

# Seeing History Through Artists' Eyes

## Class 4: The American Revolution & Civil War:

### Controversies about the stories we tell

June 27, 2022

Judy Scott Feldman, PhD / jfeldman@nationalmallcoalition.org

- I. **Recent controversies:** Confederate statues, “Silent Sam” at Univ. of N. Carolina, 1913
  - A. What’s wrong with them? What to do with them?
- II. **How artists tell the American story in the nation’s capital: The American Revolution**
  - A. **U.S. Capitol Rotunda: John Trumbull’s paintings in the Rotunda, 1819-1824:**  
Declaration of Independence; Surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga; Surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown; General George Washington Resigning His Commission
  - B. **Cf. Leon Battista Albert (1424) on history painting (ideal) vs. John Adams (real)**
  - C. **Iconography of George Washington**
    - Jean-Antoine Houdon’s 1790 statue of George Washington
    - Cf. Trumbull 1820s – General & Statesman
    - Horatio Greenough’s Washington, 1841
    - Constantino Brumidi’s Apotheosis of George Washington, 1860s
  - D. **The Mall: 1791 L’Enfant Plan** with equestrian statue to Washington
    - Robert Mills’ Washington Monument, 1830s
- III. **What artists tell of the Civil War**
  - A. DC: National Building Museum frieze, 1887
  - B. Emancipation Memorial, Thomas Ball, Lincoln Park, 1876
  - C. The McMillan Commission Plan for the Mall, 1901-1902
  - D. Lincoln Memorial, Henry Bacon & Daniel Chester French, dedicated 1922
  - E. Ulysses S. Grant Memorial, Henry Shrady, dedicated 1922
- IV. **What’s been added to the American story?**
  - A. Martin Luther King plaque at Lincoln; MLK Memorial; African American Civil War Memorial; American Indian and African American Museums; Capitol: reshuffling the 100 statues in Statuary Hall; war veterans memorials
- V. **Who decides? Is there a better way? L’Enfant/McMillan/“3<sup>rd</sup> Century Mall” Plan?**
  - A. **Commemorative Works Act** of 1986; “completed work of civic art” (2003)
- VI. **Alternative ways of telling, enhancing the American story**
  - A. Can there, should there be shared American identity? Shared values?

### Suggested reading:

- Paul Staiti, *Of Arms and Artists: The American Revolution through Painters’ Eyes*, Bloomsbury Press: New York, 2016
- Robert C. Post, *Who Owns America’s Past. The Smithsonian and the Problem of History*, Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore, 2017
- Mitch Landrieu, *In the Shadow of Statues. A White Southerner Confronts History*, Penguin Books, 2019