



# **Upon the Ruins of Liberty: Slavery, the President's House at Independence National Historical Park, and Public Memory**

*Roger C Aden*

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The 2002 revelation that George Washington kept slaves in his executive mansion at Philadelphia's Independence National Historical Park in the 1790s prompted an eight-year controversy about the role of slavery in America's commemorative landscape. When the President's House installation opened in 2010, it became the first federal property to feature a slave memorial.

In *Upon the Ruins of Liberty*, Roger Aden offers a compelling account that explores the development of this important historic site and how history, space, and public memory intersected with contemporary racial politics. Aden constructs this engrossing tale by drawing on archival material and interviews with principal figures in the controversy—including historian Ed Lawler, site activist Michael Coard, and site designer Emanuel Kelly.

*Upon the Ruins of Liberty* chronicles the politically-charged efforts to create a fitting tribute to the place where George Washington (and later, John Adams) shaped the presidency while denying freedom to the nine enslaved Africans in his household. From design to execution, the plans prompted advocates to embrace stories informed by race, and address difficulties that included how to handle the results of the site excavation. As such, this landmark project raised concerns and provided lessons about the role of public memory and how places are made to shape the nation's identity.

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