

Indian Princess and Roman Goddess: The First Female Symbols of America

JOHN HIGHAM

BECAUSE America was born in the mind of Europe, the marks of that origin have always been strong on the symbols of its identity. The earliest allegorical images of the New World were almost wholly conventional reworkings of European memories: their patent lack of authenticity brings us today a shock of nonrecognition. Eventually, Americans themselves took charge of their symbols, which then acquired a more native inflection. In the long run, however, distinctiveness and separateness have been less pronounced in the visual language of American nationalism than we ordinarily suppose. None of the major embodiments of an American identity is understandable apart from its transatlantic origins, and none in its essential character has belonged to this country alone.

The European invention of America occurred, of course, through symbols, and among the earliest were lines on a map. America had to be conceived as a place before it could acquire a further meaning. Maps alone, however, are only empty diagrams. Along with the abstract proportionalities of maps, early modern people craved concrete depictions of what they could not see di-

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JOHN HIGHAM is professor emeritus of history at The Johns Hopkins University.

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rectly. And between the two, connecting immediate representations of sensory experience with some underlying scheme of meaning, they wanted imaginative symbols to infuse visible objects with ideal truths.

For Europeans, the human figure was perhaps the richest source of such symbols. Personification associated important places, principles, and powers with human activity on the one hand and with superhuman grandeur on the other. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, literature and all of the arts teemed with allegorical figures. It was an age of exuberant display, abounding with pageants of every sort, elaborate catafalques, illuminations, triumphal arches, devices, and emblems, an age in which everything seemed to teach a lesson and invite a wondrous analogy. Generalities took on both the concreteness of human form and the vividness of metaphor.¹

Personifications of America were part of a new world view that dawned in the sixteenth century. Medieval artists had depicted a tripartite world of three continents—Asia, Europe, and Africa. None of the three parts received priority over the others. The center of the world was Jerusalem, where all three met. The sixteenth century discovered a vastly enlarged globe, on which the Americas, North and South, comprised a fourth great land mass. This expansion of the known world inspired a new, secular symbolism glorifying the greatness of Europe. Contemporary pageants presented the four parts of the world as women, among whom Europe was the most illustrious and cultivated and America the most barbaric.² Europe, according to Cesar Ripa's authoritative handbook on icons, should have trophies, books, and musical

1. Mario Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery* (London: Warburg Institute, 1939). See also Morton W. Bloomfield, 'A Grammatical Approach to Personification Allegory,' *Modern Philology* 60 (1963): 161-71.

2. Hugh Honour, *The New Golden Land: European Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), pp. 84-89; Clare Le Corbeiller, 'Miss America and Her Sisters: Personifications of the Four Parts of the World,' *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 19 (1961): 209-15; James H. Hyde, 'The Four Parts of the World as Represented in Old-Time Pageants and Ballets,' *Apollo* (London) 4 (1926): 232-38; 5 (1927): 19-27.



Fig. 1. 'America,' by Etienne Delaulne (1575), from four engravings, 'Europe,' 'Asia,' 'Africa,' 'America,' James Hazen Hyde Collections, New-York Historical Society. Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society.

instruments at her feet, to 'denote her superiority above all other parts of the world, with respect to arms, to literature, and all the liberal arts.' Her crown should 'show that Europe has always been esteemed the queen of the world.' America, on the other hand, would require only her bow and arrows, a few feathers, and a wild animal somewhere about (fig. 1). As a personified abstraction, America sprang from a Eurocentric world vision.³

There was never any question that America would be seen as female. This was because the known parts of the world were already

3. Cesar Ripa, *Iconologia* (Padua: P. P. Tozzi, 1611), pp. 355–60. This is an expanded version of the first illustrated edition, published in Rome in 1603. On Ripa's influence, see Emile Mâle, *L'Art religieux après le Concile de Trente* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1932), pp. 383–428.

so defined in the classical tradition and languages that European humanists employed. Here we touch at the outset the immense authority that Latin grammar and classical mythology exercised in the symbol making of the early modern era. Not only continents but such major places as kingdoms, provinces, and cities were consistently given female names and portrayed as goddesses on the coins and medals that the Romans struck.⁴ Accordingly, when applied to the New World, Amerigo Vespucci's baptismal name was feminized. Instead of Amerigo, the western hemisphere became America.

To differentiate America from Africa and Asia, artists relied chiefly on her partial or complete nudity. Asia was always fully clothed, often sumptuously so. Africa, attired in sometimes revealing but always elegant dress, was supposed to look Moorish, since Europeans were most familiar with the Mediterranean littoral. America alone was a savage. An early predilection for exhibiting her as a naked cannibal, toying with a severed head or a half-roasted human arm, gave way in the seventeenth century to less threatening but still muscular images. She became, for example, a barbaric queen, borne aloft in a giant conch shell, scattering baubles from her cornucopia to the European adventurers crowding below (fig. 2).

Always, America was supposed to be a native of the New World, the symbol of a place. Accordingly, she wore a feathered headdress and sometimes also a feathered skirt, both copied from early woodcuts of the Tupinamba Indians of Brazil. The headdress, a loosely vertical arrangement of feathers in a simple diadem, became the key attribute of this first personification of America. In time it evolved into the essential ethnic symbol for the Indians of North America, and in altered form so remains to this day. At the outset, however, the feathered bonnet betokened a place rather than a

4. Joseph Spence, *Polymetis; or, an Enquiry Concerning the Agreement between the Works of the Roman Poets and the Remains of the Antient Artists* (London: R. Dodsley, 1747), pp. 239, 242.



Fig. 2. Frontispiece to Jacob von Meur's *Die Unbekante Neue Welt oder Beschreibung des Welt-teils Amerika und des Sud-Landes* (Amsterdam, 1683). American Antiquarian Society.

people, an absence of culture (from the European point of view) rather than a manifestation of culture.

Beyond the Tupinamba headdress and the bow and arrows, allegorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries cared nothing about the personal characteristics of the natives they encountered. America as an allegorical figure never bore, for example, the painted body markings that European explorers noted in realistic drawings of American Indians. Amazingly, the Indians' skin color was not an essential attribute. In general, symbolic America looked decidedly European, though some artists gave her a copper tint and a few—confusing America with Africa—created a Negroid image of both.⁵

More important than racial traits were environmental allusions based on the tropical scene that Europeans initially encountered in the New World. America usually had with her a parrot and a large exotic reptile such as an oversized armadillo or an alligator, on which she was often seated.

In the eighteenth century, Europe's allegorical Indian receded still further from experience into dreams. As the New World became less threatening to Europeans, its personification grew softer, more decorative, more Arcadian (fig. 3). Amazons gave way to graceful young women, whom the European taste for exoticism endowed with an ever more voluptuous appeal. On ballroom ceilings from Sweden to Spain, the four continents occupied the corners, whence they paid homage to the local ruler; or, as porcelain statuettes, they dressed banquet tables.⁶

A new role for the Indian princess opened with the rise of political satire in eighteenth-century England. Although satirical

5. George Richardson, ed., *Iconology; or A Collection of Emblematical Figures*, 2 vols. (London: G. Scott, 1779), vol. 1, plate 16, p. 33; Corbeiller, 'Miss America,' 218–19. In *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), the following are particularly helpful: William C. Sturtevant, 'First Visual Images of Native America,' 1:417–54; Suzanne Boorsch, 'America in Festival Presentations,' 1: 503–15; David Beers Quinn, 'New Geographical Horizons: Literature,' 2: 642–51.

6. Hugh Honour, *The European Vision of America: A Special Exhibition to Honor the Bicentennial of the United States* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1975), plates 142–51.



Fig. 3. George Richardson, ed., *Iconology*, 2 vols. (London, 1779), vol. 1, plate 16. Reproduced by permission of the Library of Congress.

drawings about public affairs had been sold since the Reformation, only in the mid-eighteenth century did supply and demand explode as economical techniques for producing sophisticated prints

fed a keen public appetite for news, scandal, and parody. Distributed through stationery shops, polemical prints flourished so abundantly in London by the 1780s that they were regarded elsewhere in Europe as a peculiarly English addiction.⁷ To tease, amuse, and provoke their audience, caricaturists needed a panoply of symbols representing collective actors and impersonal forces. Through political cartoons, therefore, a simplified version of the noble American savage came to symbolize not an entire continent or hemisphere but a specifically British domain: the restive and eventually rebellious British colonies in North America.

Before settling on the Indian, caricaturists experimented with animals as symbols of the colonies, for example, the snake cut into eight segments, which Benjamin Franklin displayed in 1754 over the words 'Join or Die.' None of the animal symbols endured, however. For Englishmen at least, America was easiest to grasp as an idealized Indian.

The English caricaturists loved to excoriate the misdeeds of their own rulers and of England's European rivals, but they rarely depicted the American colonies as aggressors. Instead, the Americans were generally seen as innocent victims of evil British ministers—a perspective congenial to the merchant class that was dependent on American trade. Londoners who bought prints obviously found the image of America as a noble savage appealing.⁸

Accordingly, the Indian princess was a much abused maiden in English prints on the American crisis. When American resistance to British policies flared up in 1765, London printmakers denounced coercive measures by their own government. The mother-daughter theme played frequently in these prints, and English artists did not hesitate to present the mother in an uncomplimentary light. Britannia, for example, might be seen as an enraged lady of fashion clawing at her half-naked Indian daughter

7. M. Dorothy George, *English Political Caricature to 1792: A Study of Opinion and Propaganda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 11 ff.

8. According to Honour, in *European Vision*, pp. 220–21, only three anti-American prints are known to have been issued in London during the American Revolution. The one he includes, no. 232, personifies America as a bedraggled Continental soldier, not as an Indian.



Fig. 4. 'The Female Combatants' (1776). Courtesy of the Print Collection, Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

(fig. 4). More commonly, both of them were harassed by wicked politicians. An especially powerful, widely printed cartoon, occasioned by British enforcement in 1774 of the new tax imposed on tea, displayed a disheveled Britannia weeping in helpless shame



The able Doctor, or America Swallowing the Bitter Draught

Fig. 5. 'The Able Doctor' (1774), engraving for the Royal American Magazine, volume 1, number 10, by Paul Revere. American Antiquarian Society.

at the sight of a half-clad America pinned to the ground at the edge of Boston's harbor (fig. 5). The lord chief justice of England has pinioned the arms of the poor creature. The lord of the admiralty, crouching at her feet, is lifting her skirt. The prime minister is forcing hot tea down her throat; she spews it back into his face. Although America is sometimes viewed as impulsive and unwise, her virtue is never impugned.⁹

In one respect, the stereotype of America as noble savage was pliant. It did not have to be female. To represent America as an Indian male was entirely permissible. This tells us that gender was not the essential attribute of the first personification of America.

9. Joan D. Dolmetsch, *Rebellion and Reconciliation: Satirical Prints on the Revolution at Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1976), pp. 7-9, 42-43, 74-75; Donald H. Creswell, *The American Revolution in Drawings and Prints: A Checklist of 1765-1790 Graphics in the Library of Congress* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1975), nos. 664, 700, and 830.

Fundamentally, the allegorical Indian stood out in cartoons as unclothed, or at least as the most rudely attired person on the scene. Male or female, the Indian signified an idyllic state of nature, an uncorrupted *place*. Accordingly, the cartouche of one of the finest eighteenth-century maps of British North America combined male and female in a balanced, integrated vision of two beautiful, nearly nude, Europeanized savages (fig. 6). Lounging dreamily on her alligator, the woman rises above the man, thus manifesting the preeminence of the female as a classical symbol of place. He sits on the ground, against a background of lush vegetation, stroking a lion cub, suggesting that we are looking at a younger Britain. By inscribing the marks of a specifically English and also broadly classical authority on the allegory of an innocent New World, the map perfectly symbolizes the America that Europe invented.

This was not the way—at least not the primary way—in which Americans perceived themselves. American engravers like Paul Revere occasionally copied English prints that featured the tribulations of the Indian princess,¹⁰ since the literary market in the colonies was not yet large enough to support good American cartoonists. Yet white Americans were too close to real Indians in the eighteenth century to feel comfortable about identifying with any such personification, no matter how idealized. The earliest American-made cartoons depicting Indians presented extremely negative views of burning villages, white corpses, and blood-stained natives.¹¹ When white Americans took up arms against Britain, the most powerful Indian tribes seized the opportunity to block the advance of settlement. Allied with the British, they ravaged the American frontier; whereupon hatred of Indians largely suppressed the stereotype of the noble savage on this side of the Atlantic. European artists continued after 1776 to paint ever more

10. Creswell, *American Revolution*, nos. 626, 664.

11. E. P. Richardson, 'The Birth of Political Caricature,' in *Philadelphia Printmaking: American Prints before 1860*, ed. Robert F. Looney (West Chester, Pa.: Tunicum Press, 1976), pp. 71–89.



Fig. 6. Cartouche of Emanuel Bowen map, 'A New and Correct Map of North America, with the West India Islands. Divided According to the Last Treaty of Peace, Concluded at Paris, 10th Feby 1763' (1777). American Antiquarian Society.

exotic and sensuous visions of the American Indian princess and her consort (fig. 7); but the embattled Americans turned away.¹²

One suspects that something more than enmity disqualified the Indian as a symbol for the young republic. When Americans declared independence, they created a separate polity, not just a separate place. They assumed, as the Declaration of Independence noted, 'among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them.' Unlike the symbols of a colony, which could acknowledge subordination to the mother country, the personification of a nation would have to announce its 'equal station.' The stereotypical Indian's nakedness implicitly conceded the cultural inferiority of the New World. Prim colonial leaders resented being portrayed in England as uncivilized natives, even in the sympathetic drawings of the English caricaturists. In one notable adaptation of an English print at the very outset of the protest movement, the American artist wrapped the Indian princess in a toga; all that remained to suggest a native identity were two decorative plumes in her hair.¹³ What American patriots needed was not a reminder of their former dependence and continuing backwardness but an affirmation of parity and independence. They needed symbols that would connect them with the civilized world while declaring their political separation.

Reaching back for a second time into the iconographic heritage

12. Here I differ from the generally authoritative and eminently precise work of E. McClung Fleming, since he does not distinguish between English and American printmaking. See his essay 'The American Image as Indian Princess, 1765-1783,' *Wintertbur Portfolio* 2 (1965): 65-81. I do not mean to suggest, however, that the Indian symbol was ever totally rejected. It remained, for example, on the official seal of Massachusetts (the only state that kept it) and in a handsome, semirealistic cartouche for the first official map of the Commonwealth. Osgood Carleton, 'Map of Massachusetts Proper' (1801), in the map collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

13. Abigail to John Adams, March 31, 1776, in *Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. L. H. Butterfield et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963-), 1: 369. Compare the English print, 'The Deplorable State of America' (1765), as reprinted in *The Image of America in Caricature & Cartoon*, ed. Ron Tyler (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1976), p. 44, with the American adaptation, attributed to John Singleton Copley, in Kenneth Silverman, *A Cultural History of the American Revolution* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1976), p. 126.



Fig. 7. 'L 'Amerique,' by Jules Antoine Vauthier, engraved by Noel Francois Bertrand (181?). Reproduced by permission of the Library of Congress.

of classical humanism, Americans embraced a Roman goddess who epitomized both their separation from Britain and their common inheritance. The goddess of Liberty, with whom Marius and other leaders of the Roman republic had prominently identified themselves, reappeared in eighteenth-century England. She emerged in the midst of a clamorous political rhetoric that dwelled on the glories of English liberty and the dangers threatening it. Liberty had become, Englishmen widely agreed, the distinctive genius of British institutions and the birthright of all Englishmen. It is symptomatic that James Thomson, who produced the famous ode 'Rule Britannia' in 1740, had already written a long poetic effusion celebrating the progress of the goddess of Liberty through the ages until she found a perfect home in the British Constitution.¹⁴ In truth, liberty and nationality were forming a fateful partnership, which spread from England to America and eventually around the world.

The crucial attribute of the goddess, as preserved on Roman coins and medals, was a close-fitting, cone-shaped cap, a *pileus*, carried on a staff as Roman priests had done when they would bestow a cap on slaves at the ceremony of their emancipation. The assassins of Julius Caesar had brandished it on a spear as a token of the liberation of Rome.¹⁵ Otherwise, Liberty presented a severely simple image. In marked contrast to the flamboyant materiality that accumulated around the image of the four continents, Liberty wore a plain, white classical gown. She was the visualization of a disembodied principle.

Before Americans seized on Liberty as their national goddess, they had become familiar with her as part of the iconography of English nationalism. England already had its own tutelary spirit

14. Quoted in A. R. Humphreys, *The Augustan World: Society, Thought, and Letters in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Methuen & Co., 1954), p. 100. See also Michael Kammen, *Spheres of Liberty: Changing Perceptions of Liberty in American Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), pp. 29, 44; George, *English Political Caricature to 1792*, pp. 81-83.

15. *Der Kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike*, 5 vols. (Munich, 1975), 3: 623-24; 4: 852; 'Liberty Cap,' in *Harper's Encyclopaedia of United States History*, ed. Benson John Lossing (New York: Harper and Bros., 1912), n.p.



Fig. 8. 'Britannia,' G. B. Cipriani, engraved by F. Bartolozzi. Reproduced by permission of the Library of Congress.

drawn from the classical repertory; but the English goddess, Britannia, signified power and place far more than principle. Copied directly from Roman coins issued by Hadrian, Britannia was always seated by the sea, usually on a rock but sometimes on a globe, and bulwarked by shield and trident. At first she conveyed a distinctly imperial image, but by the mid-eighteenth century a swelling national pride in liberty popularized Britannia as a guarantor of Englishmen's rights.¹⁶ Printmakers frequently placed in Britannia's grasp a liberty cap held aloft on a staff (fig. 8). They also exhibited Britannia as a kind of guardian or sisterly companion of the goddess of liberty.

Before 1776 the partnership between Liberty and Britannia supplied American colonials with a telling symbol of their own strenuous claim to the rights of Englishmen. Beginning with the Massachusetts *Spy* in 1770, some colonial newspapers adopted a new masthead in which Britannia sits on a rock displaying a British shield while holding a liberty cap.¹⁷ After the American declaration of independence, of course, patriots found the symbol of Britannia even less appealing than was the Indian princess. What remained from the existing repertory to represent the American cause were the specific symbols of liberty and the general idea of a classical goddess.

Just how those symbols might be arranged and interrelated most effectively was not immediately apparent.¹⁸ But by the end of the Revolution an attractive young goddess named America could be seen, on maps and in almanacs, proudly holding aloft her cap-topped staff while waving farewell to a blindfolded or weeping Britannia. This was the tableau that adorned the new Wallis map

16. George, *English Political Caricature to 1792*, pp. 9, 45, 49, 61, 159, and 181; Herbert M. Atherton, *Political Prints in the Age of Hogarth: A Study of the Ideographic Representation of Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 84-90.

17. Sinclair Hamilton, 'The Earliest Device of the Colonies,' *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 10 (1949): 117-23; *Boston-Gazette and Country Journal*, December 20, 1773.

18. *Bickerstaff's New England Almanack* (Newburyport: Mycall and Tynges, 1776), frontispiece and p. 2; *Continental Almanac* (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1780); *Weatherwise's Town & Country Almanack*, n.d., in Creswell, *American Revolution*, no. 839; Q. David Bowers, *The History of United States Coinage as Illustrated by the Garrett Collection* (Los Angeles: Bowers and Ruddy Galleries, Inc., 1979), pp. 137-41, and 156.

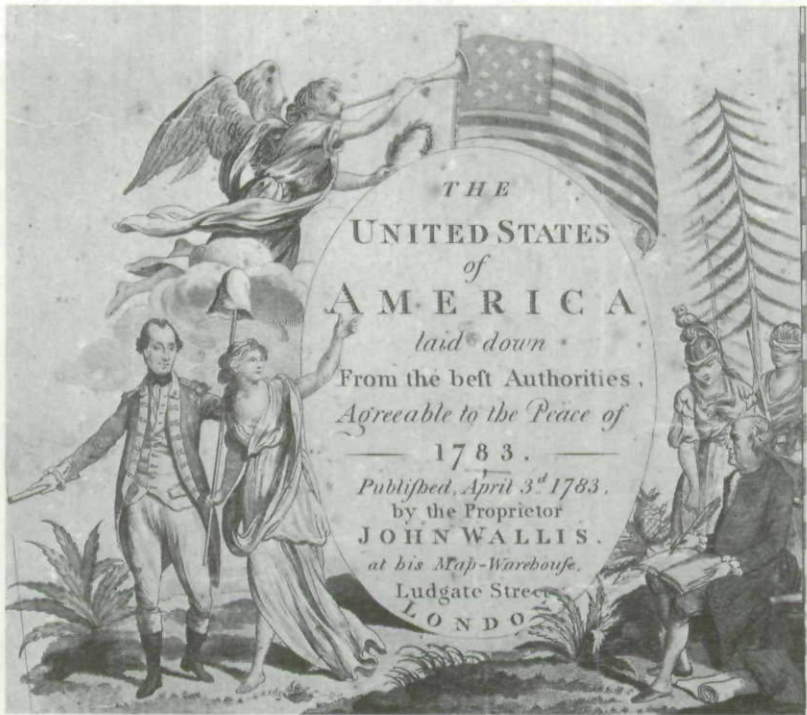


Fig. 9. Cartouche to John Wallis map, 'The United States of America Laid Down from the Best Authorities' (1783). American Antiquarian Society.

published in London, 1783, on which the boundary of the United States drawn by British and American peace commissioners was first recorded (fig. 9). At the beginning of the peace negotiations the year before, John Jay had used a famous North American map drawn by John Mitchell, which had retained the Indian princess as its cartouche.¹⁹ The change from one symbolic system to another could not have been more dramatically declared.

19. Walt W. Ristow, 'John Mitchell's Map of the British and French Dominions in North America,' in *A la Carte: Selected Papers on Maps and Atlases*, ed. Walt W. Ristow (Washington: Library of Congress, 1972), p. 107. In 1784 Abel Buell published in New Haven the first map of the United States that was compiled, engraved, and printed by an American. Buell depended heavily on Mitchell, even using a similar cartouche; but he replaced the Indian princess with a seated Liberty holding her pileus on a pole. Seymour I. Schwartz and Ralph E. Ehrenberg, *The Mapping of America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1980), p. 201.

In the 1790s the spirit of America sometimes wore the helmet of Minerva—goddess of wisdom, inventiveness, and civic authority—and sometimes, also or instead, the ostrich plumes that were currently fashionable in Europe. Neither of these variations lasted, however. A more enduring innovation was a new name for America's female personification: Columbia. A purely verbal creation, Columbia was the invention of poets who wanted to refer to the young republic in language with all of the latinized dignity conveyed by 'Britannia.' The new designation gained currency especially through the great patriotic song of the decade, Joseph Hopkinson's 'Hail Columbia.'²⁰ Nevertheless, 'Liberty' emerged as the official name for the female personification of the nation. Throughout the nineteenth century, in adverting to their national deity, Americans spoke almost interchangeably of Liberty and Columbia.

In creating a United States mint in 1792, Congress formalized the choice of Liberty as the embodiment of national consciousness. At first, the Senate intended, in conformity with European dynastic precedents, that all coins should bear the image of the current president and identify his administration in a numerical sequence of presidencies. But fears of an imperial presidency persuaded Congress to require coins to be stamped not with the visage of the president but with 'an impression emblematic of liberty [and] with an inscription of the word Liberty.'²¹ That is why almost all of the coins of the United States throughout the nineteenth century featured a neoclassical, female profile labeled 'Liberty' (fig. 10).

The fact that the American goddess had one name referring to place (Columbia) and another to principle (Liberty) illustrates the

20. Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Music for Patriots, Politicians, and Presidents: Harmonies and Discords of the First Hundred Years* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 142-43; E. McClung Fleming, 'From Indian Princess to Greek Goddess: The American Image, 1783-1815,' *Winterthur Portfolio* 3 (1967): 59. On these transitional years, Fleming is indispensable.

21. Ted Schwarz, *A History of United States Coinage* (San Diego: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1980), pp. 63-73; Bowers, *History of U.S. Coinage*, pp. 181-83.



Fig. 10. Coins produced by the U.S. Mint. Courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

multivocal nature of the symbol. The first name seemed to identify a full-scale replacement for Britannia; it proclaimed the pride of an upstart rival in her own national strength and achievements. The second name also alluded to universal needs and aspirations. It merged a specific national identity with a transnational symbol of human rights. The resulting ambiguity fostered Americans' self-centered delusions concerning the unbounded appeal and relevance of their own institutions. Nevertheless, in the young republic the mingling of national consciousness with universalism significantly extended the reach of humane concern for people who were excluded or uncared for.

The interplay of nationalism and universalism suffuses Samuel Jennings's painting 'Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences' (1792), which presides to this day over the exhibit room of the Library Company of Philadelphia (fig. 11). Surrounded by symbols of the arts, a matronly Liberty—in contemporary dress, holding her cap and staff—is showing a pile of books to several newly freed slaves. Although the whole painting is obviously an allegory of



Fig. 11. Samuel Jennings, 'Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences' (1792). Reproduced by permission of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

hopes for the new nation, it nowhere identifies the central figure as uniquely American. She can be viewed as either national or universal, or both.²² The picture documents the rise of an antislavery movement and proudly identifies it with the American republic.

As long as Liberty remained a vital symbol, its capacity to blur distinctions between nation and humanity was one of its special strengths. Yet the supranational persona of Liberty was also a handicap. By herself, without concrete associations such as those that Jennings supplied, she presented a bland, generalized image, which seems intrinsically ill-suited to rouse and unite a particular people. Fixed in a formal, neoclassical mode and occupied mostly with pouring libations or receiving either homage or neglect, Lib-

22. Robert C. Smith, 'Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences: A Philadelphia Allegory by Samuel Jennings,' *Winterthur Portfolio* 2 (1965): 84-102.

erty betrayed the marmoreal chilliness of her remote and abstract origins.²³ Naming her Columbia scarcely began to bring her down to the American earth. Throughout the nineteenth century, therefore, Americans strove to invest this personification of a principle with the corporeal reality of a place.

As a first step in localizing Liberty, artists tied her closely to less ambiguous symbols of American nationality. In addition to the pileus, she was frequently required to carry an American flag, or to lean on a shield emblazoned with stars and stripes. George Washington was a favorite companion of Liberty in popular engravings and in the decorations on early American housewares.²⁴

Liberty's almost indispensable attendant was the American eagle. Chosen as the national emblem by the Continental Congress in 1782, the American bald eagle appeared first on the Great Seal of the United States, then on the reverse of most American coins, and very quickly was embraced by Americans at every social level as the most popular single icon in folk art. Tradesmen and housewives incorporated it into almost every conceivable object of everyday use.²⁵ And automatically following tradition, they saluted the eagle as male. The eagle does male things, like swooping, soaring, and standing guard.²⁶ Associated in classical mythology with Zeus, the king of gods, the eagle implies decisive power. To nineteenth-century Americans, the eagle's command of boundless space dramatized the expansionist energies of a nation that was constantly reaching outward. America's bird, we may suspect, lurked around the American goddess not only to bring out her distinctively na-

23. Michael Kammen, *Sovereignty and Liberty: Constitutional Discourse in American Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), frontispiece, p. 33.

24. Kammen, *Sovereignty and Liberty*, p. 130; Patricia A. Anderson, *Promoted to Glory: The Apotheosis of George Washington* (Northampton, Mass.: Smith College Museum of Art, 1980).

25. Elinor Lander Horwitz, *The Bird, the Banner, and Uncle Sam: Images of America in Folk and Popular Art* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott, 1976). A good index to the preeminence of the eagle as an American symbol can be found in the large historical and statistical charts of the United States that were widely displayed in the first half of the nineteenth century. The collection at the American Antiquarian Society is designated 'Charts—U.S., Historical & Geographic, Drawer 223.'

26. 'Editor's Chip Basket,' *Yankee Notions* 7 (1858): 106.

tional identity but also to complement her symbolic feminine idealism with masculine assertiveness.

Probably the most influential image of this interaction between goddess and bird of prey was devised by Edward Savage in a 1796 engraving entitled 'Liberty as Goddess of Youth Feeding the American Eagle' (fig. 12). Against a stormy sky, a tranquil, white-gowned young woman garlanded with flowers holds aloft a cup, into which an eagle in flight is about to plunge its aggressive beak. In the background below, lightning plays about the steeple of a distant church. In the clouds floats an American flag with a large, bulbous liberty cap atop its mast. The multiple suggestions of male sexuality and female nurturance made a deep impression. The work was copied many times over in various media, for example, in the fancy membership certificates issued by the voluntary societies that flourished in the early republic.²⁷

Savage's engraving illustrates a second way of Americanizing Liberty. While surrounding her with a panoply of more distinctive national symbols, the picture also humanized her. Savage drew a real woman in contemporary dress and imbued her with humanly engaging emotions. In doing so, however, he took care not to sacrifice Liberty's ideal significance as embodiment of a transcendent principle. Savage located her in semisacred space, midway between earth and heaven. Although she appeared to be flesh and blood, she also clearly represented a divine ideal. Lesser fabulists who followed after Savage achieved a mere stock figure, which looked neither divine nor particularly human. With the onset of a great national crisis at midcentury, however, Liberty again came alive as a powerful emblem of national principles.

The sectional crisis of the 1850s and the ensuing Civil War energized America's classical goddess as nothing had before or would again. The changes in her behavior reflected what was happening in everyday experience. Through conscription, taxation, and other requirements, the federal government penetrated deeply

27. Horwitz, *The Bird, the Banner, and Uncle Sam*, pp. 78-83; membership certificate, True Republican Society, Philadelphia, 1801, in Downs Collection, Winterthur Museum.



Fig. 12. Edward Savage, 'Liberty as Goddess of Youth Feeding the American Eagle' (1796). Reproduced by permission of the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts.



Fig. 13. Sheet music cover for 'Our Banner of Glory,' by G. W. Cutter (1861). American Antiquarian Society.



Fig. 14. March of 'Universal Suffrage,' *The Independent* (New York), January 6, 1870. *American Antiquarian Society*.

into people's lives. Especially, the war assigned new responsibilities to women. Just so, Columbia or Liberty took on a most unladylike vigor in political cartoons. In some, she still did nothing but beseech the president for action. In other drawings, however, she became a scourge of the wicked, an avenging angel of righteousness (fig. 13). Instead of carrying her cap on a staff, Liberty now donned the cap and employed her right hand to brandish a sword.²⁸

This unprecedented activism put Liberty at the service of rival persuasions. She spoke for anti- as well as pro-war groups, for racism as well as reform. All could construe Liberty according to

28. 'Stephen Finding "His Mother,"' *Political Cartoons*, 1860, and 'Abraham's Dream! — "Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before,"' *Political Cartoons*, 1864, Library Company of Philadelphia; 'The Ghost,' *American Political Cartoons*, G427, *American Antiquarian Society*; 'Freedom's Best Vivandiere,' *American Caricatures*, Civil War, no. 6, *American Antiquarian Society*.

their own lights. Yet the logic of the Civil War linked victory for the North with the conquest of new freedoms. For a short while, therefore, the energizing of Liberty entailed an extraordinarily wide identification with humanity. In championing the fifteenth amendment, a radical Republican weekly, *The Independent*, depicted the classical goddess leading a serpentine march of 'Universal Suffrage' toward the U. S. Capitol (fig. 14). Immediately following the radiant standard bearer is a genteel, smartly dressed feminist, who, in turn, clasps the hand of a respectable, handsome black man; and he brings forward a pigtailed Chinese, who is linked to a melange of races and peoples in an endlessly receding procession. Guided by Liberty, the nation was fulfilling the destiny of humanity.

Both the idealism and the human expressiveness that America's goddess occasionally reached in the Civil War era were displayed most powerfully in the drawings of Thomas Nast. The first major political cartoonist that the United States produced, Nast was a German immigrant, brought to this country as a child in 1846 and early imbued with the fervent liberal nationalism of the German Forty-Eighters. Although better remembered in the twentieth century for inventing the Republican elephant and popularizing the Democratic donkey, Nast's fame as a cartoonist was originally built on his depiction of Columbia during the Civil War.²⁹ Nast's Columbia was a tall woman of proud bearing, with classic face and mobile features. When the Democratic National Convention in 1864 proclaimed the war a failure and promised to negotiate an early peace, Nast drew a bitter scene, 'Dedicated to the Chicago Convention,' in which Columbia is crumpled in grief at the grave of Union heroes, while a smug Confederate officer plants his foot on the mound (fig. 15). Endlessly reprinted, the drawing became the most celebrated piece of propaganda in Lincoln's reelection.³⁰

29. *New York World*, September 6, 1885. Clipping in 'Thomas Nast, Cartoonist and Illustrator: Examples of His Work,' Scrapbooks, 8 vols., Prints and Photographs Division, New York Public Library, vol. 1, part 2.

30. William Murrell, *A History of American Graphic Humor*, 2 vols. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933), 1: 209-10.



Fig. 15. Thomas Nast, 'Compromise with the South,' Harper's Weekly, September 3, 1864, p. 572. American Antiquarian Society.

When Lincoln died, Nast's Columbia grieved again, this time at his casket. In other moods, she cast a ballot, haunted the nightmares of traitors, taught school, protected persecuted minorities from infuriated mobs, and moved like a queen at international gatherings. Her most desperate moment (fig. 16) came in 1871, lying prostrate under the paws of the Tammany Tiger in a Roman arena, her diadem broken, blood trickling from her head, while imperial political bosses look down smugly from seats of honor in the stands. The *New York Times* called the cartoon 'the most impressive political picture ever produced in this country.'³¹

In sensing the emotional impact that Nast's best images delivered, one is tempted to attribute their power wholly to the imagination and pen of the artist. No other artist had conveyed such

31. Quoted in Albert Bigelow Paine, *Th. Nast, His Period and His Pictures* (New York: Macmillan, 1904), p. 205. For Columbia in other situations, see Morton Keller, *The Art and Politics of Thomas Nast* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), plates 10, 16, 21, 67, 83, 106, and 126.



THE TAMMANY TIGER LOOSE.—"What are you going to do about it?"

Fig. 16. Thomas Nast cartoon, Harper's Weekly, November 11, 1871. American Antiquarian Society.

moral force. Yet Nast also worked within a pattern of contemporary sensibilities that guided the thrust of his work. His Columbia, commanding but vulnerable, did not mature overnight. Nast learned from the expectations and traditions of his audience how to make a female symbol enunciate its political ideals while touching its heartstrings. His work brought out expressive possibilities that the Columbia image already contained. Thanks to a large collection of clippings from popular humor magazines of the Civil War Era held at the American Antiquarian Society, it is clear that Columbia or Liberty was the most common personification of the Union. The postures she assumed in the hands of Nast were not essentially different from those that other cartoonists gave her.³²

My inquiry into American prototypes, beginning with a symbol of place and showing how it yielded to a symbol of principle, has thus far revealed an intriguing preeminence of female images. What significance shall we attach to this preeminence? The question calls for some concluding reflections on the relation of gender to early American nationalism, on the interplay of maleness and femininity in an expanding national consciousness.

In contrast to European monarchies, America initially had no male personification. A felt need for one helps to explain the quick canonization of George Washington and the American eagle. On the female side, Liberty perfectly fulfilled one of the socially prescribed roles of the ideal woman: that of embodying and upholding fixed moral principles. Real women might be fickle, but the woman of our dreams is faithful forever. In building a nation, male symbols projected the achievement itself: the bravery of heroic acts, the glory of great events. Liberty, on the other hand, proclaimed the permanence (as well as purity) of the political creed on which the state rests. She assured Americans that their perilous experiment was founded on eternal truths. As Martha Banta has said of the

32. Actually two collections: *American Caricatures 1849-1872*, and *American Caricatures, Civil War*. Another archive that offers evidence on the relative frequency of a red-capped Liberty is *Broadside Verse—Civil War*, in the Manuscripts Division, Duke University. In these simple drawings, Liberty appears less frequently than eagles, soldiers, or flags, but no one else repeatedly personifies the United States.

late nineteenth century, 'Change, contingency, and expediency were male. Continuity, stability, and principle were female.'³³

It turned out, however, that feminine symbols had more to do. They were needed not only to personify a national ideology but also to create a national community. In the intensely localized world of the early republic, nationalists recognized that they had hardly begun to shape a cohesive culture; to engender, in other words, a national family. As early as 1790, newspaper editors asserted hopefully that 'national habits' were 'daily forming,' that a distinctive national character would check selfishness and factionalism, that a 'Great AMERICAN FAMILY' was in the making.³⁴ In effect, the editors were invoking affiliative impulses more easily associated with women than with men.

Accordingly, Liberty entered the nineteenth century with two gender-specific tasks. As an ideal woman, she symbolized a process as well as a principle. She represented not only the political creed on which the nation was founded but also the familial harmony on which its endurance depended. Between the two themes—freedom and consensus or, in nineteenth-century terms, liberty and union—there was an obvious tension, which surfaced in the sectional conflict over slavery. And, as a symbol of a new-world people, a Roman goddess had some limitations. Specifically, her capacity to represent the organic rootedness of the nation in a homeland was obviously slight. To that end, nineteenth-century Americans went back to their colonial heritage and resurrected the Indian princess, now in a distinctly subordinated role.

After 1776, a full, unambiguous recognition of the noble Indian

33. Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 411. See also Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), and Paula Baker, 'The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,' *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 620-47.

34. Joseph M. Torsella, 'American National Identity, 1750-1790: Samples from the Popular Press,' *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 112 (1988): 180-85. On the weakness of a national culture at the end of the eighteenth century, see John M. Murrin, 'A Roof without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity,' in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, ed. Richard Beeman et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 333-48.

as an American symbol was never regained. Nevertheless, idealized, affectionate depictions of Indians proliferated in the early decades of the nineteenth century on many levels of culture and communication. Their tiny, tranquil figures dotted the landscape paintings of the Hudson River School. Grave, impassive chiefs visiting Washington sat for their portraits, wearing a medal presented by the Great White Father. A new literature of the frontier sprang up, glamorizing a dying race, and it was matched in nineteenth-century schoolrooms by enormously popular fables of Hiawatha and Pocahontas. Hand-carved wooden Indians, male and female, became fixtures in front of tobacconists' shops, while erotic labels with Indian motifs sold smoking tobacco and patent medicines. All of this became possible only as native resistance east of the Mississippi disintegrated. Only then could many white Americans acknowledge a national indebtedness to, and linkage with, the people they had displaced.³⁵

In spite of the melodramatic fascination of Indian wars, scenes of bloodshed and terror are relatively infrequent in the prints about Indians, made between the 1830s and the 1890s, that are separately catalogued in the Library of Congress and the American Antiquarian Society.³⁶ The central image in the nineteenth-century American cult of the noble savage was the Good Indian—the Indian who succored whites, made peace with them, and even married them. For an individual personification of linkage between the earliest and later Americans, nineteenth-century patriots focused chiefly on Pocahontas. The daughter of 'King' Powhatan, this first semireal Indian princess was celebrated as the savior and guardian angel of the earliest permanent English colony in North America.

35. Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), pp. 3–31, 81–92; Ellwood Parry, *The Image of the Indian and the Black Man in American Art, 1590–1900* (New York: George Braziller, 1974).

36. See the several graphics files for 'Indians' in the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress; also James Thomas Flexner, *Nineteenth-Century American Painting* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), pp. 125–37. Beginning in the 1890s, those violent images returned, but that is another story.



Fig. 17. Pocahontas saving the life of Capt. John Smith. From the graphic arts collections in the American Antiquarian Society.

As Capt. John Smith told the story, the nubile maiden saved his life by throwing herself protectively upon him at the moment of his intended execution (fig. 17). Pocahontas then embraced Christianity, married another English settler, and was carried off to an early death in England. Many version of her sacrificial ardor circulated in nineteenth-century stories, histories, ballads, plays, and pictures. By yielding herself completely to the European newcomers, Pocahontas had symbolically conferred her pedigree upon them. In a more intimate sense than any peace treaty could accomplish, she had given them an indigenous heritage. She was, in effect, the primal American woman, uniting the land and its conquerors through the mediation of her body and spirit.³⁷

The role of the Indian in the personification of an American

37. Rayna Green, 'The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture,' *Massachusetts Review* 16 (1975): 698-714; Jay B. Hubbell, 'The Smith-Pocahontas Story in Literature,' *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 65 (1957): 275-300; Joyce Flynn, 'Melting Plots: Patterns of Racial and Ethnic Amalgamation in American Drama before Eugene O'Neill,' *American Quarterly* 38 (1986): 420-23.



Fig. 18. John G. Chapman, 'Baptism of Pocahontas at Jamestown, Virginia, 1613' (1840). United States Capitol Art Collection. Reproduced by permission of the Architect of the Capitol.

nation was supplementary and mythic rather than primary and explicit. The Indian princess could not herself represent the nation. Too much enmity and oppression stood in the way. She could, however, play a supporting part that denied the enmity and seemed to overcome the division between whites and Indians. Though never explicitly spelled out, her mythic role became quasi-official in certain national emblems. In 1854, the U. S. Treasury issued a three-dollar gold piece on which the profile of Liberty was embellished with an Indian headdress. Since the Indian princess had always been endowed with Caucasian features, the two images merged. The gold dollar and then the American penny followed suit. Pocahontas herself adorned one of the handsome national bank notes, printed from the 1860s to the 1890s, which reproduced the historical murals that decorate the rotunda of the U. S. Capitol (fig. 18). On the twenty-dollar note, a dark-skinned

Pocahontas humbly receives baptism in the English church at Jamestown.³⁸

In these and in many other less explicit images, the Indian was no longer simply a symbol of place but also a symbol of rootedness and continuity. Whether in tobacco advertisements or on dollar bills, the Good Indian passed on to the whites a gift received at the hand of the Creator. In doing so, the Indian exemplified and legitimized the organic connection between the American nation and the people who had preceded its formation and who were now fading away. An Indian male in a posture of honorable submission or dignified accord could symbolize the gift well enough, but in nineteenth-century culture the supreme exemplar of sacrifice, nurturance, and organic relatedness was womankind.

Historians commonly recognize that the looseness of interpersonal attachments in American society has made the formation of a national community a challenging task. The challenge has been dealt with in different ways: by staking civic life on a body of abstract ideals to which everyone can subscribe, and by trying to widen the organic solidarity that inheres in families, tribes, and local communities. It is an interesting historical fact that female symbols provided the chief allegorical device for evoking both the general principles and the specific, indigenous roots of the early American republic.

38. Bowers, *History of U.S. Coinage*, pp. 276, 279, 420, and 534-35; Robert Friedberg, *Paper Money of the United States: A Complete Illustrated Guide with Valuations* (New York: Coin and Currency Institute, 1975), pp. 30-32, 72-75. See also Georgia S. Chamberlain, "The Baptism of Pocahontas," *The Iron Worker* (1959): 15-22.

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