers wrote to his good friend and congressional supporter Edward Everett in 1850: “I would add chains under it and the foot if I thought it would not be noticed as having some relation to slavery in America—indeed if I could venture to do so, I would place chains only under the foot, for chains would fully express the sentiment intended.”<sup>[81]</sup> Five years later, he reiterated his fear in another letter to Everett, elaborating on his concern that President Pierce “is excessively guarded as to everything that concerns the ‘peculiar Institution,’ & he may be afraid, that Southern members of Congress will misinterpret the meaning of the chains under the feet of ‘America’ and regard her as an abolitionist.”<sup>[82]</sup> Perhaps that is why he asserted on February 16, 1855, “I am no abolitionist.”<sup>[83]</sup> In other words, although Powers opposed slavery and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, he hesitated to call himself an abolitionist because of his burning desire to receive a commission from the US government. Yet finally, by November 30, 1856, Powers had concluded that “all Christendom” now condemned slavery: “Slavery is a curse. In the abstract it is wrong. . . . The world is now against it. It belongs to past ages and has no place in this age. The march of human improvement shuts it out and the 19th century will trample upon it.”<sup>[84]</sup> He concluded a little over three years later, “Millions of our people were friendly to the South until forced to resist slavery extension.”<sup>[85]</sup> In 1861, Powers celebrated Abraham Lincoln's election: “I have never been an abolitionist, but if it must come to this—I too—am one. It is a necessity that the Union shall be preserved.”<sup>[86]</sup>

With the Civil War on the horizon, Powers claimed, in February 1860, “that *America* had no ‘allusion whatever to negro slavery;’”<sup>[87]</sup> but by the end of the war he saw his statue as prophetic, writing in March 1865 that it depicted “the broken chains of slavery underfoot” to show “the union unbroken” and slavery “broken and destroyed forever.”<sup>[88]</sup> He continued, “It is quite true that I did not comprehend our slave system purposefully in the design. The broken chains referred to the way in which we got our national liberty. But the statue itself fully comprehends both.”<sup>[89]</sup> Having taken this new perspective, “after the Civil War, Powers asserted that his allegorical figure [of *America*] prophesied emancipation and the survival of the Union.”<sup>[90]</sup> In 1986, I observed: “Powers wrote that he associated manacles with Southern slavery; nevertheless, he denied repeatedly—until the Civil War—that *America* referred to black emancipation. It may be that Powers intended this reference to Negro [*sic*] slavery from the beginning, but denied this association to avoid alienating Southern Congressmen.”<sup>[91]</sup>

Now I argue more clearly that Powers intended viewers to understand the meanings of chains versus manacles in both statues, one intended for the Capitol building and the other, his last version of *The Greek Slave*, for a private patron. Because Powers still hoped that President Pierce would authorize the purchase of *America* for the US Capitol, he replaced the manacles that appear underfoot in all the surviving plaster casts with broken chains as he carved the marble during the first half of the 1850s. At this point his abolitionist sentiments had not yet been fully realized, and hence the symbol did not overtly allude to Southern slavery. In other words, only *after* the Civil War could Powers, in his final version of *The Greek Slave*, overtly allude to both the captivity of Greeks in the Greek War of Independence and that of African Americans in the US South.

### Sexual Violation

There is one additional aspect of Powers's *Greek Slave*, not present in my earlier articles or central to the scholarship of others, which I now consider pertinent to its iconography—the statue implies future sexual violation. As I comment in my forthcoming book, *“Against Our Will”: Representing Sexual Trauma in American Art, 1970–2014*, nineteenth-century American male artists aestheticized and neutralized sexual violence, following a “heroic rape” model that elided the reality of physical violation against the female body in order to produce spectacles of pleasure that also involve pain, trauma, and forbidden desire. John Vanderlyn's *The Death of Jane McCrea* (fig. 7), Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave*, and Erastus Dow Palmer's *White Captive* (fig. 8) all represent or imply the seizure of a white woman by a malevolent, dark male “savage”—a Native American or Middle Eastern man—who threatens her innocence and purity. These artists suspended the narrative prior to the actual rape (and, in the case of *Jane McCrea*, murder), further stimulating the horror and prurient fascination associated with such traumatic events. Whether overtly represented or suggested, rape is thus summoned to the imagination.<sup>[92]</sup>



Fig. 7, John Vanderlyn, *The Murder of Jane McCrea*, 1804. Oil on canvas. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT, purchased by Subscription, 1855.4. Photo: Allen Phillips/Wadsworth Atheneum. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 8, Erastus Dow Palmer, *The White Captive*, 1857–58; carved, 1858–59. Marble. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/11680>. [\[larger image\]](#)

Part of the male fascination with *The Greek Slave* during the mid-nineteenth century may not have been about just the naked body, but also titillating fantasies of potential sexual violation. White male Americans could imagine the Other as sexually violating this innocent Christian woman, as a conduit for their own imagined desires. Some blatantly expressed this. As one poet wrote in the *Knickerbocker Magazine*:

Naked yet clothed with chastity, She stands  
And as a shield throws back the sun's hot rays,  
Her modest mien repels each vulgar gaze.  
Her inborn soul of purity demands  
Freedom from touch of sacrilegious hands,  
And homage of pure thoughts. Call her not Slave;  
Her soul commands what servitude would crave,  
Nor feels the pressure of those iron bands  
Clasping her limbs.[\[93\]](#)

James Freeman Clarke's poem, "The Greek Slave," similarly suggests, as I said in my article on this statue, "the innocent Christian transcends her physical enslavement and degradation through spiritual faith," but at the same time teases, in suggesting sexual violation:

For what has *she* to do with fear and shame,  
For them the danger, and on them the blame.  
Their vile hands pluck her robe—She stands not bare—  
Another robe, of purity, is there.[\[94\]](#)

He specifically alludes to her sexual violation in another stanza: "Her virgin soul is crushed, her heart is torn. / Debased, defiled and trampled in the dust."[\[95\]](#) This language imagines the buyer as the Other, touching, defiling, and raping the captive woman.

If Powers's figure indeed represents a tragic octoroon, then her mixed heritage would have allowed for sexual violation in the United States, for during the nineteenth century, actual or



attempted rape of enslaved women was neither recognized nor punished by law; it was unimaginable “because of purported black lasciviousness.”<sup>[96]</sup> Enslaved women legally could not give consent or offer resistance; hence, the act of rape legally could not be perpetrated against enslaved women.<sup>[97]</sup> The historian Eugene Genovese notes, “Rape meant, by definition, rape of white women, for no such crime as rape of a black woman existed at law. Even when a black man sexually attacked a black woman he could only be punished by his master; no way existed to bring him to trial or to convict him if so brought.”<sup>[98]</sup> From emancipation through the first three-quarters of the twentieth century, no white Southern man was convicted of raping or attempting to rape an African American woman.<sup>[99]</sup> Perhaps the indignant responses to *The Greek Slave*’s captivity then derived also from repressed desires not just to gaze at but also to touch her body.

### Conclusion

These two earlier articles, along with my later *Art and Empire: The Politics of Ethnicity in the U.S. Capitol, 1815–1860* (1992), addressed race when the subfield of African American art history had not yet become institutionalized or widespread. *Art and Empire* considered the paintings and sculptures both inside and outside the Capitol building, arguing that they outline the course of North American empire, justifying and reinforcing America’s imperialistic ideals and actions with images that promoted the subjugation of Native Americans.<sup>[100]</sup> I also contended that the art excluded African Americans during the period of sectional conflict that I had examined in my studies of Powers’s *Greek Slave* and *America*. During the intervening decades, African American art history has become a vibrant, respected, and sophisticated field in which top scholars are both publishing and training PhD students to continue a conversation about race, slavery, and art history, manifest, for example in Charmaine A. Nelson’s *The Color of Stone*. I have valued this opportunity to look again at *The Greek Slave*, *America*, and their creator—and to reexamine my own approach to them—with the benefit of the new art-historical lenses provided by African American studies, critical theory, and new directions in the field.

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### Notes



[1] Vivien M. Green, "Hiram Powers's *Greek Slave*: Emblem of Freedom," *American Art Journal* 14 (Autumn 1982): 31–39.

[2] Vivien Green Fryd, "Hiram Powers's *America*: 'Triumphant as Liberty and in Unity,'" *American Art Journal* 18, no. 2 (1986): 54–75. Both articles derived from chapters in my dissertation, "Sculpture as History: Themes of Liberty, Unity, and Manifest Destiny in American Sculpture, 1825–1865" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1984).

[3] The statue has generally been dated to 1869, the year it was acquired by Edwin W. Stoughton. Richard P. Wunder dated it to 1866, but since he did not substantiate this date adequately it was not generally accepted. Wunder, *Hiram Powers: Vermont Sculptor, 1805–1873*, 2 vols. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991), 2:162, 166. However, new research by Martina Droth undertaken for this special issue has confirmed that the most likely date is indeed 1866 (see "[Mapping The Greek Slave](#)"). This new dating is reflected throughout the issue. On the topic of Powers's shifting political thoughts, Jean Fagan Yellin significantly quotes a December 31, 1859, letter to Sidney Brooks that I had overlooked. In it, Powers lists events in the United States that contributed to his change in outlook: the "proceedings in Kansas," the Sumner case, the Missouri Compromise, the Dred Scott decision. See Yellin, "Caps and Chains: Hiram Powers' Statue of 'Liberty,'" *American Quarterly* 38 (1986): 819; and Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 106. Charmaine A. Nelson also quotes this letter in *The Color of Stone: Sculpting the Black Female Subject in Nineteenth-Century America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 93.

[4] Hiram Powers to Edwin W. Stoughton, November 29, 1869, Hiram Powers Papers, Archives of American Art (hereafter HPP-AAA). Quoted in Green, "Powers's *Greek Slave*," 32n6. See also Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 122–23; Nelson, *The Color of Stone*, 105; and Samuel A. Robertson and William H. Gerdtz, "The Greek Slave," *The Museum* (Newark Museum) 17 (Winter–Spring 1965): 23. The Hiram Powers Papers were not digitized when I first used them, and as a result, my citations do not include references to the online versions used by other authors. The collection is now available on the Archives of American Art website: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/hiram-powers-papers-7255>. The correspondence I cite can be consulted there.

[5] Green, "Powers's *Greek Slave*," 32n5. In a footnote I speculated: "Powers may have decided to use manacles in his final replica [1866] to avoid earlier criticism that the chain was unrealistic." Ibid., 32n6. Richard P. Wunder argues that Powers changed the chains to manacles because the latter would cost less for the workmen to carve. Wunder, *Hiram Powers: Vermont Sculptor, 1805–1873*, 1:262.

[6] As he wrote to Nicholas Longworth that year, "Do not start! They are not manacles [under her foot]—no allusion to the 'Peculiar Institution' but simply an emblem of despotism or tyranny." Powers to Nicholas Longworth, June 10, 1853, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, "Powers's *America*," 67; Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 118; and Nelson, *The Color of Stone*, 91.

[7] Green, "Powers's *Greek Slave*," 32n5.

[8] Ibid., 34.

[9] Robertson and Gerdtz, albeit briefly, first addressed *The Greek Slave* within the context of the Greek War of Independence, in "The Greek Slave," 5.

[10] Green, "Powers's *Greek Slave*," 35.

[11] Ibid., 38.

[12] *Christian Inquirer*, October 9, 1847, "Notices of Powers [sic] Works," scrapbook, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Green, "Powers's *Greek Slave*," 38. Nelson also quotes this letter and provides the date in *The Color of Stone*, 96–97, 207n72.

[13] *Eastport Sentinel*, August 23, 1848, "Notices of Powers Works," scrapbook, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Green, "Powers's *Greek Slave*," 38.

[14] Green, "Powers's *Greek Slave*," 36.

[15] Ibid., 38.

[16] Ibid., 36.

[17] Ibid., 37, quoting William Wells Brown, *Clotel, or the President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1853), 74.

[18] "Sally Hemings," Monticello website, Thomas Jefferson Foundation, accessed April 4, 2016, <https://www.monticello.org/site/plantation-and-slavery/sally-hemings>.

[19] For studies of Brown's novel, all published years after my article, see for example Angelyn Mitchell, "Her Side of His Story: A Feminist Analysis of Two Nineteenth-Century Antebellum Novels—William Wells Brown's *Clotel* and Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig*," *American Literary Realism* 24 (April 1992): 7–21; Martha Cuttler, *Unruly Tongue: Identity and Voice in American Women's Writing*,

1850–1930 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999); Ann duCille, “Where in the World is William Wells Brown? Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemings, and the DNA of African-American Literary History,” *American Literary History* 12 (2000): 443–62; and M. Guila Fabi, *Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

[20] Green, “Powers’s *Greek Slave*,” 37. For another comparison with American slavery, see “Sambo to the ‘Greek Slave,’” *Punch, or the London Charivari*, July–December 1851, 105; quoted in Green, “Powers’s *Greek Slave*,” 37. Although I discussed the response of *Punch*’s imagined “Sambo” to the hostage, my analysis of its language was incomplete. I saw its use of black vernacular dialect as racist parody to amuse white readers. Henry Louis Gates Jr. would later describe that dialect in terms of resistance to white hegemony, calling it “a sign of difference, a blackness of the tongue.” This explanation of the black vernacular’s subversive meaning derives from his *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the “Racial” Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xix. Alice Walker refers to this as “black folk English” in her book *The Color Purple* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1982).

[21] Green, “Powers’s *Greek Slave*,” 39.

[22] Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 65.

[23] *Ibid.*, 59–60, 72nn15–16. I based my analysis of the work’s chameleon-like iconography and meanings on previous scholarship about the personifications of *Libertas* and America. My sources for *Libertas* were Marvin Trachtenberg, *The Statue of Liberty* (New York: Viking Press, 1976); and James A. Leith, *The Idea of Art as Propaganda in France, 1750–1799* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965). For personifications of America, see E. McClung Fleming, “The American Image as Indian Princess, 1765–1783,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 2 (1967): 37–66; Hugh Honour, *The New Golden Land: European Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975); and Joshua C. Taylor, “America as Symbol,” in *America as Art* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976), 1–36.

[24] Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 71.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] *Ibid.*, 60.

[27] For the history of his marble version and its destruction in a fire while in storage, see Wunder, *Hiram Powers: Vermont Sculptor, 1805–1873*, 2:119–20.

[28] Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 71.

[29] For the historiography of American art in general, see Wanda Corn, “Coming of Age: Historical Scholarship in American Art,” *Art Bulletin* 70 (1988): 188–207; and John Davis, “The End of the American Century: Current Scholarship on the Art of the United States,” *Art Bulletin* 85 (2003): 544–80.

[30] Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[31] Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990); and Guy C. McElroy, *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art 1710–1940* (Washington, DC: Bedford Arts and the Corcoran Museum of Art, 1990).

[32] Linda Hyman, “The *Greek Slave* by Hiram Powers: High Art as Popular Culture,” *Art Journal* 35 (Spring 1976): 216–23.

[33] Significant early books on the topic included Albert Ten Eyck Garner, *Yankee Stonecutters: The First American School of Sculpture, 1800–1850* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1945); Margaret Farrand Thorp, *The Literary Sculptors* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1965); Wayne Craven, *Sculpture in America* (Newark: University of Delaware Press / New York: Cornwall Books, 1968); William H. Gerdts, *American Neo-Classical Sculpture: The Marble Resurrection* (New York: Viking Press, 1973); Sylvia E. Crane, *White Silence: Greenough, Powers, and Crawford, American Sculptors in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1972); and Wayne Craven, “Images of a Nation in Wood, Marble, and Bronze: American Sculpture from 1776 to 1900,” in *200 Years of American Sculpture* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1976), 26–73.

[34] Richard P. Wunder, *Hiram Powers, Vermont Sculptor* (Taftsville, VT: Countryman Press, 1974) (This pamphlet by Wunder has the same title as his later two-volume catalogue raisonné, mentioned in note 5 above.); Donald Martin Reynolds, *Hiram Powers and His Ideal Sculpture* (New York: Garland, 1977); and Donald Martin Reynolds, “The Unveiled Soul: Hiram Powers’s Embodiment of the Ideal,” *Art Bulletin* 59 (1977): 394–414.

[35] Robertson and Gerdts, “The *Greek Slave*,” 1–32.

[36] These books are cited in Green, "Powers's *Greek Slave*," 34n11.

[37] Henry Morris Murray, *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture* (Washington, DC: published by the author, 1916; Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), 1–3.

[38] Carl Bode, *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture, 1840–1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 99.

[39] Robertson and Gerdt, "The Greek Slave," 8, 9.

[40] Gerdt, *American Neo-Classical Sculpture*, 53. Gerdt also reiterates that "the subject appealed to antislavery passions, . . . a factor which was taken into account in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnet on the piece." "Marble and Nudity," *Art in America* 54 (May–June 1971): 62. Wunder briefly places the work within the context of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Hiram Powers, Vermont Sculptor*, 25. Hyman notices that some newspapers established "anti-slavery appeals" in connection with exhibitions of the statue and quotes some of these; see "The Greek Slave," 222. Crane claims that although "slavery had a high priority at the time in the minds of Americans," Powers "selected a subject of slavery but removed it from the contentious American context to the classical Greek islands at the time of the Greek War of Independence." *White Silence*, 203.

[41] Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 99–124.

[42] Yellin, "Caps and Chains," 801, 825n6. She discusses philhellenism again in *Women and Sisters*, 115n50.

[43] See Powers to York Atlee, February 10, 1856, quoted in Yellin, "Caps and Chains," 815; and Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 118.

[44] Powers to Edward Everett, March 2, 1861, quoted in Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 107.

[45] Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 115.

[46] For my earliest considerations of gender, see "Rereading the Indian in Benjamin West's *Death of General Wolfe*," *American Art* 9 (Spring 1995): 73–78; and "The Sad Twang of Mountain Voices: Thomas Hart Benton's *Sources of Country Music*," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94 (Winter 1995): 301–35. The latter article was reprinted in *Reading Country Music: Steel Guitars, Opry Stars, and Honky-Tonk Bars*, ed. Cecelia Tichi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 256–85. For more in-depth considerations of gender and sexuality, see especially my *Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Georgia O'Keeffe and Edward Hopper* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); "The 'Ghosting' of Incest and Female Liaisons in Harriet Hosmer's *Beatrice Cenci*," *Art Bulletin* 88 (2006): 292–309; "Bearing Witness to the Trauma of Slavery in Kara Walker's Videos: *Testimony, Eight Possible Beginnings*, and *I was Transported*," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 2010): 145–59; "Ending the Silence," in *Doin' It in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building*, ed. Meg Linton, Sue Mayberry, and Elizabeth Pulsinelli (Los Angeles: Otis College of Art and Design, 2011), 158–83; "Faith Ringgold's *Slave Rape Series*: A Counter-Narrative to African (American) Women as Victims," in *Revisiting the Sixties. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on America's Longest Decade*, ed. Laura Bieger and Christian Lammert (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2014), 2–22; "Kara Walker's *About the Title*: The Ghostly Presence of Transgenerational Trauma as a 'Connective Tissue' Between the Past and Present," *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* (summer 2016), <http://journalpanorama.org/issues/summer-2016-vol-2-no-1/?category=articles>; and "Against Our Will": *Representing Sexual Trauma in American Art, 1970–2014*, forthcoming.

[47] Joy S. Kasson, *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 2–3. This book contains a chapter on Powers's *Greek Slave* (pp. 46–72). Lauren K. Lessing later elaborated on a feminist reading, examining *The Greek Slave* within the context of the marriage debate in "Ties that Bind: Hiram Powers' *Greek Slave* and Nineteenth-Century Marriage," *American Art* 24 (Spring 2010): 41–65.

[48] Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 99–100.

[49] *Ibid.*, 102.

[50] *Ibid.*, 123.

[51] *Ibid.*, 121–22.

[52] Yellin's "Caps and Chains" cites my dissertation in footnotes 2 and 46. She also cites my dissertation in her later book, noting my comparison between Powers's *America* and the *ad locutio* pose in the *Augustus Prima Porta*. Yellin, "Caps and Chains," 801, 825n6; and Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 115n50. She does not cite my discussion of *The Virginian Slave* in *Punch*. Joy S. Kasson also reproduces this cartoon; she claims that "one art historian has argued the sculpture [*The Greek Slave*] evoked the issue of American slavery and reflected Powers' abolitionist views," citing my article on this work. See Kasson, *Marble Queens and Captives*, 65–66.

[53] Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 122.

- [54] Ibid., 102.
- [55] Ibid., 103–5.
- [56] Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Nelson, *The Color of Stone*.
- [57] For quotations from Savage throughout this paragraph, see *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 28. I observed that the “beautiful and valiant Greek, preserves her Christian purity by repelling the lecherous advances of her Moslem captor,” whom I refer to as the “salacious heathens.” Green, “Powers’s *Greek Slave*,” 35–36.
- [58] Nelson, *The Color of Stone*, 147–49.
- [59] Ibid., 75, 82.
- [60] Ibid., 86.
- [61] Ibid., 82.
- [62] Ibid., 95.
- [63] Ibid., 108–11.
- [64] Maurie D. McNiss, *Slaves Waiting for Sale: Abolitionist Art and the American Slave Trade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), chap. 2.
- [65] Melissa Dabakis, *A Sisterhood of Sculptors: American Artists in Nineteenth-Century Rome* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2014).
- [66] Powers to Nicholas Longworth, October 22, 1848, MSSq P888 EM box 3, pt. 2, folder 5, Cincinnati Historical Society. Quoted in Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 73n30.
- [67] Powers to Nicholas Longworth, September 5, 1849, MSSqRM box 3, pt. 2, folder 5, Cincinnati Historical Society. Quoted in Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 65.
- [68] Powers to Sidney D. Maxwell, November 18, 1849, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 65; and Yellin, “Caps and Chains,” 809.
- [69] Powers to Edward M. Greenway, December 3, 1850, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 73n29.
- [70] Powers to Charles Eaton, December 3, 1850, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 72n29.
- [71] Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 64.
- [72] Ibid., 68.
- [73] Ibid.
- [74] Powers to Edward Everett, June 22, 1854, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 74n66.
- [75] Ibid.
- [76] Ibid.
- [77] Powers to his cousin John Richardson, July 10, 1854, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 73n28.
- [78] Powers to John Richardson, July 10, 1854, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 74n67; and Nelson, *The Color of Stone*, 92–93.
- [79] Ibid.
- [80] Powers to Sidney Brooks, July 19, 1854, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 68; Yellin, “Caps and Chains,” 816; and Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 118.
- [81] Powers to Edward Everett, October 23, 1850, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 67; and Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 115.
- [82] Powers to Edward Everett, July 30, 1855, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 74n54; Yellin, “Caps and Chains,” 826; and Nelson, *The Color of Stone*, 93.
- [83] Powers to Sidney Brooks, February 16, 1855, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 75n69.
- [84] Powers to Philip Burrows, November 30, 1856, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, “Powers’s *America*,” 75n69.
- [85] Quoted in Yellin, “Caps and Chains,” 819; and Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 106.
- [86] Powers to Edward Everett, March 2, 1861, quoted in Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 107.

[87] Powers to Benjamin Reilly, February 17, 1860, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, "Powers's *America*," 69.

[88] Powers to Sidney Brooks, March 8, 1865, HPP-AAA. Quoted in Fryd, "Powers's *America*," 69; and Yellin, "Caps and Chains," 824.

[89] Quoted Fryd, "Powers's *America*," 69; and Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 119.

[90] Green, "Powers's *Greek Slave*," 32n5. The footnote refers readers to a letter from Powers to William H. Aspinwall, April 7, 1866, HPP-AAA.

[91] Fryd, "Powers's *America*," 71n71.

[92] Not only male artists, however, dealt with the subject of sexual violence derived from Biblical, mythological, and historical events. The nineteenth-century woman sculptor Harriet Goodhue Hosmer, in *Beatrice Cenci* (1853–55), also exemplifies the sanitizing of sexual violence—specifically incest—in nineteenth-century American art and culture, both suppressing and expressing this taboo subject. For analysis of this statue, see Fryd, "Harriet Hosmer's *Beatrice Cenci*," 292–309.

[93] H. S. C., "The Greek Slave," in *Powers' Statue of the Greek Slave* (New York: R. Craighead, 1847), 30, accessed April 2, 2016, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY3803732941&srchtp=a&ste=14> [login required]. The poem was reprinted in this compilation after appearing in the *Knickerbocker Magazine* in October of the same year. Also quoted in Robertson and Gerdts, "The Greek Slave," 17; and partially quoted in Kasson, *Marble Queens and Captives*, 61.

[94] James Freeman Clarke, "The Greek Slave," quoted in Robertson and Gerdts, "The Greek Slave," 18.

[95] Quoted in Robertson and Gerdts, "The Greek Slave," 18. Quoted partially in Green, "Powers's *Greek Slave*," 32.

[96] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 79.

[97] *Ibid.*, 81.

[98] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 33.

[99] Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985), 164.

[100] Vivien Green Fryd, *Art and Empire: The Politics of Ethnicity in the United States Capitol, 1815–1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992; Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000).



## Illustrations



Fig. 1, Hiram Powers, *The Greek Slave*, 1847. Marble. Newark Museum, Newark. Courtesy of the Newark Museum. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, Hiram Powers, *America*, 1848–50. Plaster. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC.  
[\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 3, Hiram Powers, *The Greek Slave*, 1866. Marble. Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn. [\[return to text\]](#)





Fig. 4, John Tenniel, *The Virginian Slave*, *Intended as a Companion to Power's* [sic] '*Greek Slave*', *Punch* 20, June 7, 1851: 236. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 5, Gibbs, Gardner, and Co. (manufacturer); American Anti-Slavery Society (publisher), *Am I Not a Woman & a Sister?*, 1838. Copper, Anti-Slavery Hard Times Token. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, <http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/112837>. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 6, Roger Dixon (artist), William Lutwyche (manufacturer), *Am I Not a Man and a Brother?*, ca. 1796. Copper, Anti-slavery Conder Token created for the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, <http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/112829>. [\[return to text\]](#)





Fig. 7, John Vanderlyn, *The Murder of Jane McCrea*, 1804. Oil on canvas. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT, purchased by Subscription, 1855.4. Photo: Allen Phillips/Wadsworth Atheneum.

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Fig. 8, Erastus Dow Palmer, *The White Captive*, 1857–58; carved, 1858–59. Marble. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/11680>. [\[return to text\]](#)