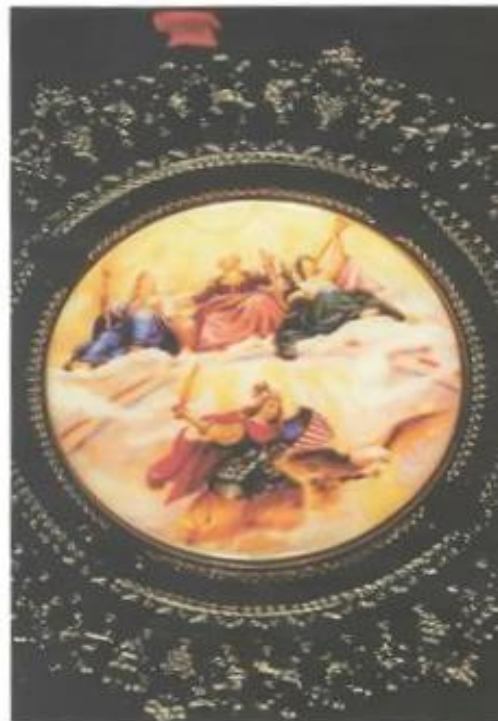


## UNITED STATES GODDESSES IN THE U.S. CAPITOL

by Ann Forfreedom

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As the cannons thundered on the battlefields of the Civil War, the Goddess of Freedom arose inside the Dome of the U.S. Capitol. It was 1865, and those who looked up from the floor of the Capitol could be inspired by the strength and power of the nation's Freedom Fighter.



A pendant showing Freedom Fighter, with her sword and shield upraised, and her ally eagle, flying By her side. Iris' rainbow arches above her. Above the rainbow, the seated figures of liberty, George Washington, and Victory-Fame preside over the heavenly scene. Photo: Ann Forfreedom, 2000.

## **FREEDOM FIGHTER COMES INTO VIEW**

The artist painting her image was Constantino Brumidi (1805-1880), later praised by his biographers and others as “the Michelangelo of the Capitol.” He painted her in vivid colors, on a huge canopy, so that American eyes could marvel at her clear victory over the men who supported slavery and tried to destroy the entire nation.

In the 1865 fresco painting, which is called “The Apotheosis of Washington,” George Washington, the commanding general and first U.S. president, appears to be in a central place, ascending into the heavens. But directly below his seated figure is an active image of Lady Freedom. She is a leader in an array of six groupings that appear around the edge of the painting. Lady Freedom is tall and powerful. She draws the viewers’ eyes.

Thanks to conservators brought in by the U.S. government to mitigate the harm caused by grime, overpainting and problems of time and temperature, the colors, costume and actions of the national Freedom Fighter, and the other figures in her specific grouping, are bright and highly visible.

Closeup photos of Brumidi’s vision of Freedom show her in great detail. The painting is 180 feet above the floor of the Rotunda, but details of Freedom can be seen in photos, cards and books in the Capitol gift shop and in various shops in Washington, D.C.

Viewers can see the bloom of Freedom’s youthful cheeks, her rosy lips, her dark eyes, her straight nose, her light skin, her long brown hair with strands flying from under her helmet. Her helmet appears tan, with white five-pointed stars across the middle of the helmet.

Freedom’s helmet is topped by a special symbol – an eagle. That brown image appears smaller than the eagle perched on top of the helmet of the Statue of Freedom, sculpted by Thomas Crawford (1814-1857). Crawford’s statue stands tall, outside, atop the Dome of the Capitol. But Freedom Fighter’s symbol does appear to be an eagle, kin to the large bald eagle flying beside her.

In the fresco inside the Dome, Freedom’s expression appears resolute. Some viewers have considered her expression stern, or even intimidating. Perhaps they were reacting to what she is doing with her hands.

In her right hand, Freedom Fighter grips an upraised, gold-hilted sword. With her left hand, she holds an American striped shield, its red-and-white stripes joining the curved blue top of the shield.

In the eyes of people unused to seeing a female armed in defiance of her male opponents, this could be considered threatening or fearsome.

She is dressed for action. Her cloak, appearing pink on the outside and a darker red on the inside, is looped around her shoulders and caught up in a brooch as it streams out behind her. Her pale gown flows down over her legs, but her torso is protected by black armor that extends from her shoulders to mid-thigh. Her sword-arm is free to move because the sleeve of her gown is rolled up in loose folds. Her left arm is protected by her American (Union) shield.

Accompanying Freedom Fighter, just below her shield, is a large flying bald eagle. The eagle's talons grasp three deadly arrows, and the eagle sends a white thunderbolt against a man in the group of men that Freedom Fighter pursues.

This is what Freedom Fighter is doing. She is not fighting air.

### **WHO FREEDOM FIGHTER FIGHTS**

At first glance, this Goddess of Freedom is chasing a group of six wild-eyed, fearful men. That in itself is astonishing. In 1865, when Constantino Brumidi painted this imagery, it would have seemed almost unbelievable to women viewers, and almost terrifying to men. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Common Era), when news accounts expose the reality that groups of men can and do menace individual women, who usually lack a defense, this image of a woman menacing a group of fanatical men is notable. This turnabout, even in art, is very unusual.

But there is a direct historical aspect to this picture. Brumidi conceived of and painted this imagery in 1865, as the Civil War was still raging, and the capital city of Washington, D.C., and even the U.S. Capitol itself, reverberated with the sounds of war.

People in Washington, D.C., knew who their enemies were. Pictures of Jefferson Davis, the Confederate president, and Alexander H. Stephens, the Confederate vice president, appeared on Confederate currency in 1862. Photographs of Confederate generals were taken by notable photographers, such as Mathew Brady.

Brumidi probably was aware of what was happening in the war. He was painting in the Capitol throughout the years of the Civil War. His paintings combine classical iconography, artistic design, illusions of sculpture and portraits of then-living people. It seems reasonable to see the group of six men being pursued by Freedom Fighter as actual human antagonists of Freedom.

Barbara Wolanin, when she served as Curator for the Architect of the Capitol, identified two of the antagonists, and hinted at the identity of two more of the six men.

As the viewer sees them, the man at the far right who is being hit by a thunderbolt and is biting his finger is Alexander H. Stephens, and the wild-eyed man next to him, with a brown hood on his white-haired head, and both arms outstretched and holding lighted torches, is Jefferson Davis.

Of course, Brumidi does not identify them by name; he calls Stephens “Anger,” and he calls Davis “Discord.” All of the six men are shown below Freedom, apparently fleeing from her. Freedom, according to the Curator, is shown gaining victory over “Tyranny” and “Kingly Power.”

The sprawling figure to the right of Davis, a man whose hand grips a scepter and who appears to have the ermine lining of a cloak by his head, probably represents “Kingly Power.”

The man with a scepter may be Emperor Maximilian of Mexico. An Austrian archduke, he and his wife, Carlota, arrived in Mexico in 1864 during the U.S. Civil War, and, aided by French troops, tried to overthrow the presidency of Benito Juarez. Maximilian did not offer direct support to the Confederacy, but he did offer sympathy. U.S. President Lincoln refused to recognize the Austrian leader, and when the U.S. Civil War ended, Lincoln demanded that the French monarch, Napoleon III, withdraw the French troops. The Mexicans defeated Maximilian and executed him in 1867.

There may have been a personal aspect to this part of the painting for Constantino Brumidi. When he and others in Rome, in 1848, had tried to overturn papal rule and create a republic, they were routed by French troops serving a monarchy.

On the viewer’s far left of the painted men who opposed the Union’s Freedom Fighter are two men tentatively identified by Barbara Wolanin’s source (in a footnote in her book). The character that is John B. Floyd, a Confederate general, is reaching out with his right hand, as though he is trying to run away from the presence of Freedom.

To his left is Robert E. Lee, the commanding general of Confederate troops, his hands resting on a cannon as his face glances up fearfully in the direction of Lady Freedom.

Behind Robert E. Lee, who is notable for his white hair, white mustache and white beard (there is a Civil War photograph of Lee with similar features), is a man who seems very young and very scared. One of his hands is on Lee’s left shoulder. His other hand is reaching up and out, as though seeking help. He may have been an aide to General Lee, or a young military recruit.

Some photographic reproductions of Brumidi's colorful painting tend to shorten this part of the artwork, so that these male figures are truncated. This presents an image of Lady

Freedom with sword and shield held aloft, issuing a warning, or threatening a few men whose faces show anxiety or fear. It is important that she is fighting powerful opponents. It is especially important that these men are particular enemies of the United States of America. And she is upholding the rights of the powerless.

Although I did not see any Black or dark-skinned people in this fresco painting, questions about the rights of Black and darker-skinned people, particularly those held in slavery, were part of the atmosphere surrounding the U.S. Capitol and Brumidi's artworks. Poet Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753-1784) defended the people she identified as "our sable race," and by the time the Civil War erupted, it was clear to many U.S. citizens that slavery must end, and the human rights of former slaves must be acknowledged.

The nation's Freedom Fighter is successfully pursuing and overcoming a group of slaveholders and their sympathizers. Her shield shows that she stands for the freedom-supporting Union, not the breakaway states. Her bald eagle companion, also a symbol for the nation, shows that lethal force has been brought to bear against those people who would have made slavery the fate of the entire nation.

Also, this powerful Freedom Fighter symbolizes the aroused might of womankind that can change the nation, and possibly the world.

## **REVOLUTIONARY WAR-ERA ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FREEDOM**

Lady Freedom has been a female divinity honored in this country since before, during and after the official birth of the nation. Many Americans of the Revolutionary War era, and later, embraced a secular view of ancient goddesses and gods, particularly those prominent in ancient Greece and Rome. Though publicly seen in secular ways, these majestic goddesses, and the powers and values they embody even today, have been woven into many of the deepest aspects of life in the United States.

## **A SON OF FREEDOM**

Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827), a major artist and political activist of the American Revolutionary War era, was an active member of Maryland's Sons of Freedom, advocates for the rights of the colonists, in 1764. A number of respectable men in the American colonies were members of the Sons of Liberty. In Maryland, several wealthy or highly respected men were members of the Sons of Freedom; those members included Charles Carroll of Carrollton, William Paca and Samuel Chase. Peale painted portraits of these notable men, and also painted images of goddesses important to Americans, such as Liberty, Justice, Plenty (sometimes seen as a version of the Roman goddess Ceres), Agriculture (possibly connected to Ceres), Minerva, Venus and others. Around 1768, he

painted a nude portrait of Venus and displayed the picture where his clients might see it in his London studio.

## **POET PHILLIS WHEATLEY**

In 1784, celebrating the victory of the United States forces in the American Revolutionary War, African-born poet Phillis Wheatley, using her married name, Phillis Peters, proclaimed:

"Lo! Freedom comes."

In "Liberty and Peace, A Poem," published in Boston as a four-page pamphlet in 1784, Peters (Wheatley) hails Freedom in her first line. She goes on to describe the new nation as "This Realm of Freedom" that rivals Britain.

Later in the poem, she declares, "So Freedom comes array'd with Charms divine/And in her Train Commerce and Plenty shine."

The last lines in praise of the divine aid to this new nation on earth declare, "To every Realm shall *Peace* her Charms display,/And Heavenly *Freedom* spread her golden Ray."

Freedom was not just a concept to her. Phillis Wheatley had been born in Africa, but was captured and enslaved, thrust onto a slave ship, and brought to Boston harbor by 1761. She was between 6 and 8 years of age, and was put on the auction block. She was given her first name from the slave ship she arrived on, and her surname from the man who bought her. She was purchased by John Wheatley, a wealthy merchant tailor, who bought her for his wife, Susannah. The Wheatley family treated her well, and gave her an excellent education. She began writing poetry at the age of 13 or 14, and her first published poem appeared in 1770. A volume of her poems was printed in 1773.

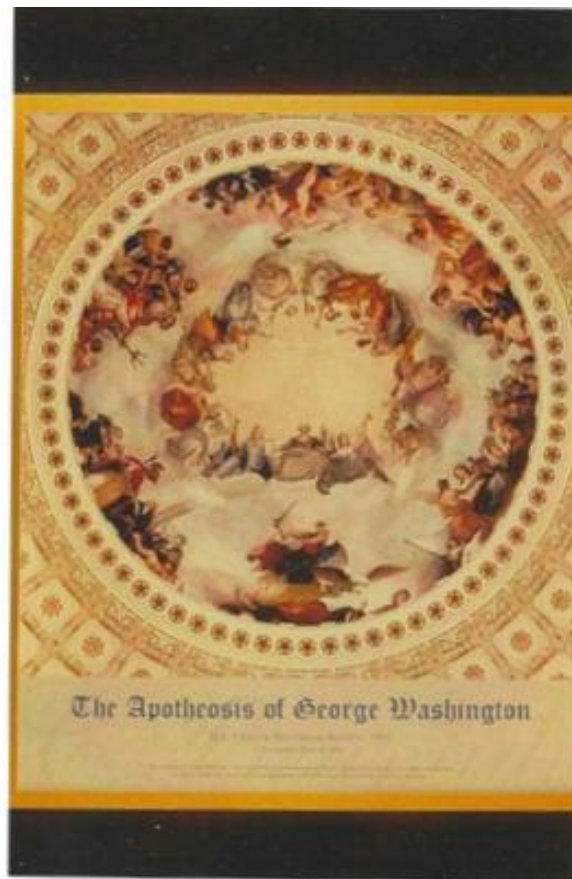
Phillis Wheatley was freed by her master in 1773. Her former mistress died in 1774, and her former master died in 1778. She continued to write and publish poetry, but her life was not trouble-free. She published her poem about "Liberty and Peace" before she died on December 5, 1784, from complications of childbirth.

She knew what it was to be abducted into slavery, and she knew how it felt to walk in freedom. She supported the patriots and rejoiced at the success of the new nation. Her poem, "Liberty and Peace," mentions a number of goddesses, including the United States goddesses Liberty (mentioned in the title), Peace (also in the title and elsewhere), Columbia (mentioned often), Plenty and Freedom (mentioned with special praise).

## CONSTANTINO BRUMIDI

Eighty-one years later, in 1865, Constantino Brumidi was able to paint his vision of a victorious Freedom helping the Union to win the Civil War. Brumidi, too, knew what it was like to face oppression and then come to a land that offered him freedom. An immigrant who became a naturalized U.S. citizen, Brumidi had tried to help start a republic in his homeland of Italy, and had endured a trial and imprisonment for his political actions before being pardoned so he could emigrate to the United States.

Brumidi's commitment to freedom was clear when, among his first privately commissioned paintings in the United States, he painted a picture of Freedom for people in a private home.



A 1997 poster showing "The Apotheosis of George Washington" Photo: Ann Forfreedom  
Poster reprinted with permission from the United States Capitol Historical Society.

## **A PANORAMA OF GODDESSES**

When Brumidi proposed his plans to U.S. officials for "The Apotheosis of Washington," in 1862, he assigned a specific title to each grouping that would appear at the edge of the painting, a little closer to the eyes of the viewers.

Freedom is the main figure in the grouping titled "War." Brumidi was used to the concept of a goddess winning a war. In another part of the U.S. Capitol, he painted a full-length portrait of the goddess Bellona (actually, Bellona-Liberty, since she wears a red Phrygian Liberty Cap). Under the picture is a plaque reading "Roman Goddess of War." Incidentally, this Roman goddess stands, holding a spear in one hand and a U.S. shield in the other; she is also wearing a brooch that appears to bear the initials USA. She is surrounded by implements of war, including a cannon with a U.S. flag beside it.

But Freedom is different. She is active. She is pursuing specific opponents. Freedom and her eagles are overwhelming her enemies.

## **SISTER GODDESSES, DIVINITIES**

Stirring as the imagery of Freedom Fighter is, she is not alone in this vast painting of "The Apotheosis of Washington." Though the title is about George Washington, there are many goddesses and divinities in Brumidi's painting gracing the canopy of the Dome of the Capitol. There have been other paintings of "The Apotheosis of Washington," honoring the first U.S. president, and there are other impressive artworks in the Capitol, but Brumidi's fresco painting is a national treasure.

Goddesses, divine maidens, powerful gods and human men are portrayed as they share in the activities, scientific and technological wonders and agricultural abundance of life in the United States.

To do justice to Brumidi's artistic vision, I will present the goddesses as clearly as I can, offering some of their history and how they are part of our lives in the United States today. These goddesses, like Brumidi's art, are part of the U.S. cultural heritage.

The painting is arranged as a circle within a circle. The inner circle focuses on the seated George Washington, the goddesses who are seated next to him, and the maidens dancing in celebration around the central group. These 13 maidens represent the original states in the United States. Each barefoot maiden has a five-pointed star above her head. Several of the maidens wave a white banner that proclaims the motto of the United States: "E Pluribus Unum" ("Out of Many, One").

George Washington, clad in his military uniform and with a lavender laprobe across his legs, is seated next to two important goddesses.



A 1995 postcard showing "The Apotheosis of George Washington" by Constantino Brumidi. Photography by Carol M. Highsmith. Reprinted with permission from the United States Capitol Historical Society.

## **LIBERTY**

On his right side sits Liberty. She wears a red Phrygian Liberty Cap, and holds a special insignia in her right hand. (This insignia is a fasces, or bundle of rods, that has an ax coming out of the top -- it can be considered a Liberty Pike, known as a symbol of Lady Liberty since before the American Revolution.)

In her left hand, she holds a large bound document, probably the U.S. Constitution. George Washington holds out his right hand in front of the document, as though he is presenting it to the world. (Washington presided over the 1787 Philadelphia convention that adopted the Constitution, and the chair he sat in, which still exists, had a Liberty Cap atop a Liberty Pole, and still does.)

## **LIBERTY: ORIGINS**

Brumidi painted a number of images of Lady Liberty within the U.S. Capitol. (As Merlin Stone showed in her pioneering book, *When God Was a Woman*, in ancient societies, a goddess often was addressed by a word such as "Lady," followed by her name or title. And it is acceptable today to address a goddess, such as Lady Liberty, in that manner.)

The Goddess of Liberty usually is traced back to ancient Rome. There, she was known as Libertas, and there is some documentary evidence about her.

In the city of Rome, her statue stood in the Forum, and there were three temples dedicated to her. One of her temples, the Atrium Libertatis, eventually became the first-known public library. This Roman goddess is pictured with a laurel wreath, and she wears or holds a cap.

Lady Liberty goes further back into Goddess cultures from the times before Rome rose into prominence. Liberty often is depicted wearing or holding a Phrygian Cap. Phrygia was a real society in Anatolia, sometimes called Asia Minor, today part of Turkey. Phrygia has been dated from 1200 B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) until 675 B.C.E., though the dates may change with more archeological information.

Anatolia, north of Babylon, was an area with numerous Goddess sites and centers. Important archeological sites have been excavated in prehistoric and historic Anatolia, in Turkey, showing Goddess statues and buildings. Neolithic sites, such as Hacilar and Catal Huyuk, and the city of Ephesus, have become well known for showing evidence of Goddess worship and Goddess cultures. Many more sites have shown that Goddess cultures existed for millennia in various parts of Anatolia, including areas near the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Phrygia was a Goddess-honoring society. One of the most well-known and powerful goddesses from Phrygia is Cybele (or Kybele), called "The Great Goddess" and "Mountain-Mother."

The worship of Cybele spread into Rome, where it continued until the Christian era. Cybele's entry into Rome involved politics, war and women.

Romans approached Phrygia to gain approval of the removal to Rome of the sacred image of Cybele. King Attalusat of Phrygia at first refused to allow her image to leave Phrygia, and he agreed only after Cybele herself appeared to him and told him she wanted to go. In 204 B.C.E., the sacred black stone (which some commentators claim was a meteorite) was taken from Mount Ida to Rome, in an effort to defeat the conquering armies of Carthage led by Hannibal.

Cybele's image was brought to Rome by ship, but there was difficulty in the approach to Rome. The ship became mired in mud. Women who had gathered to greet the ship acted to keep the sacred image from falling into the Tiber. The women carried the image by relaying it one woman to the next, until it was placed in the Temple of the Goddess of Victory, on Palatine Hill in the city of Rome.

Hannibal retreated from Italy in 203 B.C.E., and Cybele was credited for what was considered a Roman victory. Later, a special temple was built to house Cybele's image.

The Romans did not forget the aid from this Phrygian goddess. The first Roman emperor, Augustus (who ruled 27 B.C.E-14 C.E.), acknowledged Cybele as the supreme deity of the empire. He considered his wife, Livia, as her earthly aspect. Cybele in the Roman empire was known as Magna Mater ("Great Mother") and as the "Mother of all the Gods" (or Mother of Deities).

To honor such a powerful goddess, Phrygian society must have had strong, vibrant symbols of their Goddess culture. Through thousands of years, one symbol that has survived is the Phrygian Cap, worn by women, including female warriors, in numerous Goddess-honoring societies; in more modern times, the Phrygian Cap was worn by, or carried by, or near the important Goddess who was known as Liberty. The Phrygian Liberty Cap serves as a reminder, and as an inspiration, that there was a world in which the highest deity was female, and mortal women were respected as her earthly representatives and descendants.

Many centuries after Phrygia's prominence, a major goddess was depicted in a different European land, with insignia that included a Phrygian Cap. As the Goddess of Liberty in Britain, she was more directly connected to political life. As those people who honored her freed their colonies to become a new nation, Goddess Liberty changed with them. +



Closeup photos of important goddesses in specific groupings in "The Apotheosis of Washington," by Constantino Brumidi. Reproduced in 2023 courtesy of the office of the Architect of the Capitol.

The panorama of goddesses shown here presents:

\*Freedom Fighter, her sword and shield upraised, with her ally, the bald eagle, flying by her side, is vanquishing her six opponents, men who are Confederate slaveholders or their sympathizers, including the torch-bearing Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy. A rainbow, possibly symbolic of Iris, arches above Freedom Fighter. Above the rainbow are Liberty and Victory-Fame, seated beside George Washington;

\*Ceres with Flora, Pomona and the rainbow representing Iris. Young America wears a Phrygian Liberty Cap, thus representing both America and Liberty in an agricultural setting. Victory-Fame can be seen near the upper left corner of this photo, and Freedom Fighter and her bald eagle companion can be seen pursuing two of her opponents midway along the left corner of the photo;

\*Venus, in a seascape setting, holds and imparts divine energy to the transatlantic cable; and

\*Minerva educates three men of science and technology, two workers, a male educator and a (possibly coeducational) group of children and young students. A bright part of the rainbow representing Iris appears in a space between the men of science. Viewers can glimpse Freedom Fighter in the upper right corner of the photo, and Liberty in the upper center of the photo.

Outside the building, the bronze Statue of Freedom stands atop the Dome of the U.S. Capitol. This full-length photo of the Statue of Freedom shows that she protects the nation and its inhabitants.









T. CRAWFORD  
SCULPTOR  
ROME  
1876

## **LIBERTY AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION**

Liberty's Phrygian Cap usually was seen in Europe as a symbol of personal freedom, indicating someone who had been freed from slavery. In Britain, by the 1700s (C.E.), the special cap indicated a move toward freedom from governmental oppression. The North American colonial artists took it further. When Paul Revere, who sometimes drew the Liberty Cap atop the Liberty Pole, without even drawing the figure of the Goddess of Liberty, or Charles Willson Peale or other artists in what was to become the United States of America, drew Liberty, they were stating a positive value. Liberty, to them, was more than a statement against enslavement. Liberty was a call for a country that offered a new life to people, a life not dictated by nobility, highly placed priests or societal traditions. (However, slavery remained legal in the United States until after the Civil War.)

The American revolutionaries knew Lady Liberty. Many of the men were members of groups that called themselves the Sons of Liberty, and some women, especially those who argued for the rights of women or who boycotted British goods, such as tea or a certain type of cloth, were the equivalent of Daughters of Liberty. Thomas Paine (1737-1809), whose writings helped ignite the American Revolutionary War, in 1775 published a song about "The Liberty Tree." In the first stanza, Paine referred directly to the Goddess of Liberty, whom he credited with creating the Liberty Tree, a symbol and reality important to the revolutionary patriots.

Paine declared:

"In a chariot of light, from the regions of day,  
The Goddess of Liberty came,  
Ten thousand celestials directed her way,  
And hither conducted the dame.  
A fair budding branch from the gardens above,  
Where millions with millions agree,  
She brought in her hand as a pledge of her love,  
And the plant she named Liberty Tree...."

Tom Paine's song was very popular.

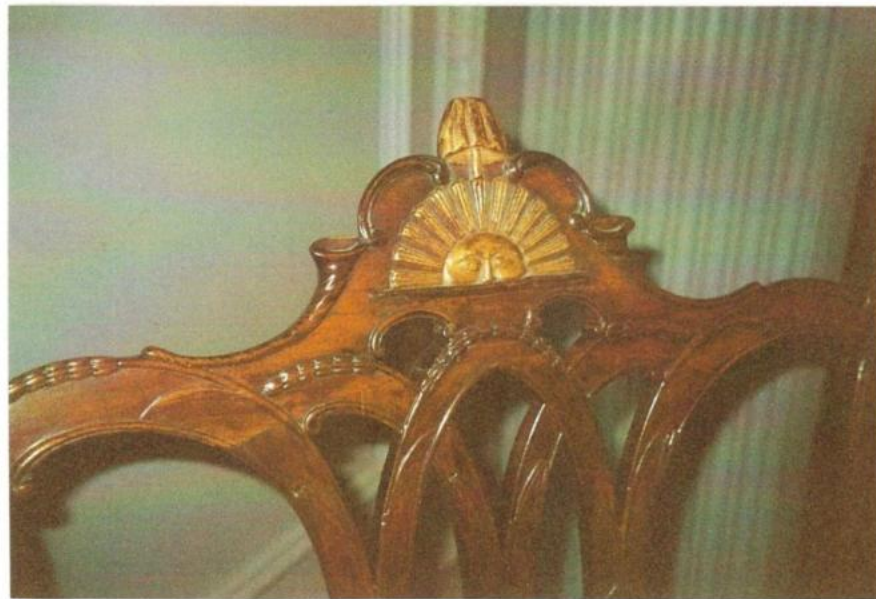


Liberty's costume changed slightly over the decades. Sometimes, her Grecian gown became more of a young girl's dress, or a matron's gown. Sometimes, the Phrygian Liberty Cap, with its top curling up and then down, was a bit simplified, looking more like a modern ski cap. But usually, Lady Liberty had a cap, and often it was on her hair, or in her hand, or on a Liberty Pole or Liberty Pike.

As already noted, the insignia of the Goddess of Liberty -- the Liberty Cap atop the Liberty Pole (or sometimes a Liberty Pike) -- was present at the convention that adopted the U.S. Constitution.



Ann Forfreedom draws attention to the Liberty Cap, atop the Liberty Pole, rising above the face of the sun at the top of the 18th-century chair that George Washington sat on when he presided over the 1787 Philadelphia convention that adopted the U.S. Constitution. Photo: Ann Forfreedom, 1999.



Lady Liberty's insignia -- the Liberty Cap on a Liberty Pole -- rises above the face of the sun on the chair that George Washington sat on during the 1787 Philadelphia convention that adopted the U.S. Constitution. Photo: Ann Forfreedom, 1999.

## **LIBERTY AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION**

Liberty tends to inspire people all over the world. Before the end of the 18th century, she inspired French people to seek to overthrow the power and government of a king, who had claimed divine rights, and the power and influence of organized religion, specifically the Catholic Church.

French revolutionaries considered Liberty a cultural value. They drew her portrait, sculpted her image, and painted her Liberty Cap red. They even portrayed her in live performances.

A festival honoring Reason and Liberty was held on November 10, 1793, in Paris, at the Notre Dame Cathedral. Amelie-Julie Candeille, a composer, musician, writer and actress, appeared as Liberty. She wore a red Phrygian Liberty Cap, a white dress, a blue mantle, and tricolor ribbons. She had oak leaves in her hair, and she carried a pike in her hand. A "Temple of Philosophy" had been built inside the cathedral, and Mlle. Candeille/Liberty was placed inside this honorary temple. Her attendants were young girls crowned with oak leaves, and they sang hymns to her.

A month later, on December 10, 1793, another ceremony for Liberty was held at Notre Dame Cathedral. Mlle. Maillard, an opera singer and actress, appeared as Liberty. When seated on the altar, she lifted a large candle, signifying that Liberty was the Light of the World.

Such ceremonies occurred throughout France. Numerous churches continued to exist, but they were called temples of Reason.

Though the French Revolution became violently extremist and produced a backlash, and then a dictatorship, the belief in Liberty continued. Liberty appeared on a French postage stamp, in artwork, and as part of the national motto ("Liberty, Equality, Fraternity").

In the United States, Liberty was depicted on coins, and later on currency bills, throughout the 19th century. Her image continued to show her Phrygian Liberty Cap and other insignia during that period. Though the Statue of Liberty with her crown of rays and her uplifted arm holding a torch, and other insignia on the statue was placed in New York's harbor as a gift from France to the United States on October 28, 1886, the national image remained close to the revolutionary image of Lady Liberty.



## **LIBERTY AND ART**

Liberty has been depicted in American art since before the American Revolutionary War. Her image and symbols were drawn and painted by artists such as Paul Revere, Charles Willson Peale, Mather Brown, Edward Savage and Samuel Jennings. Young women, such as 16-year-old Mary Gray (in 1804), embroidered her image. Sculptors gave her presence shape. Anonymous craftspeople portrayed her in a variety of ways. Artists painting mournful pictures of the death of leaders, including George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, placed her in the artworks.

Nineteenth-century artists put her in the center of paintings about Black slaves and their emancipation. Even before the Civil War, abolitionists, seeking to end slavery, depicted Liberty, with her Phrygian Liberty Cap, listening to Black slaves and freeing them. Twentieth-century artists pictured her in wartime activities, including urging support for Victory gardens and buying wartime bonds.

Liberty's image began to change, particularly in the 20th century. New York's Statue of Liberty, known as "Liberty Enlightening the World," became a celebrated symbol, and, by the late 20th century, a national icon.

An inkling of this process can be seen in a (World War II) wartime poster. The poster is headlined "THE UNITED NATIONS FIGHT FOR FREEDOM." At the bottom is the face of Liberty: the head of the Statue of Liberty, with her crown of rays and her right arm uplifted and holding a lit torch. Above her and to her left are the national flags of 30 nations or peoples, united in fighting against Nazi Germany and imperialist Japan. The allies include the United States, Great Britain, Soviet Russia, China, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, India, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, the Philippines, Poland, South Africa, and Yugoslavia. The Statue of Liberty is guiding and inspiring them.

For 20th-century U.S. generations, especially since that time, the Statue of Liberty is the image they have of Liberty. Protesters have rallied around her base. Her name or image, in whole or in part, has appeared as a logo for private entities, including an insurance company, a sports team, a tax preparation company, and a national civil liberties organization. Journalists report political speeches given in front of the base of the Statue of Liberty.

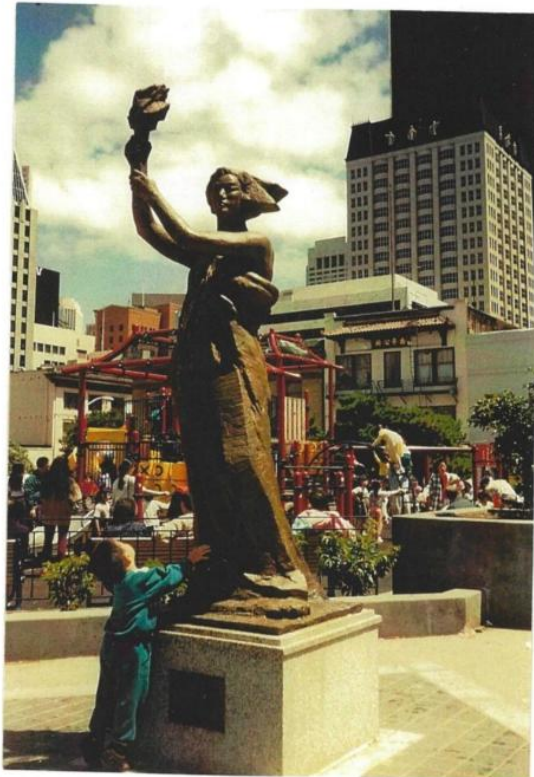
Many artists in the 20th century painted images of the Statue of Liberty. In the 21st century, some artists have painted the Statue of Liberty in connection with serious political issues. One artist, Robert (Bob) Hieronimus, in a large 2013 mural titled "We The People," painted

her with Native American symbols. The Baltimore, Maryland, mural shows the Statue of Liberty next to the Iroquois Tree of Peace, on her left; below her is the George Washington Covenant Wampum Belt.

## **LIBERTY AND CHINESE STUDENT DISSIDENTS**

It was this 1886 statue that became the welcoming face of the United States cheered by immigrants, honored by supporters of human liberty, and pictured in films. Her image inspired student dissidents in China when they created their own statue of the Goddess of Democracy in 1989. She is Chinese, but her upraised arms holding a torch appear to have been inspired by the U.S. Statue of Liberty.

Though the Chinese Communist government eventually dispersed the protesters, using force, and destroyed their statue, Liberty's inspiration lingered. In San Francisco, a strong and beautiful bronze statute of the Goddess of Democracy stands tall, recreated and built by caring and dedicated Chinese-American community leaders and residents. (There is also a bronze recreated Statue of Democracy in Washington, D.C.)



Goddess of Democracy,  
Portsmouth Square, San Francisco, California.  
Photo: Ann Forfreedom, 1995.

The child shown in this photo spontaneously wandered toward the statue, clasped the base, and looked up at her in wonder.

## **LIBERTY AND MUSIC**

Liberty has appeared on the covers of published sheet music and has been celebrated in popular song. She has been the subject of a Broadway musical.

She was on the sheet music for the patriotic song "The Good Old U.S.A." The words were by Jack Drislane, and the music was by Theodore Morse. It was published in New York, in 1906, by F. B. Haviland Publishing Co. The cover noted that these were the writers of "Keep on the Sunny Side," and mentioned other songs as well.

The cover said this was a "March Song." The two large color figures on the cover are patriotic. On the viewer's right is Lady Liberty, wearing her Phrygian Liberty Cap, and with a blue band which features three five-pointed white stars around her cap. She wears a sleeveless, belted, Grecian-style evening gown and her left hand holds a flagpole with a U.S. flag on it, topped by a small eagle. The folds of the flag come down her left side and are held by her arm. Her right arm is outstretched to meet the left outstretched arm of Uncle Sam, a debonair figure in his red-white-and-blue evening suit. His right hand holds his golden dress hat, with its curved brim and a blue band with three five-pointed white stars around it.

Hand in hand, they stand for the U.S.A.

Notable composer Irving Berlin (himself an immigrant) wrote the music to a song called "Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor." The words were by poet Emma Lazarus (1849-1887), who wrote them about immigrants and the Statue of Liberty. Her words touched American hearts, and eventually women put some of them on a bronze tablet that was placed at the base of the statue. The music sheet cover shows the Statue of Liberty in silhouette.

Irving Berlin's music to her words was arranged by Roy Ringwald, and was published by Shawnee Press, Inc. This song was in a 1949 Broadway musical called "Miss Liberty," about the Statue of Liberty.

Randall Thompson (1899-1984), an eminent American composer, honored Liberty in "The Testament of Freedom." The text contained words by Thomas Jefferson. This stirring choral music became public in 1943, wartime, and though "Freedom" is in the title, the chorus sings about "Liberty." The relevant Jeffersonian words include: "The God who gave us life gave us Liberty at the same time. The hand of Force may destroy but cannot disjoin them." (1774)

## **LIBERTY AND THE MOVIE STAR**

Nearly a decade earlier, people in the United States were dealing with the Great Depression. Some people, trying to forget the financial crisis, went to the movies. "Belle of

the Nineties," starring Mae West, was released by Paramount Pictures in 1934. In a publicity photo for the movie, Mae West posed as Miss Liberty. She wore a crown with rays on her blonde hair, and a form-fitting gown striped like the flag that flowed down to the ground and around her legs. Her arms were in shining, long, tight sleeves as she lifted a lit torch in her right hand. She placed her left hand and fingers on her left hip. Mae West was a living, sensual model of the Statue of Liberty.

## **LIBERTY AND GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS**

Liberty appears on many U.S. government documents. Liberty wearing her Phrygian Liberty Cap has been depicted on passes given to visitors in the House of Representatives. These printed passes were approved at least as early as 1912 and the 1920s.

In the United States today, many taxpaying citizens are familiar with the image of Liberty on refund checks from the Treasury Department. These checks bear the image of the Statue of Liberty.

## **LIBERTY AND POSTAGE STAMPS**

The U.S. Postal Service put Liberty on numerous postage stamps throughout the 20th century. They were almost always images of the Statue of Liberty.

Sometimes, other countries put the Statue of Liberty on their postage stamps. After the terrorist attacks against the U.S. on September 11, 2001, the Marshall Islands showed their sympathy for the U.S. by issuing a "Remembrance" series of postage stamps. These special stamps included the Statue of Liberty and the Statue of Freedom, with appropriate words of remembrance and dedication.

## **LIBERTY IN A CROSSWORD PUZZLE**

Liberty has appeared as a clue in a recent crossword puzzle. In an August 21, 2024 puzzle in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, readers were asked about "Lady Liberty's land, familiarly" (15 Across). The answer was "USofA."

## **LIBERTY ON STATE SEALS**

People doing business today with various U.S. states see goddesses numerous times. Liberty appears on several state seals.

Liberty with a Phrygian Liberty Cap atop a Liberty Pole is accompanied by Justice, with her scales and sword and blindfold, on the New York state seal, adopted in 1778.

Liberty also is on the New Jersey state seal, adopted in 1776. She has her Phrygian Liberty Cap on a Liberty Pole, and is accompanied by Ceres, who is holding a cornucopia. Later, in 1821, the state government added the motto "Liberty and Prosperity."

Arkansas, which became a state in 1836, put Liberty, with her Phrygian Liberty Cap and Liberty Pole, at the center of the images on its state seal. (It was then a slave state.)

Liberty appears on the state seal of North Carolina (which also was a slave state). Liberty is on the left, and the accompanying goddess, Plenty, is on the right. Liberty stands, facing Plenty, who is somewhat facing forward. In her downward-pointed right hand, Liberty holds a scroll labeled "Constitution." Her left arm is bent upward; she is holding a Liberty Pole topped by a Phrygian Liberty Cap. Liberty's dark hair flows down to the shoulders of her Grecian-style gown and its overgown.

Plenty, seated across from Liberty, is reminiscent of Ceres as her left hand touches the top of a large, downward-pointed, overflowing cornucopia. She also holds out three heads (or stalks) of grains in her right hand toward Liberty. Behind her, a three-masted ship sails by.

There are dates (of 1775 and 1776) curved around the two goddesses, and a Latin inscription around the rim, with the identification of the Great Seal. The imagery appears to be of the Revolutionary War era, but this is the current North Carolina state seal, officially adopted in 1971.

Maryland, in 1794, adopted a pendent (two-sided) state seal, designed by Charles Willson Peale. The obverse features the insignia of the Goddess of Liberty (a Liberty Cap, possibly a Phrygian Liberty Cap, atop a Liberty Pike), and an olive branch of peace is draped leftward across the Liberty Pike. The insignia of Liberty indicates her presence, and is in the foreground of the seal. Nearby, slightly elevated on a mound of earth, stands the Goddess of Justice. She holds the evenly-balanced Scales of Justice up in front of her with her left hand, and holds an olive branch of peace close to her with her downward-pointing right hand. She is surrounded by gleaming rays of light, and directly above her, in the border with the seal's identification, is a five-pointed star. There are other, small objects in the picture too.

This obverse imagery of Maryland's state seal was depicted by U.S. artists throughout the 19th century. However, technological changes led to a different state seal, and sometime in the 20th century, knowledge of the 1794 state seal was partially lost. The female-oriented, Goddess-centered side became invisible to Marylanders. When I rediscovered this state seal, in 2001-2002, I encountered state archives officials who denied the very existence of the seal, or who disputed the Goddess imagery on the seal. Though this seal,

which I unofficially named the 1794 Justice and Liberty State Seal, is no longer the official Great Seal of Maryland, it is part of Maryland's Revolutionary War-era history.



1794 Great Seal of Maryland, in 19th-century drawing of the obverse, featuring Justice and the insignia of Liberty. A two-sided seal designed by Charles Willson Peale. The obverse was rediscovered by Ann Forfreedom, 2001-2002.

While rediscovering this 1794 state seal, I found that many United States citizens are not aware of the importance of a state seal. A state seal can appear on official documents (including marriage licenses) and official buildings, in courtrooms, and sometimes on state flags, battle monuments and official badges. State seals have appeared on currency bills, coins, envelopes (including Civil War envelopes) and postage stamps, as well as on commemorative items, advertisements, and in art works and prints. A state seal is a state's representation of itself to the world.



**A Goddess Seeing Goddesses:**

These two U.S. Civil War envelopes are part of an array featuring the Goddess of Liberty viewing a state seal of one of the many states that supported the Union.

Above, Liberty is seated and holding a Liberty Pole topped by her Phrygian Liberty Cap. Her gown is a U.S. flag, and she wears a leafy wreath in her hair. She sees New York's state seal, also showing Liberty with her Phrygian Liberty Cap atop a Liberty Pole. Across from her is a blindfolded Goddess of Justice, one hand holding the sacred scales and the other hand apparently resting on a Liberty Pike.

Below, Liberty views California's state seal, which prominently features Minerva, seated and wearing her helmet, one hand holding her spear, and the other hand resting on her shield.

These envelopes, which are now in the author's collection, clearly feature artistic depictions. Photos by Ann Forfreedom.

## **THE STATUE OF LIBERTY AND IMMIGRANTS**

New immigrants to the United States have had special views of the Statue of Liberty. In the 19th century and the early 20th century, many immigrants entering New York's harbor looked at the more than 305-foot statue and felt she was welcoming them. This statue is over 151 feet high, on a 154-foot pedestal, and was sculpted by Frederic Auguste Bartholdi (1834-1904). It was designed, built and funded by many citizens of France and the U.S., rich and poor, well-known and anonymous. The statue took 21 years to complete, and many Americans funded the pedestal. Emma Lazarus wrote her poem ("The New Colossus") in a contest designed to raise funds for the pedestal.

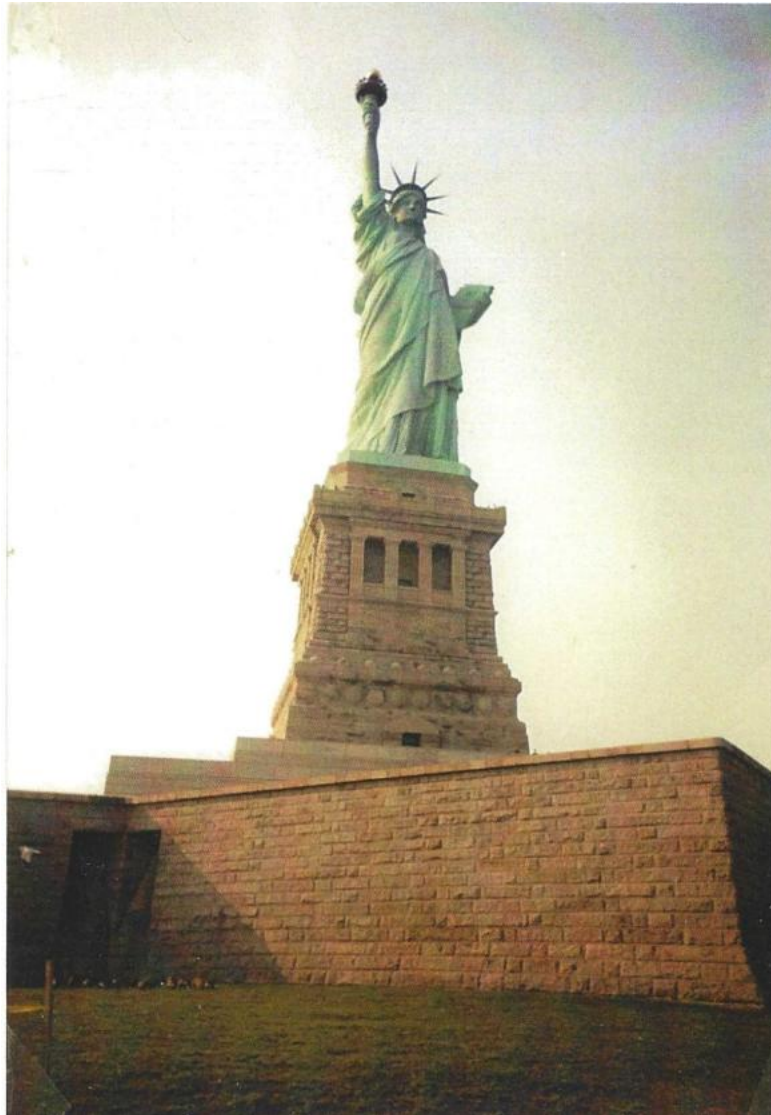
The immigrants may not have known her title, "Liberty Enlightening the World," but many considered her a divinity promising a new life for them. Her symbols had changed: her Phrygian Liberty Cap was now a crown with seven rays of light coming from it; her Liberty Pole was now a well-lit torch held aloft in her right hand; her left hand cradled a tablet or book inscribed with the date of the nation's Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776), and at her feet lay broken shackles (presumably a reference to the end of slavery).

The Statue of Liberty apparently has the face of the sculptor's mother, Anne-Marie-Auguste Charlotte Beyssar. Liberty's statue has been painted, photographed and incorporated into life in the United States.

Some immigrants honored Liberty with actual performances. In 1919, a radical Jewish labor organization in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, held a history pageant. A young man posed as Abraham Lincoln. Towering above him, a young woman posed as the Statue of Liberty. She wore the crown with rays and held a tall torch in her right hand and a tablet or book in her left hand. She wore a long, flowing white gown. She stood on a box or platform that had a sign in front. The sign read, "The Wanderer finds Liberty in America." The date was May 18, 1919, and the young woman was Goldie Mabovitz Myerson, an immigrant from Kiev. She later was known as Golda Meir, who moved to Palestine and became the prime minister of Israel.

Today, visitors to New York can see the Statue of Liberty on what is now called Liberty Island. Tourists, and also protesters, can purchase a green foam crown with rays to personify Liberty's statue.

## THE STATUE OF LIBERTY AND PROTESTERS



Statue of Liberty  
Liberty Island, New York,  
Photo: Ann Forfreedom.

Historically, there have been protesters around the Statue of Liberty since 1886. When hundreds of dignitaries, almost all of them male, crowded around the unveiled statue on October 28, 1886, a boatload of woman suffragists approached. They protested the celebration of a bronze female statue when mortal women in the United States lacked their rights and were forbidden to vote.

Woman suffragists continued to protest before the Statue of Liberty. On July 4, 1915, while some people were celebrating the birthday of the nation, New York suffragists organized events for the "Appeal to Liberty." Standing below the Statue of Liberty, Margaret Wycherly,

a Broadway actress dressed as the Goddess of Liberty, read aloud the suffragists' appeal for women's rights. Her audience included her attendants, curious women, and members of the press. At the end of the appeal, the sun came out, a band played the national anthem, and one of the suffragist organizers called up to the Statue of Liberty, "What says the Goddess?" The reply rang out from on high, "Votes for Women!"

Most women in the United States did win the vote, in 1920, but the struggles for women's rights, and the protests by women, continued. In 1970, Second-Wave feminists gathered in front of the Statue of Liberty to call for women's rights. High on the base of the iconic statue, they had placed a banner calling out "Women of the World Unite!"

### **LIBERTY AND LIBERTAS AMERICANA MEDAL**

People residing in the United States have had a chance to honor Liberty in the financial parts of their lives. Official coins in the U.S. carried images of Liberty from the 1790s through the first third of the 20th century. All U.S. coins have carried Liberty's name since the start of the nation. Coins were the national currency until the Civil War, when paper money was printed.

In 1792, Congress declared that U.S. coins should carry an image of Liberty and her name. Usually, the face of Lady Liberty and her Liberty Cap were engraved. In the 20th century, a picture of a (male) president was substituted, but the name of Liberty remained.

The first national U.S. coins bore an image and symbols that reflected a special medal designed to thank the French people for their support of the American Revolutionary War. The Libertas Americana medal, designed in 1783 by Benjamin Franklin and Augustin Dupre, a French engraver, features a strong and free-looking Liberty. She looks to her right in profile. Her hair is unbound and waving freely, and her Phrygian Liberty Cap on a Liberty Pole is at a jaunty angle directly behind her. The medal was struck in silver and gold for French nobility (and may have appeared in copper, as well). The design was greatly admired, and appeared in print publications.

Liberty appears on the obverse. The reverse also honored a goddess image; Minerva, representing the forces of France, fights a lion (representing Britain), while a baby Hercules (representing America) crushes two serpents.

The image of freedom-loving Liberty was so impressive it inspired the designs of the first official U.S. coins, starting in 1793. The early official coins used the profile model of Libertas, with unbound hair, Phrygian Liberty Cap and Liberty Pole. There were slight changes (as in the direction she faces), but this was the same image. Later revisions did not alter the portrayal of Liberty as a female image.

## **LIBERTY AND COINS**

In 1792, when the tradition of a Liberty coin became official (there had been earlier coins, including a Liberty coin attributed to Paul Revere), there were discussions of what to put on the official coins. The monarchical practice had been to put the (usually male) leader's portrait on the coins. George Washington apparently did not approve of placing his portrait on the national coins. The idea of a face or figure representing Liberty was accepted by Congress.

From 1792 onward, most U.S. coins bore the face or figure of Liberty, with her name visible. Some coins showed her flowing hair, but no cap. Most of the coins showed a Phrygian Liberty Cap, or a Liberty Cap on a Liberty Pole. Even the Confederates who rebelled against the United States in the Civil War displayed Liberty and her Phrygian Cap on their coins.

Some U.S. coins, particularly the larger ones, carried special designs. These coins often were named by collectors and books for the designer.

One small coin was misnamed because the designer was misinterpreted. The dime circulated in 1916-1945 was unofficially called the "Mercury" dime. However, as noted by the author R. S. Yeoman, this coin is more accurately described as a "Winged Liberty Head." Liberty is profiled, with a cap, possibly a Phrygian Liberty Cap, that has small wings along its sides. The design, by Adolph A. Weinman, is meant to portray Liberty as facilitating "liberty of thought." But, in a male-oriented society, when people do not recognize the goddess, a male identity is often assumed. So, an image of Liberty with wings on her cap was assumed to be a male deity, Mercury, typically depicted with small wings on his cap or helmet.

Liberty, presented as the Statue of Liberty, appears on three 1986 commemorative U.S. coins.

The first coin, a copper-nickel Half Dollar, shows the Statue of Liberty on the obverse, designed by Edgar Steever. As a ship full of immigrants steams into New York's harbor, Liberty's statue greets them. She is turned leftward, towards the sun and its rays; the sun may be rising, and the city's skyline appears in the distance.

The reverse side, designed by Sherl Joseph Winter, shows an immigrant family (a tall man, a woman holding the hand of a child, and another woman), with their baggage behind them on the dock, turned to face the New York skyline. The man waves a greeting to their new homeland. The reverse bears another motto: "A Nation of Immigrants."

The second coin is a commemorative Silver Dollar. Both sides were designed by U.S. Mint artist John Mercanti. Matthew Peloso assisted in the model work on the reverse.

The obverse shows the full-length Statue of Liberty facing the viewer. Behind her is the Ellis Island Immigration Center. The obverse has a special statement: "Ellis Island, Gateway to America." This was the processing center for many newly-arrived immigrants; today, it houses a museum with archival photos.

The reverse side features two symbolic parts of the Statue of Liberty monument. In the center is Liberty's torch, held aloft by a human hand. Strong rays of light surround the flame of the torch, showing that it is lit and reaching out to seekers of liberty. In addition, there are words along each side of the torch: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." These are words from Emma Lazarus' poem, now in a plaque at the base of the statue.

The third commemorative coin is a "half eagle" Five Dollar gold coin. This coin commemorates Liberty herself. Designed by the U.S. Mint's chief engraver, Elizabeth Jones, the obverse features a closeup of the face of the Statue of Liberty. She is wearing her crown with rays, and is facing slightly to the viewer's right. As required by law, all these coins bear the name "Liberty" on the obverse. The reverse of this coin shows an eagle in flight.

The Statue of Liberty also appeared on U.S. platinum coins in 1997 and 1998. Four denominations of the "American Eagle" platinum coins were minted: a 1/10-ounce coin, designated \$10; a quarter-ounce coin, designated \$25; a half-ounce coin, designated \$50, and a one-ounce coin, designated \$100.

The obverse, designed by John Mercanti, features a bust of the Statue of Liberty. Her carefully-carved face looks straight at the viewer. She wears her crown with rays. She may be lifting her right arm. Liberty is the name on the obverse.

The reverse, designed by Thomas D. Rogers Sr., shows an eagle flying out, away from the sun and its rays.

A special gold coin was issued as a commemorative of the sesquicentennial of American Independence. The obverse of this gold "quarter eagle" shows Liberty, who wears a Phrygian Liberty Cap and a long gown, with a cloak or shawl draped over her arms. She is standing, her head turned to her right. In her left hand, she holds up a scroll of the Declaration of Independence. In her right hand, she holds out a torch, considered the Torch of Freedom.

This 1926 commemorative coin was designed by J. R. Sinnock. The reverse of the coin shows a building representing Independence Hall, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Two 20th-century U.S. Liberty coins have been praised for their artistry. Each design presents a memorable and inspirational vision of Liberty.

Adolph A. Weinman's silver Half Dollar coins (1916-1947, and available from the U.S. Mint since then), are known as the "Liberty Walking" coins. The name refers to the image of Liberty on the obverse.

Liberty is in profile, looking to the viewer's left. Liberty's full-length image shows her wearing her Phrygian Liberty Cap. The folds of her long gown seem to move as she strides across the land. She moves toward the eastern horizon and the rising sun and its rays. She wears sandals.

Her left arm holds branches with laurel and oak leaves at the top. A U.S. flag, which she holds with her left arm, billows out around her right shoulder, as though it is being blown in the wind. Her right arm is outstretched, curving upward, as she greets the new day.

The reverse shows a large standing bald eagle perched on a mountain, looking to its right.

The \$20 gold coin, designed by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, has been praised as the most beautiful U.S. coin. The "double eagle" coins were issued in 1907-1933. Women have worn them as jewelry, in necklaces and rings, using the obverse as the focus.

The first coins differed slightly from those issued later, in 1907, for the general public. Among those differences were the high relief of the earlier coins and the presentation of the date. The earliest coins had a date in Roman numerals. Later flat-relief coins had Arabic numerals. Coins issued in 1908-1933 carried the motto "In God We Trust." Earlier coins did not have that motto. In addition, "double eagle" coins issued in 1907-1911 had 46 stars along the edge of the obverse; the coins issued in 1912-1933 had 48 stars.

Liberty is depicted on the obverse. She is standing full-length, facing the viewer. There is no cap. Her long hair flows freely to her right. Her tunic-like gown leaves her arms bare and flows down around her clearly-defined legs. Her left leg is lifted onto a rock or outcropping. Some viewers may see her as standing on an earthly pedestal. Others may see her in mid-stride over a rocky area.

Her bare left arm is outstretched and holds an olive branch, a sign of peace. Her bare right arm is lifted, and her right hand is curled around a lit torch. Rays of the sun are rising up to shine behind her.

A very small image of the Capitol building can be seen behind her right side. Liberty has a determined look as she faces the world.

The reverse shows what seems to be a double eagle flying above the sun and its rays.

Both Weinman's "Liberty Walking" coin and Saint-Gaudens' gold Liberty coin also are issued as bullion coins, sold by the U.S. Mint to authorized buyers, who sell them to secondary distributors, who then resell them to dealers and the general public.

The main difference is the design on the reverse. The Weinman design in silver of "Liberty Walking" appears the same. The reverse, designed by John Mercanti, shows a heraldic eagle, with 13 stars above it. The Saint-Gaudens design, in gold, of Liberty on the obverse is a modified version; the reverse, designed by Ms. Miley Busick and engraved by Ms. Sherl J. Winter, shows a "family of eagles."

### **LIBERTY AND CURRENCY**

At the start of the Civil War, the Union faced a shortage of metal coins, and therefore began to print paper money. The rebellious Confederate States of America followed that practice.

Liberty, and other goddesses, began to appear on Union and Confederate currency. Both sides maintained some coins, and Liberty appeared on them as well. But most of the money was in the form of redeemable paper bills. (Money, by the way, is a word that comes from the Roman goddess Juno Moneta.)



1861 U.S. check, from the Western Bank of Baltimore, featuring Liberty, on the far right, and Minerva, on the far left. Photo: Ann Forfreedom.



U.S. Fractional Currency 10-cent Note, Fourth Issue, July 14, 1869, featuring a bust of Liberty, wearing her Phrygian Liberty Cap, at the far left of the face design. Photo: Ann Forfreedom.

Some of the United States currency featuring Liberty included:

The Five Dollar Notes (1886-1891), Silver Certificates, Large Size. Liberty appears on the back side of the Note. She is shown as she appears on a silver Liberty dollar coin (specifically, on Morgan dollar coins). On each side of Liberty, who wears a Phrygian Liberty Cap, are the reverse sides of two other silver coins.

The Twenty Dollar Notes (1861), Demand Notes, Large Size. Liberty stands on the face of the Note. She is holding a down-pointed sword in her right hand, and her left hand is on a U.S. shield. A dark overgown is draped over her left shoulder, like a cloak.

The Fifty Dollar Notes (1875), National Bank Notes, First Charter Period, Large Size. The face design, on the viewer's right, shows George Washington at Valley Forge, with Liberty and another figure (possibly a goddess) hovering above him. Liberty is holding out her Phrygian Liberty Cap atop a Liberty Pole in her right hand.

One Hundred Dollar Notes (1875), National Bank Notes, First Charter Period, Large Size. The face design, on the viewer's right, features a seated female figure that may be Liberty, with her Liberty Pike (a broad fasces with an ax extended from the top) that has been placed before her on a rock or on high ground.

The Ten Cent Notes (1869), Fourth Issue, American Bank Notes Co., N.Y. The face design features the head and shoulders of Liberty. She wears a Phrygian Liberty Cap and a wreath. She faces to her left. Her dark, curly hair cascades past her shoulders. She appears to wear armor, and a star-strewn cloth (possibly a flag) is draped over her left shoulder. She is youthful and looks serious.

Due to a shortage of coins during the Civil War, merchants and the public in the U.S. complained they could not pay fractions of the dollar Notes. The U.S. government then issued Fractional Currency Notes, including the Ten Cent Note.

There were other regular U.S. currency bills that featured Liberty.

The Confederacy also was short of coins and, in addition, lacked printers, printing supplies and images. They printed paper money with available imagery, including images of Liberty.

Some of the Notes that featured Liberty include:

The Ten Dollar Notes (1861). The face design shows Liberty seated in the upper center. She is holding a Liberty Pole, topped by a Phrygian Liberty Cap, in her left arm. Her right arm is curved upward. She is facing left, looking at the large eagle perched near her. She also has a shield and a flag.

The Twenty Dollar Notes (1861), Hoyer & Ludwig, Richmond, Va., show Liberty standing. She is on the left side of the face design. She faces the viewer, and her right hand holds a Liberty Pole topped by a Liberty Cap. She herself wears a Phrygian Liberty Cap, and there is an impressive dark robe over her light gown.

The upper center of these Notes features a seated Ceres. Commerce and Navigation, apparently goddesses, are on either side of Ceres.

The Five Dollar Notes (no date, probably 1861), Southern Bank Note Co., New Orleans. These Confederate Notes present six goddesses in their face design. Five seated goddesses are featured in a group in the upper center. Liberty is at the center of the group, sitting noticeably higher than the others. Agriculture and Commerce are at her right side, and Industry and Justice are on her left. On the left side of the Notes stands Minerva. She has long dark hair, and wears a maidenly gown.

The One Dollar Notes (1862) show Liberty on the left side of the face design. She is waving a banner in her right hand, and the banner curls and floats behind her, as though lifted by the wind. She is standing with one foot forward on what seems to be a pedestal with the number "one" on it. She is wearing a gown that resembles a contemporary lady's dress.

Another issue of Twenty Dollar Notes (possibly 1861), Keatinge & Ball, (probably Columbia, S.C.), show Liberty in the upper center of the face design. She is seated on a bale of cotton, with what seems to be a United States flag fallen to the ground behind her on her left. She faces left, and appears to have a dark cloak around her shoulders.

Both the United States and the Confederacy honored Liberty, and both had leaders who talked of freedom, but the Southern rebels intended to spread their system of slavery across the continent, even into territories that were not yet states in the Union. The Union victory in 1865 led to liberation for those people who had been slaves.

## **PLACES NAMED FOR LIBERTY**

Liberty is a name familiar to many people in the United States today, not only because of coins, postage stamps and a statue, but also because there were many places named for the Goddess of Liberty. Some people consider her a promise, or a principle or an ideal. Some people consider her a place that feels like home.

The city of Liberty, Missouri, was incorporated in 1829, and became the county seat of Clay County. The city is located in Liberty Township. Liberty Island, in the Missouri River, is south of the city of Liberty.

The State Historical Society of Missouri offers information about these areas. One very interesting fact: Liberty was a stop on the Underground Railroad, helping escaped slaves to reach freedom during the years before the Civil War.

There is a small city named Liberty in Montgomery County, Kansas. The city was founded in 1869 and incorporated in 1884. It is located six miles southeast of Independence, Kansas. The city of Liberty was named for the popular ideal of liberty.

There are Liberty counties in the states of Florida, Georgia and Texas.

California has two functioning places named Liberty. Sonoma County, in Northern California, includes a town called Liberty, located near the cities of Sebastopol and Petaluma.

Liberty Island, in Solano County, Northern California, includes the Liberty Island Ecological Reserve in most of the southern areas of the island.

There are a number of other U.S. places with Liberty in their names. One is the city of Libertyville, Illinois.

Finally, the home of New York's Statue of Liberty has been affected by her presence. When she arrived there, the island on which she stood was known as Bedloe's Island. In 1956, her residence was officially renamed Liberty Island.

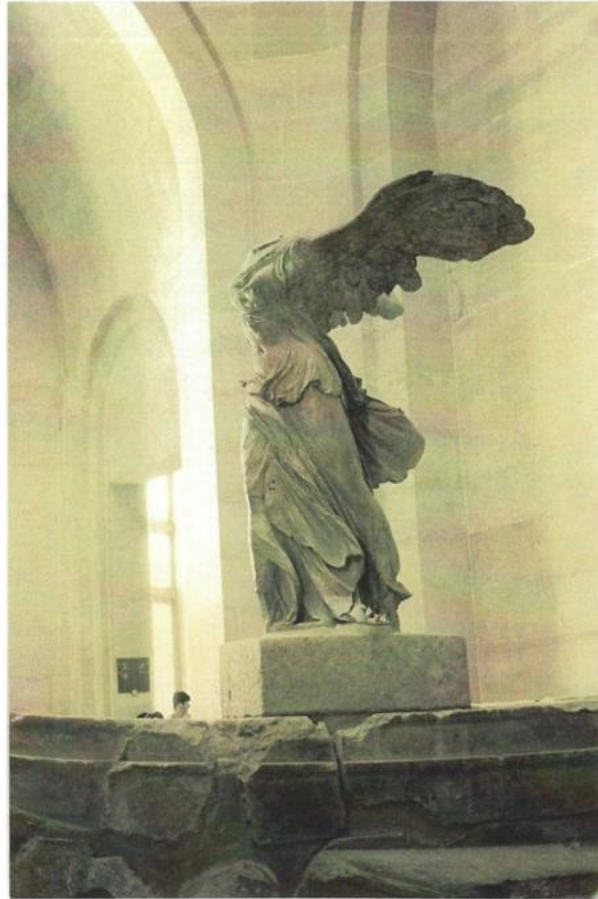
Brumidi presented Liberty in connection with the American Revolution and a new form of society. She has company. Around her in the painting are a number of sister goddesses, each of whom affects life in the United States.

## **VICTORY-FAME**

On Washington's left side sits Victory-Fame (so named because she embodies the qualities of both goddesses). She wears a green leafy wreath in her hair (possibly a laurel wreath), and with her left hand holds a long-stemmed golden trumpet to her lips. Her right hand holds a spray of leaves. George Washington holds his down-pointed sword in his left hand, near the spray of leaves.

Incidentally, Liberty is dressed in a light blue robe and a pink bodice secured by a brooch. Victory-Fame wears a dark green robe, similar in color to the leaves she holds, and a white top. Both goddesses are barefoot, with their feet resting on fluffy white clouds. Liberty is resting the bound document on a hassock or boulder, which appears to have some lines, possibly words or symbols, on it. Victory-Fame rests a bare foot on a white cloud that also has lines.

Victory-Fame has a wing showing behind her left arm. Another wing peeks out behind her right arm. These wings may be a reference to Winged Victory of Samothrace (a statue also known as Nike of Samothrace, from about the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E. -- Before the Common Era -- and discovered on the Greek island of Samothrace in 1863).



Winged Victory of Samothrace.  
Louvre Museum, Paris, France.  
Photo: Celik Guracar.  
Copyright © 1991 by *The Wise Woman* and Ann Forfreedom.

The Goddess of Victory has several names. The ancient Greeks knew her as Nike (or Nice). The Romans called her Victoria; they sometimes added the term Victrix, "The Victorious" or "The Conqueror," for her and for at least one other goddess (Venus).

Some people have called on her as the Lady of Victory. Sculptors and artists have seen her as Winged Victory.

In India, she has been called Vijayasri. The term "vijaya" is translated as "the victorious," and has been applied to the Indian triple goddess Devi-Uma-Kali.

The term "sri" refers to a goddess, usually Sri-Lakshmi. The word "sri" appears in the later Vedic hymns, and has been connected to Sri-Lakshmi. The term seems to refer to qualities, appearances and social rank, such as effective skills, power, beauty, prosperity and noble rank.

Victory is a goddess who promises a difference in the future. Victory for humans raises the possibility of change, whether in contests of athletic skill, or educational prowess, in warfare or in peacekeeping, in artistic efforts or in health practices. Human victory can change an outlook, a form of government, or the span of a life. Victory can bring freedom or devastation.

The Goddess of Victory has been connected to other goddesses. As mentioned above, her name in India may be connected to Lakshmi.

There is a connection between the Roman goddess of Victory and the Phrygian-Roman goddess Cybele. As previously mentioned, when the ship carrying the image of Cybele had trouble in the Tiber River, women carried the black stone image into Rome. They placed her image in the Temple of Victory, perhaps hoping Cybele would aid Rome in its war against Carthage. The war took years, but when Rome declared victory, Cybele was credited. Presumably, the image of Cybele had remained in Victory's temple and had strengthened Romans' resolve. (Eventually, a special temple was built for Cybele.)

Victory has been honored in many civilizations. Her image has been painted and sculpted in various ways, often as Winged Victory. The most famous image of Victory is the statue known as Winged Victory of Samothrace, now in the Louvre Museum in Paris. Although her head is missing, she remains dynamic.

There are other Winged Victory statues elsewhere. In the United States, a statue of Winged Victory can be approached and appreciated in the outdoors. Her image is in the outdoors collection at Hearst Castle, in San Simeon, California. This bronze sculpture of Winged Victory by Umberto Marcellini (late 19th century-early 20th century, C.E.) shows her poised to inscribe the name of a victor or a list of victories on a special shield that she holds on her bent left knee. Her left foot is raised on what might be the helmet of Ares, the Greek god of war.

This statue is a copy of a Roman statue. Estimates vary regarding when the Roman statue was sculpted; one account mentions the reign of Emperor Vespasian (he ruled 69-79 C.E.). The Roman statue now is in a museum in Brescia, Italy.

The United States has honored Nike, the Goddess of Victory, on a gold coin. The Olympic (international athletic competition) commemorative coin features the face of Nike on the obverse. The 1998 five-dollar gold coin was designed by Elizabeth Jones, then the U.S. Mint Chief Sculptor and Engraver. (The reverse, designed by Marcel Jovine, shows an Olympic Games flame.)

Nike is shown wearing a crown of olive leaves. Her face is strong, though portrayed in delicate lines. (The name of Liberty also is clear on the coin's obverse.)

The name of Nike is familiar to many people in the United States, but not as the name of a goddess. There is an international corporation that creates and markets sportswear that is called Nike, Inc. The name originated with the goddess honored by the Greeks, and in Brumidi's artwork.

On July 18, 2024, Goddess Victory appeared in the pages of a major U.S. newspaper. Readers of *The New York Times* who tested their knowledge and skill doing the "Crossword" puzzle were questioned about the "Figure in the Louvre's 'Winged Victory of Samothrace' " (59 Down). The answer was "Nike."

Fame seems to be a goddess with a Greco-Roman past. The Romans called her Fama, the goddess of fame. The Greeks knew her as PHEME, the goddess of charisma.

Brumidi presents a seated goddess blowing an impressively long-stemmed trumpet. The trumpet may be part of her insignia. She appears serious and supporting a worthwhile candidate for public renown, the nation's first president.

There is another portrait of Fame in the U.S. Capitol. This winged Fame is flying in the air. She holds a long-stemmed trumpet in her left hand, and a wreath in her right hand. She and Peace, the accompanying goddess, are reaching out to place wreaths atop a bust of George Washington. This relief of 1827 is by Antonio Capellano.

There are a number of paintings and other artworks about the goddess Fame. In a 1511 painting of PHEME, she plays a trumpet in a ceiling fresco of the Perseus Constellation. This colorful painting is by Baldassare Peruzzi (1481-1536), and is in the Sala di Galatea in Rome.

Artists who painted Fame also include Pierre Blanchard (1753-1809). This 1803 painting shows Fame blowing a trumpet and holding another trumpet.

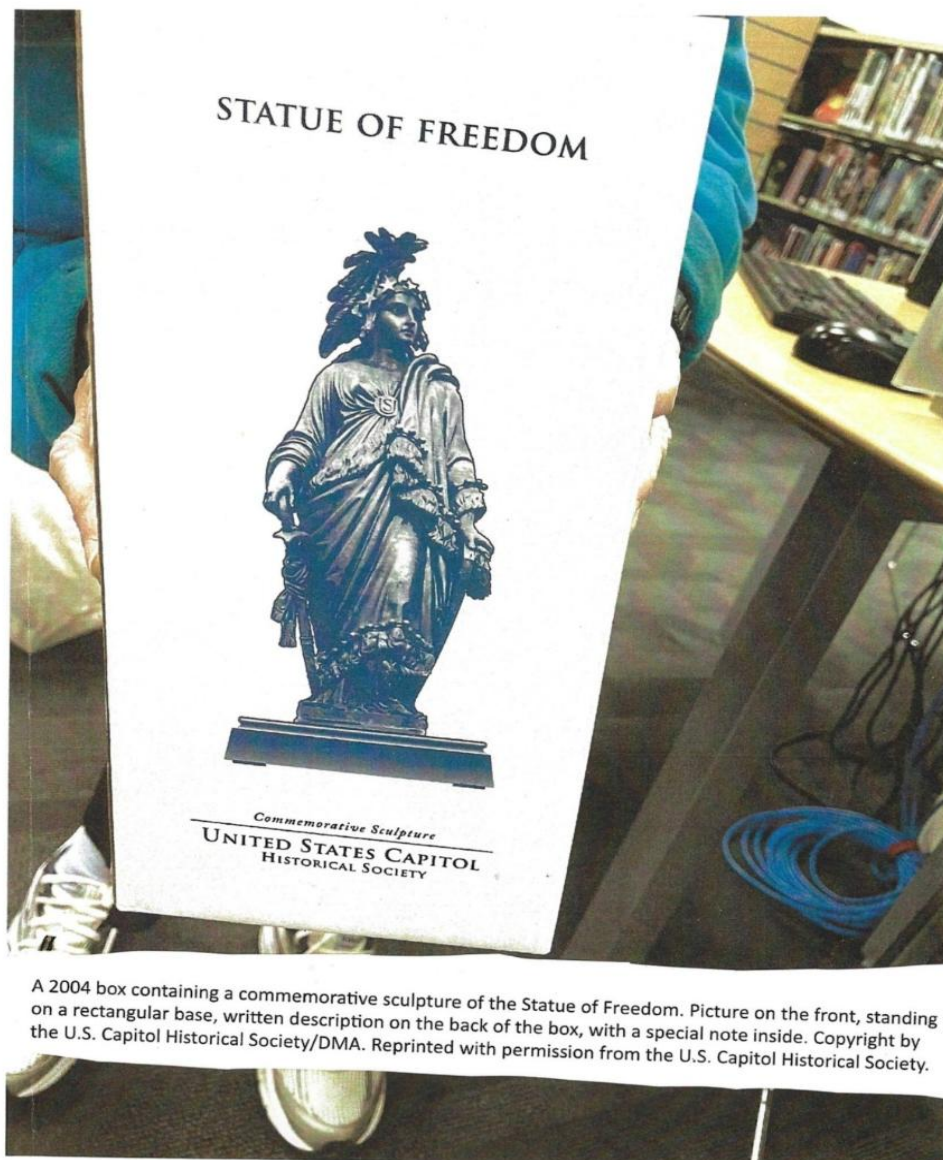
In joining with Victory to honor George Washington, Fame is drawing attention to the special deeds of Washington. He was a military leader who shared the privations of his forces, in Valley Forge, and during various defeats and retreats. He used his position as the first United States president to support the republic, and not to declare himself a dictator

or monarch. He used his personal skills to gain cooperation among differing factions. Fame had reasons for blowing her trumpet in his honor.

## **FREEDOM FIGHTER**

Freedom Fighter is an aspect of the Goddess of Freedom, a part of the goddess that fights oppressors and deals with specific areas of human life, such as combatting slavery. Freedom, as previously mentioned, has been acknowledged in American life since before the American Revolutionary War period. But each generation defines freedom in slightly different ways.

Freedom Fighter emerged in the time of the Civil War and has become more relevant in the modern United States.



A 2004 box containing a commemorative sculpture of the Statue of Freedom. Picture on the front, standing on a rectangular base, written description on the back of the box, with a special note inside. Copyright by the U.S. Capitol Historical Society/DMA. Reprinted with permission from the U.S. Capitol Historical Society.

One official factor in her emergence today is the ceremony celebrating the Presidential Medal of Freedom, originally awarded by President Kennedy in 1963. This is the nation's highest civilian award, and is presented to people for making an "especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors." This medal, which has a five-pointed star on it, has been awarded to more than 600 individual nominees since 1963. Often, there is a balance of racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as a variety of human activities involved, including political activities.

On May 3, 2024, the Presidential Medal of Freedom was presented to 19 individuals. One of them, U.S. Representative Nancy Pelosi, offered a contemporary definition of freedom in her acceptance speech. Representative Pelosi (Democrat, San Francisco) was the first female Speaker of the House of Representatives (she was the Speaker twice, 2007-2011 and 2019-2023), and was the first woman to lead a house of Congress.

"The Medal is an honor that is respected because it is about America's highest value: freedom," Representative Pelosi said. "Freedom was the vision of our founders, has been the goal of our men and women in uniform, and is our promise to our children. It is, with reverence for freedom and respect for all who have received it, that I am deeply honored and forever grateful."

Speaker Emerita Pelosi has announced her retirement from Congress at the end of the 2025-26 term, having served for decades in the U.S. Capitol, with its heritage of goddesses representing the values and hopes of the nation.

Congress honored the Goddess of Freedom in the form of the Statue of Freedom during the Bicentennial celebrations of the Capitol and its own history.



An artistic depiction of the Statue of Freedom, 1860. Photo: Ann Forfreedom, 2000.

Images of the Statue of Freedom had been seen throughout the Civil War period, and the decades afterward. Freedom's statue appeared on postal envelopes, letterhead, government documents, presidential campaign posters and signs (for Abraham Lincoln's 1864 campaign), in printed pictures and lithographs, on the cover pages of publications (such as journals), in ads (such as those featuring currency bills), on greeting cards, and even on a gambler's deck of cards.

Some of the populace saw the statue depicted on U.S. currency bills. The Statue of Freedom appeared on the Five Dollar Note, known as a Demand Note, in 1861, and on the Five Dollar currency bill called a United States Note, in 1862.

In the 20th century, the Statue of Freedom appeared on U.S. postage stamps. She also appeared on the cover page of a 1984 pamphlet issued by an abortion-rights group. She has a tear running down her face as she protests the anti-abortion Hyde Amendment.

Bicentennial celebrations for Congress in 1989 led to the minting of two commemorative coins featuring the Statue of Freedom.

The copper and nickel Half Dollar commemorative coin presents a clear and detailed portrait of the head of the Statue of Freedom. This beautiful obverse design is by sculptor Patricia L. Verani. The coin shows Freedom's face and the eagle atop her star-studded helmet. Even the eagle's talons hanging by Freedom's ears are shown, and the top of her cloak-like robe across her left shoulder is visible.

Across the top of the coin is the statement "Bicentennial of the Congress," with the dates 1789 and 1989. One of the U.S. mottoes, "In God We Trust," and the name "Liberty" are curved under Freedom's portrait.

The reverse, designed by William Woodward, shows a frontal view of the national Capitol, which is surrounded by a circle of five-pointed stars. (Unfortunately, it is difficult to see the Statue of Freedom atop the Capitol Dome.)

The 1989 Silver Dollar commemorative coin, fully designed by muralist William Woodward, shows the full-length Statue of Freedom on the obverse. She is carefully detailed, standing tall among the clouds, with rays of sunshine all around her, behind the clouds. The reverse shows the Mace of the House of Representatives, which is topped by an eagle perched on a world globe.

There also is a gold Five Dollar commemorative coin, designed by Mint Engraver John Mercanti. It shows the Capitol Dome, but the Statue of Freedom is barely visible.

During the 21st century, the Statue of Freedom also has appeared on postage stamps, ornaments, bookmarks, key rings, jewelry, clothing patches, small and large sculpted statues, and fruit (crate) labels.

An insightful artist, Robert (Bob) Hieronimus, painted a large mural of his vision of the Statue of Freedom. The mural is three stories high, in downtown Baltimore, Maryland. Her skin tone has been darkened, and she is clearly Native American. Her helmet shows five-pointed stars, but the right side of her robe is filled with six-pointed stars. Her brooch says "U.S.," but above her and to her right are religious symbols: a six-pointed star, a cross, and what seems to be a pyramid. There are many symbols in this image of Freedom.

A rowdy California city renamed itself Freedom in 1877, apparently for the respectability of the name. The city later became the home of a feminist book publisher, focusing on books about feminist spirituality and witchcraft.

Freedom Fighter appeared sporadically during the 19th century, primarily in regard to Constantino Brumidi's painting of "The Apotheosis of Washington" inside the Capitol Dome. She was in Brumidi's sketches; he may have incorporated some of her insignia and action in other goddess paintings in the Capitol. She appeared on government documents, and was described in writings about Brumidi's canopy painting.

In the 20th century and the first quarter of the 21st century, she has appeared on clothing (scarves), posters and reproductions of Brumidi's painting, a picture puzzle featuring Brumidi's painting, computer mouse pads, jewelry, kitchen magnets, painted porcelain dishes, and in books and materials about Brumidi's artworks in the Capitol.

Brumidi's canopy painting contains many noteworthy details.

Directly below George Washington is Freedom Fighter in the grouping titled "War." This was the first grouping Brumidi painted after finishing the central Washington-Liberty-Victory-Fame group (which he had begun painting at the end of 1864).

There are six groups circling around the edge of the canopy of the Dome. They are titled "War," and to Lady Freedom's left, "Agriculture," "Mechanics" (originally titled "Manufactures"), "Commerce," "Marine," and "Science." The main figures in the groupings are about 15 feet high.

Due to space limitations, I will detail the goddesses I have found in these groupings. But viewers also appreciate the groups featuring bare-chested or nearly nude males in these colorful sections of this lively painting.

Freedom Fighter is turned toward her left side, and her ally, the bald eagle, is on her left, so I will discuss the groupings starting on her left side.

## **CERES**

To the left of Freedom Fighter's shield is the "Agriculture" grouping centered around the agricultural goddess Ceres. She is seated, wears a wreath (apparently of grains) in her hair, and holds a cornucopia full of agricultural products, with a pineapple on top, in her left hand.

She sits atop a reaper filled with grain. She is facing a youth (Young America-Liberty) who wears a red Phrygian Liberty Cap and is handing her the reins to a pair of horses, one

of whom prances. Ceres has bent her right arm and is holding her right hand out to accept the reins.

Ceres is a powerful and ancient major goddess. We have heard of her from her worshipers in Rome, and like a number of great and international goddesses, she is a divinity with many names and connections to other goddesses. She is a goddess of life and death. She comes forward through time, and has even become part of United States culture.

The Romans called her Ceres, a name that, as researcher Patricia Monaghan notes, comes from the same root as the word "create." In earlier times in Rome, she may have been called Kerres, a mother goddess who was also a divine guardian. The powerful Romans connected her with the Greek goddess Demeter, with Hera of the Greeks, with Bona Dea, Tellus, Magna Dea and others.

Romans saw her as the goddess of corn and harvests, and of the growth of vegetation, a mother of the Earth, a destroyer of life (she allowed plants to grow and also to die, which made them edible). She was Fate.

Ceres also was Justice. She was called Ceres Legifera ("the lawgiver"). Her priestesses may have founded the Roman legal system.

Ceres came to Rome from Cumae, a Greek colony on the mainland of Italy, in the 8th century B.C.E., located not far from modern Naples. Her first Roman temple was dedicated after a famine in 496 B.C.E. Her worship became one of the oldest plebian religions in Roman society.

There were several festivals in her honor throughout the year. A major festival, called the Cerealia, was held annually in April, to honor the founding of her temple on Aventine Hill. Athletic Games were held throughout the Cerealia festival.

Another festival for Ceres was held in August. Women attended ceremonies called Mysteries at that time, perhaps dealing with themes of death and rebirth. In between those two festivals, there was the Ambarvalia festival in late May, to celebrate the plowed fields and bless them.

As Christianity arrived in Rome, the worship of Ceres was still popular. Christians held the Feast of Lights (Candlemas), or the Day of the Holy Virgin Mary, on February 2, which was instituted during the reign of Emperor Justinian (who ruled 527-565 C.E.). This was an attempt to avoid a conflict with the worshipers of Ceres and Proserpina, the daughter of Ceres, at the time of the Roman festivities called Lupercalia, in mid-February. Many candles were lit during Lupercalia, because Ceres had searched with candles for her

missing daughter. Christians urged people to replace the honoring of Ceres and Proserpina with their honoring of the Virgin Mary.

People who honored Ceres also gave honor to her daughters and son. When connected with Demeter, Ceres was seen as the mother of Proserpina (the counterpart to Demeter's daughter, Persephone), representing the crop that is reborn each spring. People also honored Ceres' daughter Libera, and her son, Liber, who were divinities of viticulture, the cultivation or culture of grapes. Libera is connected to the Greek divinity Kore. Libera's festival, the Liberalia, was in March. During the festival, elderly women who wore crowns of ivy sold special heated honey pancakes. People who honored these children of Ceres purchased the cakes and offered them to the deities.

Over the following centuries, artists and people involved in agriculture remembered Ceres. Girolamo Campagna sculpted a bronze statue of Ceres in the late 16th century-early 17th century (C.E.). He was a sculptor in Verona and Venice, Italy.

French artist Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) painted Ceres as Summer in 1718. He painted her in an idyllic scene; she is shown holding a sickle.

When Constantino Brumidi painted Ceres as the agricultural head of her group of deities, he knew her importance. He already had portrayed Ceres as Summer, in the ceiling painting of "The Four Seasons" in the U.S. Capitol in 1856. That painting is in the House Appropriations Committee room in the Capitol. Ceres is seated on a cloud and wears a wreath of grains. She holds a sickle in her right hand. A winged cherub holds a bound bundle of cut grain down by her right side. Five other cherubs circle around her; one cherub on her far left holds an upside-down cornucopia which spills its produce, and a cherub on her far right holds a bow and points an arrow in a downward direction.

Ceres has been pictured in the United States since the start of the independent nation. As previously mentioned, she is on the state seal of New Jersey. Holding her cornucopia, Ceres stands near Liberty. In addition, Ceres may be connected to the goddess named Plenty, who appears with Liberty on the North Carolina state seal.

Ceres, as an agricultural goddess, has been brought to the attention of newspaper readers in 2024. She appeared in two different crossword puzzles in the *San Francisco Chronicle* within the month of July. In the first puzzle (July 10), the clue was "Harvest goddess," and in the second puzzle (July 31), readers needed to identify the "Roman goddess of agriculture." The answer to both was "Ceres."

Ceres has appeared on currency bills in the United States. As mentioned earlier, in regard to Liberty, there were no official U.S. currency bills until the time of the Civil War. As a result, the images on the Notes varied, but there were goddesses depicted in the imagery.

Near the end of the 19th century, a female figure representing Agriculture appeared on two U.S. Notes. Though she was not named Ceres, she may have been connected to the goddess.

The Two Dollar Notes (1899), Silver Certificates, Large Size, on the face design show President Washington flanked by two figures, a male seated representing Trade, on the viewer's left, and a seated female representing Agriculture on the right. She is in a classic pose, perhaps partially nude, with what may be an overflowing cornucopia by her right side. She is partly in profile, with her left arm stretched down, and her right arm bent, possibly touching the cornucopia.

The Twenty Dollar Notes (1886 and 1891), Silver Certificates, Large Size, on the face design show a portrait of Daniel Manning, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, flanked by a reclining female figure on the viewer's left, and a seated or crouching male figure on the right. The reclining female is Agriculture. The male figure represents Industry. Agriculture, who may be connected to Ceres, seems to have produce around her, and a stylized leafy or budding tree behind her.

Ceres was very popular with the designers of currency bills for the Confederate States of America (C.S.A.). She appeared on different types of Confederate currency bills in 1861 and 1862.

The One Hundred Dollar Confederate Notes (1861), Hoyer & Ludwig, Richmond, Va., have a face design that shows Ceres and Proserpina, her daughter, flying. George Washington also is pictured on the Notes.

As already mentioned, there were Confederate Twenty Dollar Notes that feature Ceres in a group, and Liberty on the left side of the Notes. In the upper center of the 1861 Notes, Hoyer & Ludwig, Richmond, Va., the face design shows Ceres seated higher in the center of the group. She is between the female representations of Commerce and Navigation.

The Ten Dollar Confederate Notes (1861), Hoyer & Ludwig, Richmond, Va., show Ceres in the upper left corner. Ceres is with a female figure representing Commerce. One is seated (probably Ceres), and the other is kneeling beside her and has her right arm around a large urn.

The Five Dollar Confederate Notes (1861), B. Duncan, Richmond, Va., have a face design that shows Ceres and Justice together on the right side of the Notes. Ceres is kneeling, and Justice, with her scales, is standing next to her.

The Ten Dollar Confederate Notes (1862), Keatinge & Ball, Columbia, S.C., have a face design showing a seated Ceres in the upper center of the Notes. She is facing the viewer, but is seated toward her right side. She holds a sheaf of wheat.

There are other Confederate currency bills that feature this goddess.

Ceres is a goddess who travels. Throughout the 19th century, and into the 20th and 21st centuries, her name has moved across the United States and into outer space. In 1801, astronomers named an astronomical body for her. They thought what they saw was an asteroid, located in the asteroid belt between the planets Mars and Jupiter. It became the first body in the asteroid belt to be visited by U.S. spacecraft in 2007.

Ceres continued to move. The more the astronomical body moved, the more surprising the results. Today, Ceres is considered a dwarf planet. The goddess who nourishes the Earth is also a goddess who soars through space with her own planet.

Ceres still has a home on Earth, a place that greets her by name each day. The city of Ceres, California, is happy to share her name. The city's name was chosen by Elma J. Carter in 1871. Her father owned a granary and warehouses. The city was incorporated in 1918.

According to the city's website, in celebrating its centennial in 2018, the city praised Ceres as the Roman goddess who presided over agricultural festivals. The city said it believes its name "stands for health, beauty, fruitfulness and wholesomeness."

## **FLORA**

There are three other goddesses with Ceres in this grouping. The flower goddess Flora, with her right breast bare, is kneeling to gather flowers by a brook or stream. She already has a bunch of blooming flowers that she has placed in a container or folds of her gown that she is holding with her right arm. A robed cherub is behind her and is holding out a right hand to protect her (possibly from grains flying into the reaper, which is near the goddess). Flora is located below Ceres, and to the right of Ceres and the Phrygian Liberty Cap-wearing youth, whose toga-like robe leaves his back bare.

Flora has been known as the "Flourishing One." She flourished in a number of lands, over many centuries, becoming such an essential Goddess of Nature that her name has become a part of our languages. The English word "flower" originated from her name.

Flora was a Sabine goddess, honored as the goddess of the season of spring, and of flowers, the fruits of trees and fields, and the spirit of youthful pleasures. The Sabine people lived along the Apennines, a mountain chain in Italy, northeast of Latium, a region bordering on the Tyrrhenian Sea and crossed by the Tiber River. The Sabines were conquered by Rome in 290 B.C.E.

Flora also had a connection with ancient Greece. She was known there as Chloris, the goddess of buds and flowers. The Greeks saw her as married to the god of the west wind, Zephyrus.

In India, the goddess is called Kusumamodini. She is the goddess of the flowers of the mountains.

The Romans knew her as Flora. This is the name that has come through the ages and that we know today. She came to Rome with the Sabine King Titus Tatius. Her special priest in Rome was appointed by Numa Pompilius (who ruled 715-672 B.C.E.), a Sabine who became the second king of Rome.

The Romans grew very fond of Flora. In 238 B.C.E., Romans held a festival for her, the Floralia. Men decked themselves and their animals in flowers, especially roses, and women wore festive clothing.

In 173 B.C.E., the Ludi Florales festival became an annual event, with Games, theatrical plays and available food. The festivities lasted six days from April 28 through May 3. Rome went on to dedicate the month of May to Flora.

The customs later associated with May Day, May 1, developed from the Floralia, especially gathering May baskets of flowers, and dancing around a Maypole. Roman children made small images of Flora and decorated them with flowers. When Christianity rose to prominence, the children continued to create dolls in May, but the images were seen as honoring the Virgin Mary.

Ceremonies for Flora were held in Rome and in other places. In Rome, the Floralia was greeted with the sound of trumpets. In parts of Britain occupied by Rome, the festival was announced with the sound of cows' horns. Always, there was a festive air about celebrations of Flora.

The Roman poet Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso, 43 B.C.E.-c. 17 or 18 C.E.), who called the goddess "Mother of Flowers," wrote about a discussion he had with Flora. He recalled that she said that before she was known as Flora, she was called Chloris and was a nymph. Ovid said she told him, "...Perhaps you may think that I am queen only of dainty garlands; but my divinity has to do also with the tilled fields. If the crops have blossomed well, the threshing-floor will be piled high; if the vines have blossomed well, there will be wine; if the olive-trees have blossomed well, most bounteous will be the Year....Honey is my gift. It is I who called the winged insects, which yield honey, to the violet, and the clover, and the gray thyme....We delight in festivals and altars...."

She also mentioned that if she was unhappy with how she was treated, she would withdraw from her work until the officials instituted a festival for her. She said that the Roman Senate had neglected her once and after her response, the Senate met and voted an annual festival in her honor. Flora's political effectiveness is clear.

Her appeal to artists and sculptors also is visible. There is a statue of Flora in the Capitoline Museum in Rome today. This is a tall, dignified, classical sculpture dated 117-138 C.E.

Over the centuries, numerous artists painted their visions of Flora. Sandro Botticelli (c. 1445-1510 C.E.) painted a portrait of her in his larger picture titled "Primavera" (1477-1478). He may have relied on Greek male-oriented myths about her.

Botticelli's painting, which includes Venus, the Three Graces and others, presents a vulnerable and even frightened image of Flora. She is youthful, with long tresses of brown and gold hair over her shoulders and flying in a breeze. Her eyes are wide open. Most striking are the newly-formed spring leaves and flowers coming from her open lips and being scattered by the wind as they fall.

She is looking upward as a male blue-green figure of a god looms over her left shoulder. He has his hands on her, and the sheer, gauzy bits of drapery she is wearing offer no protection. She does not seem to welcome his advances.

There are a number of interpretations of this imagery. Some mention Greek myths about the nymph Chloris being pursued by the wind god Zephyrus. A few of the interpretations are quite direct: Chloris wanted attention, Zephyrus saw her and kidnapped her, he then raped (or ravished) her, and even impregnated her with his breath, and then he married her; then she became the goddess of spring and the trees and flowers bloomed.

Such myths and interpretations may be excuses for male violence against a female, even a divine female. However, they could also reflect the patriarchal takeover of a Goddess-centered people.

It is clear that this Botticelli painting does not present the confident, effective and astute goddess described by Ovid and welcomed into Roman lives.

A different view of Flora emerges in a portrait painted by Rembrandt (Rembrandt van Rijn, 1606-1669 C.E.). Rembrandt's vision of Flora is mature, finely dressed, and with flowers on her and around her. She wears a headband with flowers and buds carved on it. She wears long earrings and a fashionable necklace. Her contemporary gown of fine material has a low bodice and long sleeves with armbands. Her hair cascades down onto her shoulders, and a lock of hair curls onto her right shoulder. She has what are known as "bedroom eyes." Her closed lips have a slight smile.

Her left hand holds a bunch of flowers to her side. Her right hand curves over a staff with carved flowers on it.

This painting of Flora was done in 1635, and is in the National Gallery in London. Rembrandt painted Flora, represented by this same model, twice more, and those paintings are in the Hermitage Museum, in St. Petersburg, Russia, and the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, in Dresden, Germany.

The model for Flora was Saskia van Uylenburgh. She was Rembrandt's wife and the mother of their four children, only one of whom survived infancy. She died in 1642; however, her image as Flora lives on, bringing viewers a glimpse of love and joy in the world.

Flora has been the subject of a number of artworks since the days of ancient Rome, and archeologists may excavate more. Today, we know of a fresco of Flora as the season of spring, painted on a villa wall in Stabiae, an ancient city near Pompeii.

She is seen from the back, with barely a trace of her face. She holds a cornucopia filled with blossoms in her right arm, and is picking a blossom off a tall bush with her left hand. She wears a light gown, and seems to have a wreath in her short hair. The image is symbolic of Flora, but does not seem particularly real.

An artist in the 20th century sought to make her real, though classically styled. A full-length portrait of Flora, painted by Anne Marie Arnold in 1993, has echoes of Roman imagery. The goddess is seen from the back, but her head is turned towards her left, so that the image of her face is clear, though in profile. Her hair is longer, touching the nape of her neck, but she does have a leafy wreath, or branch, in her hair. Her left hand is holding the stem of a flower-laden vine, as though she is about to pick a flower. Her gown is light and floats out to her left as her bare feet move.

There are several differences from the Roman imagery. Flora's right arm holds the folds of a stole, or shawl; the Roman image holds a cornucopia filled with flowers. The modern image of Flora is outdoors, at night, with a crescent moon and a star shining overhead. She is next to a column that has flowers, circles and spirals on it. She is a redhead, with starry lights shining in her stole. Everything around her seems to flower and bloom. Even the fountain on her left has a flower climbing over it, and has a starry light reflected in its still water.

Sculptor Thomas Crawford's 1853 full-length sculpture of Flora is adorned with flowers. As her gown swirls around her, she holds flowers in her left arm and a wreath in her right hand. She has flowers on her head and flowers at her feet.

This neoclassical statue appeared in the Crystal Palace exhibition hall in London in 1855. Crawford's vision of Flora was in the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago.

Today, Crawford's Flora can be seen in the Henry Hilton Collection in the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. She also can be seen online.

Constantino Brumidi painted Flora as a Goddess of Nature, as well as a Goddess of Flowers, in the 1865 fresco painting of "The Apotheosis of Washington." He had presented a portrait of Flora in earlier years, in the 1856 ceiling painting of "The Four Seasons" in the Capitol, in which he also included Ceres.

In this colorful 1856 artwork, Flora holds a flower in her left hand, while her right hand reaches up toward a cherub bearing a flower wreath to place on her head. She is seated on a cloud, and two cherubs carry a basket full of flowers before the goddess. Another cherub holds a handful of flowers. Farther to Flora's left, a cherub reaches up as a bird flies in the direction of the goddess, and another bird flies away, above the heavenly group. Another cherub flying to Flora's right holds part of the silky stole, or long scarf, that floats around the goddess' head and arms.

This vision of Flora has her in a pleasant gown with a low bodice, and a shiny blueish robe over her lap. She is youthful, but heavenly. The painting is located in the House Appropriations Committee room.

Flora has been celebrated in arts of different kinds in the United States. She is well-known today among people who sing choral music. Those who sing madrigals are familiar with the song "Flora Gave Me Fairest Flowers." This song by English composer John Wilbye was published in 1598. It is still sung today.

The lyrics are sung by a man grateful to Goddess Flora for helping his romantic efforts to attract Phillis (or Phyllis).

Flora has been honored in poetry in the United States. The 18th-century poet Phillis Wheatley praised Flora in her poem "On Imagination." In her poem, Phillis Wheatley hopes for the ending of winter, and welcomes Flora's gifts in spring:

"Fair Flora may resume her fragrant reign,  
And with her flow'ry riches deck the plain..."

Phillis Wheatley's poetry has been reprinted throughout the 20th century.

Flora is essential to U.S. scientists, and to horticulturalists involved in the science or art of growing fruits, vegetables, flowers or ornamental plants, throughout the world. Her name is in the English language for the listing of plant life in specific regions or areas of the land.

## **POMONA**

At the left side of Ceres stands the goddess of fruits and fruit trees, Pomona. She is young and holds a large basket on her head. The basket is filled with an abundance of fruits. Her right arm curves up to hold the basket steady.

For ancient Romans, Pomona was connected to the apple, a fruit historically sacred to several goddesses. Roman banquets always ended with apples, honoring Pomona.

Goddess Pomona was honored in places associated with Roman power and trade. There is a strong, almost majestic mosaic of her, representing the fruits of autumn, found in a house in Cyprus. Her head and shoulders can be seen, and fruits adorn her locks of hair.

Centuries later, the color known as Pomona green became popular in 19th-century Regency England. Women wore Pomona-green fashionable gowns. People poured liquids into Pomona-green containers.

In the United States today, Pomona is connected to city government, higher education, a state park, and a lake and reservoir.

The California city of Pomona is named in her honor. Two California educational institutions bear her name: California State Polytechnic University Pomona (known colloquially as Cal Poly Pomona), a four-year public university in the city of Pomona, and Pomona College, in Claremont, California.

The city of Pomona, Kansas, was founded in 1869, and named for the goddess. The city is in Franklin County (east Kansas). Pomona State Park is on the south shore of Pomona Lake, in Osage County, east Kansas. The 490-acre state park was established in 1963. Pomona Lake is also called Pomona Reservoir.

Brumidi paints Pomona as youthful, perhaps at the start of autumn.

## **IRIS**

Brumidi placed a rainbow in this painting; he featured the rainbow in his final sketch, and when he balanced himself and stood high above the floor of the Rotunda to paint this rainbow inside the Dome, he had an important purpose. This rainbow may be a symbol of Iris, the Greco-Roman rainbow goddess. Iris is known as the "Messenger of Light." She travels along the rainbow, carrying with her the healing abilities of a major goddess, such as the Greek goddess Hera.

As a goddess of healing, Iris carries a caduceus, a staff entwined by two serpents and two wings at the top, a symbol still used today for physicians.

On the Greek island of Delos, in the Cyclades Islands, her worship included offerings of dried figs and cakes of wheat and honey.

Iris is vital in today's world, too; her name is applied to the colored portion of the human eye (known as the iris of the eye), and to a large class of perennial herbaceous plants and flowers.

Iris plants were particularly sacred in ancient Crete, as shown on a golden ring seal from Isopata, Crete, Second Palace Period. As the goddess descends, iris plants spring up from the ground and two female worshipers stand with arms raised to honor her. (A snake, a bird, and a hovering female celestial figure also appear on the ring seal.)

Goddess Iris is considered a messenger of the deities, especially Hera. As a goddess of healing and the rainbow, which serves as a bridge between the heavens and the earth, she has been so important that in ancient Greek religion, she slept under the bed, or throne, of Hera.

Hera has been connected to other goddesses, including Ceres. That may be part of the reason the rainbow in Brumidi's painting bends down near the image of Ceres, since Iris is a messenger of Hera. In this painting, as the rainbow bends down by Young America-Liberty, the youth is facing Ceres.

Iris can be found above Earth's sky and below Earth's soil. She travels in interplanetary areas, and also is at home in our planet's ground.

Iris orbits our sun between the planets Mars and Jupiter. The asteroid, named for the goddess, was discovered in 1847, and is the fourth-brightest object in the asteroid belt.

Iris also can be found as an element 77 metal on Earth. The silver-white metal, discovered in 1803, is named for Iris because of the many colors of its salts when it is dissolved in

hydrochloric acids. It is called iridium, and is one of the rarest elements in the Earth's crust. Iridium is also found in meteorites.

Iris has also been in the newspapers. The "Rainbow goddess" appeared at least twice in "Today's Crossword" puzzle in 2024 in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She shimmered in a July 11 puzzle and sparkled in an August 2 puzzle.

Why would Brumidi include four goddesses in the "Agriculture" grouping? Clearly, it would be a dreary nation without cereal (named for Ceres), or flowers and plants, fruit or a rainbow. And agriculture has been, and still is, a major human endeavor in this country.

Brumidi subtly honors the seasons in this portrait of important goddesses. Flora is the goddess of spring, Ceres is the goddess of summer, and Pomona is the goddess of autumn. The rainbow symbolic of Iris results from sunrays refracting and reflected off raindrops or mist; the rain, which promises renewal of plant and crop growth in the earth, often becomes a rainy season in winter.

After the all-male grouping titled "Mechanics" (originally "Manufactures") dominated by the bare-chested god Vulcan, and the next all-male grouping titled "Commerce," featuring the nearly nude god Mercury, viewers discover the "Marine" seascape.

## **VENUS**

Viewers are treated to an active scene in which waves roll, a seahorse rears up, and bare-chested youthful attendants strain to fulfill their tasks. Two deities preside over their efforts: a young goddess Venus, connected to the sea, and an aged god Neptune, a seaweed wreath on his white hair, his white mustache and white beard hanging over his bare chest as he grasps his trident in his left hand and the shell side of his chariot in his right hand.

Venus, who is nearly nude, with a dark blue robe flung over a vital area below her navel, is focused on her work. Her right arm is held up over her head as she grasps the transatlantic cable being passed to her.

Her face is tilted to the right as her left arm is down and her right hand holds the cable, which goes down through the waves of seawater. The cable appears to go from the leftward attendant between the seahorses, up across Neptune's red laprobe, through the hands of a cherub at Neptune's right shoulder, to a barebacked attendant a little lower and into Venus' hands.

Brumidi's vision of Venus adds an American view of this famed goddess. Historically considered the goddess of love, Venus here is also a divinity of communications and science. By holding the cable in her hands, Venus imparts an aura of divine energy to this (then-new) cable which provided a connection between people in different places and nations on different continents. (Elsewhere in the Capitol is a Brumidi painting of the goddesses of Europe and America shaking hands as a cherub holds a telegraph cable which connected England and the United States in 1866.)

There is a blissful look on Venus' face as she holds the transatlantic cable. Perhaps that is one of the reasons viewers tend to focus on her rather than on Neptune, who towers over her, and looks fierce and watchful.

In the spirit of connection in this marine scene, below Venus and to her right is a cherub riding a dolphin, with reins in the cherub's left hand. To the right, in the background, is a gray form that may be an ironclad ship with smokestacks; this image, which also connects with the previous grouping of "Commerce," may refer to the Civil War innovation of ironclad ships, including the *Monitor*.

Brumidi's image of Venus is attractive but not overwhelming. Yet, people in the United States encounter her almost every day. She came from ancient roots, but is part of life in today's world.

The symbol we use today for womankind is the symbol of Venus. The circle with a cross underneath was once the "mirror of Venus." Astrologers have known it. Today, it is commonly recognized as the symbol for human women, a symbol in scientific (biological, botanical, zoological and psychological) descriptions of femaleness, and even a symbol for a planet named for a goddess. Second-Wave feminists (in England and the U.S. in 1969 and the 1970s) included the symbol as part of the movement for women's liberation and women's rights. Women demanding lesbian and gay rights marched with this symbol.

Worshippers of Venus thousands of years ago would have recognized this sacred symbol of a powerful goddess who stood for the rights of females in nature and in human society.



A collage featuring some of the ways feminists of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries connected the symbol of Venus (in the center), which also is the symbol of womanhood and femaleness, with gaining women's rights and defining important societal issues. Courtesy of Ann Forfreedom and *The Wise Woman*.

## **VENUS: ORIGINS**

Venus, like a number of important international goddesses, has roots in ancient societies. She also has many powers and functions.

Venus is mainly seen in modern times as a goddess of love and beauty. In that, she has counterparts around the world, since most human beings seek love and there are many kinds of love.

The Greeks called on Aphrodite. Scandinavians sent prayers about love to Freya (or Freyja), Aztecs honored Xochiquetzal and Nigerians, Brazilians and Cubans have honored Oshun.

In India, at least three goddesses are called upon in matters of love. Rati, who is known as "Love," is the goddess of sexual passion. She is very active and effective. When her male partner, Kama, the god of love, is consumed by the god Shiva, Rati enlists a powerful goddess, Parvati, "the mountain-goddess," who was married to Shiva, to intercede and persuade Shiva to allow the reincarnation of Kama. When the god of love and desire, whom Rati wants to marry, was reborn as the first baby of Rukmini and Krishna, he was kidnapped and then swallowed by a large fish. Rati found a way to get possession of that fish, which she cut open and rescued the baby. She disguised herself as a cook for the kidnapper, and secretly raised the child to adulthood. She made him invisible, and raised him in the home of his kidnapper, a demon. One day the demon, upset over Rati's cooking, beat her. The young man, becoming visible, rushed to help her and killed the demon. Rati, seeing the handsome rescuer and knowing that he would become her husband, expressed her love for him. He hesitated, thinking she was his mother. She appeared before him as the divine goddess of love, and told him it was the will of the deities that they marry, and so they did.

Another aspect of Rati is honored in India as Ragalata. She is considered the "Vine of Love."

In addition, the Indian goddess Rembha is appealed to in matters of love and sexuality. She is the goddess of pleasure. She is considered similar to Venus.

There are other goddesses in India who are also honored for qualities of love.

In Italy, the Etruscans honored Turan as the goddess of love. She is identified on Etruscan mirrors. She was one of the triad of goddesses honored by Etruscans at a temple in the Portonaccio area, outside the city-state of Veii; the temple was dedicated to Menerva (Minerva), Aritimi (Artemis) and Turan (similar to Venus).

In Rome, a Goddess of Nature was quietly honored. The Romans called her Venus. She protected gardens and vineyards, and provided for the orderly beauty of nature.

As Romans contacted more Goddess-oriented cultures, Venus expanded her powers. She began to take on some of the characteristics of the Greek goddess Aphrodite.

Venus as seen in today's United States is not the goddess of gardens and vineyards. She is the goddess of sensuality and sexual love who came forward in the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire. Her power was extraordinary. Concepts and words about Venus in the English language offer glimpses of that power.

As archeologists in the 19th and 20th centuries began to uncover images and small statues of females from the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras of human history, they described them as "Venus" images and figurines. (Two famous figures are the "Venus of Laussel," in France, and the "Venus of Willendorf," in Austria.)

The female images and statues varied greatly in detail. Some were small, some tall, some voluptuous, some thin, many emphasized sexual or genital characteristics. Some united human and animal or bird characteristics. But the archeologists, mostly male, considered the images as sexual or pornographic, and shrugged them off as "Venus" figures.

Today, studies by feminists are reinterpreting these figures as Goddess images. Some of the images, and there are tens of thousands of them, may relate to specific kinds of goddesses. It is possible that most relate to one overall Great Goddess who gives

life, death, and regeneration or rebirth. One Goddess researcher, Elinor W. Gadon, calls these figures "Earth Mother."

However, people may decide to continue using the name of Venus, with the understanding that, contrary to patriarchal defamation, Venus is a Great Goddess with a tremendous range of powers and functions, with a particular focus on the rights and status of womankind. Connecting the ancient images of goddesses and women to Venus may be seen as a way of honoring them all.

Venus is present in the English language in a number of ways. She is honored in the form of "veneration." She is praised when called "winsome." She is considered someone who can "win." Someone asking a favor of her would "fain" get her help. Any person asking her aid would not ask in "vain."



She is part of a womanly body; a portion of the female genitals has been known as the "mons veneris" (Latin for "the mount of Venus"). Someone involved in "venery" is pursuing sexual pleasure. But if matters become "venereal," a physician can be helpful.

## **VENUS' NAMES AND TITLES**

Venus has many names and titles, especially in Rome. I am mentioning only a few that have particular importance.

She was a Goddess of Nature, including animals.

She was known as Libentina (or Lubentia, or Lubentina). This was her name as the goddess of sexual pleasure.

Like Aphrodite, she was connected with the island of Cyprus and its major city, Paphos. Therefore, like Aphrodite, she was known as "the Cyprian" and "the Paphian."

Venus gained worshipers in Sicily. An important temple was built for her on Mount Eryx.

When the Romans gained control of Sicily while fighting Carthage, they built a temple in Rome to Venus Erucina. The Roman temple was dedicated in 215 B.C.E.

As Romans grew fonder of Venus, she gained more powers. The city of Pompeii recognized her as their official protectress.

Later, during the Roman Empire, she became linked to the existence of the Roman people. Emperor Hadrian (117-138 C.E.) dedicated a temple to Venus and Rome, in 135 C.E.

Some plants and birds were considered sacred to Venus. The rose flower, the verbena (or vervain) plant and myrtle trees were special to her. Doves and swallows also were sacred to this goddess.

Among the numerous titles she held, Venus was the "Rose of the Sea" and also the "Star of the Sea."

As Venus Columba (Venus-in-the-Dove or Venus the Dove), the goddess also cared for the souls, thought of as doves, in the Roman catacombs (underground cemeteries). This was similar to how the Greeks had seen Aphrodite Columba, the Dove of Peace, aiding people at the time of death. This aspect of Venus was so important that in the Christian era she was canonized as (a mythical) Saint Columba (meaning "Holy Dove").

The ancient Roman title of Venus Columba presents an intriguing question: The U.S. goddess known as Columbia is supposedly named after the 15th-century European explorer Christopher Columbus. Could this title for Venus point to an older Goddess-oriented heritage for the American divinity? Perhaps future researchers will find an answer.

Venus also appears on Roman coins, with various titles and symbols, in the 2nd century C.E.

As the Roman Republic was becoming the Roman Empire, two titles associated with Venus became prominent, and leaders of Rome took note. She was Venus Genetrix (Venus "the Ancestress" or "the Mother"). She also was Venus Victrix (Venus "the Victorious" or "the Conqueror").

## **VENUS AND ROMAN LEADERS**

The image of Venus as the Divine Ancestress, or the Mother of the Roman people, gained prominence in the time of Gaius Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.E.). As a political and military leader of Rome, Caesar was well aware of the importance of Venus in the eyes of the people. The story about Roman ancestors, which he helped publicize (he had been a High Priest), involved Venus, who had an affair with a mortal man, Anchises, and who then bore a son, Aeneas. After fleeing Troy and a series of harrowing adventures, and a fateful visit to Carthage among various places, Aeneas came to Italy. There, he started a colony and became the founder of the Roman people. (Incidentally, Goddess Juno and Queen Dido did not fare well in this patriarchal myth. Juno became vengeful and Queen Dido lost her love and her life.) Caesar was comfortable with the image of Venus as Genetrix.

Aeneas was an ancestor of the family of Julius Caesar. At one opportune moment, during a funeral oration for his aunt Julia, Julius Caesar put forward a startling claim. He asserted that through his aunt Julia's mother's line to kings and her father's line to deities, his ancestry was both royal and divine, deriving from kings and from Goddess Venus.

This claim of divinity for Caesar and the Roman people came as other Roman men were claiming the patronage and favor of Venus.

Lucius Cornelius Sulla (138-78 B.C.E.), after successfully besieging the city of Pompeii, officially renamed it for his family and Venus.

Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, a Roman general known as Pompey (106-48 B.C.E.), vowed to build a temple to Venus Victrix in 55 B.C.E.

Julius Caesar dedicated a temple to Venus on a condition: that he would win the battle of Pharsalus in 50 B.C.E.

Later, after Caesar was assassinated, and his heir, Augustus, successfully pursued his killers, the myths about Venus as the Divine Ancestress of Romans and the Caesars were amplified and spread throughout the Roman Empire.

The importance of the god Mars (linked to the Greek god Ares) began to grow. Although Mars had been a god of agriculture, he also was a god of war. Roman military troops were drawn to him. Romans considered Mars a divine ancestor connected to their human ancestor, Romulus. There also was talk of an affair between Venus and Mars (as there had been an affair between Aphrodite and Ares).

In the fifth century C.E., Venus and Mars had a joint temple. The Roman poet Claudian (c. 370-404) recorded details of a marriage ceremony between Venus and Mars, arranged by the priests at their temple. The statue of Mars was made of iron, while the statue of Venus was made of lodestone, which is a natural magnet. Naturally, Venus drew Mars to her.

Although this dramatic ceremony may have served a priestly function, it probably served the Roman leaders well to show a direct connection between the goddess of love and the god of war. Also, it probably deepened the popular belief in the divine right of rulers.

While the generals of Rome sought favors from Venus, the priestesses of Venus also wielded influence. The rose, which many Romans knew as the Flower of Venus, was worn as a badge of office by the priestesses. Venus had the largest temple in Rome, located on the Circus Maximus.

## **VENUS AND THE PEOPLE**

People in the Roman Empire were very aware of Venus. Her symbolic sign, as previously mentioned, was associated with being female. People knew that every Friday was special, a Day of Venus (and today, Friday is still the day of a goddess, Freya).

Romans ate fish on Fridays, in honor of the goddess, and because fish was considered an aphrodisiac. In the Christian era, this practice continued among Catholics, but the meaning was changed. For Christians (Catholics), Friday was a day of penance, in regard to sin and as a remembrance of the crucifixion and death of Jesus. They were urged not to eat meat on Fridays, and fish was acceptable and inexpensive.

Families may have appreciated Venus for her child. With the god Mercury, she had a son, Cupid, who was a divinity of love. Likewise, Aphrodite and the god Hermes had a son, Eros, a god of love. In a fresco in Pompeii, young Cupid is shown flying near Venus and Mars. Another name for Cupid was Amor ("Love").

Prostitutes (or, in today's language, sex workers) were influential in Rome. They adopted Venus as their major goddess. They held a festival called Vinalia, in April, for the goddess.

There was another Vinalia in August. It was known as the Country Vinalia, and was dedicated to Venus as protectress of the gardens. The festival commemorated the time that a temple was dedicated to her and gardens were set aside for her. At the time of this festival, vegetable gardeners took a holiday.

Venus was revered by people mining copper on her sacred island of Cyprus, whose name means "copper." This island of Goddess culture was a great source of copper, and the metal dug from the earth was turned into many ornaments and implements for the Goddess' people. Cyprian smiths and jewelers produced copper ornaments to place on her statue in her temple in Paphos. They made copper mirrors used for divination on Fridays, Venus' day. Copper became her metal.

Some love charms have been named for Venus. The Venus hair stone is a clear quartz stone that contains gold or silver needles of the mineral rutile (or titanium dioxide). Sometimes, this type of stone is considered a rutilated quartz. When the rutile crystals are long and slender, they may resemble blonde hairs and can sparkle in sunshine, as hair does. People seeing this stone connected it to Venus and considered the stone to be a love charm.

Today, we see the Venus hair fern, delicate, with branches. Though not considered a love charm, the fern is named for the goddess and is a reminder of her connection with Nature.

People maintained their belief in the divinity of Venus even when Christian authorities in Europe's Middle Ages tried to destroy her shrines and temples. Early in the Middle Ages, Venus was known as the Fairy Queen of various holy mountains called Venusbergs. These were some of the places where her Goddess shrines had been. There were several Venusbergs in what is now Germany.

Though the Christian leaders tried to put an end to the worship of Venus, people continued to honor her. Eventually, the Christian authorities recognized her as (a mythical) Saint Venerina, in Calabria, Italy, and as Saint Venere, in the Balkans. Places that had been connected to Venus were renamed for these saints. Meanwhile, people continued to call on Lady Venus, most likely for love and healing.

By the time of the Renaissance, Venus had emerged as an important figure in paintings and other art forms. And she has not stopped since then.

## **VENUS AND PAINTINGS**

One of the most famous paintings of Venus is "The Birth of Venus," by Sandro Botticelli. This painting, done in 1483-1484 (or 1484-1486), is now in the Galleria Degli Uffizi, in Florence, Italy. Reproductions of it are available in Florence and many other places.

Venus is at the center of the artwork, although much of the symbolism actually reflects Aphrodite. A nearly nude Venus is being blown ashore while standing on a scallop shell. The grace and beauty of the goddess, and the care and concern of those attending her, make this a memorable portrait.

Botticelli did paint Venus with clothes. In "Primavera," a fully clothed Venus is standing near the Three Graces as Cupid, or a cherub, flies above her. (But it is difficult to focus on Venus when the frightened face and demeanor of Flora, being menaced by a male deity, is so clear, as was previously discussed in the section about Flora.)

Giorgione (Giorgio Barbarelli da Castolfranco, c. 1477-1510) portrays a "Sleeping Venus" (c. 1508-1510). This painting is in Germany, at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, in Dresden.

A nude Venus is in the foreground, sleeping outdoors on a cloth spread on the ground. The landscape, with houses and trees, is beautiful and seems quiet, but feminists might raise a few questions about the image of Venus. As a goddess, she looks peaceful and somewhat sensual; her eyes are closed, and her left hand rests on her unclothed genitalia, while her right arm curls around her sleeping head. She is attractive, but inactive.

Another nude Venus was painted by a Renaissance artist, but this one was slightly different. Titian (Tiziano Vecelli or Vecellio, c. 1488-1490 - 1576) painted "The Venus of Urbino" (c. 1538). She seems intelligent and more real. She is lying on her bed in her bedroom, propped up on her right elbow. Her eyes are open. She wears a bracelet, and the fingers of her right hand hold a posy of roses. Tresses of her light brown hair sweep down her right shoulder along the pillow, and her left hand crosses over her genital area. Her right leg is under her left leg.

A little dog, possibly a pet, is curled on the bed at the left side of Venus' feet. The bedroom opens up to another room, where a fully dressed maid inside looks down toward a white dress that has been laid on a nearby sofa. A potted plant sits on a windowsill, and branches of a bush or tree can be seen outside. There are two tapestries on the walls and the floor is carpeted.

This Titian painting inspired at least two American artists in London, Benjamin West (1738-1820) and Charles Willson Peale, two centuries later, in their vision of art and of Venus. Part of the subtle meaning of Titian's artwork may be that the divine female can be glimpsed in the human woman (a theme that can be applied to artistic images of Goddess Liberty

during the time of the American Revolution, when Liberty had her insignia but wore a contemporary dress).

Spanish artist Diego Velazquez (1599-1660) painted Venus in 1651. In "The Toilet of Venus," the goddess is nude and seen from the back as she lies on her bed. She is looking into a rectangular mirror which, indistinctly, shows her face. The back view is very clear, and her dark hair is in a chignon. She is not alone; a winged cherub, possibly Cupid, is kneeling on the bed and holding up the mirror. He has draped an ornament, possibly a necklace, on top of the mirror. He has the strap of a bow draped around his chest, and he looks toward the image of Venus in the mirror.

A century later, portraits of Venus were painted by American artists in London. Charles Willson Peale painted images of Goddess Venus early in his art career. Around 1768, Peale painted a nude Venus, based on a portrait by Benjamin West, whose painting probably was inspired by Titian's artwork. Peale kept his painting in his London studio where clients might see it.

Peale also taught his brother, artist James Peale, to paint a portrait of Venus, based on West's artwork.

Later in life, Charles W. Peale taught art to individual women, including artists Esther (Hetty) Sage and Mary (Polly) Wrench, and his daughters were named for female artists, such as Angelica Kauffman, Sofonisba Anguissola, Rosalba Carriera and Maria Sibylla Merian. Two of his nieces, Anna Claypoole Peale and Sarah Miriam Peale, also became acclaimed artists. His granddaughter, Emma Peale, had an exhibition of her works in New York.

However, earlier in his own career, in 1772, Charles Willson Peale painted and kept for exhibition a new version of "The Venus of Urbino," more than 230 years after Titian's artwork.

Two years later, in 1774, Peale was paid to paint a picture of Venus rising from the sea. Though the account book shows that Peale was paid by Edward Lloyd, the brother-in-law of Peale's Philadelphia art patron (John Cadwalader), this painting has not been located in modern times.

In 1776, Peale painted a picture of Venus, after Titian's artwork, for Colonel William Hamilton. Peale may have used his 1772 painting, or an engraving (possibly an engraving by Robert Strange), as his source. Colonel Hamilton was an American officer in the Revolutionary War, was interested in art and had recently built a home on his father's estate.

Charles Willson Peale's paintings of Venus (and almost all of his paintings of goddesses) are rarely noted by most biographers. However, they were appreciated by his contemporaries in what became the United States.

Several artworks about Venus appeared during the second half of the 19th century in the United States.

Alexandre Cabanel (1823-1889) painted his vision of "The Birth of Venus" in 1863. A romantic painting in pastel colors, it shows the moment of Venus' awareness of herself. She is lying down atop the sea, white foam around her long brown hair. Her left arm is bent over her forehead, palm showing, while her right arm is outstretched alongside her. Her eyes are open. Her left knee is bent over her right leg. Of course, she is nude. Above her, at least four winged cherubs happily celebrate her birth.

Constantino Brumidi's vision of Venus is slightly different. In his 1865 portrait of Venus, she is nearly nude and is in the sea, but she is active. She is young and slim, and is handling the transatlantic cable. She seems to love the idea of the cable encouraging overseas communications.

When French artist Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) unveiled his painting of "Venus Anadyomene" in 1867, he was following a long tradition. Numerous paintings in the

Greco-Roman world gave that title to images of Venus; even a bronze statue in the first or second century C.E. bore that title, which translates as "Venus Rising from the Sea." The Ingres artwork is in the Musee Conde, in Chantilly, France.

As portrayed by Ingres, Venus is standing on white foam (resembling a rug) in the sea. She is slightly curved to her left. Her right arm rises over her head to hold her long light-brown hair away from her face. Her left arm also reaches up toward her hair. Her eyes are open. Along her legs and feet are winged cherubs. One cherub is kissing her right ankle. Another is holding her left knee and gazing up adoringly at her; he appears to be astride a dolphin or a fish. Most notable are two other cherubs. One, possibly a female, is on Venus' right and is holding up a round mirror for the goddess. The other is behind her left thigh and is holding out a bow.

Twentieth-century paintings of Venus are varied and in differing styles. A multimedia portrayal by Paul Klee (1879-1940) is titled "Barbarians' Venus" (1921), and is very difficult to describe. His Venus has both female and male sex organs. The painting uses a number of different materials on a painted board, and is in several artistic styles, such as Abstract and Cubist. The artwork is in the Norton Simon Museum, in Pasadena, California.

There are other paintings of Venus, from the time of Pompeii through the millennia to modern times. Most are nudes. Most do not present her as the Divine Ancestress or as a major goddess of life and death. Only Brumidi, to my knowledge, shows her appreciation of science and technology. (She was the goddess of the copper-mining areas of Cyprus; copper mining has become important today for companies dealing with AI, artificial intelligence data centers, energy needs, and electric vehicle batteries.)

However, Venus has been acknowledged by many artists as the goddess of love, especially sensual and sexual love.

## VENUS AND SCULPTURES

One of the most famous and well-loved sculptures of Venus is the "Venus de Milo," c. 100 B.C.E. From Melos in Greece, this millennia-old marble statue is missing her arms and hands but has an aura of charm.



A drawing featuring the statue of Venus de Milo and a group of 19th-century women, possibly artists or art students. Courtesy of Ann Forfreedom and *The Wise Woman*.

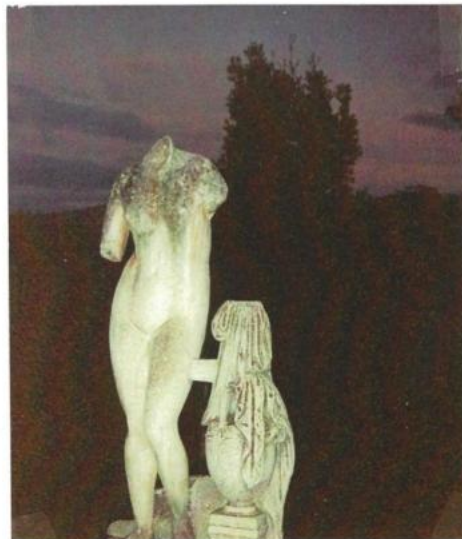
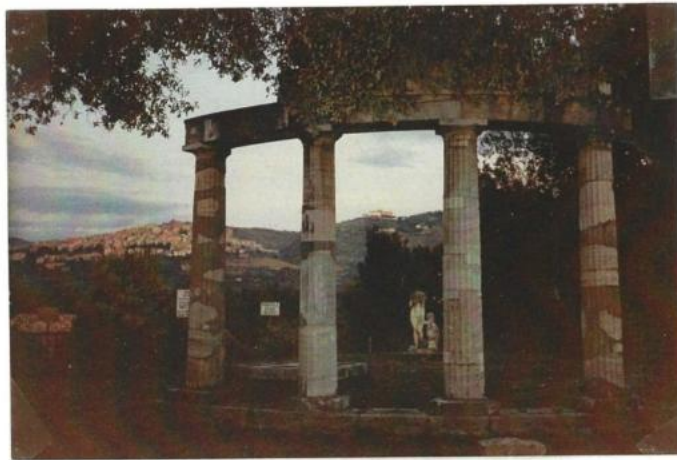
She is partially nude; a robe or gown covers her well below the navel, and her bare foot peeks out from under the folds of the garment on the flat pedestal. The curls of her hair, caught in a chignon at the back of her head, with a few tresses traveling down the nape of her neck, are very clear. She appears sensual but highly intelligent. Her left knee is bent, as though she were preparing to walk off the pedestal. She stands as a star in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

Some viewers call her Aphrodite. There appears to be some confusion between images of Venus and Aphrodite in the realm of sculpture, and in other forms of art.

A marble statue known as "Venus Genetrix" has sometimes been described as an image of Aphrodite. The statue, from 5th-4th century B.C.E., is a copy of a Greek work possibly by Callimachus. She stands with her head a little down as she adjusts her gown or robe. Her

right hand is bent upward and holds a fold of her garment, preparing to bring it forward over her shoulder. Her left breast is bare. Her left arm, which has folds of her garment falling from it, is outstretched and holds a small fruit, possibly an apple or a pomegranate. Her right leg is bent behind her. Her hair curls tightly around her head.

There are numerous statues of Venus by Roman sculptors. One that visitors can approach is at Hadrian's Villa, near Tivoli, in Italy.



A Temple of Venus and statue of Venus.  
Hadrian's Villa, near Tivoli, Italy.  
Photos: Ann Forfreedom, 1989.

At the far end of the grounds of Hadrian's Villa stand the remains of a "Tempio di Venere," a Temple of Venus. There is a sign in front of it.

In 1989, when I saw the remains of the temple, it was a semi-circle of four upraised columns, held up by a stone lintel. Through the columns, I saw a statue of Venus.

The statue has been exposed to the elements. She is missing her head and both arms and hands. Yet, she gives a feeling of welcome. Parts of the statue, at the shoulders and breasts, and also at the top of her left leg, are discolored. Her left leg is bent, and she leans toward the right. Still, she seems a beautiful sight as twilight approaches.

Next to Venus is a vase or round column on which a sculpted robe has been placed.

People in the United States have a chance to see other statues of Venus in Washington, D.C., and in California.

The "Hope Venus" stands in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. The original statue was sculpted by Antonio Canova (1757-1822) and is in a museum in Florence, Italy. The "Hope Venus," also by Canova, was commissioned by Sir Thomas Hope.

She is nude, although she holds part of a robe or gown over her genital area. Her right hand curves up between her breasts. Her head looks to the left, over her shoulder. Her hair is curled up around her forehead, and her expression appears serious.

The statue of "Venus of Cyrene" is at Hearst Castle in San Simeon, California. The statue is a copy of the original image of Venus, from the ancient Greek colony of Cyrene, in North Africa. The original statue was taken by Italian soldiers in 1913 and placed in the Museo Nazionale delle Terme, in Rome, but was returned to Libya in 2008.

This beautiful replica is in the outdoor Hearst Castle Collection. She is standing on a flat platform, with her left knee bent. She is nude, and is missing her head and both arms and hands. Yet she shines in the garden. Her gown or robe is beside her, on a small column. She is surrounded by calla lilies.

Venus is well-cared-for in Hearst Castle, which began as the residence of publisher William Randolph Hearst, and in 1958 was presented to California's state government as a state monument by the Hearst family in memory of William Randolph Hearst and his mother, Phoebe Apperson Hearst.

There are numerous statues of goddesses, some originals and some replicas, at Hearst Castle. Another statue of Venus arises from the outdoor "Neptune" swimming pool. The fountain statue, which represents Venus rising from the water, faces an ancient Greco-Roman temple. The image of Venus standing on a large shell, with cherubs around her as she uses both arms to adjust her hair, is reflected in the pool.

A very different image of Venus is presented elsewhere by Niki de Saint Phalle (1930-2002). The "Black Venus" sculpture (1965-1967) is black and also colorful. This Venus seems massive, with a large torso and very large thighs. Her head is much smaller. She appears in the style of the large goddess images of ancient Malta.

The painted polyester statue has numerous multicolor decorations, on her chest and upper legs. Extremely large bra cups cover her breasts. The right cup has a flower design, in yellow, light pink and a blue star symbol; the left cup has rainbow colors and a heart symbol. The cups are held up by white straps, in contrast to her black body.

Her midriff and upper thighs are also decorated in numerous colors. She seems to be wearing shorts with flower and heart symbols in a variety of colors.

What attracts the eye first, though, is the large heart symbol, mostly green and red, that extends over her genital area.

This Venus is active. Her left foot is lifted off the ground, while her right foot is grounded on a round disc or platform. Both arms are uplifted and hold a circular object that has a multicolored ribbon around it. Her head is lifted up in the direction of the object she holds. She seems in a celebratory mood, as though she is dancing.

"Black Venus" is in the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York.

The American public has found Venus an appealing sight in 2024, in some unusual locations. The "Bronze Eroded Venus of Arles" (2022), sculpted by Daniel Arsham (b. 1980), appeared at Tiffany's flagship store, called The Landmark, on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, New York. With a blue patina, fitting into the store's color scheme, Venus stands tall and opening her arms to welcome customers looking for jewelry and views of museum-quality art in a high-quality, high-priced store. The statue is modeled after a sculpture from the 1st century B.C.E., which is now in the Louvre Museum in Paris. Venus is popular with many Americans for many reasons.

## **VENUS AND POPULAR SONGS**

There have been songs to a goddess of love for as long as there have been voices to sing them.

In the modern United States, there have been many songs about love. At least three popular songs in the 20th and 21st centuries have called directly upon Venus, or spoken of her powers.

In 1959, Frankie Avalon sang a hit tune, "Venus," asking the goddess for her help in finding his love. The lyrics were by Ed Marshall.

The chorus lines are:

"Venus, goddess of love that you are,

Surely the things I ask

Can't be too great a task."

At the end of the song, he sings,

"Hey Venus, oh Venus,

Make my wish come true."

The song was a success. However, feminists probably winced at a sexist line; the singer tells Venus he wants "a little girl for me to thrill." But the tune was catchy, and the song reminded people that Venus might respond to a call for help in matters of love. And the singer did promise that if Venus gave him aid, he would "always be true."

A decade later, another song about Venus soared onto the music charts. A rock band called Shocking Blue released a song in Holland in 1969. The song was titled "I'm Your Venus," and the lyrics were by Robbie van Leeuwen. The song became a huge hit in the United States, and reverberations from it are felt today.

Shocking Blue, with one female singer, two male singers and a male drummer, focused on Goddess Venus as personified in the female singer. The first lines of the song identify the goddess:

"A goddess on a mountain top,

Was burning like a silver flame.

The summit of beauty and love,

And Venus was her name."

The chorus line asserts:

"I'm your Venus,  
I'm your fire, at your desire."

Coming at a time of activism, as the Second-Wave feminists publicly protested for women's rights, the song about Venus also became a song for independent women.

The band used modern technology and produced a video of their performance in 1969. They produced another video of the song in 2013.

An all-female group called Bananarama produced a video of the song in 2017. The video was very dramatic, with scenes of a woman acting independently in romantic situations, and also presenting scenes with a statue of Venus.

The three videos can be seen online today.

The goddess is also featured in a teenage male's view of "Venus in Blue Jeans," a 1962 hit by pop singer Jimmy Clanton, that reached No. 7 on the U.S. hit parade, and higher in Canada and Britain. He refers to his love interest as "Mona Lisa with a ponytail" and "a teenage goddess from above." He concludes, in a sexist line, "And she belongs to me."

Opera fans are familiar with a (male-oriented) view of Venus in *Tannhaeuser* (dweller in the house of Tann), composed in 1845 by Richard Wagner (1813-1883). Tann was an alternate name for Venus.

The hero is a German knight who stays with Venus in her Venusberg mountain cavern, a willing captive because he loves Venus. After he leaves, he is drawn to a mortal woman, and he repents his time spent with Venus.

The opera was first performed in Germany. It has since been performed in many countries, including the U.S.

## **VENUS AND THE MOVIES**

"One Touch of Venus," a movie starring Ava Gardner as Venus, was released in 1948. The film was distributed by Universal Pictures, and also starred Robert Walker, Dick Haymes and Eve Arden. This film was based on a 1943 Broadway musical and an 1885 book.

Venus is the focus of the post-war romantic comedy. A statue of Venus comes to life when she is kissed, and romantic episodes and complications follow. Venus, who is recognized as a goddess, spurns a wealthy suitor, but is attracted to a handsome, though poorer, young man. She even sings a love song. When she is called home to Mount Olympus, she returns to her pedestal and then to the heavens, but does not leave her young man bereft. Instead, she engineers a supposedly chance meeting between the man and a young woman whose name is Venus. This charming film occasionally appears on television today.

More than a decade earlier, in 1932, Paramount Pictures released a movie titled "Blonde Venus." The film was not about the goddess. But the star, Marlene Dietrich, evoked Venus in a publicity photo for the film. Her pose is eye-catching.

Her hair, blonde and fanning out around her head, her long black gloves against a black background, giving the impression that her arms were missing, and her light evening gown, and the lower red gown or robe draped at a slant across her hips, all create the impression of an ancient statue of Venus. With her eyes sultry under heavy makeup, and her closed red lips adding to the allure, she invited comparisons to Venus. The poster image is clear; next to her, the movie title, "Blonde Venus," is presented in large yellow print. Other details about the movie, including the names of the male stars (Herbert Marshall and Cary Grant), are in smaller, darker print. (The poster is bilingual, in English and German.)

## **VENUS AND POETRY**

Sometimes, words can express the feelings evoked by Venus. U.S. poets in the 19th and 20th centuries wrote about the goddess of love.

Emma Lazarus, who is known today for her poem about the Statue of Liberty, had a unique view of Venus. The 19th-century Jewish poet was driven to write her prose-poems by the plight of Jews suffering the Russian pogroms of the 1880s. Her poem "Venus of the Louvre" combines a view of a statue of Venus in the Louvre Museum in Paris with her knowledge of the experiences of Jews who were facing death in the pogroms.

She describes a statue of Venus that "glistens like a star," but is immortal. Lazarus' poetic mind sees not only the goddess but also the "pale, death-stricken Jew" at her feet. She saw that the dying Jew "sobbed farewell to love."

Poet Amy Lowell (1874-1925), of the notable Lowell family, wrote about "Venus Transiens." This poem was copyrighted in 1955 by the trustees of her estate.

Amy Lowell was inspired to write poetry after seeing the actress Eleonora Duse appear in Boston in 1902. Lowell became an Imagist poet, using clear, concise language to describe images. She edited anthologies of Imagist poetry, as well as her own poetry and writings. She had a feminist perspective and appreciated other women poets.

In "Venus Transiens," she asks, "Was Botticelli's vision/Fairer than mine..." She is welcoming a beloved person who is "Treading the sunlight" as the poet watches from the sands.

Poet Catherine de Vinck (1923-2021, died at age 99) came to the United States from Belgium, learned English, wrote volumes of poetry and raised six children.

In her poem "Venus — Aghia Sophia," she looks at Botticelli's vision of a newborn Venus and goes beyond that image. Using sophisticated language, she sees Venus as a goddess of wisdom -- "She is not to be taken lightly" -- and advises the would-be lover that "The lady made of moon-foam" could take the lover to "the universal heart of the fire."

There is a racial element in the images of Venus that are popular in the United States. Many of the pictures of Venus are light-skinned, though much of humanity is darker-skinned. A talented and insightful Black man in the United States wrote a poem about love to his wife and envisioned a different Venus.

Lewis H. Latimer (1848-1928) was an accomplished electrical engineer and innovator and a writer. His work as an engineer made life in the United States better for most people. The Lewis Latimer House Museum in Queens, N.Y., was scheduled to open in mid-2024.

Latimer, who was a self-taught inventor, draftsman and patent expert, with a family history of seeking to abolish slavery, was also an artist, flutist and poet.

Latimer wrote a poem to his wife, Mary Wilson Latimer, and its title and last stanza offer a deeper meaning of Venus in this world. The poem is titled "The Ebon Venus." The word "ebon" means "ebony." The poem was published in *The New York Age* in 1890. The complete poem is available online, and the final four lines call out to the hearts of lovers everywhere:

"O'er marble Venus let them rage  
Who set the fashions of the age;  
Each to his taste; but as for me  
My Venus shall be ebony."

Lewis Latimer died at the age of 80, but the loving spirit that shines in "The Ebon Venus" is timeless.

## VENUS AND HER PLANET

There is a planet that shines so bright in the sky that it has been called a star and likened to the sun and the moon. For millennia, human beings have looked up and marveled at the celestial light and called it by many names, including Morning and Evening Star.

Inanna of Sumeria ruled the Morning Star and Evening Star. When the Babylonians conquered Sumeria, Inanna became Ishtar, and eventually both were connected as Inanna-Ishtar. A symbol of Goddess Inanna-Ishtar was the eight-pointed star (sometimes a rosette) that also represented the planet we know as Venus.

By the time of Aphrodite of Greece, the planet, still thought of as a star, had a heritage of being connected with an important goddess and being considered a female symbol. The Greeks named the planet in honor of Aphrodite.

The rise of Rome into prominence brought a change of names for planets and stars. Goddess Venus was called "Stella Maris" (the "Star of the Sea," a title later given to the Christian Virgin Mary). The planet that shines so brightly as humans look up at daybreak and nightfall was considered the planet of Venus. The symbol of the goddess also appeared as the symbol of the planet. Astrologers continued using that imagery during the following centuries.

Today, astronomers present the symbol which was the sign of Goddess Venus as the sign of the planet Venus. Modern astronomers use the planetary names created by ancient Romans in honor of their (mostly male) deities, such as Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn and Pluto, and the female Venus. (By the way, the official statement from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, or NASA, about the planet asserts that Venus is "the only planet named after a female god." As previously mentioned, there is a dwarf planet named for Goddess Ceres.)

Planet Venus is the second in order from the sun. Venus orbits our sun from 67 million miles away. A poetic description of this planetary pattern, by Lawrence Durdin-Robertson

(see Sources), shows Venus, through retrograde motion while orbiting, tracing a "five-petaled flower" in outer space.

Ancient Romans probably looked at the planet and thought of the loving and beautiful attributes of Goddess Venus. United States astronomers share some of that romantic feeling. When looking at Venus' planet, they added to its Goddess heritage. On their maps of the planet, they have noted places named for three additional goddesses: the Ishtar Terra, a rocky highland area; Aphrodite Terra, and a deep canyon named for Goddess Diana.

Venus is a friendly goddess. She would probably welcome sister goddesses as guests on her planet.

Constantino Brumidi's painting shows a young Venus, active and aware of the importance of communication. The distinctive elements of this scene are more than equaled in the last group in this memorable artwork.

## **MINERVA**

The final grouping centers around Minerva as the goddess of wisdom, education, science, technology, sometimes war, and thriving civilization. There are several surprises in this imagery.

When Thomas Crawford rearranged the imagery of the Statue of Freedom due to the objections by Jefferson Davis, he apparently added a helmet like that of Minerva. But he went on to add an eagle and feathers, thereby changing the helmet to a new and different image.

In Brumidi's painting, Minerva stands tall and fully dressed as she educates three men of science, two workers, a male educator and a group of children and young students. This image in itself is revolutionary.

During many centuries, in a variety of cultures, women and girls have been banned from schools and universities. They have been excluded from scientific labs. They have been forced to hide their books and implements. They have been encouraged to rely on showing their emotions and hiding their intelligence. Even today, there are societies and groups of people that refuse to allow girls to be educated, especially at the more advanced levels.

In many places, past and present, women have not been permitted to be lecturers, particularly before groups of men. Brumidi's image of Minerva in this painting would be a revelation to women in many places in the world today.

In Brumidi's painting, Minerva wears a plumed helmet, Roman in style. Her mid-length red cloak is draped over her shoulders, and her pale gown, with an overskirt, falls gracefully to her feet, shod in sandals. Her right hand holds a spear as tall as she is.

As she looks down toward Benjamin Franklin, she holds out her left arm and gracefully points an index finger at an electrical experiment that Franklin is trying (with Leyden jars). She is tall and elegant and dominates the discussion.

Alongside Benjamin Franklin are two other scientists, Samuel F. B. Morse and Robert Fulton. However, Brumidi has changed the picture in a meaningful way. The character portraying Morse actually has the features and white beard of Thomas U. Walter, then-Architect of the Capitol.

There are two workers laboring in front of the scientists. One of them appears to be bare-chested, as seen from the back. There is also a printing press near the workers.

Behind Minerva are five young students and an educator. At first glance, this seems to be an all-male gathering. But a closer look shows that the face of a young person at the farthest position up, behind Minerva's red cloak, seems to be that of a girl. Such a coeducational group may have been unusual at the time; it could still be startling in a number of societies today.

There is an additional surprising part of this section of the painting. Through the clouds appears a rainbow (possibly a symbol of Iris), faint at first, then shining brightly as it arches down behind Benjamin Franklin and into the space near Samuel Morse/Thomas U. Walter. The rainbow as a whole crosses over between the grouping with Ceres, Flora and Pomona to the grouping with Minerva.

## **MINERVA: ORIGINS**

The Roman poet Ovid saw Minerva as "the strong goddess." She had the strength of mind, spirit and presence to become a figure of great power in a number of European societies. She crossed the ocean to the United States, where she has been honored as a goddess of wisdom and creativity, intelligence and invention, the arts of civilization and military skill and bravery.

Minerva was an Etruscan goddess. Her land was called Etruria, and was located in central Italy. The Etruscan people, as pioneering archeologist Marija Gimbutas (1921-1994) noted, were matrifocal and preserved matrilineal succession. Individuals were given the mother's name only, households focused on the activities and interests of women, and women could own property, were literate, and participated in public matters.

Like many people in Old Europe, as Gimbutas named the pre-patriarchal civilization in Europe, the Etruscans honored numerous goddesses and some gods. In their language, which was not Indo-European, the goddess known today as Minerva had several names, or spellings of the same name. They may have been different aspects of the same goddess, who was called Menerva, Meneruva, Menrva or Menrfa. The Etruscans considered Menrva their thunderbolt goddess, revered by artisans, musicians and physicians.

Menerva was important enough to be part of a goddess triad (or triple goddess image). Outside the Etruscan city-state of Veii, in the Portonaccio area, as previously mentioned, was a temple, which has been dated to the last quarter of the sixth century B.C.E. The temple was dedicated to Menerva (or Menrva) and other goddesses.

Etruscans believed in the sacredness of a goddess triad, and in the special nature of the number three. The Etruscans predated the Romans, and, at their height in the eighth through the sixth centuries B.C.E., traded with the Greeks and others in the western Mediterranean area, had colonies in southern Italy, and ruled the area we know as Rome. The Etruscan Tarquin kings built the Capitoline Temple in Rome; they dedicated the temple to a triad that included Menerva.

Toward the end of the sixth century B.C.E., the Etruscans suffered a series of military defeats, and they eventually became part of the Roman Empire. But when the Romans took over, they maintained some Etruscan practices and forms (including the toga clothing). Menerva, whom Etruscans sometimes depicted with wings, had been a peaceful goddess, involved with household tasks like spinning and weaving. She adapted to the Roman culture.

The Greeks had called her Athena. The Romans looked to the Etruscan culture and named her Minerva (the name we call her today).

The Romans had overcome the Etruscan Tarquin kings in 509 B.C.E. However, they kept the Capitoline Temple and made it a central part of the Roman religion. They rededicated the temple. The Capitoline Triad, for Roman worshipers, was composed of three goddesses: Juventas, Juno and Minerva. Juventas was the Goddess of Youth, and her sanctuary predated that of Jupiter. Juno was the major goddess of Rome, and protectress of everything involving women. Minerva was the Goddess of Wisdom.

As Rome became a militaristic empire, the Capitoline Triad remained sacred, but certain changes were made. Juventas was replaced by the god Jupiter (as Jove), and wise Minerva became the warriors' goddess of the defense of the empire.

When Julius Caesar wrote about his military exploits, he redefined the goddesses of the people he conquered. For example, he falsely asserted that the Celts had only one goddess -- Minerva. It is a historical fact that the people who were known as the Brigantes, who lived in parts of the British Isles, France and Spain, worshiped a triple goddess called Brigit (or Brighid, earlier known as Brigantia); the Romans separated her aspects and redefined them. One of the trinity was a goddess involved in healing and another dealt with metalworking crafts; the Romans united them as Minerva. (Another of Brigit's aspects became known as Juno, honored as the Queen of Heaven.) Sulis, goddess of the waters at Bath in England, was able to keep her name in part; under Roman rule, she became Sulis-Minerva or Sul-Minerva.

In addition to being an important goddess of the Roman Empire, Minerva was a goddess of the people. She was honored and invoked in people's lives.

## **MINERVA AND FESTIVALS**

Ovid noted that Minerva extended her protection to the olive yards of Romans' country homes. He also described the annual festival centered on Minerva.

The Quinquatrus, or Quinquatria, was a five-day festival and was considered a celebration of the birthday of Minerva. It was held in Rome five days after the Ides of March. This festival was seen as the holiday of scholars and schoolmasters, musicians and singers, weavers, various craftspeople, artists and sculptors, and others who worked with their hands.

This festival also embraced people who honored goddesses in addition to Minerva. For those who combined worship of Minerva with honoring the Greek goddess Athena, this festival became a double celebration every five years, when the Panathenaia was held (though the Greeks held that festival for Athena in July).

For those who honored the Egyptian goddess Isis as well as Minerva, the second day of the Quinquatria festival included the Pelusia, a religious festival centered on ensuring the next annual inundation of the Nile River.

Minerva had three major temples in Rome, on the Capitoline Hill, the Aventine Hill, and the Caelian Hill. She was considered one of the mothers of the Muses. She was connected to the Greek goddesses Athena and Pallas.

As times changed, and powerful societies rose and fell in Europe, the images of Minerva and the views of her powers changed. Patriarchal religious authorities tried to portray goddesses, once seen as powerful, as merely children or spouses of dominant male deities.

However, European women continued to honor Minerva. An early Christian writer, trying to intimidate these women, looked at women who were spinning and weaving, and claimed that if they called on Minerva when they began to spin, it would be a sin and would send them to hell.

## **MINERVA AND ARTISTS**

By the 17th century, Minerva, who was sometimes merged with Athena, was considered under the control of male deities, such as Jupiter, and as the helper of male heroes intent on killing powerful females, such as Medusa.

The 17th-century artist Rene-Antoine Houasse (1645-1710) painted a series of artworks about Minerva. However, most of them displayed a patriarchal version of her, with overtones of male-oriented myths about Athena. His 1688 painting of "The Birth of Minerva" portrays Minerva as a male-created offspring of Jupiter.

The painting includes a few goddesses (Diana, an ethereal Juno, and a fully armored Minerva) and a majority of gods (including Jupiter, Mercury, Vulcan and others). It is clearly

based on the male-oriented myths about the birth of Athena. A helmeted Minerva with shield and spear is rising from a sleeping Jupiter, with his eagle at his knee. Vulcan, behind Jupiter, cradles an ax, with which he created a furrow in Jupiter's head to allow the offspring to emerge. The myth obviously presents Minerva as a motherless deity owing allegiance to her divine father. This is a departure from the Etruscan-Roman goddess of wisdom and the arts of civilization.

Houasse did paint Minerva as a goddess powerful in her own right. He depicted her in another 1688 painting as "Minerva Watering her Horses into the Sea." She holds the reins. The large horses are in the water, and one bends down to drink.

In the 18th century, as portrayed by artists, Minerva became a transatlantic force. She went from France and Britain to the colonies in America, and then into the United States, where her presence in culture remains notable.

Minerva appeared in drawings and paintings in the American colonies in the years before the Revolutionary War. She was shown giving wise counsel to Liberty, or helping American patriots, such as Benjamin Franklin.

After the American victory at Yorktown, Francis Hopkinson, a patriotic leader and designer of the American flag, composed an opera honoring Minerva. Described in a Philadelphia newspaper, the opera, titled "The Temple of Minerva," featured Goddess Minerva guiding a young Goddess Columbia-America. The audience included political luminaries, such as the French minister and George and Martha Washington.

Minerva was painted by Charles Willson Peale in 1767, in London. He painted an image of a bust of Minerva in an artwork centered around the two sons of his friend and patron, John Beale Bordley. The boys were attending Eton, and the painting, done as a miniature, had educational overtones.

The large, detailed bust of Minerva, as the Roman Goddess of Wisdom, is near the boys; one boy holds a book, while the other points to a passage in the book. Behind the boys is a

small version of the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral. Minerva seems to be gazing at the boys, but she also might be looking at the cathedral of state-established Christianity. Peale saw no problem in presenting a goddess in proximity to an Anglican church, in a portrayal of wisdom and education, and a difference in religious views.

Peale exhibited this painting in 1768, and sent the miniature to Bordley in Maryland. A few years later, in 1771, Peale created a full-length picture of it, based on the miniature and his memory.

Minerva was honored by the people who participated in the American Revolutionary War. They created drawings and woven images showing Minerva with Liberty and American patriots. They admired her for her peaceful arts even more than her strategic military skills.

One exception was Minerva's appearance on the reverse side of the well-publicized 1783 Libertas Americana medal. As previously mentioned, Minerva appears as a warrior goddess. Representing the military might of France, she is successfully fighting the charging lion of Britain, and she is protecting the infant American nation. The combative Minerva does serve a peaceful purpose; designed by Benjamin Franklin and a French engraver, she is a tangible symbol of U.S. thanks to France for essential aid during the war of American independence.

During the second half of the 19th century, Constantino Brumidi painted a female warrior in a ceiling area of the Senate Reception Room. The scene is titled "War." (There also are scenes titled "Peace," "Freedom," and "Plenty.") Barbara Wolanin, as Curator for the Architect of the Capitol, considers the female warrior to be Minerva, but notes that her headdress, a helmet with stars and feathers, may reflect the helmet on Crawford's Statue of Freedom. Actually, this image could reflect a double goddess. The warrior may represent Minerva flying over the landscape, but also has features similar to Freedom Fighter. In addition, a cherub riding atop a flying bald eagle with arrows in its talons accompanies the warrior goddess. The cherub carries a fasces, symbolizing authority. Brumidi's sketches for this set of paintings show the female warrior with symbols connected with Minerva and Freedom Fighter.

Brumidi's image of Minerva in "The Apotheosis of Washington," inside the Capitol Dome, clearly is a peaceful image of a goddess educating her people. Portrayals of Minerva in the United States include images of her as a Goddess of Peace.

The U.S. Library of Congress displays a large marble mosaic called "Minerva of Peace," by Elihu Vedder (1836-1923). The mosaic overlooks the Great Hall in the Jefferson Building.

Minerva stands very tall and the spear in her right hand is pointed downward. She is looking to her left. Her brown hair is in a chignon, with a gold fillet in it. Her skin is light, and she seems brightly illuminated by the rays of the sun above her and to the right, rays that go into the clouds that are directly behind her.

Minerva wears a breastplate, with the image of Medusa on it. She also wears a pink gown with long sleeves loosely rolled up. A blue overgown or robe with an ornate design on the hem covers part of the gown. Her feet are bare as she stands on the green growing land.

Her left arm is curved as her left hand holds a scroll. Minerva contemplates the scroll, on which are written the many areas of her expertise and powers. There are twenty-six specialties listed on the scroll: education, mechanics, commerce, government, history, astronomy, geography, statistics, economics, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, poetry ... geology, botany, medicine, philosophy, law, politics, arbitration, treaties, army, navy, finance and art of war. (There is a term obscured; the artist may have listed "geography" twice.)

Two other goddesses are clearly depicted in this mosaic: Winged Victory and Medusa. Winged Victory stands beside Minerva, to the left. She is much smaller than Minerva, perhaps one-fourth her size. Winged Victory's golden hair winds around her face and over her shoulders. Her left arm is curved up a little, and she holds out a wreath. Her right arm is extended and she holds up a leafy branch. Her light gown is tied with a sash around her waist and hips, and the ends of the sash each float off toward her left. Her left wing and left arm are in front of the scroll that Minerva holds. Winged Victory stands barefoot on a globe, which is balanced on a pedestal.

Medusa appears twice in this picture, once on Minerva's breastplate, and also on a shield. Both images are usually associated with the Greek goddess Athena, yet have appeared with Minerva.

Medusa is a name that translates from the Greek as "Knowing Woman." She may have been an ancient goddess. She was one of three snake-haired sisters called the Gorgons. As a goddess, she may have been a goddess of the earth, although one Goddess researcher, Patricia Monaghan, believes she may have been an Anatolian sun goddess.

When patriarchal mythmakers recognized her as an opponent, they demoted her status to being a mortal woman. She still opposed them; one writer, Pausanias (2nd century C.E. Greek geographer), claimed she was a beautiful Amazon queen who led the Libyans of Lake Tritonis into battle against Perseus, who waited until darkness and killed her while she slept.

The negative account by Greek patriarchs that succeeded in demonizing Medusa pitted her against another goddess. Supposedly, Medusa somehow insulted Athena, who demoted her to being a Gorgon, and then arranged to have Perseus evade Medusa's deadly gaze and decapitate her. Of course, such an account omits the details of how such a fearsome female could also be a healer whose blood could bring the dead back to life, or how she could give birth to the beautiful winged horse called Pegasus.

Vedder presents both an attractive and a terrifying view of Medusa. The miniature that Minerva carries on her chest is the face of Medusa, stern yet comely, with hair, not snakes, on her head. The image on the shield, which lies on the ground at Minerva's feet, is large and frightening, more like a mask than a person.

Vedder's mosaic shows a variety of Goddess images. An owl, symbolic of wisdom, perches on a stone ledge behind Minerva, to her right. Vines, plants and buds surround the picture. A small female, who looks like a Neolithic goddess image, is near the ground to Minerva's left. She appears nude, and has an arm resting atop a very large helmet that is on the ground. The helmet has a ram (an animal sacred to the Goddess) depicted on it, and lies on top of the Medusa shield. Both the helmet and the shield seem to be implements of war

that have been lying on the ground for some time; plants have grown along their sides. Trees arise in the background, on each side of Minerva.

### **MINERVA'S POWERFUL IMAGE**

Minerva has a powerful image in the United States. She is at home in California and in Washington, D.C. She can be found with political leaders and military heroes, and in places of power and decision-making. She has also graced commercial exhibitions and commemorative coins. She appeared on U.S. and Confederate currency bills during the Civil War.

### **MINERVA OF CALIFORNIA**



Great Seal of California,  
Featuring Minerva, with Medusa.  
Courtesy of the California Secretary of State.

Minerva is featured on the Great Seal of California. This state seal was originally designed in 1849 by U.S. Army Major Robert S. Garnett and has been somewhat redesigned over the years, with Minerva retaining her central position. Today, Minerva is the public symbol of a state that, as of 2025, has the fourth-largest economy in the world.

Minerva of California appears on government documents (including state contracts, driver's licenses and marriage licenses), on state buildings and in courthouses. She appeared on postal envelopes during the Civil War, on currency bills for the U.S. and Confederacy, on special coins in the 20th century, in sculptures and on fruit (crate) labels. She appears in souvenir artworks, such as a plate with a relief of the California state seal. Such items are sold in Sacramento, the state capital.

She presides in dignity over a state with many natural resources and inventive and creative people. The multicolored state seal presents her protecting the land, the sea, a grizzly bear, a miner digging in the land, five ships sailing on the sea, a building nestled at the foot of mountains and hills, and snow-capped mountains in the misty background. Thirty-one five-pointed stars circle the sky. (California became the 31st state admitted into the United States in 1850.) The state motto, "Eureka," streams across the sky to Minerva's right.

The California goddess is seated while she keeps watch over her domain. She wears a golden helmet, which is in a Greek style; between the top of the helmet and the plume is an image of a winged horse (possibly Pegasus).

Her right arm curves up as she grasps her spear, which rises to the height of her plume. Her left arm curves down as she rests her left hand on her special shield. There are five-pointed stars circling the outer part of her shield. But the strength of the shield is the Medusa image in the center. This Medusa has wings and hair. A half-moon (or horns in the shape of a half-moon) crowns Medusa's head. Medusa's eyes look out at the peaceful scenery. However, the lower half of Medusa's face is obscured by a grizzly bear who stands near a tree log.

Minerva wears a red cloak around her shoulders, and a golden armband secures the cloak on her left shoulder. She wears a breastplate and a blue skirt that touches the ground. There seems to be a light belt over her midriff.

Minerva's hair curves into brown and gold curls around her helmet and down her neck. She is in profile toward her right, with her alert gaze and her closed lips showing her determination to protect California.

## **MINERVA AND WOMAN SUFFRAGISTS**

Minerva of California was praised by leaders of the U.S. woman's suffrage movement. In the *History of Woman Suffrage*, three of these leaders (Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage) wrote:

"The central figure in the seal of California is the presiding goddess of that State, her spear in one hand, the other resting on her shield, the cabalistic word 'Eureka' over her head and a bear crouching quietly at her feet. She seems to be calmly contemplating the magnificent harbor within the Golden Gate. The shadows on the distant mountains, the richly-laden vessels and the floating clouds indicate the peaceful sunset hour, and the goddess, in harmony with the scene, is seated at her ease, as if after many weary wanderings in search of an earthly Paradise she had found at last the land of perennial summers, fruits and flowers -- a land of wonders, with its mammoth trees, majestic mountain ranges and that miracle of grandeur and beauty, the Yosemite Valley. Verily it seems as if bounteous Nature in finishing the Pacific Slope did her best to inspire the citizens of that young civilization with love and reverence for the beautiful and grand..."

## **MINERVA AND THE MEDAL OF HONOR**

While many people in the United States saw a peaceful goddess of wisdom and education, people in the military services could look to her strategic aid and battle skills. Minerva appears on the nation's Medal of Honor, approved by Congress in 1863. This award is presented by the U.S. president to a member of the military for actions of bravery in combat above and beyond the call of duty.

The different branches of the military have their own medals of valor similar to the national Medal of Honor. The medals for the U.S. Army and the Navy feature Minerva. (The U.S. Air Force medal depicts the Statue of Liberty.)

## **MINERVA AND COINS**

Minerva symbolized the United States presence in two important expositions during the first half of the 20th century. Her portrait was placed on the official souvenir coins issued to commemorate the expositions.

The fifty-dollar gold coins commemorating the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition, with beautiful detail, were designed by Robert Aitken. Minerva is on the obverse, and is shown in profile, to her right. Curled strands of hair come from under her plumed helmet. The details of her eyes, nose and lips are clear. The motto "In God We Trust" is beside her helmet, to the right, and the date, before her image and toward the left, is rendered in Roman numerals.

This image of the head of Minerva resembles the portrait on the California state seal. The curls of hair seem similar; there is even a glimpse of her breastplate in the corner, on the viewer's left. There is a notable difference in the helmet: There is no winged horse between the helmet and the plume.

The reverse of the coin shows a large owl, symbolizing wisdom. The owl perches on a branch and is surrounded by pine cones and plants.

The wording on the edge of the obverse names the U.S. and gives the dollar value that the coin represents. The wording on the edge of the reverse names the exposition and specifies that the location is San Francisco.

This gold coin was issued in two forms: round and octagonal. The octagonal coin is slightly different from the round version. The basic images are a little smaller, and eight dolphins swim in the extra space between the edges of both the obverse and the reverse.

Twenty years later, Robert Aitken designed another coin featuring Minerva. The silver half-dollar souvenir coin was for the 1935 California-Pacific Exposition, which the guidebook (see Sources) lists as the San Diego-California-Pacific Exposition. Congress approved the coinage of the half dollars, which were minted in San Francisco in 1935, and in Denver bearing the date of 1936.

Minerva of California appears on the obverse, similar to her appearance on the state seal, with some variations. The seated and helmeted Minerva on this coin is facing to her left. Her helmet seems more Roman, with no winged horse.

Her left arm is outstretched, and her left hand rests on her shield, which bears the head of Medusa. A cornucopia flows down to the ground; it rests on the shield and is between Minerva and her shield. The cornucopia overflows with fruit or produce by the hem of Minerva's skirt.

Minerva's right hand grasps a spear, but directly in front of the spear is a bear, possibly a grizzly bear, whose face is turned to the bear's right. Minerva's gown, which may include armor, flows down as she sits on what looks like a flat pedestal. Under the pedestal is the name that appears on all U.S. coins, Liberty. Also behind the imagery of Minerva are faint images of mountains and sailing ships.

Although Minerva's presence on the obverse is reminiscent of the California state seal, R. S. Yeoman, the author of this guidebook, describes her image as "a seated female with spear and a bear..."

The reverse of the coin shows the observation tower and the California state building at the exposition.

## **MINERVA AND CURRENCY**

Minerva of California appeared on currency bills in the second half of the 19th century. The U.S. Five Dollar Notes (1870), National Gold Bank Notes, Large Size, show Minerva on the California state seal. She is on the back design, to the viewer's left. Minerva is central in the oval image. She faces the viewer, and is seated comfortably while a bear stands before her. The name "California" is at the top, and the motto "Eureka" is at the bottom.

The image in the center of this design shows a collection of gold coins, a Liberty coin atop the collection. The California connection is obvious, given the history of the California Gold Rush, and the popular view of California being a prosperous place. The calm presence of an American eagle, shown on the viewer's right, seems to endorse that perspective.

The Twenty Dollar Notes (1869), United States Notes (also called Legal Tender Notes), Large Size, show an armed female figure on the face design. She stands, knees bent, at the viewer's right. She is helmeted and her right arm holds up a shield. Her left arm holds what seems to be a spear pointed downward. Her gown reaches to the ground. She may be wearing a breastplate. This image may be Minerva.

Minerva, as a warrior goddess and as a maidenly goddess concerned with civilized arts, also appears on Confederate currency bills.

The Confederate One Hundred Dollar Notes (1861), National Bank Note Co., New York, show Minerva on the face design, to the viewer's left. She stands tall, and faces toward her left. She wears a helmet, a long dark cloak sweeps around her right side, and her right hand holds a wreath. Her light gown is long, and her left arm is extended outward. The center image is a railway train moving away from her, to her left.

Another set of Confederate One Hundred Dollar Notes (1861), Southern Bank Note Co./American Bank Note Co., New York, shows Minerva and Justice on the face design. Minerva is helmeted and to the viewer's right. She stands facing to her left. There appears to be a globe behind her, near her feet. She is on a pedestal that presents the number 100.

The Confederate Ten Dollar Notes (1861), B. Duncan, Columbia, S.C., have a clear image of Minerva on the face design. She is on the viewer's right, and she faces to her right. She is standing, and also leaning on a striped column to her left. She wears a plumed helmet, and a breastplate over her long gown. Her right hand holds a tall spear. She stands on a pedestal that shows the number Ten. The center image presents a scene featuring the Revolutionary War hero Gen. Francis Marion.

The Five Dollar Notes (probably 1861), Leggett, Keatinge & Ball, Richmond, Va., show Minerva on the face design, to the viewer's right. Minerva is helmeted and facing to her right. She wears a dark cloak over her light gown. She stands before a column on her left. Her pedestal bears the Roman numeral "V."

Keatinge & Ball printed similar Five Dollar Notes in 1861. One difference is that the pedestal spells out the number Five.

Minerva is present in today's United States in some everyday experiences. A reader of the *San Francisco Chronicle* on June 24, 2024, could see her in a crossword puzzle. The clue said "Roman goddess." The answer was "Minerva."

Brumidi's vision of Minerva emphasizes her confidence in educating human beings. Perhaps that was one of Brumidi's hopes while creating this great array of goddesses, divine maidens, gods and human beings inside the top of the U.S. Capitol.

## **STATUE AND PAINTING OF FREEDOM IN U.S. ARCHITECT'S DOCUMENT**

Freedom is the central image of sovereignty and human rights at the U.S. Capitol. She is on the inside and the outside of the Capitol. She is Constantino Brumidi's Freedom Fighter, and she is Thomas Crawford's Statue of Freedom. There is a document, an architectural drawing by Thomas U. Walter, Architect of the Capitol, that shows the placement of both images of Freedom. The drawing showing the statue at the top of the Dome was created in 1859. The watercolor image of Freedom and others on the inside canopy may have

been added by Brumidi in 1863. The Abraham Lincoln administration, and every administration since then, accepted the legitimacy of this drawing as a depiction of the two views of Freedom representing the essential values of the United States of America.

There are interesting similarities and differences in the two images, and there are important connections between the two artists.

## **TWO STRONG WOMEN**

One commentator has suggested that Brumidi's image of Freedom was based on Lola Germon Brumidi, the artist's wife. He did paint a portrait of her that showed her youthful dramatic looks, but there is no proof that she was the model for Freedom. She was very intelligent, financially astute, owning several houses, and came from a family connected with the theater and photography. Lola Germon Brumidi may have influenced Brumidi. She definitely aided him. But there seems to be nothing to directly connect her to the image of Freedom Fighter.

Thomas Crawford's wife, Louisa Ward Crawford, came from a notable family; her sister was Julia Ward Howe, writer, poet and composer of the Civil War anthem "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." But although Crawford sculpted a neoclassical bust of Louisa Ward Crawford, and she was strong enough to take control of his successful studio and numerous commissions upon his death, there is no indication that she was the model for the Statue of Freedom.

Both the Statue of Freedom and the painting of Freedom Fighter came into being during the Civil War. There were general and visible similarities between the two images.

## **SIMILARITIES**

Freedom's statue and portrait present her special insignia. Crawford's sculpture shows Freedom wearing a helmet topped by an eagle, and five-pointed white stars circling

the helmet. Brumidi's painting shows an eagle atop Freedom's helmet, and five-pointed white stars midway to the edge of the helmet.

Crawford's statue has a sword and a U.S. striped shield, as does Brumidi's image of Freedom. Both female images wear flowing gowns, with a cloak draped over one shoulder. Each vision of Freedom wears a brooch. Each stands tall, and seems strong and determined.

## **DIFFERENCES**

There are differences between the images of Freedom. Each has an eagle atop her helmet. Crawford's statue also shows the eagle with feathers and with talons hanging down over Freedom's ears.

Incidentally, an important part of the insignia helmet of the Statue of Freedom is similar to the insignia of a major goddess of Mesoamerica (among the Indigenous peoples of Central and South America). The Mayan goddess Ix Chel, whose title is Lady Rainbow, when depicted as young and beautiful, is shown with an eagle's talons and a feathered headdress. However, she has a companion, a screech owl. (Of course, when depicted as an older crone goddess, she has other, even more fierce symbols.)

Brumidi's Freedom Fighter appears to have a small eagle (without feathers or talons) perched atop her helmet. She also has a very large eagle at her side.

The Statue of Freedom holds a sheathed and tasseled sword in her right hand. In her left hand, she holds a laurel wreath (signifying victory) over a U.S. striped shield, which shows stars and 13 stripes. The tassel, which is an ornament tied around the sheathed sword, is both practical and symbolic. It is a visible sign that drawing the weapon from its scabbard would require a bit more time and thought than usual; the ornament also seems to show that Freedom is a unifying presence who could defend the people through action but prefers more peaceful means.

Brumidi's image of Freedom holds her sword up in her right hand, in the midst of winning her battle. Her Union shield, with its red stripes on a white background and a blue curved top, is held tipped to protect her upper left side. There are no stars on her shield, perhaps because the war against the breakaway states has not yet been fully won.

There are also differences in their clothing. The Statue of Freedom wears a costume that appears Native American, with a fringed robe over a fringed gown, each of which is decorated with small balls. The overrobe is flung over her left shoulder, like a cloak. Beneath it all seems to be a classical flowing gown. The balls appear above the left sleeve cuff, but not on the right sleeve. She wears no obvious armor.

Freedom Fighter wears a costume that appears European. Her gown flows over her legs, is lighter in color, and has long sleeves, only one of which is showing. That right sleeve is rolled up, to allow her to easily hold her sword. A red cloak is draped over her shoulders, and flowing down her back; part of it appears pink in the light shining through the heavenly clouds.

Freedom Fighter wears black armor, which protects her and warns her foes that her fight is serious.

Although each image of Freedom wears a brooch, that item of jewelry has different purposes.

The Statue of Freedom has a large brooch on her chest. The brooch is inscribed with the letters "U S," with the "S" inside the "U." This brooch proclaims that Freedom is the divinity and principle protecting and guiding the United States. The inscription also has the psychological effect of showing viewers that this image is about us, all of us. (Although viewers probably cannot see the brooch when looking up at the actual statue, photographs and digital images are available.) The brooch also displays a special ornamental decoration for Freedom's costume. The sculptor intended to show the brooch drawing together the lines of her robes, so that the lines appear like waves coming from the sun; Crawford sent photographs of his models for Freedom's statue to officials in the Capitol, and this

imagery of lines radiating from the brooch like sunrays is obvious. In addition, the brooch is an item of jewelry familiar to many women, and emphasizes the feminine aspect of this strong protectress of the nation.

The brooch worn by Brumidi's Freedom Fighter has no visible inscription and is relatively small. It appears pebbled and golden in color, and is pinned on Freedom Fighter's cloak, on her right side, where strands of her dark-brown hair are floating out from under her helmet. The brooch allows Freedom Fighter's cloak to fall away from her sword-arm, leaving her right arm to brandish her gold-hilted sword free of the rolled-up sleeve of her gown, and beyond the reach of her red cloak.

Her brooch gives Freedom Fighter a chic flair unusual in a battle scene.

Freedom Fighter wears black armor because she is prepared to battle each villain she faces. Freedom's statue has no need of visible armor because she has already vanquished those who wanted to deny her existence.

These differences also are reflected in what each goddess stands upon. The Statue of Freedom stands on a cast-iron globe that bears the nation's motto: "E Pluribus Unum." She thereby presents a statement of national unity and global significance. Freedom Fighter, though taking action, is less certain of what she stands upon. Her left knee is bent, as though she is in motion, and she appears to stand on the ermine-lined cloak spread out over three of her opponents, including the sprawling man with a scepter (possibly Emperor Maximilian). The Statue of Freedom standing tall atop the high Dome of the Capitol seems to be a goddess of sovereignty, while Freedom Fighter inside the dome seems to be a goddess of karmic justice. Both represent aspects of cosmic Freedom.

## **COSMIC FREEDOM: ADITI**

Millennia before Lady Freedom ascended the Dome of the U.S. Capitol, the mighty goddess representing Freedom rose to consciousness and, according to those who honored her, created the universe we live in. Free and unbounded, she gave birth to the stars

and galaxies, to our sun, our moon, and our planet Earth. People on Earth who honored her considered her the Womb of Space, and, lifting their eyes to the heavens, called her the Goddess of Space, and Mother Space, the mother of all life.

We know her today as Aditi, the primordial goddess acknowledged (nearly 80 times) in the Vedic hymns of India (c. 1200-500 B.C.E.). However, she is older than the Vedas.

As the Supreme Being and the originator of life, with no male consort, Aditi was considered the mother of deities in ancient Iran, and became the mother of all deities as worship of her spread to pre-Vedic India. Janet and Stewart Farrar proclaim, in their book about *The Witches' Goddess*, "In India, Aditi was the self-formed Cosmic Matrix, mother of the Sun and the Moon, and ultimately of everything else."

Seen by some modern people as a sky goddess, and honored by others as a sun goddess, she has been described as the deity who brought order out of chaos, creating a moral balance within the cosmos.

This everlasting goddess also has been seen as the Cow of Light, the Cow of Heaven, whose milk, from her own body, created the Milky Way galaxy. Some accounts in our day say that a later major goddess, the popular Lakshmi, was created from Aditi's milk. And even patriarchal male religious authorities and scholars have considered her the mother of major male deities and spirits.

Aditi, who is still honored in India today, is beyond the limits of time. As the goddess known as Freedom, she has been called upon for protection and aid by countless human beings. Petitions to her are mentioned in the Vedic hymns. One such hymn presents a petitioner asking the unbound goddess to free the person, who is tied up like a thief.

Aditi is recognized today, in the United States, for representing freedom. Amythest, a modern witch (or Wiccan), writes of her, "Festivals, art, and literature often pay homage to her, depicting her as a symbol of boundless sky and freedom. ...She embodies the concept of spiritual freedom and the breaking of constrictive boundaries that limit our potential."

In 1865, when Constantino Brumidi reached up to present an image of the Goddess of Freedom, he portrayed her as embodying a type of karmic justice. Aditi is not directly portrayed in Brumidi's painting, but she is the forerunner of his vision of freedom.

## **KARMIC JUSTICE RESOLVED**

The portrait of Freedom Fighter contains an example of karmic justice resolved, in the image of Jefferson Davis.

Crawford's first two versions of the statue faced objections from Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, the official in charge of relevant decorations for the new extensions of the Capitol. Davis wanted a female statue that was more militant and yet not clearly reminiscent of Liberty. He adamantly objected to the Phrygian Liberty Cap atop the second imagery of the statue. Crawford changed his design, added Native American overtones and a helmet topped with an eagle's head, feathers and talons, and Davis approved the design. Davis, a major slaveholder from the South, did not want slaves in Southern states looking to the Capitol and seeing the possibility of Liberty.

When Freedom Fighter emerged in the Capitol, Davis, who was by then president of the Confederacy of breakaway slave states, was frantically trying to prevent final defeat by the Union in the Civil War. The national image he had tried to hide from view at the Capitol had become more militant and powerful. As she wields her sword, she looks out in his direction, and the representation of Jefferson Davis runs away in fear. Freedom, whom Davis had forcibly separated from the symbols of Liberty, is victorious over the patriarchal slaveholders. Davis, who had identified as a free-born U.S. leader, is shown as a torch-bearing zealot, full of fear and incapable of defending himself or his collaborators against one strong female.

This picture of Freedom as karmic justice is present today, and will be for generations to come.

## CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE TWO ARTISTS

Just as there are connections between these two images of the Goddess of Freedom, there are connections between the two talented artists who brought these images into our reality.

Thomas Crawford and Louisa Ward Crawford came from the United States to Rome, Italy, where he pursued his training as a sculptor. Constantino Brumidi had been born in Rome, where he trained as a painter from his early teens. Both men focused on their art; Brumidi even received commissions from wealthy patrons and the Vatican.

Both men had views about freedom and political questions of the time. In 1848, when freedom-oriented revolts convulsed Europe, things changed in Rome. Members of the populace wanted to overthrow papal authority and establish a republic in Rome. A civic guard was formed and both Crawford and Brumidi served in the civic guard, Brumidi rising to the rank of captain.

They may have met and talked. Crawford may have told Brumidi about the new construction projects at the U.S. Capitol, where new wings were being built or changed, and artistic decorations would be needed.

In 1848 and for several years afterward, Italians attempted to create a popularly supported republic. The pope resisted, and was aided by French troops sent by the French monarch. The revolt failed. As previously mentioned, Brumidi was arrested, tried, and imprisoned. Then he received a papal pardon, and soon left Italy for the United States, where he could practice his art. He found his way to the U.S. Capitol.

Crawford accepted a commission for the Statue of Freedom that was meant to stand atop the new Dome of the Capitol. Brumidi probably saw a photograph of the final model of Crawford's statue, or even the plaster model received at the Capitol. He might have seen the picture of Lady Freedom that appeared on U.S. currency in 1861 and 1862.

By the time Freedom's statue was placed on the top of the dome in 1863, Brumidi was already planning Freedom's appearance inside the dome. He included her insignia, brooch and weaponry, basically as envisioned by Crawford, who had died in 1857, but whose artistry survived.

The connections between these two men transcended death. Crawford had accepted a commission to sculpt a frieze showing significant moments in the history of the Americas. The frieze was meant to be placed in the Rotunda of the Capitol, below the painting in the canopy. But Crawford died before he could start the frieze.

Brumidi, who often painted in a three-dimensional style that resembled sculpture, embraced the idea of the frieze. He sketched the idea of the frieze in 1859, about two years after Crawford's death.

Circumstances changed, especially with the Civil War and its aftermath. In 1876 he proposed to Congress that he finish the Rotunda work by painting the frieze. In 1877, he did sketches (called "cartoons"), and in 1878 he started painting the frieze, ensuring that Crawford's commitment would be fulfilled. Brumidi's work on the frieze included realistic images of Native Americans in the United States and Mexico.

Unfortunately, Brumidi was not able to finish the frieze. He worked on the frieze until the day before he died in 1880. Other artists (first Filippo Costaggini, and later Allyn Cox) finished the frieze. Costaggini followed Brumidi's designs.

Crawford and Brumidi -- two Freedom-loving artists who shared an affinity for presenting goddesses in their artworks, were married to strong women, and showed a desire to bring beauty to the United States Capitol -- left a legacy for generations to marvel at and enjoy.

## **WE NEED TO SHINE A LIGHT ON IMAGES OF FREEDOM**

Learning about the Statue of Freedom and the painting of Freedom Fighter can be inspiring. But even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Common Era), it can be challenging. We need to shine a light on images of Freedom.

There are not many accurate books or other writings, or movies and videos, that portray the cultural and artistic views of Americans of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Original items that can be found at auctions, for example, may show images of goddesses, but offer almost no detailed explanations. Materials about Goddess-oriented cultures focus on other parts of the world, not the U.S.

The few books that mention United States goddesses, such as Liberty, Freedom and Columbia, do not offer much context. In regard to Freedom, some are overly selective, showing one form of Freedom, such as Crawford's statue, and ignoring or downplaying another, such as Brumidi's painting.

Respected historians can fall into that trap. Eric Foner, for example, in his book, *The Story of American Freedom*, pays attention, with text and photos, to the Statue of Freedom, but does not mention the Brumidi painting of Freedom. However, he may have been unaware of this additional vision of Freedom.

The few materials that discuss or show Brumidi's canopy artwork offer little or no mention of Freedom's statue. In addition, they tend to blend Freedom into the crowd of figures in the artwork.

The United States Capitol Historical Society (USCHS) is an organization that publicizes, has presentations, and sells materials about the Capitol. The USCHS promotes and sells accurate and beautiful copies of the Statue of Freedom. It also offers items showing Brumidi's "The Apotheosis of Washington." However, it provides little information or emphasis regarding the presence of Freedom in the painting. It presents minimal

information about the other goddesses in the painting, and it does not recognize the importance of the Goddess symbol of the rainbow (possibly a symbol of Goddess Iris).

The USCHS, however, is a rare and essential source of materials about the Capitol. And it honors the presence of United States goddesses as part of the cultural heritage of the United States.

Some viewers may find it difficult to acknowledge two visions of Freedom. Yet many civilizations, ancient or modern, have honored important and powerful goddesses who have several images, names and areas of action and focus. This is part of human culture around the world.

Freedom is a particularly essential value in the United States. And both the Statue of Freedom and Freedom Fighter are strong images of what people in the United States deeply care about.

When 470,000 protesters gathered in a huge Women's March on Jan. 21, 2017, in Washington, D.C., they were calling for women's rights and women's freedom, in the United States and around the world. Feminist Gloria Steinem addressed the sea of women, who wore pink hats (in protest against the inauguration day of misogynistic and racially biased President Trump).

In the city where two visions of Goddess Freedom reached out to strengthen and protect women in the nation, and the world, Gloria Steinem said to these women and their male allies, "...We will not be controlled, we will work for a world in which all countries are connected. God may be in the details, but the (G)oddess is in connections. We are at one with each other ... no more asking daddy. We are linked. We are not ranked."

This Women's March was considered the largest single-day march in the history of the nation. Estimates of the number who marched that day in the United States ranged from 3.2 million to over 5.2 million people.

This was not the only Women's March of the day. City by city, country by country, even in Antarctica, women, and men, marched. Estimates were that over 7 million people participated in the Women's March worldwide.

The United States goddesses and their sister goddesses have graced the Dome of the U.S. Capitol for 160 years. When I wonder if the present generation of Americans, or future residents of the United States, will know of the protection and commitment of the Goddess of Freedom and the Goddess of Liberty, I remember Phillis Wheatley's proclamation, "Lo! Freedom comes."

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Presents a comprehensive biography of Brumidi, and numerous color photos of his artwork featuring many goddesses painted within the U.S. Capitol. Also shows conservators on scaffolds at work preserving the fresco image of Freedom Fighter (page 184).

Also see information and photos of Brumidi's portraits of Ceres and Flora in "The Four Seasons" painting in the U.S. Capitol (pages 56-57) and the information with sketches and photos of Brumidi's female warrior, possibly a combination of Minerva and Freedom Fighter (pages 111-115).

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Also see C.W. Peale including Minerva in a painting (page 35), a brief discussion of the Phrygian Liberty Cap (page 42), information about Peale painting images of Venus (page 61), information about Peale painting images of other goddesses important to Americans (throughout the article), the first stanza of Tom Paine's song about the Goddess of Liberty and "The Liberty Tree" (page 67) and color photos of the state seals of New Jersey and New York (page 127). As of 2025, this article can be found at the Smithsonian Institution's American Art and Portrait Gallery Library.

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Amythest. "Aditi, the Sky Goddess -- Unveiling the Mysteries of Ancient Vedic Mythology."  
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#### ITEMS OF INTEREST:

Description on a box containing a bronze commemorative sculpture of the Statue of  
Freedom. An inside note states the sculpture was "created from the original 1863-65  
steps of the United States Capitol, removed in 1995 renovation." Produced by the United  
States Capitol Historical Society, in Washington, D.C., 2004.

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"Today's Crossword" (52 Down, about Iris). Published in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 11, 2024 (page B11).

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Numerous factual details are courtesy of Wikipedia computer sources.

Many thanks to Bob Egelko for his supportiveness and aid in research, editing, typing and seeing this endeavor through to completion.

Appreciation and thanks to California artist Bulbul for her Goddess graphics included here.

One of her graphics presents Goddess Liberty wearing her Phrygian Liberty Cap and holding a down-pointed sword. Another features Liberty, wearing her Phrygian Liberty Cap and holding a large peace symbol, walking across the globe beside a young girl wearing a peace symbol on her garment.

Two others, which originally appeared in *The Wise Woman*, acknowledge the inclusive Goddess who creates all of Nature and who helps human beings.

One portrait shows the Goddess holding out her arm to allow a young girl to stand on her celestial hand and read a book titled *The Goddess in Us*. The Goddess, covered in vines and leaves, her sleeve patterned with flowers, and a planetary globe positioned on her headdress, shows a wide smile as she looks at the girl reading about her.

Another image of the inclusive Goddess shows her at work, knitting flowers, mushrooms and plants for the Earth. Behind her are mountains and a hill, and a stream or river. Above her is a crescent moon and floating clouds.

The staff, especially Leslie Matthaei, at the office of the Architect of the Capitol, in Washington, D.C., has been particularly helpful in contributing closeup color photography of the goddesses in Constantino Brumidi's artwork, "The Apotheosis of Washington." They also provided a special photo of the Statue of Freedom.

The United States Capitol Historical Society graciously granted permission to include images of their poster and a large postcard depicting Brumidi's "The Apotheosis of Washington" painting, and a photo of the box which features a cover picture of the Statue of Freedom. The box also contains a specially-created replica of the statue using materials from the 1863-1865 U.S. Capitol.

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NOTE: Due to the circumstances of this publishing effort, accent marks above or below names in the text have not been included.

