

Introduction

King George III will not stay on the ground. Ever since an impassioned crowd in New York City toppled his equestrian statue in 1776, burying some of the parts and boiling the rest into bullets, the King has been riding back into American culture, raising his gilded head in pictures and reenactments, and circulating in the form of battered fragments. It is time to ask why he keeps returning.

The facts of the statue's destruction are familiar. On the night of July 9, 1776, a crowd emboldened by a public reading of the Declaration of Independence gathered at a Lower Manhattan park called Bowling Green, where it pulled the huge lead monument from its pedestal, decapitated the figure of the King, and battered the horse and rider into pieces. A British officer conveyed the head to London, intending to demonstrate the rebels' defiance, and soldiers transported the remaining fragments to Litchfield, Connecticut, where townspeople melted down the lead and recast it into ammunition for the Continental army. On the way to Litchfield, sizeable pieces of the statue fell into the hands of loyalists, who concealed them in fields, swamps, and cellars.

By any reckoning, the statue should have remained beneath the earth. But since the mid-nineteenth century, fragments have been resurfacing: turned up by farmers, salvaged by treasure hunters, and collected by antiquarians, museums, and historical societies. In 2012, the *New York Times* identified one of the most vivid pieces—a section of the horse's tail—among fifty objects that exemplified the history of New York City (plate 1). Two centuries earlier, the pedestal of the statue likewise served as an evocative memorial for antebellum New Yorkers. Intact at Bowling Green until its removal in 1818, it was reimagined as a monument to the American Revolution.¹

Even before the fragments reappeared, artists began to picture scenes of the destruction. Indeed, nearly as soon as the statue came off its pedestal, painters and printmakers restored it to visibility. Soon after British forces took Manhattan in September 1776, the city honored the King's birthday with a grand illumination that included a shining transparent painting of the gilt statue upright on its perch. Overseas, a German printmaker registered the statue's destruction in a fanciful engraving, and British satirists intimated that the real monarch might be next to lose his head (fig. 1, plate 2). In the United States, antebellum writers and illustrators highlighted the statue's destruction in accounts of Revolutionary New York, and by 1876, when Centennial celebrations catalyzed decades of interest in the founding era, artists had remade the act of iconoclasm at Bowling Green into an icon of American independence. Civic organizers took this phenomenon one step further, resurrecting phantoms of the lost statue for Colonial Revival parade floats, tableaux vivants, and historical pageants at such sites as the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. Most recently, a surrogate King George III has made a prominent appearance many miles away from Manhattan: at the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia, an introductory video locates visitors at the base of the statue in Bowling Green, casting them as participants in the drama of iconoclasm. In another gallery, a larger-than-life version of the equestrian statue preens atop a mock pedestal, accompanied by a waxwork figure extending a rope to would-be iconoclasts. Embedded within the pedestal are several recovered pieces of the statue, together with a ladle and bullet mold akin to those used in 1776 to form bullets from the molten lead. Here, the actual and the virtual—the historical objects and the gleaming simulacrum—combine in seamless fashion to conjure forth the long-deposed King of America.

The perennial return of George III is all the more striking given the concurrent disappearance of so many other troublesome statues. A short list of memorable iconoclasm during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries would include the destruction of statues of Russian leaders after the Bolshevik Revolution and the displacement of those representing Soviet leaders after the fall of Communism; the Taliban's explosion of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001; the dismantling of a giant monument to Saddam Hussein by Iraqis and American troops in 2003, not to mention countless figures of the Iraqi dictator defaced and demolished beyond Baghdad; and, in the wake of deadly racial violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017, the removal of monuments to Confederate leaders and other contested statues. The fate of many public statues in the United States, and the empty pedestals of the handful already retired, remains unsettled amid ongoing dialogues about social justice, public space, historical memory, and the ideological work of monuments.² The statue of George III has not only persisted as these newer statues have disappeared; it has also informed national debates about difficult monuments and related dialogues on the meanings of American citizenship. When protestors in Durham, North Carolina,



FIGURE 1 | Franz Xaver Habermann, *La Destruction de la Statue Royale à Nouvelle York* (*The Destruction of the Royal Statue at New York*), 1776. Colored engraving. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs: Print Collection, New York Public Library. Photo: New York Public Library.

pulled down an early twentieth-century statue of a Confederate soldier, commentators referenced and illustrated the destruction of the Bowling Green monument, seeing both precedent and paradigm in the actions of rebel colonials. At the same time, hundreds of miles to the north, educators at the New-York Historical Society enlisted a canonical painting about this act of Revolutionary iconoclasm as part of a program designed to help prepare green card holders for the naturalization test (plate 3).³ Such prominent considerations of the King's statue offer the latest evidence of its continuing resonance for understandings of American nationhood and identity.

Iconoclasm in New York asks why Americans destroyed the statue of George III in 1776—and why they keep bringing it back. More pointedly, it explores how iconoclasm became an American creation story through texts, images, and performances long after the Revolution. Locally, in New York, the statue's destruction has served as a version of the Boston Tea Party, signifying a tipping point from European colony to American statehood. Nationally, it has helped to position the city within a broader narrative of independence. These are precisely the sorts of ideas celebrated in countless pictures of Bowling

Green and elaborated in writing about the American Revolution, and they make for good historical drama: after all, there would seem to be no clearer way to signal the beginnings of the United States than a ritualistic killing of the British King. Yet the persistent re-presentation of George III challenges this seemingly obvious equation, for one of the many things revealed by the statue's demolition is the endurance of British culture through the Revolutionary period and beyond. I posit that this act of iconoclasm mobilized a central paradox of the national imaginary: it was at once a destructive phenomenon through which Americans enacted their independence and a creative phenomenon through which they continued to exhibit English cultural identity.⁴

To develop this thesis, this book builds on historical studies that have understood the statue's destruction as symbolic regicide and symbolic funeral, as the birth of an independent nation, as the finale of royalist culture, and as a characteristically American action.⁵ At the same time, though, it departs from such interpretations to argue that iconoclasm in New York was not a clear ending: it did not break ties with Great Britain. Nor was it a beginning: it did not suddenly produce Americans. Rather, the destruction of the Bowling Green statue was both subtle and challenging in its processes and effects. Paul Downes, remarking that "the King of England was never more alive in America" than when he was "conjured out of mere matter," has persuasively suggested that the possibility of George III's return was contained in his very demise by mock executions such as the destruction of the Bowling Green statue.⁶ To understand how iconoclasm could trigger phantasmatic resurrections—and to grasp, however paradoxically, the ways iconoclasm reproduced Englishness—this book restores the Bowling Green statue to its vibrant contexts of production, display, and destruction, emphasizing the agency of time, space, materiality, and ritual.

To begin, this study locates the history of the Bowling Green statue within a transatlantic continuum of radical protest and a circum-colonial culture of violence enacted on material things. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, religious reformers destroyed buildings and liturgical objects throughout Britain, sensing the allure of idols in churches and monasteries; political crowds attacked statues of British monarchs; and writers satirized proposals to raise statues to living men. It might seem incongruous to connect Revolutionary-era Manhattan with such histories, for idolatry is not a concept ordinarily associated with late colonial America. Yet British anxieties about idols, together with ritual practices of iconoclasm, shaped the ways colonials understood a range of figural representations and acted against them. In New York and other colonies, moreover, people protested in ways that derived from a long tradition of British folk practices, such as rough-riding, maypoles, and Guy Fawkes Night. Manhattan was rocked by material violence in the decade before the King's statue came down, much of it linked to the Stamp Act: crowds torched a British ship, tore apart a theater, shattered tableware at a tavern, and rode loyalists on rails through the streets in the British

custom of “skimmington.” Protesters tarred and feathered tax collectors who supported the detested legislation, occasionally even coating stamped paper in the painful goo. They also targeted surrogate bodies, subjecting effigies of British officials to whipping, hanging, parading, dismemberment, burial, burning, and exploding. Although artists and writers would later represent the assault on the Bowling Green statue as an anomalous, even epochal, event of the Revolution, the statue’s destruction transpired within this much larger field of iconoclastic actions in Britain and British America.⁷

Nor was the equestrian statue the only sculptural object attacked. In late colonial Manhattan, the statue formed part of a geographical field of British monuments that mobilized political actions and feelings, sending crowds surging the length of Broadway and raising celebratory sounds across the city. One of these monuments was a liberty pole—or, rather, a series of five poles erected by the “Sons of Liberty” at the Commons (now City Hall Park) to honor the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766. As the poles grew in size and meaning, over the course of a decade, to signify resistance to British authority, loyalists ridiculed them as idols and British soldiers tried to raze them (plate 4). Meanwhile, a marble sculpture of William Pitt the Elder—the British statesman revered for his defense of colonial rights during the Stamp Act conflict—arrived from London with the statue of George III and went up on a pedestal at the intersection of William and Wall Streets, just east of today’s Stock Exchange and a few blocks northeast of the King’s statue (plate 7). By 1777, the Pitt statue had lost its head to unknown attackers, and the last liberty pole had been removed by order of the British colonial governor. Like the royal figure, however, these monuments never really went away. New Yorkers raised emblems of liberty at other locations, and Pitt’s trunk meandered around the city for decades, moving in and out of hiding places just as the surviving parts of the Bowling Green statue had. While investigating how these monuments organized political experience and daily movements around the colonial city, *Iconoclasm in New York* also follows their fragments into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, showing how British monuments, even in pieces, continued to remake the American past.

Throughout, I approach iconoclasm as a performative phenomenon. The term “performance” readily conjures theatrical entertainments, but scholars have observed its rapid enlargement in recent decades to signify a much broader range of social actions and cultural productions. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera explain that performance now comprehends “how human beings fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world.”⁸ To perform iconoclasm, as I suggest in the following chapters, is to make culture through gestures of destruction that may be actual or representational, ritualized or commemorative, serious or spectacular, and even nondestructive. Chapters 1 and 2 foreground the performative nature of ritual in the production, display, and demolition of New York’s monuments. Ritual, as Henry

Bial explains, “is the art of performance mobilized in the service of a social or religious imperative”; it can be disruptive and/or constructive (Victor Turner described the “social drama” of rituals that interrupt daily life only to foster “*communitas*” and strengthen social order), and it is inherently reiterative, reifying the significance of symbolic rites, dates, and figures.⁹ Ritual helps to describe the behavior of the groups present at the Commons and Bowling Green—including crown officials, British troops, and Sons of Liberty—where monuments went up and down in rapid succession, reprising customs that were practiced elsewhere in the British Empire and reinvented to suit local needs. Chapters 3 and 4 explore the significance of reiteration in the refashioning of fragments as relics, the creation of pictures about Bowling Green, and reenactments that resurrected ephemeral versions of the equestrian statue. Self-consciously scripted and often theatrical, the cultural performances of paintings, prints, tableaux vivants, parades, and pageants restaged iconoclasm to buttress narratives of local and national belonging.¹⁰

In positing that iconoclasm and its representations propelled a myth of American origins, this book joins a groundswell of studies about destruction. Iconoclasm is a phenomenon with ancient roots: one need only glance through art history textbooks or museum galleries to see that ruins are the familiar stuff of global history. Yet the early twenty-first century has seen a remarkable surge of interest around this topic. Museums have organized exhibitions about iconoclasm and commissioned artists to produce work on decay and dystopia. Scholars have convened conference panels, symposia, and fellowship programs to investigate issues from modernist negation to the loss of archaeological treasures. Much of this interest responds to the formative role that techniques and concepts of destruction have played in modern and contemporary art, and indeed certain canonical works (such as Robert Rauschenberg’s *Erased De Kooning* or Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece*) remind us that the art history of destruction is also a history of making. The wreckage of historical sites and antiquities around the world—through forces including war, natural disaster, and neglect—lends further urgency to the study of destruction. Our exposure to destruction in cable news and social media is such that certain acts have become iconic in themselves. How quickly can you fathom a mental image of the colossal statue of Saddam Hussein coming down in Baghdad?¹¹

Histories of iconoclasm form a vibrant subset of studies about destruction. This is a fairly recent topic of investigation for art historians (Anglophone histories of iconoclasm surged in number after World War II), even though the term “*eikonoklastes*,” derived from a Greek word translating as “image breaking,” is more than a thousand years old. The English-language variants “*iconoclast*” and “*iconoclastic*” appeared in the seventeenth century, and “*iconoclasm*” emerged in print during the era of the French Revolution. The latter term, which often connotes assaults on religious objects, bears a close and sometimes confusing relation to “*vandalism*,” a word also coined during the French Revolution and

generally employed in a derogatory way. The usage of both concepts has been enriched in recent years by the introduction of “iconoclasm,” a term that served as the title for a major exhibition organized in Germany during 2002. As defined by Bruno Latour, one of the curators, iconoclasm describes the productive ambiguity of iconoclasm: is it destructive, constructive, or both? This concept is useful for this study insofar as it helps to draw out the oddity and operations of the many pictorial and performative representations of Bowling Green produced between the 1850s and 1930s: what did Americans many generations removed from the Revolution aim to accomplish in rehearsing the destruction of the equestrian statue again and again? Of course, British subjects in late colonial New York used neither “iconoclasm” nor “iconoclasm” to account for attacks on statues or liberty poles. Rather, they described the alluring force of these objects in language that reveals a debt to early modern English rhetoric about idols and idolatry. My analysis thereby attends to period writings about idols and destruction while following recent scholars in deploying a broad understanding of the term “iconoclasm” to explore a range of assaults on material things and pictorial images.¹²

I also join other art historians in emphasizing the cyclical nature of destruction—what James Simpson has called the “kinesis of iconoclasm”—and its capacity to beget new representational forms. Much as the demolition of the Parisian Bastille in 1789–91 yielded wildly inventive “revolutionary relics” (as Keith Bresnahan terms the scores of things remade from the infamous French prison) Americans cherished fragments of the New York statues, seeing them as doubles of the King’s body, as souvenirs of independence, as cultural booty, and as local history. Further, just as French Revolutionary iconoclasm inspired complex pictorial representations, the destruction of New York’s monuments produced images that invite close interrogation, for, as Erika Naginski has remarked, depictions of iconoclasm present “a distinctive exegesis on negation that is paradoxically visual in nature.”¹³

Through such processes, iconoclasm empowers the very things it seems to erase, be they religious, political, spatial, material, or ideological. Objects destroyed in iconoclasm have a curious way of returning, whether in pieces or as equally resonant, re-formed things. The Bowling Green statue persisted in pictures and gave rise to other effigies of the King, including one whose surface was darkened with burnt cork to evoke the skins of enslaved people; at later points in American history, sculptors would fashion an equestrian monument to Andrew Jackson from a melted British cannon and a memorial to fallen American service members from the parts of a destroyed Iraqi monument. It is tempting to explain such material remakings as instances of the Freudian “uncanny”: the double, the thing repeated, the return of that which has been psychologically repressed. Within the political arenas where iconoclasm so often operates, however, Peter Maass’s observation is more on point: “In a way, statue topplings are the banana peels of history

that we often slip on.”¹⁴ Our readiness to see an overturned statue as a sign of regime change—as the degradation of a monument, the figure it represents, and the authority it signifies—may blind us to the reifications that iconoclasm produces.

The reiterative nature of iconoclasm—its generative return over time—points to further ways iconoclasm operates temporally. The following chapters look backward from 1776, to understand how iconoclasm in New York emerged from earlier British worlds of political and religious protest, and forward, to show how the liberty poles and statues continued to exercise meaning after their destruction. Thinking about temporality reveals how the years that the royal statue spent shining upright on a pedestal helped to create the conditions for its destruction and how its disfigured fragments still reverberate in museum galleries. Analyzing iconoclasm in this diachronic manner also wrestles with the common assumption that destruction is a spontaneous consequence of furious emotions. In fact, it can take hours of exhausting mental and physical labor to bring down and dispose of a statue.¹⁵

Iconoclasm quite literally takes time, but it also occurs in and across spaces. In the case of 1776, these spaces are multiple and transatlantic: New York City, Connecticut, England, the oceanic world of British imperialism. Yet the space of iconoclasm is also a matter of place and lived experience, and as such it is intensely local. Before their destruction, the statues of George III and Pitt organized geography in Manhattan, defining a royalist neighborhood, on the one hand, and a thriving commercial sector, on the other, where they doubled as pedestrian landmarks and nodes for political action. How did iconoclasm strike at this place-making capacity? How did it alter a sense of place, creating voids where things formerly stood—or, in the case of Bowling Green, installing substitutes that would be haunted by the missing original? Post-Revolutionary New Yorkers would raise a liberty tree on the vacant pedestal and imagine George Washington in the place of George III; decades later, Colonial Revivalists would propose creating a new equestrian statue of the eighteenth-century monarch. The idea immediately met with angry suggestions for a counter-monument representing a crowd tearing the statue down: an inadvertent memorial to an act of iconoclasm.¹⁶ Building on affect and memory studies as well as histories of the senses, I investigate how the statues, liberty poles, and their various reincarnations triggered emotions from joy to dread, centering soundscapes as well as landscapes and shaping local knowledge of the Commons, Wall Street, and Bowling Green.¹⁷ Noises of destruction, protest, and imperial ritual are instrumental in this analysis, for iconoclasm is rarely, if ever, a purely visual phenomenon.

Nor is it a purely human phenomenon. Whatever its form, the practice of iconoclasm reveals the interconnected agencies of objects and people. Thus, instead of approaching iconoclasm as something that people do to things—as destruction is often understood—I propose that we consider how things act on people or take part in their own destruction. How is iconoclasm mobilized by humans and objects in equal measure? While much

important scholarship has examined the figure of the iconoclast, asking what motivates an individual to topple or deface a sculpture, the things destroyed in iconoclasm are too often explained away as political or religious symbols. But such objects are much more than rhetorical signs. Sculpture, as Albert Boime has explained, “*presents* itself as an object in the universe of things. It simultaneously produces narrative while occupying space like a piece of furniture or natural or sacred object which has to be surmounted or gotten around somehow.”¹⁸ Statues possess shape, height, mass, volume, density, color, and texture, and they exert presence and excite reactions because of these qualities. Latour’s concept of nonhuman agency and Jane Bennett’s notion of thing-power—the seeming aliveness or energy of inanimate stuff—helps explain why colonial New Yorkers sensed vitality in liberty poles, imagined marble figures to speak, and worried that statues incited idolatry. Likewise, Arjun Appadurai’s understanding of the social lives of things encourages us to follow the monuments from their origins in New England forests and London workshops to their installation in Manhattan and dispersal to Connecticut villages. In so doing, the materiality of the statues and liberty poles—their gilding, ironwork, lead, and marble—becomes evident as a factor in the rituals to which these objects gave rise and the destructive actions that brought them down.¹⁹

The London sculptor who worked such matter into artistic form, designing the statues of Pitt and King George III, likewise plays an important role in this story. Joseph Wilton (1722–1803) was an accomplished individual. A founder of Britain’s Royal Academy of Arts and official “Statuary” to the court of George III, Wilton managed a large workshop in Marylebone that shipped marble portraits, chimney pieces, and funerary monuments throughout Britain, the American colonies, and the Caribbean. In an intimate painting of 1752 by his friend Sir Joshua Reynolds, Wilton’s boldly modeled head, hovering between light and darkness, offers a pictorial analogue to the chiseled busts for which he became renowned (fig. 2). Yet Wilton is still little known in art history. His reputation declined as he aged, and his name suffered even more after his death, when biographers accused him of squandering his talents at the altar of a family inheritance. While there may be some truth to the charges, recent scholarship has been more generous, rediscovering a gifted and savvy sculptor. Wilton was well positioned, thanks to his training and professional connections, to take advantage of the many commissions that came his way during the 1760s. Skilled in the styles of classical and modern sculpture, he translated the art of the ancient Roman Empire into meaningful forms for the modern British Empire. Indeed, the trajectory of his life and education virtually ensured that he would render his sculptures for New York *all’antica*, casting a togaed Pitt in the pose of Roman orators and modeling George III on the canonical equestrian statue of the imperial ruler Marcus Aurelius.²⁰

By attending to Wilton, I aim in part to address the curious omission of artists from much of the literature on artistic destruction. Emphasizing Wilton’s part in the history of



FIGURE 2 | Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Joseph Wilton*, 1752. Oil on canvas. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Bowling Green highlights the prominence of sculpture in a founding narrative of American nationhood, contributing to growing bodies of scholarship about the political work of sculpture and the formative role of public monuments in American history. At the same time, Wilton's international career demands that we look beyond national models to locate his New York sculptures within a broader geography of classicism and neoclassicism. Wilton never traveled to North America, but he went to places beyond London that shaped the appearance and meanings of his statues of Pitt and the King: in particular, Paris, Florence, and Rome. His sculptures hence belonged less to a world defined by transatlantic conduits than to the intersecting worlds of the circum-Atlantic and Europe through which artists, objects, and ideas circulated.²¹

The first half of *Iconoclasm in New York* moves back and forth between these places, tracing Atlantic networks of eighteenth-century people and things. Chapter 1 argues that the cyclical creation and destruction of the liberty poles illuminates the ritualized nature of iconoclasm and the Britishness of late colonial culture in New York. I locate the thing-power of the poles in their origin as “mast trees”—giant white pines prized for their sublime vivacity—and in the performative spectacles that drew the masts from East River shipyards to the Commons. Numerous people—American rebels, British soldiers, loyalists, and enslaved people of African descent—encountered the poles, and many of them invested these objects with the capacity to summon worshippers, to shame traitors, and even to speak. Their understanding of the poles as political forces and seductive idols illuminates the agency that material things commanded in British New York.

Chapter 2 explores how the monuments of George III and Pitt likewise enabled performative rites and brimmed with sonic resonance from the moment they went up on their pedestals in 1770. The statues arrived in New York on the heels of the battles stirred by the liberty poles. Until their destruction, they energized political streetscapes and soundscapes of marches and riots, antagonizing rising resentments toward British authority. Yet we cannot understand why they were attacked without understanding where they came from: London. Long before they reached Manhattan, Wilton's statues provoked acrimonious criticism among the British public. Locating them within an Atlantic continuum of political protest also underscores the conundrum of American Revolutionary iconoclasm: even as colonials tore apart the figure of George III in the name of independence—as if realizing, materially, the dismemberment of the King's empire—they reiterated the cultural practices that had made them British. To explore fully the interconnected histories of statue making and statue breaking that linked London and Manhattan, this chapter is divided into sections that focus on each city.

The second half of the book expands beyond 1776 to show how the symbolic death of George III became a matter of national interest through sculptural reinvention, pictorial representation, and civic performance. Chapter 3 examines the material remains of

destruction and finds a history of symbolic remaking at Bowling Green. I follow the headless statue of Pitt through its urban peregrinations and track fragments of the King's statue into and out of the ground in Connecticut. The disinterred fragments enable an additional kind of recovery, for they help to reveal the power of relics and ruins for nineteenth-century Americans, suggesting the power that sculptural objects continued to exert even when broken. Misshapen and pocked, these fragments resist the kind of easy narrativity about iconoclasm that representations of Bowling Green collectively engendered. They also reveal the extent to which a cultural memory of King George III became implicated in the hagiography of President George Washington. The statues of Washington that began to rise around 1800—in pictures and on pedestals—could not quite shake the phantom of the deposed royal monument.

Chapter 4 argues that the eclectic body of images and reenactments about Bowling Green that circulated between the 1850s and 1930s effectively remade an English ritual of radical protest into an origin story for New York City as well as the nation at large. Significantly, the earliest painting of Bowling Green couched the statue's destruction in an unexpected context: the 1848 revolutions in Europe and the mass migration of immigrants, especially Germans, that radicalized New York City over the following decade. Only later, during the swells of the Colonial Revival, would Bowling Green evolve to signify a broader American narrative. From the Centennial year of 1876 through the 1930s, elite Americans exuded nostalgia for the imagined stability of a lost Anglo culture. Correspondingly, period representations of Bowling Green resurrected a whitewashed version of the Revolutionary past, evacuating iconoclasm of its formidable material violence. Indeed, they never resulted in any destruction at all: with the exception of a few mock beheadings, George III suffers no damage in Colonial Revival pictures and reenactments.²²

This striking fact of nondestruction illuminates a key point of this study. To perform iconoclasm in late colonial Manhattan was to destroy something in the name of the King—as in the ritual attacks on the liberty poles—or, alternatively, to act against him, as in the case of rebel attacks on the Bowling Green statue and effigies of royal bodies. To perform nondestruction in the twentieth-century city, on the other hand, was to make identity politics out of iconoclasm. However ironically, the splintered remains of British monuments in New York became the formative elements of imagined Anglo-American communities.

This notion of an American identity born of the twinned phenomenon of destruction and nondestruction—of an American culture pieced together from British losses and ruins—might strike the reader as an unlikely claim for a history of American art. After all, there is ample evidence to demonstrate that both creole and newly independent white Americans modeled their portraits, tea tables, and, indeed, their very selves on perfectly intact examples of British pictures and decorative arts. If imitation enabled one practice

of cultural modeling, however, iconoclasm mobilized practices just as forceful, for it enabled a continual remaking of the past during periods of intensifying Anglo-American identity. *Iconoclasm in New York* thereby advances a history of American art that looks beyond familiar narratives of paintings and polite actors to encompass a riotous cast of material things, nonelite crowds, performative smashings, and yearning re-creations.

This is what the statue of George III and its long afterlife allows us to see: how iconoclasm has continually shaped American identities since the very formation of the United States. If the destruction (and successive nondestructions) of the Bowling Green monument helps to reveal the tenacity of Britishness in American culture, it also locates our current debates about contested monuments within a much longer chronology of nation making, one that suggests how public sculpture in the United States has always materialized—and continues to offer—proxy bodies for political reckonings. As an origin story, the destruction of the statue of George III thus operates somewhat differently from other mythologies about the founding generation, such as Paul Revere's ride, Molly Pitcher on the battlefield, or even the Declaration itself. Like Bowling Green, these parables have been bent to suit the needs of later generations by writers and artists who often cleansed them of their violence and ambiguities. But origin stories that highlight destruction as a catalyst of change are especially susceptible to creative adaptation, for they exploit the continual performances of historical displacement and replacement that the logic of iconoclasm sets into motion.²³

Finally, a note about historical actors. For all the presence of elite Americans as reenactors in twentieth-century performances of Bowling Green, it is important to note that ordinary people play vital roles in this book, more so than one customarily encounters in histories of art. Women entered less visibly than men into New York's history of liberty poles and statues, but they featured prominently in representations and reenactments of iconoclasm. In attending to anonymous crowds, whether composed of actual iconoclasts or imagined spectators, I follow the lead of historians of the Revolution who have excavated the politics of the "people out of doors."²⁴ Where possible, I have preserved original capitalization, syntax, and spelling as expressed in newspapers, journals, and other primary sources, and throughout, I use a period term that eighteenth-century Britons employed to refer to the North American upstarts: "rebel." My purpose is not to reintroduce dated language into historical scholarship, nor to contradict historians of the Revolution who have favored the word "patriot" for those who championed independence and the founding of the United States. Rather, "rebel" helps to elaborate the important cultural continuities that this book emphasizes: the rituals that colonial protesters performed when they raised and demolished monuments to British liberties, and the reenactments of destruction that their actions propelled into the art and civic life of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.