The Statue of Freedom, created by American sculptor Thomas Crawford, represents the ideals of American liberty, national independence, sovereignty, and the protection of the United States.

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Installed atop the U.S. Capitol dome in 1863, during the Civil War, the statue carries a particularly meaningful message:

Freedom must be protected, preserved, and defended.

Its original name was Freedom Triumphant in War and Peace. It was designed to symbolize a nation capable of defending its liberty while striving for peace.

What the individual symbols mean

Symbol	Meaning
⭐ Nine stars on her helmet	National identity and the American ideal of freedom
🦅 Eagle headdress	American strength, independence, and a reference to Indigenous dress
🛡️ Shield with 13 stripes	Protection of the United States and its original colonies
⚔️ Sheathed sword	Readiness to defend freedom, rather than an active call to war
🌿 Laurel wreath	Victory, honor, and achievement
US U.S. brooch	National identity and allegiance to the United States
🌎 Globe beneath her	The nation and its place among the peoples of the world

These details are documented by the Architect of the Capitol.

Architect of the Capitol+1

The historical detail that makes this statue especially interesting

There is a significant story behind the change to her design.

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Crawford originally designed Freedom wearing a liberty cap, a traditional symbol associated with emancipated slaves in ancient Rome. The symbol was also adopted during the American and French Revolutions.

However, Jefferson Davis, then Secretary of War, objected to the liberty cap. He argued that it was inappropriate for Americans because they had supposedly been born free. Davis requested a helmet instead.

The design was changed, and the final statue received its distinctive eagle-inspired headdress.

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There is a historical irony here: Jefferson Davis later became president of the Confederacy, while the statue was finally installed in 1863, during the Civil War.

Even more remarkably, an enslaved Black craftsman named Philip Reid played an essential role in casting the bronze statue. He was freed in 1862, before the statue was installed on December 2, 1863.

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