



INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON
OSTROM WORKSHOP

TOCQUEVILLE LECTURE SERIES

Francesca Viano

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Friday, November 6, 2020: 12:00 – 1:30 pm EST

Virtual via Zoom: [Click here for link to Zoom meeting](#)



What Says the Goddess? Miss Liberty and the Sorrows of an Abstract Icon

“I’m supposed to be a beacon of light,” - complains Miss Liberty to her eagle analyst in a recent New Yorker cartoon – “but I actually feel like the corroded hologram of an America that never existed.” From such a perspective, the Statue of Liberty is, indeed, a sorrowful icon. But was she meant to be so? Was there ever a time in which she incarnated a truthful image of America’s greatness?

The statue was made to memorialize the Franco-American allegiance that had defeated the British in the American War of Independence. I will take you back to the earliest days of the Statue’s American life, the days in which she lost her original meaning to become an icon of America. We will discuss the different ways in which Americans reacted to the statue’s abstractness across the centuries, from Mark Twain’s suggestion to turn her into an icon of Adam to Emma Lazarus’s portrait of the Statue as a mother of exiles to Ken Cuccinelli’s latest proposal to turn her into the stewardess of travelers who “stand on their own two feet.” Finally, I will address the question of the statue’s permeability to new contents. Is the Statue an “empty bottle,” always ready to be filled with new meanings, as historian of art Albert Boime declared in 1987? Or does her symbolic abstractness conceal a European vision of the New World that Americans themselves have failed to grasp?

Francesca Lidia Viano (Ph.D Cambridge) is a fellow at the Weatherhead Center for International Studies. She has written extensively on transatlantic intellectual exchanges. Her last book, *Sentinel: The Unlikely History of the Statue of Liberty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018) traces the hidden and often controversial story of the ideas, encounters and misunderstandings behind the New York Statue of Liberty. Her new project, *The Union Men: Trust and the Making of America*, is an exploration of the intellectual, emotional and political dynamics leading to the Revolutionary War and its constitutional aftermath.

Cosponsors: The Tocqueville Program, IU Department of Political Science, Lilly Family School of Philanthropy

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Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all Ostrom workshop presentations will be virtual until further notice. Join instantly using the link above. For questions, contact Allison Sturgeon (sturgeon@iu.edu)