

## INTRODUCTION

“Within a Few Steps of the Spot”: Art in an Age of Racial Capitalism

A world compartmentalized, Manichean and petrified, a world of statues . . . that is the colonial world.<sup>1</sup>

**FRANTZ FANON**

Slavery and genocide do not have edges.<sup>2</sup>

**TIFFANY LETHABO KING**

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**CAN AN IMAGE INCITE CHANGE?** Let us approach this question by considering a moment in the mid-nineteenth century, when the American sculptor Hiram Powers sent his sculpture *The Greek Slave* for exhibition in the United States (fig. 0.1). Modeled in Powers’s Florence atelier in 1843, the white marble statue depicted a young Greek woman taken captive with her wrists bound by chains. It made its way through the artist’s home country on a meandering tour, appearing before audiences in New York, Boston, New Orleans, Philadelphia, and many other cities. By late 1850 *The Greek Slave* arrived in St. Louis, Missouri, where it drew glowing praise from newspapers as “faultless,” “a beautiful specimen of art,” and “perfect and life-like.”<sup>3</sup> One review stood out. Addressing the statue directly, an anonymous commentator for the abolitionist newspaper the *National Era* noted, “Within a few steps of the spot which thy presence is consecrating, maidens as pure and as sensitive as thou art are weekly bought and sold.”<sup>4</sup> This was in reference to the main slave market in downtown St. Louis, where enslavers trafficked human beings



FIGURE 0.2  
William Hackwood and Henry  
Webber for Josiah Wedgwood,  
Antislavery medallion, 1787, jasper-  
ware. The Metropolitan Museum  
of Art, Gift of Frederick Rathbone,  
1908.

until the abolition of slavery in the United States in 1865. *The National Era* suggests that Powers’s *Greek Slave*—on display in an entertainment hall across the street—stood not in a rarified space apart from that world but within it.<sup>5</sup> The sculpture’s presence there, the commentator reasoned, might move viewers to appeal to the justice of “those equally oppressed in [their] very midst.”<sup>6</sup>

Whether a statue like *The Greek Slave* could indeed do such work forms the central focus of this book, which interrogates the place of sculpture in the transatlantic fight to abolish slavery in the United States. In 1788, the English potter Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795) sent the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society a package of small jasperware medallions (fig. 0.2), each bearing a bas-relief of a kneeling Black man in chains encircled by the words, “Am I Not a Man and a Brother?”<sup>7</sup> Widely circulated in campaigns to outlaw the slave trade in the British Empire, Wedgwood’s medallion took on currency in the American context as well, quickly becoming a recognizable image to viewers on both sides of the North Atlantic. Over the course of the nineteenth century, it would be joined by a host of busts and statues by American and European artists

including Powers (1805–1873), John Bell (1811–1895), Edmonia Lewis (1844–1907), and Francesco Pezzicar (1831–1903), each of which gave visual form to the politics of abolition. Each of these artists helped shape and were shaped by a mass visual culture whose efflorescence would come to define the long nineteenth century, a time in which viewers faced more diverse ways to consume images.<sup>8</sup> Sculpture in particular was increasingly accessible and reproducible, whether in the form of small handheld medallions, tabletop figurines, or life-size statues seen by thousands on traveling tours, and this visibility primed it well for mobilization in projects of reform.<sup>9</sup>

Yet objects like the Wedgwood antislavery medallion or Powers's *The Greek Slave* were not always straightforward emblems of radical change, a premise that is borne out with renewed attention to their making, circulation, and reception. As the *National Era* suggests of the latter, the consumption of sculpture also unfolded in close proximity to the institution of slavery and the regimes of racialized value that ordered it. In this book I argue that sculpture stood at slavery's ends in conflicting and contradictory ways as it moved through a world contoured at once by the wide-reaching economies of enslavement as well as the international campaigns to refuse and abolish them. If the medium was a highly visible means of interrogating the politics of slavery, so too was it a deeply unstable one. The works of art under discussion in the following pages were categorically neither "good" nor "bad" images—a limiting and presentist rubric that has often governed past understandings of "abolitionist" imagery—but rather ones that came out of a world of aesthetic, political, and economic flux in which any vision of freedom proved challenging to articulate as visual and material fact.

What became an ineluctably paradoxical relationship between art and abolition in the nineteenth century was something that stemmed from ways the sculptural enterprise and medium overlapped modes of commerce and commodification constituted under enslavement and other forms of unfreedom under racial capitalism. First, sculpture's production and circulation—a capital-intensive, increasingly industrial enterprise—was embedded in flows of global trade connected to American plantation economies. Second, its reception was shaped by contemporary considerations of corporeality. Nineteenth-century concerns with the lifelike nature of sculpted bodies carved from marble, cast in bronze, molded from plaster, or fired in clay—long understood as measures of artistic virtuosity—were inextricable from hierarchies of race and subjectivity that shaped the institution of slavery and its regimes of bodily commodification. In making this central claim, *Sculpture at the Ends of Slavery* aims to revise and critique conventional art historical understandings of sculpture as both phenomenologically produced body and industrially made object. In so doing, it also seeks to contribute to interdisciplinary dialogues about race and justice by modeling a set of strategies for considering the possibilities and limitations of art in the pursuit of redress under capitalism.

In pursuing these lines of inquiry, this book takes an expansive approach to sculpture in the nineteenth century: where it was made, who paid for it, and the markets

and regimes of value it occupied and to which it stood adjacent. I thus conceive of sculpture as an entity that inhabited an interconnected transatlantic world that spanned merchants' exchanges and cotton factorage houses in the American South, quarries and studios in Italy, foundries and industrial manufactories in Britain, anti-slavery commemorations in Sierra Leone, African American Civil War soldiers' fairs in Boston, world's fairs, and touring shows. And while my focus rests primarily on the question of slavery's abolition in the United States, its scope necessarily exceeds those geographic bounds.<sup>10</sup> The making and reception of nineteenth-century sculpture was a transnational affair, as many scholars have shown, with artists from the world round converging on European cities such as Florence and Rome (and later, Paris) to access professional training, good materials, and collections of ancient and modern statuary.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the aesthetic, material, and financial demands of sculptural production in this period intersected a broader transatlantic hegemony of racial capitalism—what Cedric Robinson defines in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983) as a system founded upon and complicit with racial oppression borne out through enslavement, expropriation, and empire.<sup>12</sup>

This book's account of sculpture as a representational, transactional, *and* transnational object looks to shift understandings of the medium in a way that accounts for histories of enslavement that, as Robinson and other scholars of the Black radical tradition first argued, have been constitutive to a modern capitalist world order.<sup>13</sup> Enslaved labor, as W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in 1935, was “the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the English factory system, of buying and selling on a world-wide scale.”<sup>14</sup> If sculpture has long been understood as a vital force in modern culture and society, so too was its production, circulation, and consumption complicit with and enabled by a global capitalist economy forged by stolen labor. Furthermore, that sculptures—in particular those depicting enslaved and captive bodies—were able to traverse such a world opens onto deeper concerns about the medium's pernicious relationship to bodies commodified under slavery, or what Fred Moten has termed the figure of “the commodity who speaks.”<sup>15</sup> Put differently, what is at stake when we locate the history of racial capitalism at the center of the fraught relationship between “art” and “objecthood”?<sup>16</sup>

### “LIFE-LIKE”

Thinking about sculpture in the nineteenth century often involved a suspension of disbelief. The commentator for the *National Era* did not write about *The Greek Slave* so much as speak to it as if it were a sensing subject. And when the art critic Henry Tuckerman wrote his poetic ode to the same statue upon seeing it displayed in New York in 1847, he opened with two questions: “Do no human pulses quiver in those wrists?” and then, “Is no woman's heart now beating in that bosom's patient swell?”<sup>17</sup> Tuckerman engages *The Greek Slave* not as an inert stone thing but as an animate, pulsing body.<sup>18</sup> Several decades later, visitors to the sculpture galleries of the Philadelphia Centennial



FIGURE 0.3  
After Fernando Miranda, *The Statue of the "Freed Slave" in Memorial Hall*, 1876, wood engraving. Wallach Picture Division, New York Public Library.

Exhibition of 1876 variously described the bronze figure of a freedman as represented by Francesco Pezzicar's *The Abolition of Slavery* as "a faultless copy of the man," "alive" and "speaking."<sup>19</sup> Likewise, when the sculpture was featured in an engraving, it appeared in print not as a static work of art but as a man in motion, vigorously striding off his pedestal into a crowd of shocked and delighted fairgoers (fig. 0.3).

Such discursive play with sculptural ontology was not atypical for criticism and literature of the day. On the one hand, the traditional methods of art history might

lead us to make sense of the preceding descriptions in relation to an Ovidian speaking or living statue.<sup>20</sup> Since antiquity, the potential for a sculpture to be “life-like,” as one of the St. Louis newspaper correspondents wrote of *The Greek Slave*, was frequently a marker of valuation for artists and critics alike. On the other hand, nineteenth century preoccupations with the animacy of objects were as much political as they were aesthetic. Jennifer Roberts, following the work of Bill Brown, acknowledges how the rhetoric of the animate object was at once a key trope of material culture and “inseparable from debates about slavery.”<sup>21</sup> Still, questions of race and enslavement often linger at the periphery rather than the center of art historians’ inquiries into the agency of objects in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century material culture.<sup>22</sup> Recent work by Wendy Bellion and Amelia Rauser has begun to address this lacuna by taking seriously the “sense of lifelikeness” attributed to statuary and shedding essential light on how the imagined vitalism of sculptural forms intersected calcifying racial hierarchies in transatlantic spaces of the late eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup> What still remains unaccounted for are the ways that shifting conceptions of the sculptural from that moment into the nineteenth century have been perpetually yoked to a crisis of racialized subjectivity—what Frantz Fanon would describe as “this crushing objecthood” (*cette objectivité écrasante*)—that endures into present configurations of white supremacy.<sup>24</sup>

*Sculpture at the Ends of Slavery* looks across disciplines to legal and literary theory in order to articulate the stakes surrounding historical confluences of sculpted forms and human bodies. As Sianne Ngai reminds us, “to be animated in American culture is to be racialized in some way.”<sup>25</sup> Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American law conceived of enslaved African American people as objects of property, subjecting human life to what the legal scholar Cheryl Harris describes as “the ultimate devaluation” of personhood to a condition of market alienability.<sup>26</sup> Stephen Best similarly writes of slavery as a central ordering force in modern constructions of property, race, and personhood, which he in turn places in a genealogy of post-Enlightenment Anglo-American theories of the dual nature of the body as not only a corporeal entity but symbolic of larger networks of socioeconomic relationships.<sup>27</sup> Best argues that these concerns about the fungibility of corporeality, specifically as they were articulated in William Blackstone’s influential *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–1769), were reconfigured as cornerstones of American property law by the nation’s white male framers.<sup>28</sup> As core concepts ordering the body politic, these ideas came to bear distinct consequences for practices of representation across performance, literature, and other media from the eighteenth century to the present moment.<sup>29</sup> This book extends ideas explored by Best by demonstrating how the development of the art market, and the aesthetic theories and hierarchies that fueled it, also emerged in lockstep with the machinations of racial capitalism over the course of the long nineteenth century. Conceptions of sculpture’s vitalism—what I understand as sculptural animacy—stemmed from the same Enlightenment notions of fungible corporeality marshalled to justify slave law and the commodification of human life.<sup>30</sup>

A central preoccupation throughout this book, then, is to look at the aesthetic, racial, and political ramifications posed by “life-like” statues in an age of abolition, particularly those that depicted captive figures. Even when mobilized in the context of opposition to slavery, the representation of the enslaved subject is always an act laden (and latent) with the dispossessive violence of slavery.<sup>31</sup> Art historians before me have in turn paid careful attention to what it meant to represent the enslaved in three dimensions—a medium that was, by the nineteenth century, already tethered to hierarchical ideas of racial difference and bodily possession. Neoclassicism remained the lingua franca of academic art and the sculptor’s education well into this moment, with writings of critics like Johann Joachim Winckelmann extolling the virtues of marble bodies whose lithe forms harkened back to an imagined Greek past.<sup>32</sup> Charmaine Nelson has discussed how such theories foreclosed possibilities for representing Black subjects by assuming a beau idéal of white subjects in white marble.<sup>33</sup> Nelson’s study, in addition to scholarship by James Smalls, Kirsten Pai Buick, Kirk Savage, Michael Hatt, and Joy Kasson has shed vital light on the ways sculptural depictions of enslaved Black subjects are rife with visual and ideological instabilities—in terms of the materials from which they were modeled, carved, or cast, as well as the subjects they depict.<sup>34</sup> We are thus primed to see how an image like Josiah Wedgwood’s antislavery medallion not only reinforced racial hierarchies in its representation of a supplicant African man beneath the text “Am I Not a Man and a Brother,” but, moreover, in the very fact of its materiality. In language hauntingly similar to Thomas Jefferson’s racist assessment of dark skin as an “immoveable veil of black” in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), Wedgwood described in the very same year of his development of jet black jasperware as an impermeable ceramic “body” that might take colors “through its whole substance.”<sup>35</sup> If sculpture was a singular medium “to say something” about the histories of slavery and emancipation, as Freeman Henry Morris Murray compellingly observed as early as 1916 in his landmark study of the topic, it was still one indelibly fraught with contradiction.<sup>36</sup>

This book adds to these existing understandings of the racialized materiality of sculpture by lending further attention to the economic regimes enfolded in dominant understandings of the aesthetic and the racial in nineteenth-century America and Europe. Kathryn Yusoff’s remarks on the geologic are helpful here. She writes, “The process of geologic materialization in the making of matter as value is transferred onto subjects and transmutes those subjects through a material and color economy that is organized as ontologically different from the human.”<sup>37</sup> In recognizing these ontological stakes of materialization we should recall that it is, of course, the sculptor who “puts into hard and alpine stone / a figure that’s alive,” as Michelangelo writes, and my contention is that such conceptions of sculptural animacy in the nineteenth century cannot be understood as existing apart from global economies of theft and expropriation.<sup>38</sup> Like nearly all other modalities of production in the Black Atlantic, the artistic practice of someone like Hiram Powers or John Bell was made possible by markets and wealth born out of enslavement and empire. Furthermore, the imaginaries surround-

ing the circulation and reception of completed works reveal how the entangled economies of sculpture and of slavery extended to the very problem of the corporeal in modern culture as it was produced under the horizon of racial capitalism. Narratives of modernism often culminate in the declaration of sculpture as an autonomous “specific object” sealed off from the workaday world; the trajectory I trace here is in many ways the exact opposite.<sup>39</sup> Figures of jasper, marble, bronze, Parian ware, and plaster were bodies produced—literally and figuratively—in relation to broader economic and legal negotiations of ontology and animacy of the period.

A note on terminology: throughout I use the terms “animacy” and “animated” to describe the quality of liveliness attributed to three-dimensional sculpted objects representing the human body. Mel Y. Chen’s evocation of animacy as an affective construct shaped by race and sexuality is a crucial point of reference here, for it opens up ways to think about the racialized and libidinal economies affirmed, set into motion, or reconfigured in relation to sculpted bodies.<sup>40</sup> Throughout I consider not only the affective presence of statues and the phenomenological engagements they engender, but I also foreground the role of language, criticism, and materials in anchoring and managing those encounters. Drawing from Fanon, Chen emphasizes the “alchemical” power of language in the construction of animacy and objectification alike, noting how people use hierarchies of animacy “to manipulate, affirm, and shift the ontologies that matter in the world.”<sup>41</sup> This insistence on the scalar determination of animacy is important as it complicates new materialist assertions about the unequivocal “vibrancy” of matter, instead asking us to pay attention to the human-driven efforts to differently motivate subjects and objects in the discursive and material world.<sup>42</sup>

Close attention to the man-made material and immaterial apparatuses that preceded, accompanied, and framed sculptures is thus an essential aspect of this book’s method. (Here it is worth remembering that Marx, writing *Capital* in 1867, famously drew upon metaphors of the sculptural in stating that New World slavery constituted the “pedestal” for the veiled growth of European industrial capitalism.)<sup>43</sup> Significantly, it is the pedestal of *The Greek Slave* that plays a central role in the *National Era*’s account of the sculpture in St. Louis. Upon describing the place of the exhibition “within a few steps of the spot” of the city’s slave market, the narrative that then unfolds imagines the statue—improbably—coming to life and addressing the spectators in the gallery. Its animacy is activated by the rotating base upon which it stands; the sculpture is described as “turning just then upon its pedestal” and delivering in “the mute language of the marble” an antislavery address.<sup>44</sup> In this regard, the case of *The Greek Slave*’s rotating pedestal opens onto three important points. First, the newspaper mobilizes the trope of sculptural animacy in order to make a point about the atrocity of slavery and the commodification of human life. Second, in so doing it evokes the statue as a bodily surrogate for the abolitionist lecturers who crisscrossed the country on traveling circuits, itineraries themselves not dissimilar from those of touring paintings or statues.<sup>45</sup> Third, and most importantly, it raises the issue of just

precisely *who* is figured by the abolitionist body—a larger question about historical agency and power with which this book ultimately seeks to grapple. Let us revise the question with which we began. It is perhaps not so much the matter of whether an image can incite change, but really more one of why an image is needed or urgent, and for whom.

### OF ABSENCES AND ENDS

The year 1850 was marked by two cataclysmic events in regard to histories of abolition. First, in January—in the courthouse opposite the entertainment hall where Powers's *The Greek Slave* would stand on display just months later—Dred Scott and Harriet Robinson Scott won their freedom in a trial held before the State Supreme Court of Missouri after having filed individual suits several years prior. The case was ultimately reversed at the federal level in 1857, when in *Scott v. Sandford* Roger Taney's Supreme Court ruled against the citizenship rights of African American people enslaved in the United States.<sup>46</sup> But for the seven years prior, the Scotts, both of whom were born into slavery, were declared free in the eyes of the law. Second, in September, the 31st Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, which mandated that all persons escaped from slavery be returned to bondage upon capture. In one succession after another, both events bespeak the ways the status of people enslaved in the United States remained under intense juridical and political debate at midcentury. The stakes of abolitionist discourse mounted in turn, with an article like the *National Era*'s review of *The Greek Slave* grappling with the question of how art might figure therein.

Infinite “inborn absences” inhere in any recounting of the wider impacts of the Scotts' trial or the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. Michel-Rolph Trouillot uses this turn of phrase in *Silencing the Past* (1995) to describe the uneven construction of history as “event” as he looks to account for the ways the radical uprisings of the Haitian Revolution went unacknowledged by many in the Western world.<sup>47</sup> His meditations open onto a crucial point about narratives of the end of slavery. If, after the end of the US Civil War, the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment formally reversed legislation upheld by decisions including the Fugitive Slave Act and *Scott v. Sandford*, it was neither the law nor the war that effected emancipation in its totality but rather the resistance of the enslaved across scales. Such resistance encompassed actions like the Scotts' lawsuits and also extended more broadly to what Saidiya Hartman describes as “infinitesimal assaults to the slave order” effected by those in bondage, or the everyday forms of contestation, kinship formation, and self-assertion that comprised the routine, the transient, and the fugitive.<sup>48</sup> Many have discussed the manifold ways the redressive acts of the enslaved formed the core of abolitionism in the Black Atlantic.<sup>49</sup> This reality is essential for it corrects the mythos—one embodied as early as 1787 by the kneeling jasperware figure on the Wedgwood medallion—that abolitionist discourse was the domain of a select few white reformers in Britain and the United States and that emancipation was in turn proffered to enslaved Black people by benevolent



FIGURE 0.5  
Francesco Pezzicar, *The Abolition of  
Slavery in the United States*, 1863,  
1873, bronze. Museo Revoltella,  
Trieste. Photograph by author.

white people in the “events” of 1833 and 1865.<sup>50</sup> My understanding of abolition and emancipation in this book follows the work of Hartman, Rinaldo Walcott, Tiffany Lethabo King, Christina Sharpe, Lisa Lowe, and others, who posit that horizons of Black freedom remain deferred under enduring configurations of coloniality, white supremacy, the afterlives of slavery, and the carceral state.<sup>51</sup> If in what follows I consider the question of slavery’s “ends,” I do so with the understanding that abolition remains partial, incomplete, and contingent.

A core concern of the following chapters, then, is how sculpture gave way to the complexities and fictions of the idea of abolition in an age of industrial and imperial accretion. Many of the works of art under discussion were conceived by their makers as commemorations of emancipation. John Bell’s marble bust of the white British anti-slavery campaigner Thomas Fowell Buxton was commissioned for a prominent colonial cathedral in Freetown, Sierra Leone, following the end of apprenticeship in 1838

after the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act in the British Empire five years before (fig. 0.4). Similarly, the anonymous Black freedman represented by Francesco Pezzicar's monumental bronze statue *The Abolition of Slavery in the United States, 1863* stood on display at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876 to mark both the end of slavery in the United States and a more general idea of "freedom" at a world's fair held to mark the centenary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence (fig. 0.5). In so doing both sculptures—on display in spaces key to the formation of national and imperial narratives—worked to construct the fictive idea of abolition as a discrete historical event that neatly cleaved histories of slavery from futures of freedom; they were, in Trouillot's formulation, "artifacts and bodies that turn an event into fact."<sup>52</sup> Put another way, sculpture at the ends of slavery gave way to a distinction between emancipation and liberty: one a juridical process, the other an ideal far more elusive and ineffable.

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This book begins with a question at once simple and deceptively complex: why sculpture? What could it do for the antislavery movement that a painting, print, or text could not? When Josiah Wedgwood sent an envelope of his famed antislavery cameos to Benjamin Franklin, then the president of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, he expressed his hopes that "the subject of freedom will itself be more canvassed and better understood."<sup>53</sup> Franklin confirmed this to be true, writing of the medallions, "I am persuaded it may have an effect equal to that of the best written Pamphlet."<sup>54</sup> Chapter 1 considers the stakes surrounding the persuasiveness of the Wedgwood medallion and the *Description of a Slave Ship* broadside, two images issued under the official auspices of the London-based Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Both elicited an engagement that had as much to do with touch as it did sight, and I argue that this hapticity found parallels in contemporary theorizations of sculptural engagement. Drawing from theories of sensory perception ranging from John Locke to Johann Gottfried Herder, I address the violent contradictions at stake as images circulated by the Society enabled beholders to "grasp"—or conceptually and physically surveil and possess—an impression of the horrors of slavery that many abolitionists acknowledged existed outside of the realm of visual or textual representation. Neither ceramic medallion nor printed broadside were sculptures, but the fact that both elicited a form of spectatorship akin to one's engagement with a statue prefigured the kinds of paradoxes that would subtend the place of medium in abolitionist discourse in the decades to follow.

Chapter 1 takes into account a wide range of actors, including Wedgwood, the modelers and craftsmen under his employ such as Henry Webber and William Hackwood, contemporary philosophers and art critics, formerly enslaved activists, reformers and lawmakers, and a heterogeneous world of "ordinary" consumers of material culture. I employ a similar approach in the chapters that follow, considering the "production" of

sculpture as a collective and multivocal affair. This method fittingly parallels the material realities of nineteenth-century sculptor's studios—and indeed industrial manufactories—which were far from the purview of a lone artist but involved many kinds of labor, skills, and technologies executed by many kinds of people. At the same time, the positionalities, biographies, and careers of individual artists also matter, particularly in a moment when sculpture remained largely a pursuit of the white, the male, and the wealthy.<sup>55</sup> The opportunities and obstacles that faced Hiram Powers, a white man who courted the patronage of Southern enslavers, differed vastly from those encountered by Edmonia Lewis, a Black and Anishinaabe woman who confronted the exigencies of racism but also navigated and participated in the support networks and institution-building of African American and Native artists, entrepreneurs, educators, reformers, consumers, and audiences over the course of her career. Throughout this book, I seek to tell an object-centered story of nineteenth-century sculptors' practices that remains at the same time responsive to—but not reductive of—the raced, gendered, and classed limitations of biography. Each chapter case study, then, centers on a single artist but situates their work in a larger ecosystem of labor, production, consumption, and reception.

Chapter 2 focuses on Powers's *The Greek Slave*, a sculpture that Freeman Henry Morris Murray would later deem “American art's first anti-slavery document in marble” in his landmark text *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture* (1916).<sup>56</sup> It rethinks the work's relationship to the urgent matter of slavery's abolition in the antebellum United States, a connection that has long been understood by scholars as implicit and bedrock.<sup>57</sup> Considering *The Greek Slave*'s transatlantic trajectories from the sculptor's studio in Florence to exhibition spaces in the United States, I show how its making and circulation intersected the machinations of racial capitalism in the Black Atlantic. We have already begun to see how these concerns emerged in sharp relief during the sculpture's display in cities like St. Louis, and they would become more urgent yet in the city of New Orleans in particular. Attention to unstudied archival sources and period commentaries will further reveal how the sculpture's display was inextricable from the acts of seeing and surveillance central to the institution of slavery and human trafficking. Across this chapter and the following, I also examine how this adjacency would in turn become a potent point of critique on the global stage, sparking responses that took visual and visible form on behalf of formerly enslaved Black activists and white abolitionist allies.

It was precisely this possibility of sculpture to function as a form of antislavery critique that sparked the British sculptor John Bell to respond to the popular *Greek Slave* with a statue of his own, a bronze electrotype depicting an enslaved Black woman entitled *A Daughter of Eve—A Scene on the Shore of the Atlantic* (1853) (fig. 0.6). With *A Daughter of Eve* as well as works like *Thomas Fowell Buxton* and *The Octoroon* (see fig. 3.14), Bell hoped his art “may aid in directing a sustained attention to the greatest injustice in the world”: slavery in the United States.<sup>58</sup> Chapter 3 thinks through the