

Becoming Lincoln: His Changing Legacy from Savior of the Union to the Great

Emancipator, 1865 - 1965

by

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Abstract

The aim of this project is to demonstrate the relationship between scholarly treatments of Abraham Lincoln since his death and popular conceptions of the man and his legacy in the United States. Lincoln is an integral figure in American identity and central to collective national narratives of exceptionalism and racial progress. As such, Lincoln manifests in scholarly discourse and popular American culture with regularity. For this thesis, I analyzed the connections between academic and popular representations of Lincoln, illustrating the evolution of his legacy in American memory. I drew upon academic journal articles and long-form publications for an understanding of the scholarly image of Lincoln, and considered such mediums as newspapers, magazines, monuments, memorials, ceremonies, works of fiction — and later in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, television and film — to analyze Lincoln’s public image. Following an examination of this source base, I illustrate the transformation of Lincoln’s image from Savior of the Union to Great Emancipator in American memory.

Introduction

Since Abraham Lincoln's death in 1865, writers have churned out a purported 15,000 works dedicated to the life and legacy of Lincoln. Historians, medical doctors, and journalists alike have analyzed aspects of Lincoln's life, from his sexuality to the corn bread recipes of his youth. Through numerous works, authors attempt to reconcile the ambiguity of the plainspoken man from the prairie, with the epic statesman and commander-in-chief, martyred at the height of his political prowess. The subject of over 300 films and television shows, Lincoln's is a familiar face in American popular media. From blockbuster films to commercials, novels to cookbooks, the popular representations of Lincoln ensure he remains culturally relevant and inimitable in the American pantheon of heroes. Lincoln's image routinely appears in American media and academic culture, and it is onto this mythical figure that Americans project the nation's perceived highest values, hopes, virtues, ideals, and aspirations.¹

Lincoln's veneration was not immediate, and during his lifetime, public opinion never hinted that he would eventually be considered one of the central figures of America's national narrative. Yet, as the first president to be assassinated, a spontaneous and seemingly universal grief manifested throughout the nation. In that outpouring of grief, popular memorializations of the martyr-president began to appear in newspapers

¹ Jackie Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc: Selling the Sixteenth President in Contemporary America*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 2, 7, 29.

and magazines that celebrated his role in saving the Union. Entire cities held commemorations. There was a popular demand for Lincoln content and to fill in the gaps, reminiscences from friends, family, and acquaintances were gathered and published to satiate the public's interest. Scholars, too, were entranced by Lincoln's multifaceted and towering American legacy. In the years, and then decades, following Lincoln's death, both popular and scholarly treatments of his life and legacy have contributed to and have shaped his enduring image in American memory as the Savior of the Union, and, later, as the Great Emancipator.

As noted by sociologist Robert Bellah, Lincoln is a central figure in America's civil religion – the nation's collective “set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals.”² Lincoln personifies the “nation's perceived values, virtues, aspirations, fears, and fantasies” and reifies “cherished conceptions of American national identity.”³ Thus, Lincoln functions as a form of national synecdoche and a veneration of Lincoln equates to a veneration of the nation itself.⁴ Lincoln's image seems destined to fascinate generation after generation of American scholars and non-scholars alike. The biological and biographical Lincoln, the ‘middle of the road’ emancipator and controversial president, has, over time, been subsumed by the dominant and near-universal American adoration of a mythic Lincoln: the Savior of the Union, the Self-Made Man, the hailed Great Emancipator. Most Americans of the twenty-first century are taught that Lincoln is the personification of the nation at its best, an unimpeachable American hero who ended slavery in the United States. Analyses of Lincoln's less desirable traits, like the mistreatment of Native

² Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, 96, no. 1 (1967): 4.

³ Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.*, 2, 29.

⁴ Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.*, 2, 29.

Americans during his presidency, or his use of racial slurs, have neither penetrated nor subverted the popular understanding of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator.⁵

Shaped originally by print materials like magazines, newspapers, and books, Lincoln's popular image is now derived from, and molded by, additional forms of media including film, television, and the internet. Collectively, media fuels a mass national culture by connecting distant and diverse Americans through its speed and accessibility. Media culture, as described by Douglass Kellner, influences the fabric of daily life, dominates Americans' leisure time, shapes political views, and "provides the materials out of which people forge their very identities."⁶ As a national icon, Lincoln's pervasive presence in popular media serves as a reminder of American values. As a potent symbol, Lincoln's image brings forth feelings of civil equality, racial justice, and venerable democracy. By invoking Lincoln in popular culture, one invokes not only his legacy, but also his significance as a symbolic and idealized representation of American values and virtues.⁷

Yet, nations are discursive constructs. They are made, shaped, and "sustained in part through the stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols and rituals which give meaning to the nation."⁸ As Deanna Sellnow writes, cultural groups share a collective rhetorical vision that provides meaning and order to their

⁵ Elizabeth Brown Pryor, *Six Encounters with Lincoln*, (New York: Viking, 2017), 127; Schwartz, "Collective Memory and History," 476.

⁶ Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics: Between the Modern and the Postmodern*. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1-2.

⁷ Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.* 2.

⁸ Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.*, 153; Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," *Modernity and Its Futures*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 293.

perspective and reality.⁹ More so than race, religion, or geographical boundaries, Ernest Renan notes that a nation is held together by its past and the shared heritage of its citizens.¹⁰ Best said by Benedict Anderson, nations are imagined communities.¹¹ Thus, the stories a nation tells about itself reveal its self-perceived distinctive character. These stories help citizens connect to, and feel part of, their national community.¹² The nation's less exemplary traits are omitted from the grand narrative. By ignoring the nation's faults, the stories told about the nation become, in part, myth. Myths, in the words of Renan, are the spiritual soul of the nation, and it is upon these grand narratives of the past that national identity builds.¹³ The Lincoln myth, then, personifies American national identity. By ignoring Lincoln's faults, the nation ignores its own imperfections and the result is Lincoln's universal presence as the Great Emancipator, a symbol of the American nation at its best.¹⁴ In sum, the popular understanding of Lincoln derives from cherished narratives and myths the nation tells about itself and its greatest president.

Lincoln's enduring popularity stems, in part, from his continued relevance. The challenges of Lincoln's time (i.e. war and racial tension) connect to, and resonate with, contemporary audiences. In the words of David Lowenthal, modern society is "beleaguered by loss and change," and "clings to remnants of stability" in the past to provide the constancy the nation yearns for today. As a construct, the nation's past is revised continually by cultural institutions to format the times and needs of the present.

⁹ Deanna D. Sellnow *The Rhetorical Power of Popular Culture: Considering Mediated Texts*, (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 12.

¹⁰ Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?," text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne March 11, 1882.

¹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 1983), 6-7, 28.

¹² Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.* 133, 153.

¹³ Renan, "What is a Nation?"

¹⁴ Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.*, 155.

Lincoln's image is reshaped to support the perspectives and needs of society today. A protean figure, Lincoln has at one time or another embodied white regional reunification, the self-made individual, democracy, racial justice, and civil equality - as needed to fit the time, theme, or mood of his invoker's cause.¹⁵

Today, Lincoln's legacy as the Great Emancipator seems self-evident. His image is synonymous with emancipation and racial justice, and the wide dissemination of his image in popular media continually reinforces this favored understanding of Lincoln. Yet, Lincoln's legacy as the nation's champion of racial equality was not always so. In the century following Lincoln's death, the nation memorialized his legacy as the Savior of the Union. During the economic uncertainty of the Great Depression, Lincoln was remembered for his perseverance in the face of adversity as the Self-Made Man. Even as civil rights activists in the 1950s and 60s added a new category of characteristics to Lincoln's legacy as the Great Emancipator, the notion of the white Savior of the Union persisted. How then — despite the prominence of his legacy as the Savior of the Union— did Lincoln's legacy transform so substantially as to represent a racial legacy the nation previously ignored? How did Lincoln become the Great Emancipator? How did the symbol of white racial unity become the symbol of racial equality during the civil rights movement, and his memorial the site of the most powerful, but contentious, moments of these events? As a symbol, Lincoln's significance has been fashioned and refashioned in response to changes in American values and beliefs, a process that continues. The popular understanding of Lincoln's legacy as the Great Emancipator is the result of a

¹⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6; Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.*, 126, 129.

contentious history as Americans debated over the nature of the nation's character, and thus, Lincoln's significance. In 1963, the malleable nature of Lincoln's legacy reached a national climax when it came to embody his current and enduring role as the nation's Great Emancipator.

I analyzed the transformation of Lincoln's historical legacy from Savior of the Union to the Great Emancipator. Popular representations of Lincoln between 1865 and 1965 illustrate the evolution of Lincoln's legacy and the significance of his idealized place in American memory. As Lincoln scholar Philip B. Kundhardt observes, Lincoln's legacy is "a jagged narrative filled with contention and revisionism." Each successive generation interprets Lincoln differently and as a result, his popular legacy shifts to reflect the change. The last major cultural shift in the popular understanding of Lincoln occurred during the civil rights movement, when after a span of 100 years, Lincoln's emancipatory legacy subsumed his earlier significance as the Savior of the Union.¹⁶

This manuscript begins with an overview of Lincoln's life to provide context for the later mythicization of his legacy and his popular rebirth as the Great Emancipator. An examination of the popular memorializations and the academic treatments of Lincoln in the years immediately following his death, through the turn of the century, follows. In this period, there was an unprecedented national outpouring of grief in reaction to Lincoln's assassination. Criticism of the late president all but vanished in the days following his death. Early treatments of Lincoln by biographers mimicked the popular perspective, as friends and family worked to enshrine Lincoln's life and legacy in the best

¹⁶ Kundhardt, "Lincoln's Contested Legacy."

light. In Chapter Three, I provide a contextualization of the changes in academic and popular representations of Lincoln in relation to America's rapid cultural and industrial growth between 1900 and 1945. As the nation made an effort to solidify Lincoln's legacy as the Savior of the Union, cultural events such as World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II transformed the fabric of American society, and subsequently, Lincoln's image. In Chapter Four, I examine Lincoln's popular rebirth as the Great Emancipator during the civil rights movement from 1945 to 1965. In a post-war society, black and white activists enacted a national racial reckoning that forced Americans to embrace all aspects of Lincoln's legacy. I conclude with a brief reflection on the status of academic and popular portrayals of Lincoln in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 1 – Lincoln in Life

On the night of April 14, 1865, Abraham Lincoln entered into Ford's Theatre as a polarizing head of state and left as a victim of fatal violence. Throughout the course of the Civil War, Lincoln had been an inflammatory public figure. Lincoln's election itself proved to be the inciting catalyst of four years of conflict. His decision to pursue emancipation provoked intense controversy and public opinion of Lincoln's wartime leadership became increasingly critical. Despite a Union victory under his leadership, uncertainties over Reconstruction, and emancipation (and their effect on the nation's future), overshadowed Lincoln's political success. In the aftermath of his assassination, though, there was a gradual recalibration of thought in favor of Lincoln's memory. A post-mortem idealization of Lincoln transformed him into a mythicized figure as, over time, the embellishments gained precedence over fact. The myth of Lincoln won out over the man, and his divisive actions in life were gradually forgotten in the face of popular and academic representations of the "true-born king of men." Thus, in order to trace the evolution of Lincoln's image as a sanctified American hero, an understanding of his actions in life is necessary to inform the modern historical perspective of his legacy. In short, Lincoln's post-mortem transformation into a unifying American symbol obscures

the fact that his actions as president were highly controversial and that his political legacy was far from assured at the time of his death.¹⁷

Born in rural Kentucky on February 12, 1809, Lincoln grew up on the frontier of the early republic. Farmers by profession, and jacks-of-all-trades by economic necessity, the Lincoln family lived on a series of small farms in Kentucky and Indiana. Known for his incredible physical strength, the teenage Abraham was an indispensable resource to his father. Routinely hired out to earn income for the family, Lincoln lived with, and worked for, his parents until he earned legal independence at the age of twenty-one. Later in life, Lincoln described himself as someone who “used to be a slave.” Referencing the perceived indentured servitude of his youth, this early appropriation of Lincoln’s labor created the foundation for his later commitment as a politician to the idea that all people, regardless of color, were entitled to the “natural rights to the fruits of their toil.”¹⁸ Lincoln’s self-described narrative of his youth in Kentucky, and later Indiana, reveal formative experiences that would later influence his presidential position on citizenship. Once legally independent, Lincoln moved to New Salem, Illinois in 1831. To Lincoln’s chagrin, his rural youth meant that he had little formal education to draw upon once he arrived in New Salem. An autodidact, Lincoln worked to educate himself, and to distance himself from the frontier poverty he had escaped.

¹⁷ Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 25, 27; George M. Fredrickson, “A Man but Not a Brother: Abraham Lincoln and Racial Equality,” *The Journal of Southern History* 41, no. 1 (1975): 40.

¹⁸ Roy P. Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, (Rutgers University Press, 1953), Volume 4, Autobiography Written for John L. Scripps; Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 36.

In New Salem, Lincoln's political ambitions emerged. Initially, he worked a series of odd jobs to make ends meet. Following a brief enlistment as a captain during the Black Hawk War in 1832, Lincoln opened a dry goods store in partnership with William F. Berry, a fellow militia member. The venture was short-lived, however, and Lincoln abandoned the enterprise in severe debt by the end of 1833. Shortly after, Lincoln landed the role of the city's postmaster. He supplemented his income by working periodically as a land surveyor for the county. These roles allowed him to gain an intimate familiarity with both New Salem's citizens and its topography. Well-liked in the small city, Lincoln ran a failed campaign for the Illinois Legislature in 1832. Undeterred, he ran again in 1834 and won on his third bid in 1836. His focus on navigable river infrastructure made him well-known among Illinois citizens, as did his successful efforts to relocate the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield.¹⁹ Throughout his time in the legislature, he studied to be an attorney. In September of 1836, he received his law license. Looking for wider political and professional opportunities, Lincoln moved to the state's new capital, Springfield, in March of 1837, already a known Whig in Illinois politics.²⁰

Once settled in Springfield, Lincoln entered into a series of strategic law partnerships to bolster his political aspirations. The first was with John Todd Stuart, a prominent Whig and local attorney. Lincoln and Stuart met during their service in the Black Hawk War and it was Stuart who encouraged Lincoln's law studies throughout 1835 and 1836. Lincoln ran for, and was reelected to, the state legislature in 1838 and 1840. Lincoln and Stuart maintained a lucrative partnership until Stuart's election to

¹⁹ Abraham Lincoln, "First Political Announcement," *Sangamo Journal*, New Salem, Illinois, March 9, 1832.

²⁰ David Donald, *Lincoln*, (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 64.

Congress in late 1839 shifted the bulk of the practice to Lincoln alone. In 1841, Lincoln entered into a new law partnership with Stephen T. Logan, the leading attorney in Sangamon County. Logan chose Lincoln for his personable nature, remarkable memory, and easy and conversational relationship with juries. Lincoln absorbed Logan's command of procedures and precedents, and grew to become a "lawyer's lawyer, adept at meticulous preparation and cogent argument."²¹ Under Logan's tutelage, Lincoln advanced to practice with increasing frequency before the Illinois Supreme Court and he became one of the most successful lawyers in the state. Though highly successful in their firm, Logan and Lincoln amicably dissolved their partnership in 1844. Several months later, Lincoln entered into a third and lasting law partnership with William H. Herndon, an inexperienced lawyer.²²

Now a veteran attorney, Lincoln focused his efforts on entering into the national political scene. During the course of Lincoln's professional relationship with Stuart, he entered into a courtship with Mary Todd, Stuart's cousin. The two wed in November of 1842. Educated and raised in a Whig family, Mary encouraged Lincoln's political ambitions and he pursued election to the House of Representatives in 1843. Lincoln lost the bid and spent the next year campaigning on behalf of Whig presidential nominee, Henry Clay. In 1846, Lincoln ran again for the House of Representatives and won. Lincoln assumed his seat in Congress in 1847, one year into the hostilities of the Mexican-American War. The war began in 1846 after the United States and Mexico entered into armed conflict over America's disputed annexation of Texas in 1845. On

²¹ Stephen Oates, *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011), 104.

²² Donald, *Lincoln*, 97 – 101.

December 22, 1847, the newly-elected Lincoln questioned President James Polk's repeated justification of the war's origin, that blood was shed on legal American soil, by asking "whether the particular spot of soil on which the blood our citizens was so shed, was, or was not, our own soil." This question, among seven others, came to be known as the Spot Resolutions and earned Lincoln the derogatory nickname, "Spotty Lincoln," for his criticisms of the president during wartime.²³ However, the animus toward Lincoln was brief, and the controversy surrounding his challenge to Polk's wartime executive authority came to naught, as the war ended five weeks later.

Nevertheless, the Mexican-American War was the impetus that set Lincoln on the defining course of his political career - slavery. The war had raised questions about the system of slavery in the United States and its expansion into new territories. As a member of Congress, Lincoln became embroiled in intense debates over the Wilmot Proviso, a proposal to prohibit the western expansion of slavery into newly obtained territories.²⁴ As a Whig, Lincoln opposed slavery's expansion and supported the proviso. The proposal did not pass, but the long debate in Congress alarmed proponents of slavery who viewed the proviso, and its Congressional supporters, as a threat to an economic future fed by slavery, but also to the continuation of slavery in the areas where it already existed. To alarmed Southerners, support of the proviso was an attack on the institution of slavery and thus a threat to the South's economy. Regional fissures, generally characterized as the anti-expansionist North and the proslavery South, began to trump party divisions and

²³ Abraham Lincoln, "Lincoln's Spot Resolution, December 22, 1847; G. S. Borit, "Lincoln's Opposition to the Mexican War," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908 – 1984)*, Vol. 67, No. 1, Abraham Lincoln Issue (Feb., 1974): 79 – 80, 87; Louis Fisher, "The Mexican War and Lincoln's 'Spot Resolutions,'" *The Law Library of Congress* 1, (August 18, 2009): 1.- 9.

²⁴ Eric Foner, "The Wilmot Proviso Revisited," *The Journal of American History* 56, no. 2 (1969): 262.

sectional unrest intensified. Some twelve years later, Lincoln's early support of the proviso would incite the South to pursue secession and disunion.²⁵

In 1849, Lincoln introduced his first piece of anti-slavery legislation. The bill was designed to gradually end slavery in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C. Lincoln's bill planned for the transition of slave children into 'apprentices' who would labor for their owners for an indeterminate amount of time; would hold all slaves in bondage until freed by their owners (who would receive federal compensation); would prohibit slave movement in or out of the capital; and, would enforce the capture and return of fugitive slaves.²⁶ Lincoln's bill received a lukewarm reception; some Whigs praised his efforts to take a public stand against slavery, while others dubbed Lincoln "the Slave-Hound of Illinois" for his support of the Fugitive Slave Acts.²⁷ The effect of the bill was two-fold; it introduced the fundamental themes of Lincoln's later antislavery legislative efforts, gradual abolition coupled with financial compensation to slave-owners, and further aligned him with the nation's antislavery forces in the eyes of the South. The remainder of Lincoln's term passed unremarkably. He voted along party lines and returned home in May 1849 after the 30th session ended.

Following his time in Congress, Lincoln's political career fell dormant. He returned to Springfield and worked at his law office with Herndon. It was not until the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 that Lincoln resurrected his public presence and cemented himself as an opponent of slavery's westward expansion. Prior to 1854, the

²⁵ Carl Lawrence Paulus "The Slaveholding Crisis: The Fear of Insurrection, the Wilmot Proviso, and the Southern Turn Against American Exceptionalism," Rice University; Dissertation, 2, 8 -9.

²⁶ Abraham Lincoln, "Congressman Lincoln's Draft of a Bill to Abolish Slavery in the District of Columbia, January 1849," U.S. Capitol.

²⁷ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 57 -58.

Missouri Compromise of 1820 banned the addition of slave territories north of the 36°30' latitude. With the statehoods of Kansas and Nebraska pending, Democratic Senator Stephen A. Douglas proposed to repeal the congressional mandate in lieu of a popular sovereignty plan.

During an 1854 speech in Peoria, Illinois, Lincoln condemned both Douglas's plan and the South's claim that the federal government lacked the authority to prohibit the extension of slavery. Lincoln denounced the South's defense that slavery was a "sacred right of self-government" and stated that he could not conceive of any "moral right in the enslaving of one man by another."²⁸ The entangled societal systems of slave versus free damaged America's efforts to establish the superiority of free republican politics - and for Lincoln, it was of the utmost importance to excise this blight from the nation's reputation.²⁹ Lincoln described slavery as a "retrograde institution [that was] undermining the principles of progress, and fatally violating the noblest political system the world ever saw." Lincoln did not call for abolition, but rather for a return to slavery's legal status as a system that existed out of necessity as positioned by the Founding Fathers.³⁰ Circulated via print around the country, the Peoria speech identified Lincoln as a prominent member of the newly-formed Republican Party, a coalition of anti-slavery Whigs and Free Soil Democrats that gained prominence in the late 1850s.

Lincoln's eloquent opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act gained him national notoriety. His general popularity motivated the Republican State Convention to select Lincoln as their candidate in the 1858 Illinois senatorial campaign against Stephen. A

²⁸ Abraham Lincoln, "Peoria Speech," October 16, 1854.

²⁹ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 91, 102.

³⁰ Lincoln, "Peoria Speech."

Douglas, the incumbent Democratic Senator. Speaking before his Republican colleagues, Lincoln outlined his political platform that centered on the topic of slavery. Lincoln predicted that a crisis awaited the nation as “a house divided against itself cannot stand.” Neither the government nor the nation could endure being “permanently half slave and half free,” and ultimately the nation would “become all one thing or all the other.”³¹ In fierce competition, Lincoln and Douglas traveled throughout Illinois engaging in a series of seven debates over slavery’s expansion westward during the Fall of 1858.

In order not to alienate the entirety of the white Southern Democratic voting bloc, Lincoln campaigned for a free-labor society to distance his campaign from the weighty rhetoric of abolition or racial equality. In the first Lincoln-Douglas debate, Lincoln took pains to clarify his opinion that blacks were entitled to certain natural rights, but not political or social equality. Lincoln argued that “there is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to the natural rights of the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Lincoln stated, however, that blacks, both slave and free, were systemically inferior, and regardless of right or wrong, neither “[his] own feelings” nor the “great mass of white people would admit blacks as equals to whites morally, politically, or socially.”³² Democrats vehemently rejected Lincoln’s expression of support for any type of black advancement in society. Lincoln tempered his limited support of natural rights for blacks by noting that a black man was “not my equal in many respects – certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment.” Lincoln reiterated and expanded on this point in his fourth debate against Douglas when he explicitly stated:

³¹ Abraham Lincoln, “House Divided Speech, June 16, 1858.”

³² Abraham Lincoln, “Peoria Speech, October 16, 1854”; Abraham Lincoln, “First Lincoln-Douglas Debate: Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858.”

I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, -that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between white and black races which I believe will for ever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.³³

Lincoln's distinction between rights and citizenship dates back to as early as 1847. A surviving fragment of a tariff discussion evidenced Lincoln's conviction that the fruits of labor "belong to those whose labour has produced them."³⁴ The fragment, when coupled with the rhetoric of the fourth debate, highlights the paradox within Lincoln's racial ideology. To Lincoln, slavery violated the Declaration of Independence as all people, regardless of race, were entitled to natural rights that included agency over the fruits of their own labor. Lincoln, however, distinguished between natural rights and citizenship; he did not believe natural rights automatically translated into the basic civil, political, or social rights innate to white American citizenship.³⁵ Citizenship was a controlled status and defined by the majority group in power. In short, Lincoln opposed slavery but accepted white racial supremacy.³⁶ The Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 provide evidence of Lincoln's commitment to natural rights, views that only strengthened throughout his lifetime; he firmly carried the belief in constitutionally-guaranteed natural laws into his presidency. The debates also illustrate that Lincoln's political and racial philosophies were influenced by the racial dictates of his time. Despite his understanding

³³ Abraham Lincoln, "Fourth Debate: Charleston, Illinois," September 18, 1858.

³⁴ Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol 2, 411 – 412.

³⁵ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 110, 118, 123. Lincoln's presidential efforts would lead to a definition of American citizenship; of what rights and liberties it entailed and exactly who was eligible to be a citizen.

³⁶ Fredrickson, "A Man but Not a Brother," 52.

of natural rights, Lincoln continued to struggle with defining who was eligible for citizenship.

Lincoln's success in the debates gained him even greater national prominence as an opponent of slavery. The Lincoln-Douglas debates sparked widespread interest over the ongoing question of states' rights and further inflamed the sectional conflict. Despite being a free state, Illinois voters ultimately reelected Douglas to the Senate. Lincoln, now a nationally-recognized speaker, campaigned on behalf of Republican candidates in other states.³⁷ He accepted one such invitation to speak at the church of abolitionist, Henry Ward Beecher, in Brooklyn, New York on February 27, 1860. The venue had to be changed to the larger Cooper Institute to accommodate the crowd of 1,500 who gathered to hear the rumored presidential aspirant speak. Lincoln spoke at length about slavery, its constitutional legality, and the roots of sectional strife. Deftly researched, Lincoln reflected on the thirty-nine signers of the Constitution, the Founding Fathers, and their understanding of the question – “does the proper division of local from federal authority, or anything in the Constitution, forbid our federal government to control as to slavery in our federal territories?”³⁸ Slave-owning citizens felt it was their right to own slaves; the Founding Fathers, after all, never explicitly outlawed slavery in the Constitution. Lincoln countered that slavery was never “distinctly and expressly affirmed” as a right in the Constitution. Lincoln's persuasive conclusion was that the federal government possessed the constitutional authority to control the expansion of slavery within the United States. In an effort to placate agitated Southerners fearful of federal intervention into their

³⁷ Gary Ecelbarger, “Before Cooper Union: Abraham Lincoln's 1859 Cincinnati Speech and Its Impact on His Nomination,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol 30, No. 1 (Winter 2009): 1-2.

³⁸ Abraham Lincoln, “Cooper Union Address,” February 27, 1860.

property, Lincoln's speech carefully illustrated that the current Republican view of federal control over slavery mimicked that of the signers of the Constitution. In so doing, Lincoln presented the Republican Party as the ideological heir of the Founding Fathers. Lincoln's use of logic over morality made him a less polarizing candidate than the more outspoken abolitionists in the Republican Party.

Lincoln's mastery of the nuances of constitutional authority and his eloquent, but relentless, articulation of his argument resulted in political gains throughout the North.³⁹ Thus, when the Republican National Convention met in May of 1860 in Illinois to select their presidential nominee, nationally-recognized Abraham Lincoln was a viable candidate. Lincoln's logical approach to slavery's legality, and his extended campaign tour of 1858 and 1859, made him well-known in Republican circles, earning him many favors. His political absence from 1849 to 1854 also meant he had fewer political enemies than more prominent candidates, like New York Senator William H. Seward. After three ballots, and the calling in of his many campaign favors, Lincoln received the nomination for president.⁴⁰ The Democratic Party, by contrast, lacked unity. After fifty-seven ballots, the Democratic Convention could not reach a majority on any candidate. The party fragmented into three Democratic factions, each nominating a presidential candidate to run against Lincoln: John C. Breckinridge of the Southern Democratic Party; John Bell of the Constitutional Union Party; and, Stephen A. Douglas of the Northern Democratic Party.

³⁹ Abraham Lincoln, "Cooper Union Address, February 27, 1860,"

⁴⁰ Michael Burlingame. "Abraham Lincoln: Campaigns and Elections." UVA Miller center. <https://millercenter.org/president/lincoln/campaigns-and-elections>.

Lincoln's stance on slavery was the central issue of interest during his campaign. Although Lincoln tried to center his platform on Homestead Acts and a free-wage and labor society, the focus of Democratic attacks against Lincoln was his support of "negro equality." Newspapers published articles with titles such as "White Men Read Read Read!" warning that Lincoln was an "unscrupulous Abolitionist" intent on "overwhelming the people of the South by placing the negro on an equality with the free white voters."⁴¹ Southern papers declared the need to secede upon Lincoln's election as the federal government would "force amalgamation between [negroes] and the children of the poor men of the South." One Georgian warned that to remain in the Union meant "in TEN years or less our CHILDREN will be the *slaves* of negroes."⁴² In political cartoons, speeches, and newspapers, Democratic supporters emphasized the social stigma of Lincoln's supposed support of black equality.⁴³

The campaign against Lincoln turned crude and personal. Republicans and Democrats throughout the country criticized Lincoln's uncouth mannerisms, rural origins, lack of education, and mocked his extraordinary six foot height. Lincoln's reviled status stemmed in part from his relatively unknown past. Between 1858 and 1860, Lincoln drafted three autobiographies. The first, a mere 47 words long, named only the place of his birth, his professions, and his time in politics. At just under 600 words, the

⁴¹ *The Democratic Press*, November 21, 1860.

⁴² *M'Arthur Democrat*, November 1, 1860; *Richmond Enquirer*, November 2, 1860; Alice Fahs McPherson, Gary Gerstie. *Liberty, Equality, and Power: A History of the American People*, (Boston: Thompson Wadsworth, 2008),444.

⁴³ "An Heir to the Throne." <https://elections.harpweek.com/1860/cartoon-1860-Medium.asp?UniqueID=6&Year=1860>; "Chief of the Wigwam." <https://elections.harpweek.com/1860/cartoon-1860-Medium.asp?UniqueID=10&Year=1860>; "Monkey Uncommon Up, Massa!" Lincoln's Election, *Punch Magazine*, December 1, 1860. <http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/34105>

second autobiography described his family as undistinguished and himself as “literally without education.” Regarding the brevity of this narrative, Lincoln said “there is not much of it, for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me.” Leading up to the presidential election in 1860, Lincoln wrote his longest autobiography, for John Scripps of the *Chicago Press and Tribune*. The Scripps autobiography detailed with indifference Lincoln’s rural upbringing on the frontier.⁴⁴ Following its publication, and in response to a letter from a supporter, Lincoln notably said “it is great folly to attempt to make anything out of me or my early life. It can all be condensed into a single sentence; and that sentence you will find in Gray’s *Elegy*: ‘The short and simple annals of the poor.’ That’s my life and that’s all you or anyone else can make of it.”⁴⁵ Lincoln’s rural background, combined with his sparse role in politics, made him a political unknown. He was neither a career politician nor a man of sophisticated upbringing. To the capital elites in the Northeast, Lincoln lacked the strength or sophistication to save the nation’s democracy. The South viewed him as an interloper in their affairs. Compounded with rising fears over the impending hostilities of secession, Lincoln was the subject of national scorn.⁴⁶

Lincoln supporters, however, were undeterred. Thousands of northern youths banded together to support Lincoln, forming a paramilitary organization called the Wide

⁴⁴ “Lincoln’s Autobiographies of 1858 -60,” Abraham Lincoln Online, <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/autobiog.htm>.

⁴⁵ William H. Herndon, Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon’s Lincoln*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, (Knox College Lincoln Studies Center, 2006) 15.

⁴⁶ Larry Tagg, *The Battles that Made Abraham Lincoln: How Lincoln Mastered his Enemies to Win the Civil War, Free the Slaves, and Preserve the Union*, “Chapter 6 – Lincoln’s Nomination, (Savas Beatie, 2012), para. 59 – 61, 63 – 64.

Awakes.⁴⁷ Six-foot-four tall supporters attended rallies and cookouts to split rails and listen to prominent Republicans campaign on behalf of Old Honest Abe, “the woodchopper of the west.”⁴⁸ On November 6, 1860, Lincoln received 180 electoral votes compared to Douglas’s 12, Breckinridge’s 72, and Bell’s 39. Omitted from Southern ballots, Lincoln won only 40 percent of the popular vote but strong support in the North earned him the necessary electoral votes to win by a wide margin.⁴⁹ Lincoln’s greatest strength as a candidate was his ‘middle of the road’ policy that made him palatable to the spectrum of constituents in the Republican Party.⁵⁰

Upon his election in November 1860, Lincoln supporters rejoiced that the party of freedom and liberty had won, while Democrats lamented the calamity that had befallen the South.⁵¹ However, praise for Lincoln was not universal among Republicans. Lincoln’s tall and lanky frame earned him the derision of New York Republicans who considered him to be “unshapely,” and “a barbarian, Scythian, yahoo, or gorilla.”⁵² A column in the *Salem Advocate*, a paper from Lincoln’s home territory in Illinois, stated that “people now marvel how it came to pass that Mr. Lincoln should have been selected as the representative man of any party. His weak, wishy-washy, namby-pamby efforts, imbecile in matter, disgusting in manner, have made us the laughing stock of the world.”

⁴⁷ Jon Grinspan. “Young Men for War”: The Wide Awakes and Lincoln’s 1860 Presidential Campaign.” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 96, No. 2, Abraham Lincoln at 200: History and Historiography (Sept. 2009), 357- 359.

⁴⁸ Michael Burlingame. “Abraham Lincoln: Campaigns and Elections.”

⁴⁹ Alice Fahs McPherson, Gary Gerstie. *Liberty, Equality, and Power: A History of the American People*, 444.

⁵⁰ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 144, 149.

⁵¹ “Let the People Rejoice: Lincoln Elected,” November 17, 1860; *The Freeport Wide Awake*. *The Lansing State Republican*, November 7, 1860; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 7, 1860; *Cedar Falls Gazette*, March 8, 1861; *Daily Intelligencer*, November 7, 1860; *The Weekly Mississippian*, November 7, 1860; *The Wabash Express*, November 7, 1860.

⁵² Mark Bowden, “‘Idiot,’ ‘Yahoo,’ ‘Original Gorilla’,” *The Atlantic*. Accessed November 11, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/06/abraham-lincoln-is-an-idiot/309304/>.

Already the subject of death threats, a disguised Lincoln snuck into Washington, D.C. for the inauguration under the cover of night. The ignominious start earned him the rebuke of the Northern press. One New York paper called for him to earn “the deepest disgrace that the crushing indignation of a whole people can inflict,” while another morbidly suggested “Mr. Lincoln may live a hundred years without having so good a chance to die.”⁵³

Lincoln’s election to the presidency was the catalyst for secession efforts. Even as a politician who embraced limited racial progress, and one who repeatedly emphasized black racial inferiority, Lincoln’s limited antislavery stance portended doom for the Union. The slaveholding states expected Lincoln to pursue the ultimate extinction of slavery and they reacted preemptively to remove themselves from his federal authority.⁵⁴ On December 24, South Carolina declared its secession from the Union due to the “election of a man to the high office of President of the United States whose opinions and purposes are hostile to slavery.”⁵⁵ Mississippi followed on January 9, 1861, as their “position [was] thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery.”⁵⁶

By the time Lincoln took office on March 4, 1861, seven states had declared their independence.⁵⁷ Lincoln was cognizant that apprehensions over slavery and his election existed throughout the country. In his first inaugural address, he attempted to guarantee the nation that he had no purpose, right, or inclination “to interfere with the institution of

⁵³ E. Lawrence Abel, *A Finger in Lincoln’s Brain: What Modern Science Reveals About Lincoln, His Assassination, and Its Aftermath*, (Praeger, 2015), 4; Harold Holzer, *Lincoln and the Power of the Press: The War for Public Opinion*, (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2014), 286.

⁵⁴ Paulus, “The Slaveholding Crisis,” ii.

⁵⁵ Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induct and Justify the Secession of South Carolina form the Federal Union.

⁵⁶ A Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of the State of Mississippi from the Federal Union.

⁵⁷ South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas.

slavery in the States where it exist[ed].”⁵⁸ Yet, despite Lincoln’s insistence that he had no intention to act against slavery, hostilities commenced within a month of his inauguration.

Above all else, Lincoln sought to avoid armed conflict with the seceded states. He deliberately closed his first inaugural address with a reminder: “[it is] in your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, the momentous issue of civil war.”⁵⁹ As tensions increased at the Union-held Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, Lincoln debated the best course of action; he knew that to send in federal reinforcements would provoke hostilities and thus make the Union the instigator of war. To evacuate the fort would damage Lincoln’s presidency just as it began. Instead, Lincoln decided to resupply the forts with necessary supplies, like food and water, rather than to provide reinforcements or munitions. Lincoln would not escalate hostilities nor incur blame for starting war. Instead, it would be the Confederacy’s decision whether or not to provoke conflict. After a resupply ship was turned away, Confederate troops bombarded Fort Sumter with artillery on April 12, 1861. The Civil War had begun.

Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to suppress the rebellion.⁶⁰ Through June and July, Confederate and Union forces clashed five times in and around Virginia. Union morale was high. Lincoln ordered Union commander, Brigadier General Irvin McDowell, to plan an attack that would, if successful, open a path to the Confederate capital in Richmond, Virginia, and end the war. On July 21, the armies engaged at Bull Run in

⁵⁸ Abraham Lincoln, “First Inaugural Address,” March 4, 1861.

⁵⁹ Lincoln, “First Inaugural Address.”

⁶⁰ *Pomeroy Weekly Telegraph*, April 19, 1861; *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, April 19, 1861; *Holmes County Republican*, April 18, 1861; *Western Reserve Chronicle*, April 17, 1861; *The New York Herald*, April 15, 1861.

Virginia. The Union line broke, however, and the Confederates claimed a substantial victory. Already elected with low popular support, Lincoln needed to show steady and decisive leadership in guiding the Union to victory. Stinging from the loss at Bull Run, he replaced his Union commander with George B. McClellan.⁶¹ McClellan showed terrific promise for a decisive Union victory. Appointed head of the Army of the Potomac, McClellan was popular with his troops, a brilliant organizer, and had every federal resource and advantage at his disposal. However, despite his strengths, he was a poor field commander. Slow to move, full of bravado, and wary of Confederate troop numbers, McClellan's army stagnated on the Potomac. Initially, McClellan enjoyed Lincoln's full confidence and the President deferred to McClellan's expertise in military affairs. However, as 1861 dragged on and McClellan remained at camp, Washington D.C. grew impatient and Lincoln grew frustrated. McClellan's superior attitude and inaction made Lincoln appear useless as a leader, and newspapers took to satirizing the Union's, and thus Lincoln's, inefficacy.⁶²

Lincoln's popularity, and support of his administration and its policies, relied upon the military success of the Union.⁶³ Opposition to the war increased following Union military defeats. The largest opposition came from the Copperheads, a faction of conservative Democrats. Strict constitutionalists, the Copperheads believed secession was a legal right and felt the war would end immediately if only the Union would ratify an

⁶¹Herman Hattaway, "Lincoln's Presidential Example in Dealing with the Military," *Papers of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 7 (1985), 21; *The Alleghanian*, July 25, 1861; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 25, 1861.

⁶² Hattaway, "Lincoln's Presidential Example," 24 – 26; "Masterly Inactivity," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, February 1, 1862. <http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/37689>

⁶³ Jennifer L. Weber, "Lincoln's Critics: The Copperheads," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2011, 33.

amendment to protect slavery. In the early months of the war, opposition remained relatively low. After the Union defeat at Bull Run, however, Copperheads began to agitate against the war, rallying behind the mantra “The Union as it was and the Constitution as it was.”⁶⁴ In response to the military defeat and the increasing antiwar rhetoric at home, Lincoln’s administration began to censor the press. Dissident newspaper editors were jailed and entire papers were shut down. Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus in 1861, and again in 1862 and 1863. Copperhead presses called Lincoln a tyrant.⁶⁵

In response to the unfolding crisis, the official policy of Lincoln’s administration was conciliation. Lincoln believed that secessionist sentiment in the South was lukewarm at best, and was mainly led by plantation gentry rather than by popularly elected officials.⁶⁶ As such, Lincoln ordered Union troops to respect the rights of southern citizens. White southern property, including slaves, was not to be touched. Lincoln’s primary goal was the preservation of the Union and a return to the antebellum status quo once the Union suppressed the Confederate rebellion. Lincoln repeatedly emphasized that the federal government did not have the authority, nor the desire, to seize the property of Southerners.⁶⁷ By forbidding slavery’s expansion to the West, Lincoln assumed the institution would gradually move towards abolition, with states functioning as the primary actors rather than the federal government. Lincoln’s proposed answer to the slavery question, gradual abolition, compensation, and colonization, received a lukewarm

⁶⁴ Weber, “Lincoln’s Critics,” 35; *The New York Times*, October 18, 1864.

⁶⁵ Weber, “Lincoln’s Critics,” 34; Abraham Lincoln, “Order to Suspend Habeas Corpus,” April 27, 1861; Michael Curtis Kent, “Lincoln, Vallandigham, and Anti-War Speech in the Civil War,” *William and Mary Bill of Rights Journal*, Vol. 7, pp. 105 – 191: 117 – 119.

⁶⁶ John C. Rodrigue, *Lincoln and Reconstruction*, (Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 15 – 16.

⁶⁷ Rodrigue, *Lincoln and Reconstruction*, 8, 16.

response. Northern abolitionists wanted immediate emancipation. The border states had not been enticed by Lincoln's repeated offers to compensate owners for manumission. Black Americans refused to emigrate out of the country of their birth. As his administration's conciliatory policies failed to bring an end to regional hostilities, Lincoln (and thus, the Union) were forced to consider more direct strategies to forcibly subdue the South. During the summer of 1862, the Lincoln administration abandoned their conciliation stance in favor of a more pragmatic approach that included the confiscation of Southerner's property and the emancipation of the region's slaves.⁶⁸

During the war's second year, Lincoln entertained the radical idea of immediate, federally-enforced emancipation.⁶⁹ The unproductive summer of 1862 strengthened his resolve to cripple the South and to end the rebellion as quickly as possible. In a July 1862 letter, Lincoln affirmed that he would "not surrender th[e] game leaving any available card unplayed."⁷⁰ Assessment of public opinion, however, informed Lincoln's actions. Lincoln understood that "the great masses of this country care comparatively little about the negro, and are anxious only for military successes."⁷¹ Attuned to Northern public sentiment, Lincoln understood that strategic timing of an emancipation proclamation was essential to its success. Lincoln needed to issue the proclamation after a major Union victory so it would not appear defeatist or desperate. In September of 1862, just days after the Union win at Antietam, Maryland, Lincoln announced his plan to emancipate the region's slaves. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation would take effect on January 1,

⁶⁸ Mark Grimsley. *The Hard Hand of War*, (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2-3.

⁶⁹ Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, 4.

⁷⁰ Basler, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume 5, page 343.

⁷¹ *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. by Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher, (Stanford University Press, 1996), 119.

1863 and “all persons held as slaves within any state or states” in Confederate-held territory “shall then, thenceforward, and forever, be free.”⁷²

The nation saw the months of September and December 1862 give rise to terrific battles that affected Lincoln’s popularity. Concerns over the bloodshed at Antietam were rapidly overshadowed by the issuance of a preliminary emancipation proclamation announced on September 22. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* declared that there was “universal acquiescence and rejoicing,” The *New York Tribune* described it as “the beginning of the new life of the nation.”⁷³ The *New York Times* said “the wisdom of the step taken is unquestionable; its necessity is indisputable.”⁷⁴ The *Daily Green Mountain Freeman* declared it “the greatest victory of the war.”⁷⁵ Democratic presses and organizations, however, denounced the proclamation as an excuse for Lincoln to violate the property rights of the South, and Copperheads gleefully touted that Lincoln’s true cause had revealed at last; the war was not waged to protect the Constitution, but to destroy slavery and to establish racial equality.⁷⁶ The disastrous battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862, however, devastated Northern morale. Over the course of four days of fighting, the Union suffered nearly 13,000 casualties, versus only 5,000 lost by the Confederacy. An outraged North blamed Lincoln for the slaughter.⁷⁷ One northern lawyer spoke on behalf of many when he stated that “all united in ascribing to the President the honor of being the author of all our calamities. His imbecility, vacillation, meddling

⁷² Abraham Lincoln, “Annual Message to Congress – Concluding Remarks,” December 1, 1862; Abraham Lincoln, “Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, 1862,” American Originals,

⁷³ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 24, 1862; *New York Tribune*, September 24, 1862.

⁷⁴ *New York Times*, September 24, 1862.

⁷⁵ *Daily Green Mountain Freeman*, September 23, 1862.

⁷⁶ *Daily Democrat and News*, September 23, 1862; *The New York Herald*, December 31, 1862.

⁷⁷ *The New York Herald*, December 16, 1862; *The New York Herald*, December 17, 1862; *Chicago Tribune*, December 17, 1862.

interference with everything, his frivolity and total incapacity of received or appreciated advice make him the most incorrigible stumbling block that God ever afflicted any nation with.”⁷⁸ *Harper’s Weekly* lamented that Northerners “have borne, silently and grimly, imbecility, treachery, failure, privation, loss of friends and means, almost every suffering which can afflict a brave people, but they cannot be expected to suffer that such massacres as this at Fredericksburg shall be repeated.”⁷⁹ The public outcry was so widespread that General Ambrose Burnside, Commander of the Army, published an official apology for the debacle.

Criticisms of Lincoln’s wartime leadership intensified. The arguments of Lincoln’s detractors gained traction as the financial and human cost of war continued to mount through 1863 and 1864.⁸⁰ Anger by Northerners reached a boiling point in 1863 following the passage of the Enrollment Acts, the first federal conscription law. Riots broke out in Toledo and Boston against the draft, and the violence turned deadly in New York City. From July 13–15, infuriated, white, New Yorkers raged throughout the streets, destroying property, and attacking black Americans in retaliation for the perceived infringement of their rights. An estimated 1,200 people died and some 3,000 black Americans were left homeless.⁸¹ In the face of declining Northern enlistments, black Americans answered the call to Union arms. Black enlistments further inflamed racial

⁷⁸ Weber, “Lincoln’s Critics,” 35 – 36.

⁷⁹ Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2008), 448; *Harper’s Weekly*, December 27, 1862.

⁸⁰ Weber, “Lincoln’s Critics,” 34.

⁸¹ *The Sun*, July 11, 1863; *The New York Herald*, July 14, 1863; Albon P. Man, Jr. “Labor Competition and the New York Draft Riots of 1863,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 36, no. 4 (Oct., 1951): 375 – 376.

prejudices, and seemed to legitimize Copperhead criticisms that the true purpose of war had been abolition.⁸²

Civilians wanted Lincoln to settle the war at any cost.⁸³ In March 1864, Lincoln appointed the popular “Unconditional Surrender” Ulysses S. Grant as head of the Union army. Grant’s appointment thrilled Union supporters and many felt the war would end quickly under his leadership.⁸⁴ The boost to morale, however, quickly extinguished after 64,000 Union soldiers perished under Grant during a six-week campaign that resulted in no gains nor tactical advantage for the Union and only mired the army in sieges along Confederate frontlines. Union supporters grew despondent and renamed the general, ‘Grant the Butcher.’⁸⁵ The summer of 1864 was the nadir of Northern support for the war and Lincoln’s popularity. Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, lamented in a letter to Lincoln: “our bleeding, bankrupt, almost dying country...longs for peace, shudders at the prospect of fresh conscriptions, of further wholesale devastations, and of new rivers of human blood.”⁸⁶ Critics called Lincoln the ‘widow’ or ‘orphan maker.’⁸⁷ The public lost trust in Lincoln and was disillusioned over the purpose of the war. *New York Times* editor and chair of the Republican Party, Henry J. Raymond, advised Lincoln that many Union supporters felt “we are not to have peace in any event under this

⁸² Weber, “Lincoln’s Critics,” 35 – 37.

⁸³ Weber, “Lincoln’s Critics,” 46.

⁸⁴ *Cleveland Morning Leader*, March 9, 1864; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 6, 1864; *Daily National Republican*, March 10, 1864; *Cleveland Morning Leader*, March 11, 1864.

⁸⁵ *The Shasta Courier*, October 8, 1864; *Rutland Weekly Herald*, August 18, 1864; *The Weekly Pioneer and Democrat*, August 26, 1864; *Evening Star*, June 6, 1864.

⁸⁶ Horace Greeley, “Horace Greeley to Abraham Lincoln,” July 7, 1864, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/letter-to-abraham-lincoln/>.

⁸⁷ Weber, “Lincoln’s Critics,” 40; *The Highland Weekly News*, January 15, 1863; *Dayton Daily Empire*, September 30, 1864; *Holmes County Farmer*, October 27, 1864; *New Oregon Plaindealer*, October 28, 1864.

administration until slavery is abandoned.”⁸⁸ Lincoln’s refusal to compromise with Confederate President Jefferson Davis led to the public perception that Lincoln was prolonging the war by obstructing peace.

Lincoln’s chances for reelection in 1864 appeared to be nonexistent. When the Democratic National Convention convened in Chicago in August 1864 to select their candidate, even Lincoln felt that a Democratic win was all but assured. *Harper’s Weekly*, a bastion for Republican support, listed all the names that had been applied to Lincoln in the months leading up to the election: Filthy Story Teller, Despot, Perjurer, Thief, Tyrant, Buffon, Fiend, Usurper, Butcher, Monster.⁸⁹ Yet, within 48 hours of the Convention’s close, General William T. Sherman captured the city of Atlanta, Georgia. The unexpected success revitalized Union support overnight and public opinion was reenergized in favor of the war.⁹⁰ The success buoyed Lincoln’s image and his reelection campaign rallied behind the slogan: “don’t change horses in the middle of a stream.”⁹¹

Lincoln earned a landslide win with 212 Electoral votes and 55 percent of the popular vote.⁹² Women, free blacks, and Confederate citizens were ineligible to vote, though for very different reasons. Therefore, the recorded win was not representative of his true popularity among American citizens. Lincoln’s success at the polls relied upon the spoils system and the infusion of pro-Union sentiment provided by Sherman’s capture

⁸⁸ Francis Brown, *Raymond of the Times* (New York: W.E. Norton, 1951), 259 – 260, as quoted in Jennifer L. Weber, “Lincoln’s Critics,” 42 – 43.

⁸⁹ Burlingame, “Abraham Lincoln: Campaigns and Elections”; *Harper’s Weekly*, September 24, 1864.

⁹⁰ *The Evening Telegraph*, September 3, 1864; *Daily National Republican*, September 3, 1864; *Chicago Tribune*, September 3, 1864; *The Daily Gate City*, September 3, 1864; *The New York Herald*, September 3, 1864; Weber, “Lincoln’s Critics,” 45.

⁹¹ Burlingame, “Abraham Lincoln: Campaigns and Elections,” Miller Center; *The Pittsburgh Post*, September 25, 1863; “President Lincoln and the National Union League,” *Evening Star*, June 9, 1864.

⁹² *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 4, 1864.

of Atlanta. Despite a clear electoral triumph with 212 votes, little more than half of white male Americans in the Union supported Lincoln. The Republican Party also lacked enthusiasm for the reelection. Ohio Representative, Lewis D. Campbell, stated “nothing but the undying attachment of our people to the Union has saved us from terrible disaster. Mr. Lincoln’s popularity has nothing to do with it.”⁹³ Maryland Republican, Henry Winter Davis, called Lincoln’s win “the subordination of disgust to the necessities of a crisis.”⁹⁴ Even the South viewed the reelection with bemused disinterest. The *Richmond Daily Dispatch* reported the day after Lincoln’s win that the Yankees willingly continued to live in civil slavery by reelecting a vulgar tyrant, but that the “the surrender which the Yankees made on yesterday of their liberties to the Jack Pudding, Abraham Lincoln, is in its way the most remarkable event of which history makes mention.” *The Daily Dispatch* closed by stating that the Yankees were a “profligate and degenerate race,” but that its voting habits made it “if not the greatest, [it] is, at least, the most interesting of all nations.”⁹⁵ Lincoln’s reelection garnered little enthusiasm.

On April 9, 1865, Lincoln received news of Confederate General, Robert E. Lee’s, surrender. Reporting on the events at Appomattox, Union papers expressed their readers’ celebratory sentiments, while Southern papers chronicled the lamentations of their readers’ humiliation and revulsion at the thought of forcible reintegration into a society that allowed any advancement in black equality.⁹⁶ Abolitionists despaired that Lincoln’s ‘middle of the road’ emancipation policy would ensure the continued

⁹³ Larry Tagg, *The Battles that Made Abraham Lincoln*, “Chapter 32 – The War at the End of the War,” para. 4.

⁹⁴ William C. Harris, *Lincoln’s Last Months*, (Harvard University Press, 2004), 41.

⁹⁵ *The Daily Dispatch*, November 9, 1864.

⁹⁶ “Surrender of Lee’s Army,” *Quad City Times*, April 10, 1865; *The New York Times*, April 10, 1865; Martha Hodes, *Mourning Lincoln*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 17 – 38.

disenfranchisement of black Americans. Lincoln's intimation of black suffrage for Union veterans at an impromptu speech given late on April 11, 1865, disgusted Copperheads. Conflicting domestic fears over the country's future overshadowed Lincoln's wartime success. Four days later, on the night of April 14, John Wilkes Booth fatally shot Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre. Present at his bedside, Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, remarked "now he belongs to the ages."

An inflammatory figure to the end, Lincoln's shocking assassination nevertheless jarred the public. As news of the assassination spread, the guilt that citizens felt over their ambivalence towards Lincoln during his last months in office fueled an unprecedented public expression of grief.⁹⁷ The polarization about Lincoln faded amidst a swell of post-mortem adulations. At the close of the war, both the North and South began to recraft Lincoln's image. The North embraced Lincoln as a benevolent martyr whose purity of soul and greatness overrode any perceived shortcomings associated with his wartime leadership. Some Southerners viewed Lincoln's death as "glorious news," but the idea that the South had murdered its best hope circulated widely.⁹⁸ As the nation confronted the formidable challenge of reunification, Lincoln became a symbol emblematic of love of country and sacrifice. Transformed in American memory, Lincoln's emancipatory legacy became contested in the era of Reconstruction as the nation capitulated to the pressures of white regional reunification.

⁹⁷ "The Nation's Bereavement," *The New York Times*, April 17, 1865; Carolyn Lawton Harrell, *When the Bells Told for Lincoln: Southern Reaction to the Assassination*, (Mercer University Press, 1997), ix.

⁹⁸ Pryor, *Six Encounters with Lincoln*, 142; Carolyn Lawton Harrell, *When the Bells Told for Lincoln*, 33 – 34; "Our Domestic Correspondence," letter from H. O. Waggner, Chicago, April 16, 1865, *New York Anglo-African*, published Apr. 26, 1865, as quoted in Martha Hodes' *Mourning Lincoln*, 139.

Chapter 2 - The Making of a Martyr

The era of Reconstruction dawned over a fractured nation. By the end of the nineteenth century, the polarities of American politics had transformed the cultural fabric of the United States. The Civil War exceeded all predictions: in length, cost, and social significance. A controversial president, Lincoln's assassination permanently elevated his stature. Transformed into a symbol of American identity, Lincoln's memory took on significant cultural and political ramifications indicative of how the nation remembered the purpose of the war, and its goals for its future. The fractious period of Reconstruction exacerbated regional hostilities and inaugurated a period of white-on-black violence throughout the South. References to Lincoln's emancipatory legacy grew scarce for the remainder of the nineteenth century, and his prominence was renamed for his dedication to securing North-South reconciliation. In order to transcend the lingering tensions between North and South, the United States embraced Lincoln's legacy as the Savior of the Union. The failure of Reconstruction to prevent a return to legalized racial discrimination was reflected in Lincoln's image. Sanitized of polarizing racial policies, Lincoln became a symbol for white national unity.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era*, 14 – 15; Davis S. Kaufer & Shawn J. Parry-Giles, "Refined vs. Middling Styles in the Lincoln Reminiscence: Comparing the Rhetoric of Formality and Familiarity," *Rhetoric Review* (Vol 33, No. 4), 345.

Reconstruction did not begin with Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox on April 9, 1865, but rather it began five days later, with Abraham Lincoln's assassination. Although reelected, Lincoln remained an unpopular and polarizing head of state following the war's end. Despite widespread criticisms of his wartime leadership, most citizens expected the president to continue to lead and maintain the balance between national extremes of political thought. As news of the war's end spread throughout the country, near-concurrent reporting of Lincoln's death served to deflate the growing excitement. The president's unexpected removal from office meant that Reconstruction policies passed from Lincoln's moderate hands into those of the Republicans. Leading Republicans faced the challenge of creating policies that not only reunified North and South, but also incorporated liberated black Americans into society. Radical Republicans embarked on a civil rights campaign of sweeping proportions. Landmark legislation guaranteed federal protection to all citizens regardless of race for the first time in the nation's history. Lacking Lincoln's sense of moderation and public opinion, however, the Republicans underestimated pushback by Southern Democrats. As Democrats returned to office, they rolled back Republican gains in order to pursue sectional reconciliation instead of racial justice. Lincoln's death threw Reconstruction into a contested political landscape.

On April 15, 1865, Andrew Johnson succeeded Abraham Lincoln as president. A Democrat from Tennessee, Johnson remained staunchly pro-Union during the Civil War. Johnson fiercely stated throughout 1864 that "treason must be made odious, and traitors must be punished and impoverished."¹⁰⁰ In the same year, Johnson styled himself a

¹⁰⁰ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*, (Harper: New York, 1988), 177.

‘Moses-like’ figure who would guide the blacks to freedom and equality. Radical Republicans looked forward to Johnson’s leadership, and what they hoped would be decisive and far-reaching change resulting from his Reconstruction policies. However, Republican hopes dissolved as it became apparent that Johnson was a dogmatic proponent of limited government and an inveterate racist. Contrary to Republican expectations, Johnson proposed a lenient Reconstruction plan. Vast swaths of Southerners received full pardons, and the constitutional conventions ordered by Johnson excluded blacks from attendance. These all-white bodies drafted new constitutions that incorporated a series of laws designed to curtail black labor opportunity, commonly called Black Codes. Black Codes contractually bound black laborers to work for specified periods on white farms. Laborers that ‘broke’ their contracts lost wages, and unemployed blacks were subject to arrest and consignment to forced labor. White Southerners did not accept the realities of emancipation and instead attempted to return to a form of paternalism, “clothe[d] with the force of law,” that would forcibly “restore all of slavery but its name.”¹⁰¹

Early in 1866, Congress took steps to modify the Reconstruction policies of Lincoln’s successor. The proposed legislation, The Civil Rights Bill of 1866, acknowledged that all persons born in the United States were citizens with “full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property.” Passed with substantial majorities in both Houses of Congress, Johnson surprisingly vetoed the bill. The veto was overridden by Congress, the bill passed, and the federal government

¹⁰¹ Eric Foner and Olivia Mahoney, *America's Reconstruction: People and Politics after the Civil War* (LSU Press, 1997), 75; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 200.

assumed for the first time, a responsibility to guarantee all Americans' civil rights.¹⁰² In short order, Congress passed the Fourteenth Amendment in June of 1866 and guaranteed all citizens equality before the law. Now openly in conflict with Johnson, Republicans swept the 1866 congressional elections. In March of 1867, following a second override of Johnson's veto, Congress implemented the Reconstruction Act and placed the South under military control. The Act stipulated the rebellious Southern states draft new constitutions that permitted black elections to office and guaranteed black suffrage. The period of Congressional Reconstruction created the nation's first biracial democratic government. Among the achievements of black representatives was the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in early 1869, guaranteeing black men's suffrage.

Six years after Lincoln emancipated the slaves, the federal government guaranteed black Americans the right to vote regardless of race. With the amendment's ratification, many felt the work of Reconstruction was complete with "four million human beings," delivered from "the auction-block to the ballot box."¹⁰³ White Southerners, however, fiercely opposed Reconstruction. From 1868 to 1871, white-on-black violence was rampant throughout the South. White supremacy organizations, most notably the Ku Klux Klan, engaged in a reign of terror designed to prevent blacks from voting in local elections. Using threats, violence, and murder, Southern Democrats reclaimed their governments from Republican rule. The commitment to Reconstruction by Northerners, however, waned as liberal Republicans imbibed the racist rhetoric of newly-empowered Southern Democrats. Despite the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which

¹⁰² Foner and Mahoney, *America's Reconstruction*, 11, 78 – 79.

¹⁰³ Foner and Mahoney, *America's Reconstruction*, 80 – 83. 90.

outlawed racial discrimination in places of public accommodation, white support for black enfranchisement and mobility eroded throughout the 1870s. With the 1876 presidential election looming, amid mounting fears over another civil war over emancipation, the federal government abandoned its support for Reconstruction policies. The military occupation of the South was ended. Southerners redrafted their state constitutions “disenthralled from a government which had been foisted upon them.”¹⁰⁴ The fundamental civil gains of Reconstruction were undone as the new constitutions removed the earlier protections extended to blacks in the postwar society. By the 1890s, Democrats reversed or circumvented most laws of Reconstruction. Blacks were disenfranchised, segregated, and politically disempowered.¹⁰⁵ The federal government tacitly stood by during the unraveling of Reconstruction, and ultimately legalized racial segregation with the 1896 Supreme Court decision in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*. Southern stereotypes of black ineptitude and inferiority, seemingly validated by scientists and historians, received widespread dissemination throughout the United States. By the end of the nineteenth century, white Americans accepted Jim Crow and Southern justification of the racial status quo.¹⁰⁶

The intensity of white Southern opposition to Reconstruction illustrates the dramatic socio-political tensions during and following Lincoln’s presidency. Though politically reintegrated into the United States, the South still held itself apart culturally. The ‘Lost Cause’ movement began to gain a foothold in Southern thought. First advanced

¹⁰⁴ Gabriel J. Chin, “The Voting Rights Act of 1867,” *North Carolina Law Review*, Vol 82. 1584.

¹⁰⁵ Chin, “Voting Rights Act of 1867,” 1582.

¹⁰⁶ Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction*, (Vintage, 2013), 216.

by Edward Pollard in his eponymous 1866 work, the Lost Cause referred to a romanticization of the ‘Old South’ by Southerners, in which slavery was downplayed as a major tenet of society. The nostalgic reimagining of the antebellum South painted the region in the best possible light and as the idea gained widespread traction, slavery as a main construct of Civil War lost ground in the national memory. White Americans increasingly shaped their memory of the war around the theme of reunification. The pressures of reunification had subsumed the legacy of emancipation.¹⁰⁷

Lincoln’s legacy, too, reflected the shift. The federal emphasis on reunification recast Lincoln as ‘Savior of the Union’ rather than as the ‘Great Emancipator.’ Lincoln’s role in effecting a racial revolution was downplayed as the prewar racial hierarchy regained a foothold in American thought. Newspapers, memorials, and sermons about Lincoln focused on the theme of reunification and the polarizing elements of emancipation largely disappeared from the popular conception of Lincoln. Writers, too, shied away from Lincoln’s emancipatory legacy and focused instead on aspects of his early life or his journey from prairie boy to masterful statesman. For the remainder of the 1800s, the popular image of Lincoln supported and legitimized a return to antebellum customs and the racial status quo.

From the moment news of Lincoln’s assassination began to circulate, there was a rapid reshuffling of public opinion with regard to his actions as president and his legacy. Only weeks prior, the nation heard Lincoln call for “malice toward none” in his Second Inaugural Address. Now, the nation grappled with emotional extremes of vengefulness,

¹⁰⁷ Foner and Mahoney, *America’s Reconstruction*, 124; Foner, *Forever Free*, 216 – 217.

sorrow, grief, and exultation in the aftermath of his murder. The incongruence of Lincoln's death at the zenith of his political success stunned the country, and public reaction to the news reflected the widespread unrest and confusion of a victorious nation suddenly "drowned in sorrow."¹⁰⁸ Responses to Lincoln's death took many forms. Most commonly, reactions appeared in newspapers and editorials, but also in anthologies, reminiscences, and tributes. Entire cities hosted ceremonial commemorations and speakers eulogized Lincoln's legacy. Artists captured the sorrowful nature of Lincoln's death in paintings and sculpture, while poets and musicians enshrined his legacy in lyrical prose. Lincoln's veneration as an American martyr was not immediate, but the initial frenzy of universal grief and national mourning laid the foundation for Lincoln's popular veneration by the end of the century. In downplaying the nation's unpopular opinion of him in his final months, and by limiting his inflammatory association to slavery and emancipation, the early tributary memorializations of Lincoln sanitized his nineteenth century image.¹⁰⁹

With some individuals receiving near concurrent reports of the war's end and the assassination, accurate news of the effects of Lincoln's death on national affairs was in demand. Northern newspapers reported the "complete details of the great calamity," and lamented the untimely "cold-blooded assassination" at the "very moment when [Lincoln] was closing the rebellion which had drenched the land in blood and tears."¹¹⁰ Though

¹⁰⁸ "The Murder of President Lincoln," *The New York Times*, April 16, 1865; "Our Great Loss," *The New York Times*, April 17, 1865.

¹⁰⁹ *Daily Davenport Democrat*, April 15, 1865; *The Wheeling Daily Register*, April 17, 1865; *Chicago Tribune*, April 17, 1865; *The New York Herald*, April 18, 1865; *The New York Times*, April 20, 1865; Abott A. Abott. "The Assassination and Death of Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America, at Washington, on the 14th of April, 1865."

¹¹⁰ "Complete Details of the Great Calamity," *The Chicago Tribune*, April 17, 1865; "The Murder of President Lincoln," *The New York Times*, April 16, 1865.

some parts of the South reveled in the “glorious news” of the assassination, others considered it an abhorrent, inhuman crime that dealt “the heaviest blow which ha[d] ever fallen upon the people of the South.”¹¹¹ The intensity of the public’s reaction to the assassination, both North and South, illustrates the deep anxieties of the fragile new Union.¹¹²

After newspapers confirmed Lincoln’s death, their focus shifted to coverage of Lincoln’s elaborate and circuitous funeral procession to Springfield, Illinois. Daily business ground to a halt as thousands of people lined the streets to catch a glimpse of the train bearing Lincoln’s body.¹¹³ “Never was King or Emperor honored with such obsequies as those with which our Republic has laid to rest its greatest hero,” described *Harper’s Weekly*.¹¹⁴ Newspaper illustrations depicted the thronged streets and black drapery of the cities that hosted the funeral procession.¹¹⁵ The people of Washington observed funeral rites for Lincoln on April 19 and cities across the nation held their own vigils in solidarity, expressing the magnitude of the nation’s loss.¹¹⁶ On April 22, 1865, the city of New Orleans, alone, held a public demonstration to honor Lincoln’s role as the

¹¹¹ *Demopolis Herald*, April 19, 1865; *The Richmond Whig*, April 17, 1865.

¹¹² “The Effect of President Lincoln’s Death on National Affairs,” *The New York Times*, April 17th, 1865; “Our Great Loss,” *The New York Times*, April 16, 1865; Harold Holzer, “What the Newspapers Said when Lincoln was Killed,” Smithsonian, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/what-the-newspapers-said-when-lincoln-was-killed-180954325/>.

¹¹³ “The Rites in Honor of the Dead President The General Mourning,” *The New York Times*, April 20, 1865; Ralph G. Newman, “In This Sad World of Ours, Sorrow Comes to All,” A Timetable for the Lincoln Funeral Train,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908 – 1984)*, Vol 58, No. 1 (Spring 1965), pp. 5 – 20: 5 – 6.

¹¹⁴ “President Lincoln’s Funeral,” *Harper’s Weekly*, May 6, 1865.

¹¹⁵ Frank Leslie. “President Lincoln’s Funeral Procession in New York City - Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper Drawing.” *Remembering Lincoln*. Web. Accessed June 23, 2019. <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/1114>

¹¹⁶ “The Nation’s Loss, A Sermon Upon the Death of Abraham Lincoln,” preached at Paducah, Kentucky, April 19th, 1865, Edward C. Slater. D.D.. Charles Sumner, Citizens, Boston. *A Memorial of Abraham Lincoln, Late President of the United States*. Boston: City Council, 1865. <https://www.loc.gov/item/12011018/>

Great Emancipator. Speaking on behalf of his community, a local minister said that “millions of hearts are wrung with grief for [Lincoln’s] loss,” and that “all mankind will mourn the death of the universal philanthropist.” The only solace from the irreparable loss, said another speaker, was that Lincoln ascended to “the highest culmination of human destiny” and thus returned “to the bosom of God.”¹¹⁷

Due to the timing of Lincoln’s death on Good Friday, popular responses likened his death to that of Jesus Christ. Biblical allusion cast Lincoln as a Christ-like figure, a martyr who sacrificed his life so his people could live. Popular artistic depictions illustrated Lincoln ascending to heaven in the embrace of angels. An idealized deathbed scene, published in 1865, depicted an expiring Lincoln, surrounded by beleaguered officials, beneath three angels descending from heaven to collect his soul. Another lithograph from 1865 depicted an ascendant Lincoln, embraced by George Washington as he descends with laurel in hand, to guide Lincoln to heaven.¹¹⁸ In addition to the strong religious symbolism, secular depictions of Lincoln’s death were abundant also. The painting, “Lincoln Borne by Loving Hands,” captured the hushed anxiety and dark foreboding of America’s shattered victory in the only artistic representation of the assassination by a surviving witness. The engravings of Currier and Ives famously captured the moments of John Wilkes Booth’s attack and Lincoln’s deathbed scene.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ J.S. Whitaker. "Louisiana's Tribute to the Memory of Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States: public demonstration in the city of New Orleans, April 22, 1865." Speech of Major General N. P. Banks. *Remembering Lincoln*. Web. Accessed June 24, 2019. <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/1192>

¹¹⁸ “Abraham Lincoln,” *Harper’s Weekly*, April 29, 1965; “Our Great Affliction,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 17, 1865; See D. T. Wiest’s *In Memory of Abraham Lincoln: The Reward of the Just* (1865), Max Rosenthal’s *The Last Moments of Abraham Lincoln*, Philadelphia, 1865, and J. A. Arthur’s *Washington & Lincoln (Apotheosis)* (1865),

¹¹⁹ Carl Bersch, “Lincoln Borne by Loving Hands,” 1865; “The Assassination of President Lincoln,” Published by Currier and Ives, 1865; “Death of President Lincoln,” Published by Currier and Ives.

Enterprising individuals produced mourning pins, armbands, and eulogies for public use. These portable totems memorialized Lincoln as “true in life, true in death!” as the country’s “best son,” “the late lamented,” “a martyred patriot,” and as the man that “set the millions free.”¹²⁰ Poetic tributes to Lincoln appeared throughout the remaining months of 1865.¹²¹

Of the published elegies, no voice better captured the mood of the people than that of poet Walt Whitman. Whitman, like many, found Lincoln to be a peculiar individual when he burst onto the national scene in 1858. Lincoln’s humility and lack of pretension, however, made a lasting impression on Whitman. Over time, Lincoln came to embody Whitman’s ideal president - a “heroic, shrewd, fully-inform’d, healthy-bodied, middle-aged, bear-faced American blacksmith or boatman” from the West. As Lincoln rose to the unique challenges of his presidency, Whitman implicitly trusted Lincoln’s “supernatural tact” and “Idiomatic Western genius.” The two men never met, but Whitman’s poetic style took on echoes of Lincoln’s speeches. Kindred spirits, both men shared a commitment to the preservation of the Union, an appreciation for the common man, and a shared passion for democratic ideals. Whitman considered Lincoln’s death a personal tragedy, but also saw it as the concluding, redemptive sacrifice in the

¹²⁰ *Lincoln, Mourning Ribbon.*, 1865. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/scsm000750/>; *Mourning Bade, True in Life, True in Death!* 1865. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/scsm000747/>; *Mourning Bade of Colored Satin with Portrait of Lincoln.*, T. Stevens, Coventry, n.d. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/scsm000482/>; *Mourning Badge.*, n.d. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/scsm000730/>; Examples of sheet music include: M. Keller, *Inscribed to the Memory of Abraham Lincoln, The Champion of Universal Liberty*, Boston, 1865, <https://www.loc.gov/item/scsm000095/>. George Root, *Farewell Father, Friend, and Guardian*, Root and Cady, Chicago, 1865, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200000445/>. Septimus Winner and Alice Hawthorne. *A Nation Mourns her Martyr’d Son*. W. Auner Song Publisher, Philadelphia, 1865, <https://www.loc.gov/item/scsm000510/>.

¹²¹ See Phoebe Cary’s “On Lincoln’s Death,” “A Dirge,” *Harper’s Weekly*, April 29, 1865; “A Nation’s Grief,” *Harper’s Weekly*, April 29, 1865; “Funeral Ode,” *Harper’s Weekly*, May 6, 1865; Walt Whitman, “O Captain! My Captain!,” http://www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/poems/my_captain.html.

metaphorical epic poem of the nation's narrative. In tribute, Whitman wrote four poems: "O Captain! My Captain!," "Lilacs," "Hush'd be the Camps To-day," and "This Dust was Once the Man." Of these, "O Captain! My Captain!" alone entered into the nation's popular culture to earn lasting immortality. Of the poetic tributes dedicated to Lincoln in the wake of his death, Whitman's was, and remains, the most quoted and admired.¹²²

On the anniversary of Lincoln's birthday, February 12, 1866, at the request of both houses of Congress, Washington D.C. hosted a federal eulogy for Lincoln to express the nation's grief. Senators and representatives gathered in the Capitol to hear George Bancroft honor the "martyr president of the United States." Labeled as "altogether American," Bancroft narrated Lincoln's seemingly inevitable transformation from a disadvantaged "child of the west" to "America's choice" as president. Bancroft described Lincoln as "inexorable," "self-sacrificing," "gentle," "great," and "honorable." Emphasizing Lincoln's love of country above all else, Bancroft concluded that Lincoln's lasting contribution to the nation was the moral unity he bestowed on America by making it a land of free labor.¹²³

More permanent memorials to Lincoln's memory began to appear as early as 1867, when Nebraska renamed its capital in Lincoln's honor. On the third anniversary of Lincoln's death, Washington D.C. erected the first monument to his memory. By the end of the century, New York, Illinois, and Washington D.C. had dedicated five more statues

¹²² Clarence A. Brown, "Walt Whitman and Lincoln," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1908 – 1984), 47 no. 2 (Summer, 1954): 176; Walt Whitman, *Prose Works* 1892, Ed. Floyd Stovall. (New York: New York UP, 1963–1964). 2:535; Walt Whitman, *The Correspondence*. Ed. Edwin Haviland Miller. 6 vols. (New York: New York UP, 1961–1977), (1:83).

¹²³ George Bancroft. "In Memoriam of Abraham Lincoln, the Martyr President of the United States". L. Towers. *Remembering Lincoln*. Web. Accessed June 24, 2019. <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/813>

to Lincoln. Of the seven reliefs and monuments erected prior to 1900, only one alluded to emancipation in any way. Dedicated in Lincoln Park in Washington, D.C. in 1876, the *Emancipation Memorial* depicted Lincoln in the process of freeing a shackled slave kneeling at his feet. Present at the dedication ceremony, abolitionist Frederick Douglass called the statue demeaning and criticized the symbolism of a kneeling slave.¹²⁴ Despite the lukewarm reception, the statue was nonetheless the first public memorial in the United States to venerate Lincoln's role in the Emancipation Proclamation over his sacrifice or love of country.

In 1874, the Lincoln Memorial Association completed construction of Lincoln's tomb in Springfield, Illinois. Some 25,000 people attended the ceremonial dedication and an outpouring of tributes to the "glorious old Martyr-President" appeared throughout the nation's newspapers. Among the speakers present were President Ulysses S. Grant and General William T. Sherman, who described Lincoln's inexorable love of country and their great affection for their previous Commander-in-Chief. Numerous newspapers printed letters from leading citizens that expressed their regret for not being able to attend the ceremony.¹²⁵ *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* of West Virginia reported, "statues will crumble, monuments will vanish, and wreaths will wither, but a Nation's heart will enshrine in living remembrance the talismanic name of Abraham Lincoln."¹²⁶ *The*

¹²⁴ Scott A. Sandage, "A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, The Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939 – 1963," *The Journal of American History*, 80 no. 1, 139; Freeman Murray, *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture: A Study in Interpretation*, (Murray Brothers, Washington D.C., 1916), 27 – 28.

¹²⁵ "The Martyr's Crown," *The Chicago Daily News*, October 16, 1874; "The Lincoln Monument," *Mineral Point Tribune*, October 29, 1874; "Lincoln," *The Indiana State Sentinel*, October 20, 1874; *Ottumwa Weekly Courier*, October 22, 1874.

¹²⁶ *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, October 16, 1874.

Bellows Falls Times described the nation's joy at being able to "provide a suitable place for the remains of the wisest and purest of men known to its national history."¹²⁷

The memory of Lincoln returned to the forefront of popular thought with the assassination of President James A. Garfield in 1881. Bereavement iconography pictured Garfield alongside Lincoln in tributary lithographs.¹²⁸ "Again our nation mourns," decried one Illinois author.¹²⁹ Multiple papers across the nation printed "worthier men than Abraham Lincoln and James A. Garfield this country has never seen in high station, and each was taken early in the height of fame and in the prime of manhood."¹³⁰ Others intoned that just as the government had survived Lincoln's death, so too it would survive again.¹³¹ Throughout the remainder of the century, tributes to Lincoln appeared in newsprint on the anniversaries of his birth and death. Articles chronicled his descendants' successes and woes, and sporadic tributes praised various aspects of Lincoln's character.¹³² The twenty-fifth anniversary of his death gave way to a resurgence of popular expressions of grief. Editorials and letters reiterated the "chill of terror" on that "black day" when the "defender of humanity" fell. Cities and churches across the nation

¹²⁷ *Bellows Falls Times*, October 30, 1874; *The Grange Advance*, October 21, 1874.

¹²⁸ *Lincoln and Garfield*, 1884. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2009632235/>; Littleton View Co. *The Martyrs – Lincoln and Garfield*. United States, 1884. [Littleton, N.H.: Littleton View Co., 1898] Photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2007680364/>; August Hageboeck, Artist, *Two Grand Representative. American Characters, Our Martyred Presidents.*, ca. 1881. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003690614/>.

¹²⁹ O.H. Oldroyd, *Lincoln and Garfield*. Springfield, Illinois, 1881. Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/scsm000499/>.

¹³⁰ *Richmond Daily Palladium*, September 20, 1881; *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, September 20, 1881; *New-York Tribune*, September 20, 1881; *Daily Globe*, September 20, 1881.

¹³¹ *Evening Star*, September 20, 1881; *Daily Globe*, September 20, 1881; *Wheeling Register*, September 20, 1881.

¹³² "Laughed at Himself," *Daily Independent*, April 9, 1890; "Lincoln's Oratory," *The Rock Island Argus*, February 12, 1889; "Lincoln's Jugendliebe," *Der Deutsche Correspondent*, June 7, 1890; "Foreign News," *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, December 31, 1881; "Abraham Lincoln," *Capital City Courier*, February 18, 1888; "The Martyr President," *The Columbus Journal*, February 8, 1888.

hosted memorial services in commemoration of the fateful day that “robbed the nation of its head.”¹³³

Reminiscences, biographies, and sketches appeared with regularity, and sermons and speeches with Lincoln as the subject were well attended and news worthy.¹³⁴ American products like Dr. Bicknell’s Syrup for Indigestion, Marble Hall Clothing’s Tailoring and Furnishings, and Lincoln Pure White Lead paint, commercially-appropriated Lincoln’s image to lend an aura of reliability and credence to each brand.¹³⁵ By the end of the century, Lincoln had become a popular cultural brand, emblematic of trust, integrity, and justice. In short, popular representations of Lincoln varied in form and substance, but were largely uniform in their depiction of the slain president. He was a figure to be “generally celebrated.”¹³⁶ Tributes and newspapers depicted Lincoln as the Savior of the Union, the ultimate statesman and patriot whose magnanimous attitude and eminent virtue made him a man among men. A prairie-born underdog, he embodied the American belief in opportunity.¹³⁷ Lincoln was an individual to learn from, an exemplar model for youths and adults alike, for his honesty, courage, and humility. Lincoln’s critics were cautious, fearing public outrage if they were perceived as lambasting the increasingly-

¹³³ “Death was Victor,” *Evening Journal*, March 6, 1890; *Evening Capital Journal*, April 14, 1890; “Twenty-Five Years,” *The Daily Republican*, April 14, 1890; “Twenty-Five Years Old,” *Pittsburg Dispatch*, April 14, 1890; “Belongs to the Ages,” *The Morning Call*, April 15, 1890; “News in Brief,” *Daily Tobacco Leaf-Chronicle*, April 16, 1890; “The Loyal League,” *Deseret Evening News*, April 16, 1890.

¹³⁴ *The San Francisco Call*, November 10, 1895, page 22; “Log Cabin to White House,” *The Morning Times*, February 9, 1896; “Local News,” *The Daily Sentinel*, September 4, 1900.

¹³⁵ *Dr. Bicknell’s Syrup*, Photograph. The Huntington, Accessed June 24, 2019, <https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p16003coll6/id/4949/>; *Advertising label for Lincoln Pure White Lead Paint*, ca. 1866. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/92506765/>; *Marble Hall Clothing. Includes Portrait of Lincoln*. Baltimore Maryland United States, Wander Printer, Photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/scsm000461/>.

¹³⁶ “To Be Generally Celebrated,” *Kansas City Journal*, February 12, 1899.

¹³⁷ *Fire Department of Philadelphia Mourning Announcement*. Philadelphia Fire Department, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1865. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/lprbscsm.scsm0698/>; “Log Cabin to White House,” *The Morning Times*, February 9, 1896.

venerated martyr-president. Previously discussed faults disappeared amid the popular outpouring of grief following his death. Critics abandoned censure and instead embraced Lincoln nostalgia.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, academia was a field in flux. From colonial times forward, universities had been associated with specific religious denominations and the curriculum was constrained by conservative edicts. Universities tended to be small, church-based organizations that primarily offered programs in law, medicine, or literature. In the late nineteenth century, there was a progressive rise in research-based education. Updated curricula increased the rigor and professionalism of American degrees. Lincoln's death, however, occurred at the beginning of the Academy's transformation. Thus, the first generation of Lincoln scholars were not formally trained as historians, but were a mix of men of good standing, stature, and erudition.¹³⁸ These authors were comprised primarily of men who knew Lincoln in life — fellow politicians and lawyers, some college graduates — who had a desire to properly memorialize and commemorate the 'real' Lincoln. Tone and rhetoric, rather than educational credentials, determined the educational merit of the work. The works they published ranged from researched biographies to collections of reminiscences and magazine articles. The Lincoln of biographical research echoed the Lincoln of popular media. Best said by Lincoln scholar, Merrill D. Peterson, the “eulogistic tone of the apotheosis colored the early biographies of Abraham Lincoln. The atmosphere was favorable to the generation

¹³⁸ David B. Potts, “American Colleges in the Nineteenth Century: From Localism to Denominationalism,” *History of Education Quarterly*, 11, no. 4 (Winter, 1971), pp. 363-380; Kaufer and Parry-Giles, “Refined vs. Middling Styles,” 345.

of myths, pious falsehoods, and wayward traditions.”¹³⁹ With the modernization of universities still in its infancy, the first Lincoln scholars were not writing for the academic community, but for the public at-large. There was a demand for Lincoln content, but content that was expressly favorable to Lincoln’s memory. Lincoln’s critics sharply curtailed criticisms after the assassination had launched his memory to new heights of popular veneration. Insulated by the violent nature of his death, disparaging comments toward Lincoln were no longer palatable to the society that had so recently lambasted him themselves. Under such conditions, the first educational works embodied the generally positive public opinion of Lincoln.

Some associates of Lincoln felt the need to immortalize his legacy as soon as possible. Joseph H. Barrett for example, an Ohio Republican appointed by Lincoln to serve as Commissioner of Pensions, authored one of the first biographies of Lincoln while he was still in office. Barrett published an updated edition in 1865 that included “scenes attendant upon his tragic and lamented demise.” Barrett dedicated the book to the “great and good President,” who “after witnessing the triumph of his labors, fell martyr to the cause he had so firmly upheld through the darkest hours... No name will be more sacred in our country’s annals, or more perpetual in the memory of the world, than that of Abraham Lincoln.” In the over 800-page book, Barrett explored Lincoln’s early life, political career, and presidential policies in three comprehensive parts. Pulling from political writings, state papers, and speeches, Barrett’s biography was factual and well-researched, but lacked analysis or interpretation of Lincoln himself.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 66.

¹⁴⁰ Joseph H. Barrett, *Life of Abraham Lincoln: Presenting His Early History, Political Career, and Speeches In and Out of Congress; Also a General View of His Policy as President of the United States*;

Following suit, Henry J. Raymond, editor of the *New York Times*, authored the new “definitive life” of Lincoln, also published in 1865. Raymond worked tirelessly to capture the eulogistic emotion of the apotheosis. However exhaustive in scope, neither Barrett nor Raymond fully addressed the elusive aspect of Lincoln’s personal character that made him so singular and extraordinary. The public wanted insights into Lincoln the man, not Lincoln the politician. Painter Francis B. Carpenter attempted to answer the call. Carpenter spent months in the White House studying Lincoln at work on state matters, and more intimately when dealing with his family at home. Carpenter published his personal reminiscences throughout the summer of 1865 in the New York *Independent*. The articles were combined and the resulting *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln* detailed Lincoln’s humor, his use of anecdotes, and a “deep undercurrent of sadness, if not melancholy” he embodied. Well received, Carpenter helped sate what Merrill D. Peterson described as a “public craving for an intimate hero, one who was loved as well as venerated.”¹⁴¹

Josiah Holland’s *Life of Abraham Lincoln* was among the most well received and popular early biographies. A respected journalist, Holland was the editor of a prominent Republican newspaper, the *Springfield Republican*, and led the city’s eulogy held in honor of the martyred president. Unique to the initial flood of biographers, Holland never

with His Messages, Proclamations, Letters, etc., and A History of the Eventful Administration, and of the Scenes Attendant Upon His Tragic and Lamented Demise, Moore, Wiltach & Baldwin, New York, 1865. iv. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 66 – 67.

¹⁴¹ Allen Thorndike Rice, *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time*. (New York: The North American Review Publishing Company), 1888; Joseph H. Barrett, *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, (New York: Moore, Wiltach, & Bandwin), 1865; Henry J. Raymond, *The Life and Public Services of Abraham Lincoln*, 1865

Francis B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham*, (New York, 1866), 50 – 52, 114 – 115, 81; Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 66 – 68.

met Lincoln, but he did travel to Illinois to speak with individuals who knew Lincoln before his presidency. Holland's research allowed for a more nuanced analysis of Lincoln the man. Published in 1866, Holland's depiction of a refined, self-made, and thoroughly devout Christian Lincoln sold over 100,000 copies. A devoted Christian himself, Holland exaggerated Lincoln's piety, but the book was the first to holistically balance Lincoln the politician with the inner life of Lincoln the man. Though the popular reception to the work was favorable, Holland's contemporaries derided him for his preoccupation with eulogizing Lincoln.¹⁴²

Isaac N. Arnold, an anti-slavery Republican congressman, rounded out the immediate flood of post-assassination biographies. Arnold was a fierce supporter of Lincoln, and a close personal friend; they met as lawyers on the Illinois circuit in 1837. Published in 1866, Arnold's *Abraham Lincoln and the Overthrow of Slavery* placed Lincoln as the one true hero of the long American conflict with slavery. Despite his deep familiarity with the subject matter, Arnold omitted evidence that conflicted with his portrayal of Lincoln as an inveterate abolitionist. Arnold ignored Lincoln's support of the Fugitive Slave Act, his own repeated denial of being an abolitionist, and the limitations of the Emancipation Proclamation to free rebels' slaves only in certain Confederate states. Heavy on general history and lacking substantial research into Lincoln's inner feelings on slavery, Arnold's twenty-plus year relationship with Lincoln nonetheless provided anecdotal material not known to his Washington D.C. contemporaries. As a member of Lincoln's administration, Arnold had unique and intimate first-hand knowledge of

¹⁴² Allen C. Guelzo, "Holland's Informants: The Construction of Josiah Holland's Life of Abraham Lincoln," *Civil War Era Studies*, 2002, 1 – 2.

Lincoln's policies, his growth as a politician, his use of patronage, and the history of emancipatory legislation.¹⁴³ By the end of the 1860s, the prominent and accessible works in the growing literary field of Lincolnia presented a relatively uniform treatment of Lincoln as infallible, folksy, devout, and beloved.¹⁴⁴

Lincoln's Illinois contemporaries also saw the fiscal opportunity, and demand, for an intimate cradle-to-grave biography, and several close associates began the task of writing the definitive record of Lincoln's life. William. H. Herndon, Lincoln's Springfield law partner, began collecting Lincoln's papers and amassed an expansive oral history of memories and anecdotes from old friends, acquaintances, and relatives. Tracking down information on Lincoln's early life in Kentucky and Indiana proved laborious. Insolvent, Herndon sold part of his research materials. The purchaser, Ward Hill Lamon, former personal bodyguard to Lincoln, hired Chauncey Black to ghostwrite *The Life of Abraham Lincoln: From his Birth to his Inauguration as President*. Upon its publication, readers disputed the book's authorship and the veracity of its claims about Lincoln's private life, religion, and love affairs. Black's inclusion of Lincoln's erratic Christian beliefs, rumors of his illegitimacy, and his purported romance with Ann Rutledge (his alleged first love from New Salem) outraged the Lincoln family. The biography was a commercial failure and sold only 1,900 copies.¹⁴⁵ In rebuttal, Robert

¹⁴³ James A. Rawley, "Isaac Newton Arnold, Lincoln's Friend and Biographer," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Winter, 1998), 39 – 40, 50-53.

¹⁴⁴ Josiah Holland, *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, (Boston, 1866); Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 68; Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.*, 4.

¹⁴⁵ Albert V. House, Jr., Ward H. Lamon and Chauncey F. Black, "The Trials of a Ghost-Writer of Lincoln Biography: Chauncey F. Black's Authorship of Lamon's Lincoln," *Journal of Illinois State Historical Society (1908 – 1984)*, Vol. 31 No. 3 (Sep., 1938): 263 – 265.

Todd charged Lincoln's personal secretaries, John Nicolay and John Hay, to write a more suitable biography of his father's life.¹⁴⁶

Published in 1890, the monumental ten-volume work was a hagiography that extolled Lincoln's virtues with emphasis on his sagacity, Christian morality, charity, and devotion to the United States. In the preface, Nicolay and Hay contend that it was "the almost unbroken testimony... [that Lincoln] was incomparably the greatest man of his time."¹⁴⁷ An exhaustive effort, they endeavored to write a true, unbiased narrative of Lincoln's life. Robert Todd, however, stymied their efforts. As owner of the research materials made available to Nicolay and Hay, Todd maintained complete control over the content of the biography. As such, the authors omitted elements distasteful to the family, like Lincoln's private life prior to his marriage, and the enduring rumors about Ann Rutledge. The resulting product was a sanitized contribution to the growing literature on Lincoln. Nicolay and Hay noted that the timing of Lincoln's death, at the height of a stunning victory and the zenith of his political acumen, enveloped Lincoln's memory in a "halo of radiant success [that] dazzled the eyes even of his most hostile critics."¹⁴⁸

A longtime associate and close friend of Lincoln, Herndon rededicated himself to drafting what he viewed to be a true and unfiltered biography of the inner life of the slain president. Believing that the public had a right to know the necessary truths, Herndon decided to ignore "prevailing standards of biography" and provide a full treatment of

¹⁴⁶ Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 66 – 67.

¹⁴⁷ John Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, (New York Century Co., 1890), Volume 1: ix – xi.

¹⁴⁸ Nicolay and Hay sealed their source papers until 1947. Lincoln scholars in the early 20th century did not have the benefit of these recourses until the late 1940s. Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, Volume 10: 341; William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, (Lincoln Studies Center, 2006), xvi.

Lincoln's personal and private life prior to his presidency. Co-authored by Jesse W. Weik, Herndon's 1889 biography remains massively influential and a rich source of anecdotal materials that detail Lincoln's mannerisms, foibles, and idiosyncrasies. Unafraid to discuss Lincoln's negative traits, Herndon elucidated Lincoln's cold, analytical mind, cunning ambition, irreligious beliefs, suicidal behavior, persistent melancholy, and most notably, his loveless marriage to Mary Todd.¹⁴⁹ Though Lamon and Black's biography was the first to include Ann Rutledge in Lincoln's early life, Herndon reintroduced the subject and expanded upon Ann's importance and lasting influence in Lincoln's life. Arguing that Lincoln never loved another woman after Ann, Herndon's biography incensed Mary and Robert Todd Lincoln. The Lincolns withdrew their support of the book and it languished in contemporary denigration. The success of the Nicolay and Hay biography, over the heavily anecdotal work of Herndon, illustrates that twenty-four years after Lincoln's death, his image as an American hero was deeply ingrained in the public memory.¹⁵⁰

Controversy over Lincoln's legacy was not confined to Herndon's atypical treatment of the slain president's inner life. Soon after Lincoln's death, a debate over his legacy emerged among the post-assassination biographers; should Lincoln be remembered for his 'official' legacy as an epic and sophisticated statesman, removed from the everyday man, or should his humble, self-made, and democratic origins define his memory? Biographers like Herndon embraced the familiarity of the latter approach,

¹⁴⁹ Herndon and Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln*, xvi – xvii, 348. Mary Todd Lincoln and William H. Herndon shared a hostile relationship. Historians J.G. Randall and John Y. Simon contend Herndon intentionally misrepresented Lincoln's relationship to Ann Rutledge in response to a previous slight from Mary. A more detailed analysis of Lincoln and Herndon's relationship can be found in John Y. Simon's "Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge." *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 11 (1990), p. 13 – 33.

¹⁵⁰ Herndon and Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln*, 353-356.

while writers like Allen Thorndike Rice followed the former. Whereas previous biographers like Lamon, Herndon, and Wilkes sought to make Lincoln more accessible, albeit from a subjective viewpoint, scholars like Rice preferred Lincoln rendered in formal prose. In contrast to Herndon, Rice felt that distinguished men of stature and education should steward Lincoln's official memory. In 1866, Rice published his *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time*. Rice felt that the inner life of Lincoln, his youth and life prior to the presidency, were irrelevant and mundane areas of study. The focus of Lincoln literature, according to Rice, should be on his time in office, his administration, and his masterful statesmanship. As such, Rice included anecdotes only from Lincoln's political contemporaries during his time in Washington, D.C. Rice's work received favorable public praise. Contrasted with the poor reception of Lamon, Herndon, and Wilkes' treatments of Lincoln, demonstrates the American preference for a refined collective memory of Lincoln.¹⁵¹

Published in 1896, Ida Tarbell's *The Early Life of Abraham Lincoln* was the last significant contribution to nineteenth century Lincolnia. A pioneer in the field of investigative journalism, Tarbell made a name for herself in Paris as an astute researcher and biographer. Personally sought out by the publisher of *McClure's Magazine*, Tarbell joined the staff as a freelance reporter. Following the success of her series focused on Napoleon Bonaparte, McClure tasked Tarbell with authoring a twenty-part series on Abraham Lincoln to compete with Nicolay and Hay's work, which was then published in installments in the competitor *Century Magazine*. Despite a rebuke of professional encroachment by Nicolay and Hay, Tarbell's investigative prowess yielded incomparable

¹⁵¹ Kaufner and Parry-Giles, "Refined vs. Middling Styles," 344 – 346, 357 – 358.

fruit. Researching the history of the Lincoln family, Tarbell rescued the Lincoln name from the “short and simple annals of the poor.”¹⁵² Following extensive research of the Kentucky civic archives, Tarbell found the 1806 marriage certificate for Lincoln’s parents, and permanently ended the longstanding insinuation that Lincoln was of illegitimate birth. Tarbell’s research into Lincoln’s father, Thomas, further rehabilitated the Lincoln family name. Tarbell contended that Lincoln’s childhood home suffered the scarcity common to pioneer life on the frontier, but illustrated that Lincoln’s father was a man of good standing and credit in Kentucky.¹⁵³ Though Tarbell’s contemporaries considered her scholarship to add little academic contribution to the historiography of the time, her sharp research skills silenced critics who contended that Lincoln was the illegitimate child of an indolent backwoodsman.

Pertinent to Tarbell’s successful representation of Lincoln as a heroic westerner was the format of her biography. Published in the cheap monthly, *McClure’s Magazine* for ten cents an issue, Tarbell’s work was far more affordable and accessible than the works of Nicolay and Hay that appeared in the more expensive *Century Magazine*, or its final ten-volume publication. It was estimated that between 1893 and 1899, ten-cent magazine readership increased from 250,000 to over 750,000. With its wide accessibility, the cheap monthly inaugurated a mass culture as one of the first forms of national media. Hence, by the end of the nineteenth century, the culturally-dominant public image of

¹⁵² In Lincoln’s campaign biography, he described his early life by way of quoting Gray’s elegy, “the short and simple annals of the poor.”; Donald, *Lincoln*, 19.

¹⁵³ Ida Tarbell, *The Early Life of Lincoln*, ed. Paul M. Angle, (A. S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1974), vi; Tarbell, *The Early Life of Lincoln*, 30 – 31, 42 – 43.

Lincoln was a blend of the epic, heroic statesman described by Nicolay and Hay, and the humble, accessible Lincoln of folklore.¹⁵⁴

Popular and academic representations of Lincoln in the nineteenth century were largely reinforcing of one another and propagated the same embellished image of Lincoln. The early biographies contributed to, in the words of historian Joshua Zeitz, the “Lincoln know[n] today—the sage father figure, the military genius, the greatest American orator.”¹⁵⁵ Due to the lengthy research and collection process, twenty-five years passed before the publication of Nicolay, Hay, and Herndon’s works. In the long interim since his death, the public’s popular memory of Lincoln perceived him as a beloved American hero with few faults.¹⁵⁶ It was these favorable recollections and reminiscences that early Lincoln biographers (excluding Herndon) drew upon to create their narratives of Lincoln as both man and politician. Mutually reinforcing, the public did not want negative depictions of Lincoln that painted him in any light unbecoming of the martyr-president. The negative reception of both Lamon and Herndon’s critical depictions of a faulty, informal Lincoln, represented a wholesale rejection by a public that had spent three decades imagining a venerable and respected American patriot. Lincoln’s acumen as a cunning politician was ignored, as was any disreputable mention of impiety or ambition. Polarizing references to slavery and race, too, were abandoned in favor of national and sectional reunion. Lincoln’s anecdotal humor, rural upbringing, and folksy charisma were emphasized, as was his love of country and magnanimity.

¹⁵⁴ Melvyn Stokes, “D.W. Griffith’s Abraham Lincoln,” *Presidents in the Movies: American History and Politics on Screen*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) 2011,” 46; Cornelius Reiger, *The Era of the Muckrakers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932) 13-14, 17, 21; Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.*, 4.

¹⁵⁵ Joshua M. Zeitz, *Lincoln’s Boys: John Hay, John Nicolay, and the War for Lincoln’s Image*. 2014, 265 – 266.

¹⁵⁶ Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.*, 4.

The resulting Lincoln persona, presented in both popular and academic treatments of the time, delineated a real life example of cherished national myths of the self-made man, opportunity, and unity.

Chapter 3 – Preserving a Paradox

At the start of the twentieth century, the nation would attempt to solidify Lincoln's reputation in American memory. On the centennial of Lincoln's birth, committees, citizens, and governments planned an elaborate series of celebrations designed to memorialize Lincoln permanently as the Savior of the Union.¹⁵⁷ Yet, while the nation made an effort to commemorate Lincoln's legacy and to literally set it in stone, the country experienced substantial socio-political change. Between 1900 and 1945, the United States had engaged in two world wars and had suffered through a decade-long economic depression. During that time, Lincoln served as a framing device for a rapidly evolving society that was looking to the past for guidance in times of successive crises.¹⁵⁸ Lincoln's memory provided reassurances during a period defined by prolonged social transformation. In reaction to substantial cultural and political change, Lincoln's legacy was pulled in contrary directions, as the nation attempted to solidify Lincoln's legacy as the Preserver of the Union even as intervening cultural events continued to redefine Lincoln's place in the nation's memory.

Chief among the factors influencing Lincoln's legacy in the twentieth century was the continuing era of Jim Crow. With the unraveling of Reconstruction, advances in race relations were dismantled and society returned to a semblance of the antebellum racial

¹⁵⁷ Philip J. Kowalski, "From Memory to Memorial: Representative Men in the Sculpture of Daniel Chester French," *Journal of American Studies*, 41 (2007), 60 – 61.

¹⁵⁸ Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System," 908.

status quo. Jim Crow laws were established in the late 1800s, and the system of racial discrimination remained firmly entrenched in the early 1900s. Popular forms of media supported and legitimized black racial stereotypes. The advent of film and radio ensured widespread circulation of negative portrayals of blacks in a newly forming mass American culture. The visual power of the Jim Crow era combined racial imagery of criminal, childlike blacks with the nostalgia of the antebellum South and the Lost Cause. The potent result was a widely circulated and accepted justification of black racial inferiority.¹⁵⁹

Popularly, Reconstruction was viewed as the nadir of American democracy. In accepting the widespread racialized imagery of Jim Crow, white Americans were able to embrace a white-based interpretation of the Civil War. Now remembered as the Savior of the Union, Lincoln was memorialized for his efforts to save white national unity rather than black emancipation. With visual aides circulating Lost Cause ideology and academic and scientific evidence supporting ideas of black inferiority, white Americans celebrated a composite version of Lincoln devoid of explicitly racial politics. Removed of polarizing racial allusions, Lincoln was celebrated by a white American public that embraced the racial bigotry of Jim Crow.¹⁶⁰

In quick succession, however, World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II transformed the cultural fabric of the United States, and with it, Lincoln's meaning as a national symbol. The First World War resulted in America's emergence as a world power, and thus, Lincoln became a symbol on the international stage. However,

¹⁵⁹ Eric Foner and Joshua Brown, *Forever Free*, 214 – 216.

¹⁶⁰ John Smith, J. Vincent Lowery, and Eric Foner, *The Dunning School*, 5-6; Eric Foner, *Forever Free*, 216 – 217; Jerrold Packard, *American Nightmare*, (St. Martin's Press: New York, 2002), 160 – 161.

America's elevation as a world power complicated Lincoln's image. Americans debated whether Lincoln should represent the sophistication and refinement of diplomacy or portray national traits of humility and agrarian democracy. Despite the differences in interpretation between the epic or folk style of Lincoln, he nonetheless personified national unity throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s.

Beginning in October of 1929, severe economic depression gripped the United States. Lasting until 1939, unprecedented rates of unemployment, social unrest, and personal hardship defined the period. During the Great Depression, Americans looked to figures from the past to derive strength and inspiration. Lincoln, as a popular symbol, featured prominently in the rhetoric of politicians aiming to inspire Americans during the economic hardship. In radio addresses and in speeches, Depression-era presidents implored the people to follow "Lincoln's way" and forge ahead in the face of adversity.¹⁶¹ Gradually, the image of Lincoln as the 'self-made man' gained traction in popular thought. By the end of the Depression, Lincoln was remembered both for his role in saving the Union and for his pioneer youth, self-reliance, and spectacular rise from poverty to the presidency.¹⁶²

World War II, however, had the most substantial impact on reshaping the national memory of Lincoln. As the atrocities of the Nazi regime came to light, the war was recast in morally simplistic terms; the United States and its allies fought to defend liberty, whereas Germany and the Axis powers fought to impose tyranny. Lincoln's image

¹⁶¹ Kenneth Whyte, *Hoover: An Extraordinary Life in Extraordinary Times*, (Knopf, 2017), 433.

¹⁶² Kathleen Logothetis Thompson, "Looking for the American Dream: Lincoln Statues in the Great Depression," February 10, 2015, Civil Discourse, <http://www.civildiscourse-historyblog.com/blog/2015/2/6/lookingfortheamericandream>.

underwent a rebirth as he symbolized the Great Emancipator of peoples everywhere in wartime propaganda. In contrast, segregation and Jim Crow persisted in America. As the United States' global power expanded during and after the war, the tensions between Lincoln's domestic image as the Savior of the Union conflicted with the international projection of Lincoln as both emancipator and defender of democracy.

At the start of the 20th century, the state of Lincoln historiography had evolved little since its inception in 1865. Stymying scholarly advance in the field was Lincoln's surviving son, Robert Todd. Described as a "jealous guardian of his father's papers," Todd denied scholars access to the materials and only permitted brief and intermittent use of his father's papers when he deemed the researcher worthy, such as Nicolay and Hay, and to a lesser extent, Ida Tarbell. After a lifetime of close stewardship, he bequeathed the collection to the Library of Congress on the condition the papers remained sealed until twenty-one years following his death.¹⁶³

Constraining the historical field, too, was the emergence of the Dunning School of historiographical thought at the start of the twentieth century. Columbia University professor, William Archibald Dunning, pioneered the professionalization of Reconstruction as a field worthy of academic research. Dunning mentored a new Southern school of historians around the central premise that "the Civil War had been a tragic misunderstanding and that Reconstruction had been a scurrilous punishment foisted upon helpless white Southerners by arrogant Yankees who exploited African Americans by giving them citizenship rights."¹⁶⁴ Prior to the emergence of the Dunning school,

¹⁶³ Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 258 – 259. Robert Todd died July 26, 1926.

¹⁶⁴ John David Smith, *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, 2.

histories of the Civil War and Reconstruction were heavily partisan and laden with sectional feelings rather than truth or fact. Northern intellectuals dominated the field and praised Republican efforts for saving the Union while condemning Southern Confederates as traitors. Dunning's unabashedly pro-Southern conception of history was eagerly embraced by Southern academics. Dunning reconceived Reconstruction, in the words of historian David Levering Lewis, as a "tragic decade of federal intervention and Negro misrule."¹⁶⁵ Supporting Dunning's findings were the leading German-inspired intellectuals of the time. Ethnocentric European scientific studies in the late 1800s used qualitative metrics to objectively classify Africans as an inferior race. Scientific Darwinism seemed to confirm that white superiority was biological and even to non-racists of the time, "black inferiority was a self-spoken fact."¹⁶⁶

Unsurprisingly, the Dunning interpretation of Reconstruction, as the lowest and darkest part of American democracy, found a receptive audience in turn-of-the-century white America, and Dunning's theory flourished in academia and heavily influenced public thought. Dunning-supported stereotypes of black incompetence and corruption dominated popular depictions of Reconstruction, most famously in *The Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind*. Massively influential, Dunning and his students led a growing national condemnation of Reconstruction Republicans. The subsequent impact on Lincoln's legacy was the nearly complete erasure of emancipation as a war-time goal. Dunningites believed Radical Republicans acted against Lincoln's Reconstruction plans

¹⁶⁵ David Levering Lewis, *W.E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868 – 1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 384 as quoted in John David Smith, *The Dunning School*, 1.

¹⁶⁶ Smith, *The Dunning School*, 5-6, 11, 23. The German-led model of Darwinian science gained prominence in the 1880s and continued into the 1900s. The scientific idea persisted in Germany until the end of World War II in 1945.

for a quick and merciful restoration of the Union. In so doing, Republicans violated Lincoln's memory and intentionally dismantled acceptable Southern governments enacted under President Johnson's Reconstruction Act. In sum, the Dunning School provided a historical justification for Lincoln's ascendancy as the Savior of the Union and the suppression of his emancipationist legacy. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the Dunning School of thought influenced historians, academics, and the general public's memories and knowledge of the war, Lincoln's legacy, and the proper place of blacks in American society.¹⁶⁷ With the Dunning School's insulation of Lincoln's memory from larger considerations of race or Reconstruction, Lincoln scholars continued to compete amongst themselves to draft the definitive biography of Lincoln's life; a work that not only chronicled his journey from the prairie to the White House, but also explored his extraordinary moral qualities.

In 1922, Herndon's former writing partner, Jesse W. Weik, decided that Herndon had fallen short of the task of presenting the authentic Lincoln in his 1889 biography. Weik, uniquely situated due to his extensive previous Lincoln research, published his own biography, *The Real Lincoln: A Portrait*, that more fully illustrated Lincoln's human side. Weik focused on the lesser described aspects of Lincoln's private life, such as his activities as a lawyer, a neighbor, a husband, and a Springfield citizen. Rife with analyses of Lincoln's cheap court fees and the social functions of a relatively affluent Springfield denizen, Weik's work received more favorable praise than his previous contribution. More anecdote than analysis, critics said *The Real Lincoln* "offered no interpretation of

¹⁶⁷ Smith, *The Dunning School*, 2; Harry Kincaid, "Victims of Circumstance: An Interpretation of Changing Attitudes Toward Republican Policy Makers and Reconstruction," *The Journal of American History*, Vol 57, No. 1 (June 1970), 49, 59.

[Lincoln's life], but that Weik had made a "genuine advance over *Herndon's Lincoln*," and provided episodic support to the modern canon of Lincolnia.¹⁶⁸

In early academic interpretations of Lincoln's life, researchers struggled to incorporate the blend of factual support, characterization, and analysis required to make a substantive Lincoln biography. Early works like Nicolay and Hay, Holland, or Allen, ultimately abandoned a measure of critical inquiry into their subject in order to portray Lincoln in a positive light befitting a sanctified, national hero. The epitome of effusive prose culminated in Carl Sandburg's *The Prairie Years*, an imaginative narrative of Lincoln's early life. A poet, Sandburg was not a trained historian, and the notable lack of footnotes or sources throughout his work underscores the fact that the work was a balance of tradition, contemporary research, and imagination. Vivid prose and poetic interpretation blended to invoke what felt like the authentic Lincoln in his formative years on the frontier. Sandburg's portrayal of a folksy, rural, American echoed the western pioneer described first by Ida Tarbell in the 1890s. Sandburg followed this first two-volume contribution with a four-volume sequel, *The War Years*. Illustrative and descriptive, Sandburg's six-volume biography traced Lincoln's origins prior to his conception and continued until his body was laid to rest in Springfield, Illinois. Academically, Sandburg made a limited contribution to the scholarly field, but he unquestionably revitalized public interest in Lincoln and simultaneously opened new corridors of academic inquiry. Sandburg's poetic language and unrestrained descriptions

¹⁶⁸ Randall T. Shepard, "Jesse W. Weik: The Young Indiana Lawyer Who Made Herndon's Lincoln Possible," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 105 no. 4, 382; Glenn Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," *Lincoln Herald*, 77 no. 1 (1975) 11, citing *Outlook* February 27, 1924.

of Lincoln's close friendship to Joshua Speed as 'soft,' 'lavender,' and like 'May violets,' laid the foundation for a future line of scholarly research into Lincoln's sexuality.¹⁶⁹

In the continuing absence of the Robert Todd papers, collectors worked diligently to recover lost materials to provide new, fuller editions of Lincoln's writings. Paul Angle's 1930 *New Letters and Papers* introduced 430 original items to the catalogue of Lincolnia, most notably Lincoln's eulogy for President Zachary Taylor. In the search for content, Angle engaged in a quasi-rivalry with Emmanuel Hertz. Hertz's 1931 two-volume *Abraham Lincoln: A New Portrait* asserted in its preface to be a "complete and authentic appraisal of Lincoln, the man" in light of newly discovered papers (Hertz claimed 3,500 documents) that he was editing and printing for the first time. Adamant in his conclusion that Lincoln set the "bar for all succeeding presidents," Hertz was unrestrained in his praise for the "super-politician" who was "God's anointed messenger."¹⁷⁰ Unique to Hertz's interpretation of Lincoln's papers was the intimation that Lincoln only pretended to be pro-slavery in life, and that the ruse was designed to ensure that a united North supported the Emancipation Proclamation. Angle condemned Hertz's work for being indiscriminate, fraudulent, and unproven – a contention supported by modern scholar, Merrill Peterson, who noted that Hertz's claim to 3,500 previously hidden documents was not only absurd, but utterly false.¹⁷¹ Other early collectors contributed invaluable editions of Lincoln's papers, but the premier researcher and collector of Lincolnia in the 1920s and 1930s was Oliver R. Barrett. An Illinois native

¹⁶⁹ Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, (Harcourt, 1939); Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years*, (Harcourt, 1926), Volume 1: 264 – 266.

¹⁷⁰ Emanuel Hertz, *Abraham Lincoln: A New Portrait*. 4, 475 – 476.

¹⁷¹ Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 260.

himself, Barrett's exhaustive search yielded the original and only surviving letter from Lincoln to Horace Greeley, editor of the *New-York Tribune*, during the Civil War.¹⁷²

The state of the Lincoln historiography categorically shifted with the treatment offered by J.G. Randall, first in his essay, "Has the Lincoln Theme been Exhausted?" and later in his four-volume biography, *Lincoln, The President*. Systematic in his analysis of sources, Randall condemned the vast field of Lincoln literature as superficial, uncritical, and amateur. Randall contended in his 1936 essay that Lincoln remained woefully understudied and his papers largely unedited. Randall felt that no proper biography of Lincoln yet existed and he dedicated himself to the task. Randall worked tirelessly to rectify the "misleading" and "uncritical writings" that comprised Lincoln literature until 1945. A trained historian of the revisionist school of Civil War historiography, Randall endeavored to clear the field of the academic debris that littered serious Lincoln scholarship. Most notably, Randall took specific issue with the research of William Herndon. Randall exhibited a clear disregard for the burgeoning psychological field and dismissed large swaths of Herndon's anecdotal work on the grounds of excessive psychoanalysis and conjecture on Herndon's part.¹⁷³

The second volume of the series offered a full condemnation of Herndon's previous treatment of Ann Rutledge, Lincoln's purported first love in New Salem, Illinois. In a supplementary appendix entitled "Sifting the Ann Rutledge Evidence," Randall dismantled Herndon's argument with exacting precision. Dismissing the

¹⁷². Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 260 – 262.

¹⁷³ J. G. Randall, "Has the Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?," *The American Historical Review*, 41 no. 2 (1936); J. G. Randall, *Lincoln, The President*, (Dodd, Mead & Company, 1945), Volume 1: vii – x; Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 256 – 260, 302.

reminisces that formed the bedrock of Herndon's biography, Randall interpreted Herndon's inclusion of the Ann Rutledge story as an intentional attack on Mary Todd Lincoln. Believing Herndon to be personally motivated to denigrate Mary's image, Randall did his best to excise Ann from scholarly discourse. Ann's dismissal from Lincoln historiography, however, had the harmful effect of suppressing serious discussion of the documented depressive episode Lincoln experienced in the weeks after Ann's death. By removing Ann from scholarly discussions, Randall downplayed the fragility of Lincoln's mental health in 1833. Ironically, Randall's condemnation of Herndon's lack of professionalism, and Randall's general dismissal of the Lincoln historiography, halted serious academic research into Lincoln's personal life. Few scholars wished to encroach on Randall's command of the subject matter and earn his professional ire. Nonetheless, Randall's biography irrevocably changed the substance and scholarly rigor of Lincoln literature. Randall's meticulous use of sources ushered in a new standard of critical analysis.¹⁷⁴

With Jim Crow enforcing white cultural and legal supremacy, Lincoln's emancipatory legacy was all but forgotten in the early 1900s. In radio plays and films, in annual celebrations and speeches, Lincoln was remembered by white Americans for his defense of the Union. As early as 1887, people, cities, and organizations began to gather on significant dates of Lincoln's life to commemorate his legacy. The annual celebration of 'Lincoln Day' included dinners, public gatherings, folk festivals, printed tributes in news materials, Republican Party campaigning, and fund raising. By the early 1900s,

¹⁷⁴ Randall, *Lincoln, The President*, Volume 2: 321 – 342; John Y. Simon, "Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, no. 11 (1990): 15; Joshua Wolf Shenk, *Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness*, (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 234; Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 298 – 304.

Lincoln Day was primarily a political holiday for the Republican Party. Comprised of white-only events, blacks were barred from attending. Competing interpretations of Lincoln, the white savior versus the black emancipator, contributed to the increasingly racialized politics of memory. As black and white society grew further apart, interpretations of Lincoln's legacy and memories of the war's purpose grew incompatible. Segregation, rather than inclusion, became the theme of Lincoln Day celebrations. Excluded from mainstream Lincoln Day events, black Americans celebrated the Great Emancipator in their segregated neighborhoods, churches, and businesses.¹⁷⁵

In 1909, cities, communities, and committees across the globe participated in a celebration of the hundredth anniversary of Lincoln's birth. Nationally, it was the largest tribute to an American in the country's history. New York City dedicated \$25,000 for the event, and Chicago spent \$40,000 "to outdo the efforts of any [other] city in the United States as an example of patriotism." Lincoln's adopted home of Springfield, Illinois, hosted one of the grandest celebrations in honor of its favorite son. In the zeitgeist of commemoration, the Lincoln penny was minted and Washington D.C. politicians formed a committee to create a befitting monument to Lincoln in the nation's capital. The Lincoln Centennial Association, later renamed the Abraham Lincoln Association, hosted the Springfield celebration in the State Arsenal. A lavish event, some 750 men attended the black-tie affair. Attendance was for whites only; local black citizens celebrated separately at a church across town. Just six months prior, terrorized black residents of

¹⁷⁵ "Lincoln Day Dinner," *The Saint Paul Globe*, February 12, 1900; "Lincoln's Birthday," *Deseret Evening News*, February 12, 1900; "Abraham Lincoln, the Nation's Greatest Hero," *Chicago Eagle*, February 11, 1905; *The Plymouth Tribune*, February 9, 1905; *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, February 12, 1910; "Abraham Lincoln," *Daily Capital Journal*, February 12, 1910; *The Nonpartisan Leader*, February 7, 1921; "Out of the Wilderness: A Folk Festival of the New Salem Years of Lincoln," New Salem State Park, <https://www.loc.gov/item/98509559/>.

Springfield had taken refuge in the Arsenal as a violent race riot took hold in Lincoln's hometown. A white mob of 2,000 men and boys plundered black property, setting fire to business and homes. After two days of violence, six people were dead. White attendees at the Lincoln gala, however, were unperturbed by the irony. In segregated celebrations throughout the country, white Americans celebrated the legacy of Abraham Lincoln.¹⁷⁶

The 1900s inaugurated a categorical shift in American mass media with the innovation of cinema. By 1913, the character of Lincoln had appeared in seven films, and pictorial representations of Lincoln quickly grew to become the primary medium through which audiences would encounter and interpret him. Predominantly depicted as democratic, kind, and merciful, films portrayed Lincoln as the devoted father-like figure of the nation.¹⁷⁷ The most important of the early Lincoln biopics was D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Based on the novel, *The Clansman*, by Thomas Dixon, *The Birth of a Nation* chronicled the war, Lincoln's death, and Reconstruction from the perspective of two families, one pro-Union in the North and the other pro-Confederacy in the South.

Lincoln featured prominently in the film as the 'Great Heart' whose singular goal was to defend the inviolability of the Union. Despite the strong Southern bias in the film, Griffith featured Lincoln favorably and in concert with Lost Cause thematic elements.

¹⁷⁶ Philip B. Kundhardt, "Lincoln's Contested Legacy," Smithsonian; Roberta Senechal de la Roche, *In Lincoln's Shadow: The 1908 Race Riot in Springfield, Illinois*, (Southern Illinois University Press, 1990) xii – xiii, 1; "Black at Lincoln Banquet?" *Chicago Tribune*, February 11, 1909; Darold Leigh Henson, "Lincoln at 100 at Lincoln: The Abraham Lincoln Centennial Celebration (1909) in his First Namesake Town," <http://findinglincolnillinois.com/bicentennial/LincolnIL1909Celebration-5.pdf>.

¹⁷⁷ *The Reprieve* (1908), *Abraham Lincoln's Clemency* (2010), *One Flag at Last* (1911), *The Seventh Son* (1912), *When Lincoln Was President* (1913), *The Songbird of the North* (1913), and *The Toll of War* (1913); Stokes, "D.W. Griffith's Abraham Lincoln," 47; Barry Schwartz, "Iconography and Collective Memory,' Lincoln's Image in the American Mind," *The Sociological Quarterly*, 32 no. 3 (1991): 302.

The villain of the film was not Lincoln, but the Radical Republicans who seized power in the wake of his death. White actors in black-face portrayed blacks as sexually violent, unintelligent, crude, and criminal. In its closing scenes, the film romantically portrayed the Ku Klux Klan as a noble organization that defended the honor of the South from black barbarism. Both Northern and Southern audiences cheered for the Klan's victory. The film, though controversial at the time of its release, was a popular success. Northerners and Southerners alike enjoyed it for its portrayal of both regions as victims of the schemes of Radical Republicans. The film portrayed a sense of white-national unity that had been lacking in popular thought since the Civil War began.¹⁷⁸ By 1930, an estimated fifty million individuals had seen the film and its catastrophic portrayal of Reconstruction only validated existing historical beliefs: Lincoln was a benevolent white hero, blacks were inferior, and Reconstruction was a wholesale disaster.¹⁷⁹

As Lincoln's historical renown continued to rise in the nation's memory, the country moved forward with its official commemoration of Lincoln's legacy. The first monument dedicated to Lincoln was in his home town of Springfield, Illinois, in October of 1874. Designed as both memorial and final resting place, the Lincoln Tomb enjoyed a brief period of acclaim before its poor construction caused it to fall into a state of ruin. Thus, during the Lincoln Centennial celebration, Congress announced its decision to create a centralized, national monument befitting of the gravitas and solemnity of Lincoln's memory. The Lincoln Memorial Commission assembled in 1911 to make a

¹⁷⁸ D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915); David K. Fremon, *The Jim Crow Laws and Racism in United States History*, Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2015, 27 – 28.

¹⁷⁹ Stokes, "D. W. Griffith Abraham Lincoln," 50 – 51; Conrad Pitcher, "D. W. Griffith's Controversial Film, 'The Birth of a Nation,'" *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol 13, No. 3, The Progressive Era (Spring, 1999), pp. 50 – 55: 51.

“recommendation upon the location, plan, and design for a memorial in the city of Washington, District of Columbia, to the memory of Abraham Lincoln.”¹⁸⁰ After a series of failed proposals, including a 72-mile memorial road connecting Washington, D.C. to Gettysburg, the committee settled on the site and design of the Lincoln Memorial as it is known today.¹⁸¹

After deliberation, a remote and isolated site on the edge of the National Mall was selected for the memorial’s location. Lincoln’s private secretary, John Hay, described the theme of the memorial best: “Lincoln was of the immortals. You must not approach too close to the immortals. His monument should stand alone, remote from the common habitations of man, apart from the business and turmoil of the city; isolated, distinguished, and serene.”¹⁸² In 1912, the commission selected architect Henry Bacon to design the memorial. Following Hay’s directive, Bacon chose the memorial’s Potomac Park location for both its relative isolation and the uninterrupted line of sight. With no other memorials or features of importance, the memorial would have no visual competition and could better feature its “object of reverence and honor.”¹⁸³ The site also had the advantage of its proximity to Robert E. Lee’s family home in Arlington, located just across the Potomac. The location tied together North and South by uniting the two great heroes of the civil conflict. Bacon designed the memorial as a massive colonnaded Greek Doric temple. It was situated on a rectangular base of thirteen ascending steps to

¹⁸⁰ Nancy Hill, “The Transformation of the Lincoln Tomb,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), 39, 42; Report of the Lincoln Memorial Commission, 7.

¹⁸¹ Brian J. Snee, “Saving the Emancipator,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Spring 2015), 141.

¹⁸² Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 284 – 285.

¹⁸³ Lincoln Memorial Commission Report, 11, 38.

symbolize the thirteen original states. Thirty-six columns, emblematic of the thirty-six states of the Union at the time of Lincoln's death, created the memorial's perimeter.¹⁸⁴ The site's isolated geographical location emphasized the gravitas of the spirit honored within; in the fashion of classic Grecian temples, a larger than life figure of the subject was placed within to ensure its separation from the mortal world.¹⁸⁵ Joining Grecian principals of tribute, Lincoln was publically memorialized as an American demigod.¹⁸⁶

The most important feature of the memorial was the statue of Lincoln. Located in the center of the temple, "and by virtue of its imposing position in the place of honor, the gentleness, power, and intelligence of the man, expressed as far as possible by the sculptor's art, will predominate."¹⁸⁷ The commission chose sculptor Daniel Chester French for the task. French's statue dominated the interior of the temple and intimated Lincoln's larger-than-life place in American history. French intentionally replicated the iconography of an earlier Lincoln statue in his own design. The reference was to Augustus Saint-Gauden's 1887 *Lincoln*, an acclaimed statue in Chicago that depicted Lincoln in the act of delivering the Gettysburg Address. By paralleling Saint-Gauden, French fortified Lincoln's legacy as a master statesman and orator dedicated to fixing the fissures of disunion.¹⁸⁸

By design, the memorial referenced portions of two of Lincoln's speeches that illustrated his commitment to preserving the Union: the Gettysburg Address and his Second Inaugural address. Coupled with the epithet inscribed above his head, "In this

¹⁸⁴ Snee, "Saving the Emancipator," 142; Lincoln Memorial Commission Report, 27.

¹⁸⁵ Strokes, 53; Sandage, "A Marble House Divided," 140 – 141.

¹⁸⁶ Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, 264.

¹⁸⁷ Lincoln Memorial Commission Report, 13.

¹⁸⁸ Kowalski, "From Memory to Memorial," 59 – 60.

temple as in the hearts of the people for whom he saved the Union the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever,” the rhetoric carved into the memorial’s walls supported a depiction of Lincoln as a “symbol of the union of the United States, which he stated as his paramount object to save.”¹⁸⁹ The purpose of the memorial was to commemorate a specific aspect of Lincoln’s legacy that was national, not racial unity.¹⁹⁰ In the early twentieth century, the country still celebrated the political and economic reunification of North and South.¹⁹¹ Thus, the building site of the memorial, its design, the statue, and inscriptions worked in concert to explicitly commemorate Lincoln as the Savior of the Union in the collective memory of the nation.

On May 30, 1922, a crowd gathered on the edge of the Potomac River to dedicate the memorial to Lincoln’s towering national memory. Both white and black speakers attended the dedication in the name of national unity. Unsurprisingly, black speakers at the memorial’s dedication offered conflicting commentary on what Lincoln’s image represented in the twentieth century. President Warren G. Harding distanced Lincoln’s actions from racial equality by assuring the gathered attendees that Lincoln “would have been the last man in the republic to resort to arms to effect abolition. Emancipation was a means to the great end – maintained union and nationality.” Robert Russa Moton, a speaker from the Tuskegee Institute, acknowledged that Lincoln’s primary effort was to save the Union, but argued that despite Lincoln’s priorities, he was still the individual to emancipate the enslaved. Throughout Harding and Moton’s speeches, military ushers quietly relocated black attendees to the back of the crowd. The segregated seating of a

¹⁸⁹ Lincoln Memorial Commission Report, 13.

¹⁹⁰ Snee, “Saving the Emancipator,” 142.

¹⁹¹ The decision to create a national monument to Lincoln was part of his Centennial celebration.

Lincoln celebration illustrated the tension between America's egalitarian and racist ideals.¹⁹²

America's elevation to global influence following World War I elevated Lincoln's importance as a national symbol, but competing interpretations of Lincoln's legacy complicated how he could be venerated. Beginning in the late 1880s with Lincoln scholars Allen Thorndike Rice and William H. Herndon, a competition emerged between two distinct styles of Lincoln memorialization: the formal, sophisticated statesman (epic) versus the informal, modest underdog (folk). While the debate had previously been confined to Lincoln scholars, it became an issue of national importance once America had an image to project internationally. In 1915, the United States and Great Britain observed the centennial anniversary of peace between the two nations. To commemorate their friendship, the American Peace Centenary Committee decided to send a replica of a bronze statue of Lincoln to London. War efforts, however, delayed the project and it was not until 1917 that the statue arrived in London.¹⁹³

Upon its reveal, supporters of the epic image of Lincoln criticized George Gray Barnard's folk statue. One particularly harsh critic lambasted the statue for its portrayal of "the President in the worst possible way, exaggerating his every defect in body and dress. The Savior of the Union was revealed as a common clodhopper, a lanky, stooped-over man ridiculously dressed."¹⁹⁴ Instead of Barnard's folk statue, citizens suggested that a copy of Augustus Saint-Gaudens' 1887 Lincoln statue be selected for its stately

¹⁹² "Lincoln Memorial is Dedicated to People," *The New York Age*, June 10, 1922; Schwartz, "Collective Memory and History," 477; Sandage, "A Marble House Divided," 138.

¹⁹³ Schwartz, "Iconography and Collective Memory," 300 – 305.

¹⁹⁴ Schwartz, "Iconography and Collective Memory," 303 – 306.

pose and dignified demeanor. The statue controversy embodied, in microcosm, the nation's rapid social and cultural revolution. Could the Jeffersonian ideal of agrarian democracy, viewed as a modest and humble institution, be reconciled with the high culture associated with global influence? Torn between its agrarian past and its global future, Lincoln's physical representation in 1917-1918 embodied a national debate over the character of American democracy. A rural, rough Lincoln indicated national weakness in this new age defined by power, while a strong Lincoln, one who embodied class and competence, grew away from the long tradition of modest democracy.¹⁹⁵

Out of respect, England erected both statues despite lingering American criticism that Bernard's statue was inferior to that of Saint-Gaudens'. Two years later, a British play entitled *Abraham Lincoln* opened in New York to immense popularity. Contemporary critics positively noted that the "actor who portrays Lincoln often stands as though he had studied the Barnard statue for every wrinkle of his coat." Wildly popular, the depiction of the Barnard-based Lincoln — rough, inelegant, and common — illustrates that Americans were selective of their self-portrayal abroad. The dualism of Lincoln's depictions echoed the nation's larger duality politically; domestically, America was a democracy for the common person, while abroad it was a dignified institution capable of global stewardship.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Stokes, "D. W. Griffith," 50 – 51; Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 195 -196; Schwartz, "Iconography and Collective Memory," 301, 308; *Evening Star*, May 13, 1917; "Recommends Solution of Pending Disputation," *Evening Star*, October 21, 1917; "Notes and Activities in the Art World," *The Sun*, November 4, 1917; "A Matter of Choice," *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, November 8, 1917; "Barnard Under Fire," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, November 1, 1917.

¹⁹⁶ Schwartz, "Iconography and Collective Memory," 306, 314 – 317; "At the Shrine," *The Sun*, November 16, 1919; "Lincoln as an English Writer Sees Him," *New-York Tribune*, December 7, 1919; "Mr. Drinkwater's Lincoln," *The Washington Herald*, April 3, 1919.

Popular films in the 1930s continued to propagate the same sanitized image of Lincoln removed from racial allusions. Sectional reconciliation, rather than emancipation, themed not only Griffith's 1915 *Birth of a Nation*, but also his 1930, *Abraham Lincoln*. The concluding shot of the film fades from the blistery wood cabin of Lincoln's youth to the splendor of the Lincoln Memorial. Backlit by a radiant halo, Lincoln appears as an American god. John Ford's, *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939), and John Cromwell's, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (1940, also a play and a radio production), depicts a predestined and righteous Lincoln who was courageous, morally sure, and the "epitome of human decency." As Iwan M. Morgan observed, it was not the historical Lincoln that mattered, but the "mystique and reverence surrounding him" that made him an "emblem of the whole American experience."¹⁹⁷ Lincoln's integrity, decency, and devotion to America permeated Frank Capra's, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), as a young politician sought refuge at the Lincoln Memorial to refortify his spirit against the entrenched corruption of Washington, D.C.

Slavery's centrality disappeared not only from popular representations of Lincoln's life, but also from portrayals of the Civil War. Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, a coming-of-age narrative of a Southern woman enduring the struggles of both Civil War and Reconstruction in Atlanta, Georgia, was published to immediate acclaim in 1936. Awarded the Pulitzer Prize, Mitchell's novel reportedly sold 50,000 copies in a single day and was turned into a major feature film in 1939. Its popularity as both a novel and a film, made it one of, if not the most, popular representations of the Civil War

¹⁹⁷Iwan W. Morgan, "Introduction," *Presidents in the Movies: American History and Politics on Screen*, 11, 13 – 33; Stokes, "D. W. Griffith's Abraham Lincoln," 33 – 35.

available to the public in the 1930s. Lincoln, however, was scarcely mentioned. In 1,072 pages, Lincoln's name appeared only fourteen times.¹⁹⁸ The focus of the book, rather, was an exploration of antebellum Southern society and the region's tenacity during Reconstruction. The heroine, Scarlett O'Hara, embodied the romanticism of Lost Cause ideology. A glamorous Southern belle, Scarlett's struggle to preserve her family's plantation in the face of Reconstruction policies resonated with Southerners who longed for the splendor and gallantry of the Old South. The highest-earning film to that point, *Gone with the Wind*'s massive popularity circulated stereotypes about blacks nationwide and provided another visual justification of the racial status quo.¹⁹⁹

Part of *Gone with the Wind*'s success was the escape it provided to Americans caught between the lingering anxieties of the Great Depression and the intensifying hostilities in Europe. During the prolonged period of economic unease, Americans looked to the past for guidance and motivation.²⁰⁰ As best advanced by Frederick Jackson Turner, the frontier was a central force in shaping the American character.²⁰¹ As New Englanders steeped in the Puritan work ethic of self-reliance began to move west in search of new opportunities, their beliefs in individualism and hard work spread outward. The spirit of the pioneer exemplified fortitude in times of uncertainty to achieve individual success.²⁰² Thus, during the Great Depression, Americans increasingly began

¹⁹⁸ *The Times-News*, October 6, 1936.

¹⁹⁹ Darden Asbury Pyron, "Gone with the Wind and the Southern Cultural Awakening," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 62, no. 4, Autumn 1986. 566 – 569, 587.

²⁰⁰ Kathleen Logothetis Thompson, "Looking for the American Dream: Lincoln Statues in the Great Depression," February 10, 2015, Civil Discourse, <http://www.civildiscourse-historyblog.com/blog/2015/2/6/lookingfortheamericandream>.

²⁰¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, (Holt, New York: 1962), 2 – 3.

²⁰² Turner, *The Frontier*, 78; Ning Kang, "Puritanism and its Impact upon American Values," *Review of European Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (December 2009), 148 – 151.

to hail the tenacity of the pioneer, or the self-made man.²⁰³ Lincoln, once a pioneer youth himself, came to embody the spirit of the frontier. Lincoln, through his own enterprise, had elevated himself from the poverty of the frontier to the White House.²⁰⁴ Lincoln became a Depression-era symbol of triumph in the face of adversity.²⁰⁵

President Franklin D. Roosevelt further intertwined Lincoln's legacy with the American way of life. In 1929, Roosevelt wrote in an open letter that it was time for "us Democrats to claim Lincoln as one of our own."²⁰⁶ Elected to the presidential office in 1933, Roosevelt used every opportunity to align himself with Lincoln. Strong parallels existed between the economic strife and social unrest of Lincoln's day with the massive unemployment and uncertainty of 1930s America. The rampant economic want created by the Depression was likened to slavery, and metaphors about American bondage to the economy abounded.²⁰⁷ Parallels were drawn between the millions of slaves in the 1850s and the millions of unemployed in the 1930s. President Roosevelt's implementation of New Deal policies revitalized the American economy and was viewed as a second Emancipation Proclamation, one that freed the individual from economic submission. Lincoln's image graced posters for New Deal initiatives and some described Lincoln as the New Dealer of his day.²⁰⁸ By the end of the depression era, the social upheavals of the

²⁰³ Kathleen Logothetis Thompson, "Looking for the American Dream."

²⁰⁴ Dwight T. PITCHAITHLEY "Abraham Lincoln's Birthplace Cabin: The Making of an American Icon," in *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape* by Paul Shackel, 2001, 252.

²⁰⁵ Whyte, *Hoover: An Extraordinary Life*, 433.

²⁰⁶ Richard N. Current, "The Lincoln Presidents," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (Winter, 1979), 26.

²⁰⁷ Barry Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System: Abraham Lincoln in World War II," *American Sociological Review*, 61 no. 5 (1996): 908.

²⁰⁸ William Allen White, "We are Coming Together Father Abraham," *Congressional Record*, February 13, 1940 as quoted in Schwartz, "Collective Memory and History," 484; Federal Theatre Project, U.S., Sponsor. Big tent theatre - now playing - Abraham Lincoln, the great commoner. Illinois, 1936. [Illinois: Federal Art Project] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/98509674/>. Harry Herzog. Artist, E. P Conkle,

1920s and 30s had redefined Lincoln's memory to be one of self-reliance and state activism.²⁰⁹

Marian Anderson capitalized on and reinforced the burgeoning thread of emancipatory imagery with her 1939 Lincoln Memorial Concert. A black American contralto, Anderson was an internationally-celebrated musician. While planning a tour in the United States, Anderson requested permission to perform in Constitution Hall in Washington D.C. The venue's owners, the Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.), denied Anderson's request due to the color of her skin. When first lady Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the D.A.R. out of protest, the prejudice that Anderson experienced received national attention. Perceiving the opportunity to illustrate the "illegitimacy of racial prejudice," Anderson used her stardom to draw national attention to the enduring racial bigotry of America.²¹⁰ The national conversation over race moved from Constitution Hall, a bastion of American identity, to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, the new site of the open-air concert. Anderson played to an integrated audience of 75,000, far exceeding the seating capacity of Constitution Hall. The visual power of the event was without precedent. Millions read in newspapers, or saw on newsreels, the striking imagery of Anderson singing in the foreground of the nation's shrine to Lincoln. Anderson's powerful voice linked Abraham Lincoln's image in the public mind to that of black racial equality.²¹¹ Anderson's performance laid the

and Sponsor Federal Theatre Project; "Prologue to glory" by E.P. Conkle / herzog. New York, None. [Nyc: wpa federal art project, between 1936 and 1939] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/95505497/>.

²⁰⁹ Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System," 908; Schwartz, "Collective Memory and History," 484.

²¹⁰ Raymond Arsenault, *The Sound of Freedom: Marian Anderson, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Concert that Awakened America*, (Bloomsbury Press: New York, 2009), 2-3, 148, 159-160.

²¹¹ Sandage, "A Marble House Divided," 143 – 146; Kunhardt III, "Lincoln's Contested Legacy"; Arsenault, *The Sound of Freedom*, 2, 164.

foundation for the reemergence of Lincoln's emancipation persona in the 1940s and, more importantly, began the practice of using the memorial as a site to illustrate ongoing racial inequality in America.²¹² In the coming decades, the Lincoln Memorial came to be the site where black Americans "demanded that the nation live up to Lincoln's ideal."²¹³ Anderson used the power of the myth of Lincoln - as the personification of American ideals - to "highlight the hypocrisy of segregation and discrimination in front of the memorial" to the man who had emancipated the slaves over seventy-five years before.²¹⁴

The rising forces of fascism in Europe would continue to solidify Lincoln's legacy as an emancipator. On the eve of war in 1940, an estimated one-third of American citizens (44 million) had been born in the late nineteenth century, a time when Lincoln was popular in print media and fresh in the memories of those who had survived Civil War.²¹⁵ Barry Schwartz, the preeminent scholar of Lincoln's changing image during World War II, states that it was this generation of inveterate Lincoln worshippers (most Civil War survivors had died by this time and with them largely went animosities towards Lincoln) that comprised large portions of the nation's population.²¹⁶ For this generation's parents, Lincoln had defined a nation's war effort. Sharing this same form of memory as a cultural and social frame of reference, the symbolism associated with Lincoln naturally helped frame, articulate, and legitimize the nation's World War II experience.²¹⁷

²¹² Snee, "Saving the Emancipator," 143.

²¹³ Keith R. Eberly, "'To Thee We Sing': Racial Politics and the Lincoln Memorial," *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2009), 55.

²¹⁴ Eberly, "To Thee We Sing," 55.

²¹⁵ Barry Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System: Abraham Lincoln in World War II," *American Sociological Review*, 61 no. 5 (1996): 908; Schwartz, "Collective Memory and History," 484; William Allen White, "We are Coming Together Father Abraham," *Congressional Record*, February 13, 1940 as quoted in Schwartz.

²¹⁶ Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System," 912.

²¹⁷ Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System," 921; Kunhardt III, "Lincoln's Contested Legacy,"

Lincoln's likeness appeared on federal advertisements for enlistments and war bonds, while his birthday marked the start of rationing campaigns to "inspire the preservation of Liberty" and the determination to "do [their] duty for God and Country." Throughout World War II, Lincoln's image was a force of national encouragement. As a cultural icon, Lincoln legitimized the purpose of the war, inspired citizens, and provided an image of support during an extended period of personal and national sacrifice. Lincoln appeared in wartime posters, newspapers, and magazines. Through quotation and imagery, propaganda prints connected Civil War rhetoric and symbolism to the fight against Hitler. From images of Lincoln standing beside President Roosevelt and saying "You have a greater task than I had. Slavery must be removed from the whole earth," to Honest Abe shredding a Nazi flag with an ax, Lincoln appeared in American popular media as motivation for the public to defend democracy abroad. In sum, Lincoln's popular image functioned as a morally-imbued ideal against which war-weary Americans could see their own hardships in perspective.²¹⁸

By 1945, the popular Lincoln of public memory had become a substantially different figure than the one martyred in 1865. Adults in the first half-century had grown up in a society that, for the most part, still held the values and beliefs of agrarian America. After two world wars interspersed with a ten-year long economic depression, Lincoln had become a multidimensional figure. It was, however, during World War II that Lincoln's popular image was reformed, yet again, to fit new national values and

²¹⁸ *Roanoke Rapids Herald*, February 4, 1943; *Evening Star*, July 4, 1942; *The Wilmington Morning Star*, March 29, 1944, p. 5; "That We Here Highly Resolve That These Dead Shall Not Have Died in Vain," a poster by War Production Board, 1942-1943, *National Archives*; U.S. Office of War Information, *Let Freedom Ring*, 1944. Poster. The Abraham Lincoln Museum, Harrogate, Tennessee; Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System," 915 – 916.

mores. As the atrocities of the Nazi Regime's genocide against the European Jewish population came to light in the United States, there was an uncomfortable dissonance between America's mobilization in the war as defender of democracy and the great American dilemma of ongoing racial inequality at home. Barry Schwartz observes that it was during this time that the general population began to tentatively embrace Lincoln's little-venerated legacy as the Great Emancipator rather than the Savior of the Union or the Self-Made Man.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ Schwartz, "Collective Memory," 486; Schwartz, "History, Commemoration, and Belief," 188 – 189; Iwan M. Morgan, *Presidents in the Movies*, 11; "Freedom for Religion," *Evening Star*, February 11, 1940; "Among the Stamp Collectors," *Evening Star*, 10, 1943; "If Gen. George Washington and President Abraham Lincoln Were Living Today..." *The Midland Journal*, February 12, 1943; "Congress Hails Big Three Stand," *The Wilmington Morning Star*, February 13, 1945.

Chapter 4 – The Duality of Democracy

In the late 1940s, the American people had tentatively reconnected Lincoln's image to emancipation in popular thought. As a central figure in the American national narrative, and with his clear ties to emancipation during the Civil War, civil rights activists perceived the power of Lincoln's image as a vehicle to illustrate the hypocrisy of racial inequality and segregation in the United States. During the civil rights movement, activists capitalized on the burgeoning strain of Lincoln's emancipatory legacy and continually reinforced Lincoln's image as the Great Emancipator. A potent American symbol, the appropriation of Lincoln's image to support the civil rights movement made his legacy, personified at the Lincoln Memorial, resonate powerfully among black and white Americans alike.²²⁰ After decades of commemorating a specific representation of Lincoln as the Savior of the Union, the activism of black and white Americans for racial equality forced the nation to confront all aspects of Lincoln's legacy.

As observed by Scott Sandage, "tactically, the modern civil rights movement came of age on Easter Sunday 1939" with Marian Anderson's "political use of Lincoln's memory."²²¹ Beginning in 1939, and extending through the "classical" phase of the civil rights movements, "blacks strategically appropriated Lincoln's memory and [the Lincoln Memorial] as political weapons," and in the process changed forever "the public meaning

²²⁰ Patrick Washburn, "The 'Pittsburgh Courier's' Double V Campaign in 1942," August 1981, Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism; Schwartz, "Collective Memory and History," 469, 484 - 486.

²²¹ Sandage, "A Marble House Divided," 136.

of the hero and shrine.”²²² In the prelude to the civil rights movement, Lincoln was a compelling national symbol that appealed to white Americans. Activists capitalized on Lincoln’s mass appeal and used the site of his national veneration to demand that the country live up to his emancipatory legacy.²²³ In 1965, civil rights activist, Bayard Rustin, described the “classical phase of the civil rights movement” as consisting of three parts. The classical began in 1954 with the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, extended through a period defined by highly visible public protests, and culminated with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It was during the classical phase of the civil rights movement that activists transformed Lincoln’s image and aligned his popular legacy with themes of civil equality and racial justice.²²⁴

When Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, he invited all “persons of suitable condition,” regardless of race to serve in the Union military.²²⁵ Yet, some eighty years later, segregation still permeated the nation’s armed forces.²²⁶ Though allowed to enlist, black service personnel were routinely assigned to non-combat roles and often received harsh punishments (such as dishonorable discharge) for minor infractions that excluded them from qualifying for veterans’ benefits.²²⁷ Black soldiers became

²²² Sandage, “A Marble House Divided,” 136; Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, (Princeton University Press, 2000), 187.

²²³ Eberly, “To Thee We Sing,” 56.

²²⁴ Jacquelyn Hall Dowd, “The Long Civil Rights Movement,” *The Best American Essays 2007* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York), 1234.

²²⁵ Abraham Lincoln, “The Emancipation Proclamation,” January 1, 1863.

²²⁶ James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government*, (Oxford University Press, 2011), 223 – 231.

²²⁷ Sparrow, *Warfare State*, 223 – 231.

disillusioned over the dissonance between the proclaimed war aims and the reality of segregation and racial disparity in the American military.

In order to meet the dual demands of warfare, resources and labor, there was an unprecedented mobilization of American citizens during World War II. Women and black Americans entered into professional spheres previously barred to them. Black Americans served not only in the nation's military, but also worked in domestic wartime industries earning unprecedented wages and professional mobility. White racial attitudes mellowed as the need for national unity superseded racial inequality with white Americans more receptive than ever to black claims to citizenship. During the period of increased racial unity, the Double V Campaign gained prominence. Created in 1942 by the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the largest black-owned newspaper in the country, the Double V Campaign called national attention to the fact that blacks lacked equality at home even though they fought to achieve it for others abroad. Supported by black and white citizens alike, the campaign gained widespread support and endorsements from prominent entertainers like Marian Anderson and Humphrey Bogart.²²⁸

Once the external threat to the United States ended with Allied victory, thousands of white males returned home to rejoin the American workforce. The public veneration of the American soldier redefined the hierarchy of citizenship. Idolized as "citizen-soldiers," white veterans received preferential treatment, along with generous benefits, upon their return. Viewed with the utmost respect for their ardent patriotism and "virulent masculinity," businesses were quick to rehire white veterans over women or blacks.²²⁹

²²⁸ Washburn, "The 'Pittsburgh Courier's' Double V Campaign in 1942."

²²⁹ Sparrow, *Warfare State*, 14.

Black Americans lost the tentative gains they had made during the war years. The Double V campaign quietly lost white support and black Americans were expected to return to their pre-war position in society, one that still enforced the racial segregation of Jim Crow. Complicating the post-war era was the general ambivalence that society felt towards black veterans. Despite the general veneration of the returning soldier, black veterans had limited access to the rights and benefits bestowed upon their white counterparts. Black veterans began to agitate for full citizenship and the movement gained national momentum.²³⁰

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Lincoln's image appeared in print materials that renounced segregation.²³¹ President Harry Truman legitimized the use of Lincoln's image in that respect when he spoke before the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) at its annual convention on June 29, 1947. Standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Truman declared that the nation had reached a turning point in its race relations and that the country must learn from the mistakes of Europe's racial and ethnic prejudice. Truman said that race-based discrimination had no justifiable reason to exist, and that the nation "must not tolerate such limitations on the freedom of any of our people and on their enjoyment of basic rights which every citizen in a truly democratic society must possess." Just over a year later, President Truman issued Executive Order 9981 to end racial discrimination in the United States military. President Truman's public renunciation of segregation on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial

²³⁰ Washburn, "The 'Pittsburgh Courier's' Double V Campaign in 1942."

²³¹ "Gift of God," *Evening Star*, February 8, 1948; "Proclaim Negro History Week," *Jackson Advocate*, January 28, 1950; *Evening Star*, February 10, 1952, p. 12; *Evening Star*, February 11, 1952; *Arizona Sun*, February 6, 1953; "To Be, or Not to Be?" *The New Tribune*, August 12, 1956.

reinforced Marian Anderson's politicization of the site as a form of critique against a segregated white society.²³²

Black veterans took advantage of their limited service benefits and entered into the nation's collegiate system. The increased black student presence also meant an increased interest in black history, which culminated in the professionalization of black studies in the 1940s. The proto-black studies field emerged in 1926 with the founding of *The Journal of Negro History (JNH)*, the first professional journal dedicated to the study of black history. The brainchild of the early black history movement, Carter G. Woodson dedicated his life's work to its establishment. Among his many accomplishments was the implementation of Negro History Week, a cultural and educational week designed to promote black interest in black history. Through the reach of the *JNH* and its parent organization, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Woodson revolutionized the field of American historiography by "extending the discipline to various non-professionally groups of trained scholars." Historians, school teachers, ministers, and business professionals contributed to the field. By adapting to the rapid cultural changes created by the Great Depression and the World Wars, Woodson fostered an engaging field of black research that laid the foundation for the professionalization of black studies as a field of scholarly research. The advancements gained by civil rights

²³² "The Transformation of the Racial Views of Harry Truman." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 26 (1999): 28-30. doi:10.2307/2999133; Harry S. Truman, Address Before the NAACP, June 29, 1947. <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/harrystrumannaacp.htm>

activists, and the dismantling of Jim Crow, allowed black students to enter into levels of academia previously barred to them.²³³

With the professionalization of black studies emerging as a respectable field and black veterans receiving government benefits to attend college, the first generation of black scholars emerged. At the same time, white veterans were entering universities en masse. An analysis of Ph.D conferral rates awarded by year provides evidence of the changing academic landscape that, quite literally, set the stage for Lincoln's popular rebirth as the Great Emancipator. Between 1943 and 1946, 3,460 men earned their doctoral degrees in the United States. In 1947 – 1948, 3,989 men earned their doctorates and another 10,331 by the end of 1950.²³⁴ As freshly minted black historians entered into the professional field, subjects like Reconstruction underwent substantial change as new voices entered into the national historical dialogue alongside those of existing scholars.

One of the leading black scholars in the post-war period was W. E. B. Du Bois, the first black American to earn a doctorate degree. An early civil rights leader, Du Bois created the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, on the anniversary of Lincoln's birthday in 1909, to combat racism in the United States. John Hope Franklin was a black historian whose controversial work, *Reconstruction After the Civil War*, critically debunked the popular Dunning myths of negative black stereotypes. Benjamin Quarles's, *Lincoln and the Negro*, illustrated Lincoln's imperfect journey that led him to pass the Emancipation Proclamation. Alongside Marian Anderson, the voices

²³³ Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, "Marking Black History Practical and Popular: Carter G. Woodson, the Proto Black Studies Movement, and the Struggle for Black Liberation," *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 28, no. 2, 2004: 372 – 374.

²³⁴ U.S. Department of Education, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993), 83

of black scholars helped to forge Lincoln's emancipator legacy within popular American thought.

The influx of historians, both black and white, also meant a divergence in the study of Lincoln. As the Dunning School lost its foothold in academic thought, the Consensus School emerged. Advanced by John Higham, Consensus historiography emphasized the unity of American values and the continuity of those values in the country's national character. As Consensus historians sought to eliminate conflict, Lincoln featured prominently as the uncontroversial Savior of the Union. Despite the increased presence of black voices in both the popular and academic spheres, interpretations of Lincoln formed along parallel paths as the earlier, white-based categories of Lincoln's legacy endured alongside the burgeoning popular understanding of Lincoln, the emancipator.

Prior to 1945, Lincoln scholars largely grappled with portraying Lincoln's life in biography. Scholars would nitpick each other's work over the significance of Lincoln's legacy, or the specifics of his early love life. With more historians entering the field, they carved out niche areas of expertise. Instead of attempting to create a new definitive biography of Lincoln, Lincoln literature transitioned into a field of monography.²³⁵ Continuing a shift away from the voluminous studies, a younger generation of scholars adopted the form of essays to readdress basic Lincoln themes that were obfuscated by

²³⁵ Examples of monography include: Robert S. Harper's *Lincoln and the Press* (1951), T. Harry Williams's *Lincoln and His Generals* (1952), Albert A. Woldman's *Lincoln and the Russians* (1952), Harlan Hoyt Horner's *Lincoln and Greeley* (1953), Robert Bruce's *Lincoln and the Tools of War* (1956), Norton Garfinkle's *Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War* (1959), Benjamin Quarles's *Lincoln and the Negro* (1962), William W. Betts's *Lincoln and the Poets* (1965), T. Harry Williams's *Lincoln and the Radicals* (1965), Gideon Welles's *Lincoln and Seward* (1969), David Plowden's *Lincoln and His America, 1809 – 1865* (1970), Edgar De Witt Jones's *Lincoln and the Preachers* (1970), and Christopher Dell's *Lincoln and the War Democrats* (1975).

layers of conflicting scholarly treatment. Among the most famous of Lincoln essays was David Donald's "Getting Right with Lincoln." Donald detailed how and why modern political parties appropriated Lincoln in order to earn "Lincoln's endorsement" during election seasons. Republicans were the nominal heirs to the Lincoln brand while Democrats were its ideological titleholders. "Despite [Republican efforts] to reclaim him," Donald wrote, "Lincoln was by now everybody's grandfather." Lincoln's name was continually associated with varying parties and causes seeking legitimacy. At any one time, Lincoln "was a Communist, a vegetarian, a socialist, a prohibitionist, a greenbacker, and a proponent of Union Now." Most famously, Donald predicted that Lincoln's "continuing vogue [was] his essential ambiguity. He can be cited on all sides of all questions." Lincoln's malleability made him the perfect political brand. Any political agent could find a way to key their cause to Lincoln's legacy.²³⁶

During the first stage of the classical phase, the Lincoln Memorial served both to celebrate black civil gains in society, but also to illustrate the imperfect reality of black freedom. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional during the watershed civil rights case *Brown v. Board of Education*; on the third anniversary of the decision, over 30,000 demonstrators assembled on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to commemorate the event and pray "in the presence of the memory of Abraham Lincoln and of the God and father of our people."²³⁷ Led by some of the nation's leading black clergyman and civil rights leaders, The Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington for Freedom celebrated the landmark ruling, but also drew attention to the

²³⁶ David Donald, "Getting Right With Lincoln," *The Atlantic*, 1956, <https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/95nov/lincoln/lincite.htm>.

²³⁷ Sandage, "A Marble House Divided," 154.

ongoing struggle for human rights. During the three-hour demonstration, clergyman Martin Luther King Jr. spoke before a national audience for the first time. Although the organizers hoped for some 50,000 protestors to attend the gathering, the Prayer Pilgrimage was the largest organized demonstration thus far in the civil rights movement. The protest received substantial coverage in newspapers and circulated the linked rhetoric of civil rights, inequality, and Abraham Lincoln. A successful event, the Prayer Pilgrimage continued the practice of using the Lincoln Memorial as a site of civil protest and Lincoln himself as a powerful symbol to draw national attention to issue of race.²³⁸ Lincoln's image, name, and legacy as the Great Emancipator appeared in newspapers throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s with increasing frequency.²³⁹

Not all Americans embraced the popular refashioning of Lincoln's legacy in the nation's memory. During the zenith of the civil rights movement, the Republican Party made a concerted effort to reclaim Lincoln as the founder of the party. The ideology of the Party, however, had changed substantially since the days of Lincoln. Throughout the 1950s, grassroots conservatives worked to revive the Republican Party and to end the dominance of the Democratic Party that had begun with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal policies. The newly-organized Republican Party, or the new American Right, "rejected liberal visions and instead championed individual economic freedom and

²³⁸ "Prayer Pilgrimage," *The Detroit Tribune*, May 26, 1957, p. 6; "Local Civic Leaders to March for Freedom," *The Detroit Tribune*, May 18, 1957, p.1; "Secure Lincoln Memorial for Prayer Pilgrimage," *The Detroit Tribune*, May 4, 1957; Sandage, "A Marble House Divided," 153.

²³⁹ *The Detroit Tribune*, January 10, 1959; *The Detroit Tribune*, February 14, 1959; *Jackson Advocate*, February 21, 1959; *The Catholic Times*, February 12, 1960; *Românul American*, February 13, 1960; *The Petal Paper*, November 9, 1960; *The Detroit Tribune*, April 15, 1961; *Arizona Sun*, July 10, 1958; *The Detroit Tribune*, February 12, 1955.

a staunch social conservatism.”²⁴⁰ Due to the blend of conservatism and anti-liberalism, the Republican Party appealed to middle-class suburban families who were predominantly white. Racially conservative, the Republican Party resisted civil rights efforts to claim Lincoln as a symbol of racial equality, and instead tried to reclaim Lincoln as a Republican figure emblematic of conservative American values and the racial status quo.²⁴¹

In June of 1961, civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr., petitioned President John. F. Kennedy to issue a Second Emancipation Proclamation on the anniversary of Lincoln’s original one. Intentionally publicizing the plea, King made the proposal during a news conference, framing the second proclamation as an extension of Lincoln’s unfinished work and as a reminder that Lincoln had once warned the country that it could not exist half-slave and half-free. So too, King implored, should the Kennedy administration recognize that America could not continue to exist half-segregated and half-free.²⁴²

Like Lincoln, Kennedy was more receptive to black claims of citizenship than any recent president before him. Kennedy hosted Martin Luther King Jr. at the White House in 1961 to discuss King’s proposed second emancipation proclamation. Kennedy’s support for the civil rights movement, limited as it was, cemented the popular perception that the Kennedy administration was a friend to the civil rights cause. Although Kennedy

²⁴⁰ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*, (Princeton University Press, 2001), 12.

²⁴¹ Tasha Philpot, *Race, Republicans, and the Return of the Party of Lincoln*, (University of Michigan Press, 2007), 2, 37, 41.

²⁴² Samuel Momodu, “Second Emancipation Proclamation,” Blackpast, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/second-emancipation-proclamation-1962/>.

was supportive of the efforts of civil rights activists, federal backing of the movement was slow to follow. In 1963, tired of federal inaction, civil rights leaders decided to plan a massive protest to exert pressure on the Kennedy administration to enact substantive civil rights legislation to end segregation in the United States. Mass protests in Washington, D.C., or the threat of them, had proven successful before. In 1941, civil rights leader, A. Philip Randolph, organized a demonstration in the nation's capital to exert pressure on President Roosevelt to desegregate the nation's defense-related industries. Randolph called for 100,000 marchers to demonstrate at the Lincoln Memorial to "shake up white America."²⁴³ Days before the march was to occur, Roosevelt partially ceded to the activists' demand. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 which prohibited racial discrimination in the hiring policies of the federally-contracted plants. The success of the 1941 march influenced the planning of the 1963 protest.

The planners of the second March on Washington selected Washington D.C. for the national media attention the demonstration would likely draw. A mass peaceful protest calling for full racial equality would be visually and symbolically more potent if it occurred in the heart of the nation's capital. 1963 was the centennial of Lincoln's signing of the Emancipation Proclamation and civil rights activists across the nation planned to celebrate one hundred years of freedom from slavery. The celebrations, however, reminded activists that true equality had not yet been achieved. Despite Kennedy's promise to pursue civil rights legislation as part of his presidency, racial discrimination still limited the professional and social mobility of blacks.²⁴⁴ Inspired by King's call for a

²⁴³ A. Philip Randolph, "Call to Negro America to March on Washington for Jobs and Equal Participation in National Defense," *Black Worker* 14 (May 1941).

²⁴⁴ Shumaker, "Untold Stories from America's National Parks," 123.

second Emancipation Proclamation and the centennial of the original proclamation, protest planners decided to use the Lincoln Memorial as the site of the demonstration.

The Lincoln Memorial as a site of black protest had become a “standardized civil rights protest ritual” throughout the 1940s and 1950s.²⁴⁵ NAACP Director, Walter White, noted that an event at the Lincoln Memorial “would double the news value” of a protest.²⁴⁶ As a “coveted cultural symbol of the American way of Life,” Lincoln’s legacy, embodied by the memorial, provided a “cultural language” for civil rights activists to speak and connect to white Americans and garner their support for full racial equality.²⁴⁷ Repeated protests reinforced the memorial as “the stronghold of racial justice” and, over time, refashioned the popular understanding of both Lincoln and his national shrine.²⁴⁸ In 1963, in celebration of both Lincoln’s signing of the proclamation and to illustrate the unfulfilled aspects of Lincoln’s legacy, protest leaders planned for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom to finish at the Lincoln Memorial. Over 200,000 integrated demonstrators gathered on the steps of the memorial on August 28, 1963.

The central element of the Lincoln Memorial program were the speeches by prominent civil rights leaders. Among the most noted were the “Big Six” – leaders of national civil rights organizations: A. Philip Randolph, the Director of the March and President of the Negro American Labor Council; John R. Lewis, Director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; Whitney Young, Director of the National Urban League; James L. Farmer Jr., Director of the Congress of Racial Equality; Roy Wilkins,

²⁴⁵ Sandage, “A Marble House Divided,” 152.

²⁴⁶ Eberly, “To Thee We Sing,” 55.

²⁴⁷ Shumaker, “Untold Stories from America’s National Parks,” 120; Sandage, “A Marble House Divided,” 136, 145 – 147.

²⁴⁸ Sandage, “A Marble House Divided,” 147; Shumaker, “The Lincoln Memorial,” 120.

Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; and, Martin Luther King Jr., President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Throughout the long afternoon, speakers detailed their hopes, dreams, and calls for action in the nation's struggle to achieve racial equality. With so many speakers, however, the attention of the assembled crowd began to wane as the program dragged on. By the time the last speaker, Martin Luther King Jr., moved toward the podium, the major news stations that had been covering the event returned to regularly-scheduled programming. King, a southern-style preacher, reenergized the crowd with his impassioned rhetoric. More so than any other speaker in the program, King connected Lincoln and his legacy to the movement by framing his speech around Lincoln's famed Gettysburg Address:

Five score years ago, a great American in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation, this momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination.²⁴⁹

In impassioned oratory, King framed the fight for racial equality as the fulfillment of Lincoln's legacy rather than a repudiation of it.²⁵⁰ Ending with the stirring rhetoric of his dream for the future, the image of King imploring the nation to live up to its ideals, with Lincoln brooding over his shoulder in the background, became immortalized in American memory. At the time, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom protest at the Lincoln Memorial was the largest peaceful demonstration in America's history. The event received widespread news circulation in the United States. Photographs of the crowd gathered before the towering presence of Lincoln splashed across the front pages

²⁴⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr. "I Have A Dream," August 28, 1963.

²⁵⁰ Sandage, "A Marble House Divided," 157.

of newspapers nationwide. The news repeated sound clips of King's speech. In newsreels and in print, by word of mouth and by ear, Lincoln's legacy as the Great Emancipator and the personification of racial justice was solidified in the eyes and memory of the American public.²⁵¹

The visual power of the March was immense and King's phenomenal speech was described as historic.²⁵² The March not only challenged the nation's racial perceptions, but also refashioned the significance of the memorial in the public's memory. *The New York Herald Tribune* described how the March forced the nation to look at the memorial in a new light and created a new feeling in American towards civil rights and Lincoln: "a feeling for country. Tens of thousands of these petitioning Negroes had never been to Washington before, and probably would never come again. Now here they were. And this was their Washington ... and that great marble memorial was their own memorial to the man who had emancipated them."²⁵³

By 1963, civil rights activists had succeeded in refashioning Lincoln's popular legacy in American memory. Through repeated efforts, the Lincoln Memorial was no longer symbolic of Lincoln the Savior of the Union but dedicated to Lincoln the Emancipator.²⁵⁴ As a sought-after cultural symbol of American identity, Lincoln's presence in the background of the protests at the memorial, and gradually the national discourse over civil rights, legitimized the movement by framing the ongoing inequality

²⁵¹ *The Washington Post*, August 29, 1963; *The New York Times*, August 19, 1963; *The Afro-American*, August 22, 1963; *Chicago Tribune*, August 29, 1963; *The Herald Examiner*, August 29, 1963; Universal International Newsreel, C-Span, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?10928-1/1963-march-washington>.

²⁵² *Jackson Advocate*, September 7, 1963.

²⁵³ *New York Herald Tribune*, August 29, 1963.

²⁵⁴ Shumaker, "Untold Stories from America's National Parks," 137.

black Americans experienced as un-American.²⁵⁵ By connecting racial equality to Lincoln as the fulfillment of his legacy, activists framed opposition to the movement as opposition to the legacy of the Founding Fathers and thus, a repudiation of Lincoln's ideals. Lincoln was "the face of history that had [yet] to be completed."²⁵⁶

Following the March on Washington, Kennedy hosted the protest's leaders at the White House. Only weeks before, Kennedy had finally lent definitive support to the movement by labeling racial inequality as the principal moral issue facing the nation. During the televised address, Kennedy invoked the spirit of Lincoln by reminding the nation "one hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free."²⁵⁷ Kennedy closed with a promise to enact substantive civil rights legislation. Civil rights leaders were thrilled with the address, and King immediately wrote Kennedy to express his elation. Their joy was cut short. Just three months after the March on Washington, Kennedy became the second presidential casualty in the nation's racial reckoning. He was assassinated on November 22, 1963, in Dallas Texas. The second martyr-president, Kennedy's funeral rites closely echoed Lincoln's; the president's remains were taken to the same room and displayed on the same catafalque used during Lincoln's funeral. A highly publicized event, the parallels between Lincoln and Kennedy's deaths were immortalized by the intense national coverage of the funeral. As the sorrowful procession wound its way through the streets of the capitol to Arlington Cemetery, it passed by the Lincoln Memorial, and the solemnity of Lincoln's own tragic end framed that of Kennedy's in the American mind.

²⁵⁵ Shumaker, "Untold Stories from America's National Parks," 120.

²⁵⁶ Shumaker, "Untold Stories from America's National Parks," 137.

²⁵⁷ John F. Kennedy, "Address on Civil Rights," June 11, 1963.

Just as the government had passed civil rights legislation in the aftermath of Lincoln's death, so too did Kennedy's successor. On July 2, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the same White House room where Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. One hundred years after Lincoln emancipated the slaves, the federal government outlawed racial discrimination and segregation in public accommodations and guaranteed federal support to end discrimination in voting processes and public housing. The final phase of the classical civil rights movement was complete. On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, on the 158th anniversary of Lincoln's birthday, during the annual Lincoln Memorial Ceremony, President Johnson stated that "it ha[d] taken more than century for [the United States] as a nation to assert the ideal that Lincoln had barely formulated." Johnson concluded that Lincoln lifted the "baleful burden of racism from the American soul," and it was time for the nation to learn from Lincoln's lesson and to embrace his teachings as an equally liberated nation.²⁵⁸ Lincoln's transformation into the nation's patron saint of racial justice was complete. Lincoln's popular legacy was refashioned and he came to occupy a unique symbolic space in the nation's memory as his white-based legacy of preserving the Union was subsumed by his legacy as the Great Emancipator, champion of civil rights.

²⁵⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, "President's Address," February 12, 1967.

Epilogue

The American fascination with Lincoln is seemingly endless. “If one were to read one Lincoln book a day, it would take the diligent reader over forty-one years to cover the 15,000 books of Lincoln literature that exist today.”²⁵⁹ Lincoln’s prominence in the popular and academic cultures of the United States stems from his power as a central myth in the grand narrative of American identity. Successive generations of Americans have, and will, project onto Lincoln’s image their hopes, values, and fears. As the concerns of each generation change, so too will Lincoln’s purpose, meaning, and significance in American memory. In the words of Jackie Hogan, “each age finds in Lincoln what it needs: inspiration, hope, and an idealized reflection of itself.”²⁶⁰ The Lincoln myth remains fluid and subject to change in the nation’s collective memory.

The concept of ‘collective memory’ was first advanced by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who theorized that “memory resides not only in the minds of individuals but also in the very fabric of society.”²⁶¹ Space, language, imagery, and material objects all reflect the collective memory of a people, and thus, memory is continually revised as changes occur to the culture of a group. Following Halbwachs’s perspective, changes to representations of Lincoln, then, reflect changes in the nation’s collective memory

²⁵⁹ Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.*, 29.

²⁶⁰ Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.*, 9.

²⁶¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francise J. Ditter Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper Colophone, 1980).

itself.²⁶² As a prominent symbol of American identity, Lincoln's legacy will continually undergo revision. After all, Lincoln successively embodied white national unity as the Savior of the Union, the American pioneer spirit as the Self-Made Man, and then racial justice as the Great Emancipator - all in the span of forty years. It was not through new facts that Lincoln's historical legacy changed from savior to emancipator, but as a parallel for evolving national values and beliefs. As the nation's sense of identity changed, so too did Lincoln's significance as a cultural symbol and as a central figure in the nation's grand narrative.

With the passage of the civil rights legislation of 1964 and 1965, Lincoln's emancipatory legacy was fulfilled. Following his centrality as a visual symbol during the civil rights movement, Lincoln transitioned into the national background. With the splintering of the civil rights movement, the increased militancy of black activists, and the mobilization of America's military to Vietnam, the nation placed less focus on historical figures of the past. Americans no longer felt bound to worship heroes as preceding generations had; they could recognize greatness without emulating or venerating it to extremes. The zenith of Lincoln's potency as a cultural symbol ended. Now, Americans reflexively remember the president, but without the intensity and showmanship exhibited in the early twentieth century.²⁶³ Having transitioned into a

²⁶² Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.*, 73.

²⁶³ Schwartz, *Post-Heroic Era*, 2; "Epilogue," in *U.S. Report on the Joint Committee on Arrangements on the Commemoration Ceremony in Observance of the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of Abraham Lincoln, 1809 – 1865*. (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1959), xii – xiii. <https://archive.org/details/abrahamlincolnco00unit>; "Address of Carl Sandburg Before a Joint Session of Congress, February 12, 1959. The University of Southern Mississippi. Accessed July 8, 2019, http://www.lib.usm.edu/spcol/exhibitions/item_of_the_month/iotm_oct_2012.html; "Text of Carl Sandburg's Address," *Românul American*, February 12, 1960; United States Lincoln Sesquicentennial Commissions. Manuscript/Mixed Materials. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mm81043588/?locId=bloglaw>.

frame of reference for American society, Lincoln helped citizens put current events and tragedies into perspective, but he no longer actively shapes national events. Although relevant, Lincoln now stands in the background of American life. By the end of the 1960s, Lincoln's image was inextricably tied to racial progress and civil liberty, but he transitioned from an active to a passive presence in popular America.²⁶⁴

Lincoln, however, remains a ubiquitous figure in American culture. Whether through advertisements, merchandise, or currency, Americans encounter Lincoln's likeness almost on a daily basis. Lincoln's pervasive presence in modern America continues the cultural tradition of veneration that originated in the aftermath of his assassination. Starting in 1865, Americans disseminated Lincoln's image as part of the nation's mourning process and, gradually, Lincoln became a type of American brand, emblematic of national values and identity. It is, however, the very ubiquity of Lincoln's image — born out of a genuine appreciation for his legacy — that diminishes his potency as a symbol of American identity. As Roger Chartier observes, hallowed images lose their venerability from overuse. In other words, once a representation is overpublicized, it becomes common and loses its previous impenetrability.²⁶⁵ Since his death, the government, historians, and ordinary citizens, alike, have invoked Lincoln's legacy for myriad reasons. The wide circulation of his image in newspapers, memorializations, books, and films brought a commonality to Lincoln's legacy that diminished the earlier veneration that pervaded his memory in the nineteenth century and again in the 1960s.

²⁶⁴ Dion DiMucci. *Abraham, Martin, and John*. Dion. 1968, recording.

²⁶⁵ Roger Chartier, "A Desacralized King," *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, (Duke University Press, 1991), 111 – 135.

Once common, Lincoln's memory was prone to what Barry Schwartz describes as "benign ridicule."²⁶⁶ Lincoln's popular image became the subject of humor, and cartoons, newspapers, and magazines increasingly used Lincoln as a way to make fun of "authority figures and tradition."²⁶⁷ When Lincoln's image was accepted for its political and social humor, it passed into absurdity. One of the earliest examples of the 'fantastical Lincoln' was a 1961 episode of *The Twilight Zone* that featured Lincoln as a ghost lamenting the tragedy of the Civil War.²⁶⁸ Within the decade, he would appear as an aphorism-spouting alien who joined the protagonists of *Star Trek* to defeat the forces of evil. The trope of the fantastical Lincoln has become increasingly popular since its inception; Lincoln has appeared for bizarre effect in numerous works of fiction, television programs, and films.²⁶⁹

Though Lincoln's image has been sensationalized, he is still predominantly invoked as the Great Emancipator. This dichotomy is best embodied by two American films, both released in 2012, that depict Lincoln as the Great Emancipator. The first film, *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, was a fantastical action-horror film that portrayed Lincoln as a vampire hunter who defended slaves against the voracious appetites of their vampire-slaveowners. The second film, *Lincoln*, was a critically-acclaimed drama that emphasized Lincoln's commitment to ending slavery and achieving racial equality. The

²⁶⁶ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era*, 158 – 159.

²⁶⁷ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era*, 158 – 159.

²⁶⁸ "Back There," *The Twilight Zone*, January 13, 1961; "The Savage Curtain," *Star Trek: The Original Series*, March 7, 1969.

²⁶⁹ *The Muppet Show: Sex and Violence* (1975), *The Lincoln Conspiracy* (1977), *Police Squad!* (1980 – 1989), *The Garbage Pail Kids Movie* (1987), *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1989), *Red Dwarf* (1991), *Coneheads* (1993), *National Lampoon's Senior Trip* (1994), *The Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer* (1998), *Futurama* (1999 – 2013), *Bedazzled* (2000), *National Treasure: Book of Secrets* (2007), *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (2009), *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian* (2009), *Adventure Time* (2010 – 2018), *Abraham Lincoln vs. Zombies* (2012), *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (2012), *FDR: American Badass!* (2012), and *The Lego Movie* (2014) among numerous others.

sensational depiction of Lincoln as an axe-swinging vampire hunter did well at the box office despite its much more serious competition.²⁷⁰ The prominent cultural depictions of Lincoln in 2012 illustrate the dichotomy that still exists in his modern day image; American society venerates Lincoln's memory as the Great Emancipator with gravitas and solemnity, while simultaneously and without conflict, sensationalizes his image for fantastical and comedic effect.

As popular images of Lincoln become increasingly bizarre, however, academic representations of his life grow ever more sophisticated as scholars advance insightful depictions into his life and actions. Since the 1990s, there has been an explosion in Lincoln-based research that analyzes the popular myth of the folksy, humble emancipator.²⁷¹ Despite these discerning works that tackle the obfuscating layers of myth that surround Lincoln's legacy in collective memory, none seem to successfully contradict the enduring impermeability of the popular American myth of Lincoln.²⁷² Perhaps because Lincoln is, and for so long has been, an idealized benchmark of national identity that Americans ignore the insights made by scholars into the 'real Lincoln.' In life, Lincoln was raised on the pioneer, folksy in manner, and the author of the

²⁷⁰ Snee, "Saving the Emancipator," 144.

²⁷¹ Examples include: Michael Burlingame's *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* (1994), Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (1994) Dan Abrams and Davis Fisher, *Lincoln's Last Trial: The Murder Case That Propelled Him to the Presidency* (2018), Charles R. McKirdy, *Lincoln Apostate: The Matson Slave Case* (2011), Joshua Wolf Shenk, *Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness* (2005), Charles B. Strozier, *Your Friend Forever, A. Lincoln: The Enduring Friendship of Abraham Lincoln and Joshua Speed*, (Columbia University Press, 2016), Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, (Simon & Schuster, 2005), Harold Holzer, *Lincoln and the Power of the Press*, (Simon and Schuster, 2014), Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, (W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World*, (W.W. Norton, 2008), Jackie Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc: Selling the Sixteenth President in Contemporary America*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), John McKee Barr, *Loathing Lincoln: An American Tradition from the Civil War to the Present*, (Louisiana State University Press, 2014), Elizabeth Brown Pryor, *Six Encounters with Lincoln*, (Viking, 2017).

²⁷² Iwan W. Morgan, *Presidents in the Movies*, 34; Eric Foner, "The Civil War in 'Postracial America,'" *The Nation*, October 10, 2011, 25.

Emancipation Proclamation. He was also an ambitious politician, melancholic, and steeped in the racial prejudices of his day. The mythicized Lincoln, the merciful patriot and dedicated abolitionist, however, seems destined to fascinate generation after generation of Americans.

Jackie Hogan suggests that part of Lincoln's cultural staying power is the relief he provides white Americans by alleviating lingering guilt over the racial sins of the past and ongoing racial inequality in the United States.²⁷³ Though America perceives itself as being a post-racial society, social movements like Black Lives Matters evidence remaining strains of social inequity in the United States. Thus, Hogan perceives Lincoln's enduring centrality in the American narrative as the Great Emancipator as a way for white Americans to distance themselves from the ongoing effects of racial inequality. Lincoln, then, serves the very real purpose of providing stability to a national narrative that still fractures under the strain of the imperfect actualization of democratic ideals. As such, Lincoln manifests often in popular media as either the solemn emancipator or the fantastical patriot as neither representations threaten weakening national myths of unity and equality.

America avoids Lincoln's less ideal qualities because the nation does not want to face its own less than exemplary traits. As a national synecdoche, a less than perfect Lincoln equates to a less than perfect America. It seems likely that as long as the great American dilemma, the enduring "inconsistency between the nation's ideals and the reality of racial equality," continues, Lincoln's image will remain open to

²⁷³ Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.*, 154.

interpretation.²⁷⁴ As long as the issues of Lincoln's day, war and racial tensions continue, Lincoln and his legacy will remain relevant in the minds of the American people.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Morgan, *Presidents in the Movies*, 11.

²⁷⁵ Hogan, *Lincoln, Inc.*, 154 – 155.

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