The Dedication of the Living:
Augustus Saint Gaudens’s
*Abraham Lincoln* in Chicago
and London

CHRISTOPHER J. YOUNG

It is easy in the world to live after the world’s opinion;
it is easy in solitude to live after our own;
but the great man is he who in the midst of the
crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the
independence of solitude.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” 1841

Augustus Saint Gaudens’s bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln towers
over passersby in Chicago’s Lincoln Park. Seven years after its dedi-
cation, Jane Addams would seek out the statue during the Pullman
strike that paralyzed Chicago in 1894 and prompted President Grover
Cleveland to dispatch federal troops to the city. She recalled that she
walked “the wearisome way from Hull-House to Lincoln Park . . . in
order to look at and gain magnanimous counsel, if I might, from the
marvelous St. Gaudens statue which had been but recently placed at
the entrance of the park.” Two decades later, during the Great War,
poet Carl Sandburg would walk Lincoln Park, noting the bronze stat-
ues that had come to decorate it. He mused,

I cross Lincoln Park on a winter night when the snow is falling.
Lincoln in bronze stands among the white lines of snow,
his bronze forehead meeting soft echoes of the
newsies crying forty thousand men are dead along
the Yser, his bronze ears listening to the mumbled
roar of the city at his bronze feet.
Carl Sandburg’s expression places Lincoln’s effigy at the intersection of the still beauty of a winter evening and the unfolding horrors of the Great War. Great Britain’s prime minister David Lloyd George would find in the replica of Saint Gaudens’s “Standing Lincoln” in Parliament Square a point of hope and inspiration as he considered in 1920 the complicated world born of that same war. The social worker, the poet, and the politician expressed their responses to Saint Gaudens’s rendering of Lincoln in a way that may represent what many others have thought, but have not documented, as they walked past the “Standing Lincoln.” Perhaps the experience that connects these individuals—known and unknown—is captured best by early twentieth-century Chicago sculptor Lorado Taft when he enthused in 1896 that to stand before Saint Gaudens’s Lincoln: The Man is to feel that one is “in the very presence of America’s greatest soul.” It is, Taft admits, “beyond my power to describe. It has affected me and countless more as no other statue has. It does not seem like bronze; there is something almost human or shall I say? superhuman about it.”

Recognized in 2001 by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks as “one of the oldest public sculptures in Chicago and one of the most significant monuments to Lincoln in the United States,” Saint Gaudens’s piece has been listed alongside numerous others in books that catalog and describe the statues of America’s sixteenth president. The invaluable studies by Franklin B. Mead, Donald Charles Durman, and F. Lauriston Bullard survey the range of representations of Abraham Lincoln. But there is little analysis of the dedications and even less comparative analysis across time and place. The following essay hopes to build on these invaluable works by focusing on the dedicatory ceremonies in Chicago and London that accompanied the installations of Augustus Saint Gaudens’s Abraham Lincoln: The Man. For, as Donald Durman reminds us, those who spoke at dedications

1. Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull-House with Autobiographical Notes (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 32; Carl Sandburg, “Bronzes,” Chicago Poems (New York: Henry Holt, 1916), 57; Lorado Taft, “American Sculpture and Sculptors,” Chautauquan: A Weekly Newsmagazine 22 (Jan. 1896), 390. The author wishes to thank James Cornelius, Gianluca Di Muzio, Christian McWhirter, and the anonymous reviewers whose comments improved this essay considerably. This project was supported by an Indiana University New Frontiers Exploration Traveling Fellowship. The author dedicates this essay to his Mom and Lincoln fan, Mary T. Ferone Young (1939–2018), and to his Dad, Bob Young (1936–2018), who watched the kids while he was in London doing research for this article. Both were wonderfully supportive parents.
of Lincoln sculpture over the years tried “to convey to their hearers the thoughts which Lincoln might have voiced.”

Noted French historian Pierre Nora observes that monuments are a tangible “boundary stone of another age” marking their place in our understanding and imagination. As Lorado Taft instructs us, sculpture is a particularly “difficult and expensive craft,” and thus monuments “are not erected by a community without good and sufficient reason.” The expense behind the presumed permanency of a monument is considered worthwhile because it affords the opportunity for a society or a group within the society to remember the past but also to influence the way future generations will remember that same past. That is, as philosopher Edward Casey put it, monuments embody a “Janusian trait” because their “very massiveness and solidity almost literally enforce this futurity, while inscription and certain identifiable features . . . pull the same physical object toward the past it honors.” In short, the society that erects the object of public memory “strives to preserve its memory in times to come—at the limit, times beyond measure.”

Discussing the dedications of Augustus Saint Gaudens’s statue of Abraham Lincoln in Chicago in 1887 and of its replica nearly four thousand miles away in London in 1920 reveals insights not only into the time period in which these events occurred but also into the cultures in which they happened. Furthermore, the dedicatory events

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connected to Saint Gaudens’s “Standing Lincoln” in Chicago and its replica in London suggest that an international comparison brings into relief cultural differences that inform the memory of Abraham Lincoln.⁴

Chicago

Chicago was an appropriate place to honor Lincoln. While most people think of Springfield, Illinois, as the most important city in Lincoln’s life, Chicago played a critical role in the development of his legal and political career. It was in Chicago that the Republican Party chose Lincoln as a presidential candidate in 1860. Moreover, it was in the city that artist Leonard Volk gently covered Lincoln’s face in plaster, creating the life mask that would literally give shape to sculptures of Lincoln for decades to come.

The city was gathering momentum by the mid nineteenth century and was well on its way to becoming the political and economic powerhouse of Illinois and the Midwest. Lincoln’s contact and relationship with Chicago coincides with its urban growth. His first documented visit was for the River and Harbor Convention of 1847—the first national meeting of significance held in Chicago. Recently elected as a Whig to represent his district in Congress, Lincoln had demonstrated an interest in and commitment to federally funded internal improvements and attended the convention because he was interested in connecting waterways in his state and beyond. During the 1850s Lincoln made several more trips to Chicago to conduct legal and political business. While there, he tended to stay for several days at a time and the newspapers of the period published reports on his speeches at public events.⁵

⁴ Heroic-size bronze copies of Abraham Lincoln: The Man exist in London, Mexico City, and Hollywood Hills, California. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, at the Cobb Memorial, one will find a heroic-size copy of the figure only. The Saint Gaudens National Historic Site holds the plastic model for the Mexico City cast. In June 2016 a heroic-size bronze was dedicated on the grounds of the Saint Gaudens National Historic Site in Cornish, New Hampshire. After 1910 a number of reductions of the statue were cast and are now housed in museums and libraries, among other locations, throughout the United States. Busts based on the statue are part of the collections of a variety of American institutions. See John H. Dryfhout, The Work of Augustus Saint Gaudens (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1982), 159–62.

The famous 1858 senatorial race between Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas commenced at the Tremont Hotel in Chicago, where the two candidates made speeches laying out the themes that would come to define the subsequent debates of that year. It was at that time that Chicago-based sculptor Leonard Volk first met Lincoln. In April 1860, when Lincoln was in town for the longstanding and contentious *Johnston v. Jones and Marsh* case, Volk invited him to the studio, where Volk had Lincoln’s face and upper chest plastered. Several months later, when Lincoln was the newly minted Republican nominee for president, Volk visited him at his home in Springfield, where he cast his hands. In the mid-1880s, these items came to the attention of a group of prominent American men who formed a committee to recruit subscribers to purchase the original pieces from Volk and present them to the Smithsonian Institution. One of the driving forces of this committee was the American sculptor Augustus Saint Gaudens, who would rely heavily on Volk’s work in his own renditions of Lincoln.6

Augustus Saint Gaudens was born in Dublin in 1848 to an Irish mother and a French father. When he was six months old, he migrated to America with his family, who settled in New York City. His parents recognized and encouraged young Augustus’s artistic talents. He attended classes at the Cooper Institute and worked in the shops of two cameo cutters, Louis Avet and Jules Le Brethon. Acknowledging his son’s artistic acumen, Augustus’s father sent him to Paris to experience the 1867 Exposition and develop further his skills. When he returned home five years later, Saint Gaudens was poised to make his entry into the sculptural world of nineteenth-century America.7

In 1881 Saint Gaudens revealed his sculpture of Admiral David Glasgow Farragut in New York City. This piece included a number of features that would come to define Saint Gaudens’s work, including his “Standing Lincoln.” The Farragut sculpture showed an unsurpassed attention to detail, especially when it came to clothes. Moreover, the Farragut launched a collaboration between Saint Gaudens

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and his friend, renowned architect Stanford White. White was responsible for designing the exedra, a critical feature in Saint Gaudens’s Farragut as well as both his standing and seated Lincolns in Chicago. The exedra, a semicircular seat, envelopes the subject while also inviting the viewer to participate in the experience of facing the high seas with the admiral or leaning in to hear a speech by the president. White was also responsible for designing the chair, a striking feature of the Lincoln sculpture. That Lincoln’s effigy stands in front of the chair instead of sitting in it is an effective touch and an unusual one in sculpture. “I remember what a surprise that empty chair gave us,” Lorado Taft wrote in his work, *Modern Tendencies in Sculpture*. “It was so daring—so strange!”

Emerging as the premier American portrait artist during the late nineteenth century, Saint Gaudens understood the importance of depicting a man whose memory was seared into the hearts of many contemporaries. To accomplish the task, he relied on the Volk life mask and hands, enlisted Langdon Morese, a six-foot, four-inch man from Windsor, Vermont, and had him run around a field with clothing resembling Lincoln’s to capture a body in motion. This is critical to Saint Gaudens’s success, for he sought to depict a living Lincoln; the way people remembered him. Contemporaries remarked how his face was difficult to capture in photography and other vehicles of art because it was constantly in motion.

The sculptor relied on his memory as well. When Lincoln visited New York City in 1861, the artist saw him standing in his carriage and bowing to the crowd. That Saint Gaudens had a vivid memory of a standing Lincoln likely explains why he chose to represent the president as standing in *Abraham Lincoln: The Man*.

The statue was the result of $40,000 set aside by Chicago businessman Eli Bates, who had amassed a fortune in the lumber business. The trustees for the Bates estate were impressed with Saint Gaudens’s


statue of Admiral Farragut and sought him out. Although he refused to compete for the Chicago commission, the trustees, who established the Lincoln Memorial Fund with Bates’s financial gift, unanimously chose Saint Gaudens and provided him with much leeway in terms of design and time. The statue of Lincoln he produced is twelve feet tall.

Figure 1. Augustus Saint Gaudens’s *Abraham Lincoln: The Man* (1887) in Chicago’s Lincoln Park. The date of the photo is unknown, but it was probably taken within a decade of its dedication. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-19193.)
Saint Gaudens’s Abraham Lincoln

and sits on a granite pedestal measuring seven feet. Steps lead to the Stanford White–designed exedra bench, which is sixty feet across and thirty feet deep. The steps and exedra are flanked by bronze globes. The heroic-size representation of Lincoln set within the exedra invites the observer to move in closer, presumably to consider the words of his 1860 Cooper Union Speech, which are inscribed into the back of the bench. The Saint Gaudens creation is remarkable for its detail: the creases in the pants and jacket, the detailed vest and buttons, the left hand on the lapel, the right hand behind the back, the head slightly tilted forward, and the toe of one foot slightly off the pedestal. Together, all these elements have a stunning effect on the viewer.

Saint Gaudens was committed to American civic sculpture, especially as it related to the Civil War and its participants. He believed that his admiration for the men who participated in the conflict stemmed from his experiences in New York City as a young man. In his autobiography, he recalled events and parades connected with the 1860 presidential election. He also described soldiers, camps, cavalry squadrons, recruiting tents, and the intense desire for news. His workstation in the cameo shop faced a window that allowed for a full view of the activities in nearby streets. One day, while working at his lathe, Saint Gaudens saw “virtually the entire contingent of New England volunteers on their way to the Civil War, a spectacle profoundly impressive, even to my youthful imagination.”

Significantly for our purpose here, the young Saint Gaudens saw president-elect Abraham Lincoln pass through New York City on his way to Washington. He recalled “in a procession the figure of a tall and very dark man, seeming entirely out of proportion in his height with the carriage in which he was driven, bowing to the crowds on each side.” Seared into Saint Gaudens’s memory was also the day he learned of the president’s death. He vividly recalled his parents weeping while they read the newspaper accounts of the assassination aloud in the family home over breakfast. Saint Gaudens stood in line with thousands of others to view the president’s body lying in repose at
City Hall. Once he had his turn, Saint Gaudens returned to the end of the line to get another glimpse. While watching the funeral procession from a rooftop, the teenage artist was deeply moved when he “noticed every one uncover while the funeral car went by.” Saint Gaudens was not unique in this respect. As historian Merrill D. Peterson observes, “Lincoln’s death sank into the hearts and captivated the minds of the generation that grew to maturity after the Civil War.” The passing of the funeral car concluded Saint Gaudens’s “vision of the big man,” as he referred to his close encounters with Lincoln.

In October 1887 Saint Gaudens revealed his Lincoln Park statue on a chilly and wet fall day, in front of thousands of people. As people eagerly waited to see the statue that the Chicago Tribune promised would be the finest product of American sculpture yet achieved, they little knew that Saint Gaudens’s Abraham Lincoln: The Man would become the most famous representation of the sixteenth president until the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., eclipsed it in 1922. A month following the dedication of the “Standing Lincoln” in Chicago, an author for the Century Illustrated Magazine pronounced the monument “the most precious the country yet possesses; which is not only our best likeness of Abraham Lincoln, but our finest work of monumental art.”

On the miserable but typical late October day in Chicago when Saint Gaudens’s statue was unveiled, invited guests, including dignitaries, speakers, and Lincoln’s family, took their places while the mass of others pressed in to get a good view. The commemoration started when Robert Lincoln and his son, Abraham Lincoln II, each took a seat flanking the still-veiled statue. Once the honored descendants of the sixteenth president were seated, the band broke out in music. The Republican mayor of Chicago, John A. Roche, formally welcomed the crowd, while Thomas Withrow, a trustee of the Eli Bates estate, officially presented the statue to William Goudy, who accepted for the public on behalf of the Lincoln Park Commissioners. The band broke

out into a rendition of “America,” and thirty-eight cannons fired as Lincoln’s grandson and namesake unveiled the statue.  

Roche was the first of several speakers for the occasion leading up to the keynote address by Leonard Swett. The mayor began by explaining that Lincoln remained “enshrined” in the hearts of Americans because he was both Savior of the Union and Emancipator. Furthermore, his hold on Americans was due also to his character. “There is a reverence for his character,” he noted, as the American people remember, “whence he sprang and how he lived, and toiled, and struggled, and conquered, and died.” The statue of Lincoln will serve as a reminder “for future generations” that he “died for liberty.” Following Roche, Withrow shared with the crowd how Bates’s life mirrored Lincoln’s in the sense that he was a kind and generous man, whose path in life took him from poverty to one of great success. The next speaker, W. C. Goudy, commented on how he expected the statue in Lincoln Park to inspire young men to serve humanity. He also expressed his hope that the statue would remind all Americans of the struggle for national existence. As the chill held the audience in its grip and the crashing waves of Lake Michigan threatened to drown out the speaker’s voice, Goudy said that it was a “happy thought” that led to the building of a monument “in this beautiful resort of the people.” While acknowledging that the monument served as a memorial to both Lincoln and Bates, Goudy speculated that Bates donated the money for the Lincoln statue because he appreciated “the patriotism and devotion of the man who saved the Government from destruction.” Moreover, he suggested that Bates was inspired by Lincoln’s actions and “desired to exhibit his steadfast purpose which resulted in the emancipation . . . of slaves from bondage.”

Following the speeches by Roche, Withrow, and Goudy, attorney Leonard Swett took to the dais to dedicate the statue. Swett and Lincoln had become friends as they traveled Illinois’s Eighth Circuit. Lincoln,

18. The volley went unfinished, however, when the explosions startled a horse. The animal shot forward while a carriage carrying two women was still attached. The horse jumped across a fence, but the carriage jammed against the same fence thereby preventing it from going any farther. Alarmed, the crowd turned its attention to the sudden burst of excitement and activity. Once the women were discovered to be unharmed, the horse was attended to and the dedicatory exercise recommenced. “The Martyr President: Unveiling of His Statue at Lincoln Park,” Chicago Daily Tribune, October 23, 1887. When Saint Gaudens reflected on the events years later, he felt that the weather dampened the dedication exercises. He wrote, “The monument was duly unveiled in 1887, but unfortunately on a rainy day and without the ceremonies that might have lent consequence to the occasion.” Saint Gaudens, Reminiscences, 1:353.

the elder of the two, steered cases to his talented young friend and, as president, appointed him to several commissions. Lincoln’s death was a visceral experience for Swett, who spent much of his life after 1865 writing and talking about his friend, offering keen insights into Lincoln’s life for eager audiences. As someone who knew Lincoln so well, he was a sought-after speaker on all things Lincoln. That he also lived in Chicago made Swett a natural choice for the dedicatory speech.  

After explaining how humans seek to immortalize the great who have lived among them, Swett reviewed the characteristics that made Lincoln the man that he was: patience, intelligence, kindness, and self-reliance. Like others on that day, Swett discussed Lincoln’s impoverished beginnings and his rise to the highest political office in the land. This brought Swett to his main point: only in America could a person rely solely on his personal qualities to attain the highest level of leadership. Swett described Lincoln’s life as a quintessential American story.

He was, as Swett explained, a product of American institutions. “The character of Abraham Lincoln sprung upon American soil and was of American growth,” he told the audience. “It would not have been possible for any other soil on the globe, or any other country other than America, or any other civilization than our own, to have produced him.” Lincoln was, the keynote speaker continued, “emphatically the child of the Republic and the product of our institutions.” In short, Lincoln was a person to whom all could relate. In fact, Bates’s generous gift to the city of Chicago was a manifestation of this sentiment.

The Chicago dedication felt like a memorial service. While twenty-two years had passed since Lincoln’s death, it was a time to remember a friend, a favorite son. However, like Lincoln—and Bates for that matter—there were many people who lived a rags-to-riches story. It was relatable. There were many patient and honest people. There were many wise and kind-hearted folk. In 1887 Chicago, the question was considered: what made Lincoln different from his contemporaries—that is, what made him different than the people in the audience? The keynoter answered the question for everyone. Many Americans had good character and moral qualities, and they followed a similar path to professional success as Lincoln. What made Lincoln different is that he became president when the nation’s survival was threatened like never before. While in that position of responsibility, he saved the Union. To do that, he freed the slaves. Because he did that, he was

21. “Martyr President.”
22. “Martyr President.”
killed. Thus, in Chicago, Lincoln was the Savior of the Union, the Great Emancipator, and the Martyred President.

**London**

The inhabitants of London in 1920, like those of the rest of Europe and America, were still reeling from the high casualties of the Great War. The story of the dedication of Saint Gaudens’s *Lincoln* in Parliament Square that year began six years earlier—a time when Lincoln’s image in the American and international mind was changing.²³

In 1913 the American Peace Centenary Committee, which had been formed four years earlier on the one-hundredth anniversary of Lincoln’s birth, decided that it would be fitting to mark the centennial of the end of the War of 1812 by sending Great Britain a statuary representation of the sixteenth president. On February 7, 1914, the American committee’s counterpart, the British Committee for the Celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of Peace Among English Speaking People, formally requested from Earl Beauchamp, the First Commissioner of Works, a location in Parliament Square for a replica of Saint Gaudens’s Lincoln statue. The committee explained that the prospective addition was a work of art considered by a number of its members to be “perhaps the most beautiful monument in America.” H. S. Pervis, the secretary of the British Committee, wrote that the committee strongly wished that “if possible, room should be found for this most interesting gift somewhere in Parliament Square, which would undoubtedly be the most appropriate place, and the one which would give most satisfaction to the American people.” By August 1914 a formal decision was made that the site for the Saint Gaudens’s Lincoln would be the square’s Canning Enclosure.²⁴


²⁴. H. S. Pervis to Earl Beauchamp, February 7, 1914, and “Lincoln Memorial” memorandum, n.d., Office of the First Commissioner of His Majesty’s Works to the Secretary, His Majesty’s Treasury, August 25, 1914; His Majesty’s Treasury to His Majesty’s Works, September 1914, National Archives, United Kingdom. In addition to a replica of Saint Gaudens’s *Lincoln*, which was the most widely recognizable statue of Lincoln, the committee planned to send a replica of the famous statue of George Washington by Antoine Houdon. (There is also a copy of this statue in Chicago.) While Virginia agreed to pay for the statue of George Washington, the Saint Gaudens *Abraham Lincoln* remained unfinance.
The gift from the American Peace Centenary Committee to Great Britain was planned for 1915, but the start of the war in Europe in 1914 forced a delay. When the project was rekindled in early 1917, the replica of Saint Gaudens’s Lincoln remained without a sponsor. The funding issue was thought to be resolved when Charles Taft, businessman, former congressman, and half-brother of President Taft, offered to sponsor the creation and shipment of a replica of a Lincoln statue that he had commissioned sculptor George Barnard to create in 1910 for the city of Cincinnati. The British Committee wrote to Sir Alfred Mond, the First Commissioner of His Majesty’s Office of Works, to inform him that they had heard from the American Committee, “who have expressed their desire to substitute for the St. Gauden’s monument of Lincoln” a different work of art that “they consider to be a superior monument, namely that by George Grey Barnard, recently unveiled in the city of Cincinnati.” The British Committee decided to accept the offer and “a casting of the Barnard” was soon completed in the United States and prepared for shipment. Participants in this correspondence as well as those involved in the subsequent decisions did not know that this was actually the opening volley of an ugly and emotional controversy that involved the American art world as well as the American public.

While the American and British Committees celebrating a century of peace between the two nations accepted the offer, the Office of Works remained reluctant to do so. Several days after Mond received the letter from the British Committee regarding the Barnard statue, a letter signed by Mond reached Harry Brittain, a British subject who, as the founder of the Pilgrim Society, had a longstanding interest in forging closer ties between Britain and the United States. The Office of Works wondered if the Barnard was truly as good as or better than the Saint Gaudens, and hoped Brittain would be able to inform the office regarding the general opinions circulating about the two works of art.

Barnard’s Lincoln was strikingly different from Saint Gaudens’s. While some considered the Barnard more democratic than the statelier work sculpted by Saint Gaudens, others thought it grotesque and wrongheaded. The focus of Barnard’s sculpture was on the spirit,
that is, the essence of Lincoln’s democratic being. In fact, two former presidents, William H. Taft and Theodore Roosevelt, commended the Barnard statue as capturing the genuine Lincoln.  

That is not to say there was universal acceptance of the statue. Robert Lincoln was not at all pleased with Barnard’s rendition of his father. He considered it “horrible,” “beastly,” “a monstrosity,” and “grotesque as a likeness of my father at any time.” Barnard’s decision not to rely on any of the many photographs of Lincoln flummoxed Robert, who focused on the shoes of the statue to highlight how the piece misrepresented his father. He remembered “his father perfectly from the time when he was a member of Congress. His footwear and that of people like him at that time was boots, and it happens that he was very particular about his boots. In my knowledge of him he never owned a pair of shoes, and the representation by Barnard in that respect and in the general deformity (I do not mean size) as grotesquely absurd for my father as it would be for any of his associates.” Robert concluded this letter by stating, “I cannot help having the feeling that the man who as a sculptor made the feet of which that photography is a representation, might be suspected of having a ‘screw loose.’” As the son of Lincoln and as a former minister to Great Britain, Robert was horrified at the possibility of Barnard’s work serving as the representation of his father abroad.28

Robert was fighting this battle nearly alone until it was announced that Barnard’s Lincoln had been chosen as the American people’s gift to Great Britain. At this point, art experts as well as the general public voiced their opinions, which brought the controversy from a simmer to a boil.

The *Art World* declared that the rule of the periodical was to “[p]raise a good work as much as you can; ignore a mediocre work as much as you can; hit a bad work as hard as you can!” Based on the editorials in the publication, the magazine certainly believed Barnard’s work to be bad, and it certainly hit it hard. “In art we expect a statue of Lincoln to represent Lincoln,” an editorial pronounced, “not a whining, weeping hobo.” Some went so far as to suggest that should “this atrocious libel on Lincoln [be] erected in London, there will be developed in this country a suspicion—that the English people are secretly not averse to seeing a caricature of Lincoln set up in London ‘for Jackdaws to peck at.’” If this were to happen, the editorialist concluded, any good feeling between the two nations may suddenly “evaporate.”

Rayman F. Fritz was inspired to protest the Barnard statue in verse:

I scan this dull grotesque, and turn away  
In painful doubt and wondering dismay.  
Shamed by the thought of Lincoln thus belied  
Here in the land for which he lived and died  
And in the world’s great capitals as well!  
Is this the ringing story art should tell  
Of that outstanding life which bound again  
At frightful cost of wealth and life and pain  
A sundered nation? Can we let him be  
Thus travestied for all futurity?²⁹

The vehement public criticism of Barnard’s statue put the British in an awkward position. How could they accept a statue that was utterly disliked and controversial in America? Finally, in 1918, a solution was found: the British centennial committee decided that both statues would find a suitable home in England. Robert Lincoln offered to pay for the Saint Gaudens statue, but the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace covered the expenses. In the end, a replica of Barnard’s statue was dedicated in Manchester, England, in 1919, and Saint Gaudens’s statue was dedicated in London in 1920.³⁰

The dedications of the Lincoln statues in Manchester and London occurred when Lincoln had become a “complete national idol” in the United States, according to historical sociologist Barry Schwartz. This heightened admiration for Lincoln extended beyond America’s shores, however. As historian Merrill Peterson notes, when tension exploded into war in Europe in 1914, the memory of Lincoln and his administration of executive power during a terrible armed conflict took on greater meaning, especially in the United Kingdom. Consequently, Lincoln became a hugely admired political leader in Great Britain. Lincoln had always been a hero to Britain’s prime minister David Lloyd George, but it was during the prime minister’s time as a war leader that he leaned on the memory of the American president in a very real way, including turning down a peace offer from the autocratic powers in Germany just as Lincoln had done at the Hampton Roads conference. Moreover, the memory of his hero helped Lloyd

George remain resilient as casualties began to mount to unprecedented levels.\textsuperscript{31}

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On July 28, 1920, a large and enthusiastic crowd gathered inside at London’s Central Hall due to the weather to witness the formal presentation and acceptance of the replica of Saint Gaudens’s Lincoln. Following the speeches by Lord Bryce, Elihu Root, and Prime Minister Lloyd George, the ceremony continued outside for the formal unveiling of the statue in Parliament Square.

Lord Bryce, who once served as Britain’s ambassador to the United States, presided over the dedicatory ceremonies. He started by discussing Lincoln’s greatness as well as his Englishness—key themes of the day’s program. When the pilgrims went to America, Bryce explained, the English race split into two branches. Indeed, he reminded the audience (incorrectly) that Lincoln’s parents were born as English subjects.\textsuperscript{32} Lincoln, Lord Bryce pronounced, was of English stock, and therefore, he stated “almost quarrelsomely” as he looked at Root, the former United States secretary of state, “is as much ours, Mr. Root, as he is yours.” This statement was enthusiastically received by the audience with a burst of cheers. Another theme that Bryce cultivated, as did others before the day was over, was the greatness of Lincoln. While there were many great men of English stock—as the history books and the statues of Parliament Square testified—Lincoln’s path to greatness stood in stark contrast to that of other men. It was this contrast, Bryce contended, that made Lincoln great. It was his plainness—his humble beginnings and common sense—that made him a hero to people around the world. His extraordinary services to country were “rendered by a plain son of the people” and nowadays “in these dark days of strife and confusion” Lincoln’s “life and character stand like a beacon of hope to us all.”


\textsuperscript{32} Lincoln’s father, Thomas, was born in 1778 in revolutionary Virginia; his mother, Nancy Hanks, was born in Virginia in 1784; and four years later, in 1788, his stepmother, Sarah Bush, was born in the same American commonwealth. Arguably, one might contend that Thomas’s nationality at the time of his birth was a matter of perspective.
Figure 3. Saint Gaudens’s “Standing Lincoln” in London. Memorial Day. No Date. (Courtesy of the Bain Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ggbain-36093.)
After Bryce spoke, Root took to the podium to formally present the statue to the British people. Like Bryce, Root centered his speech on Lincoln’s Englishness and on his greatness as a leader. Speaking to an increasingly moved audience, he described the ascendancy of Lincoln’s political career, his response to the Lancashire cotton spinners, the letter to Mrs. Bixby, and the Gettysburg Address. In emphasizing the friendship between Great Britain and America, he gloried in Lincoln’s Englishness: “He was of English blood; and he has brought honour to the name.” He prophesized that English children will one day look “on Lincoln’s statue with a glow of pride and rejoice that ‘of such stuff are the English people made.’” Root told the cheering audience that Lincoln embodied the English principles of liberty and justice that stretch back to the Magna Carta—principles, he observed, that were saved for all of the English-speaking people on both sides of the Atlantic a century and a half ago when “Chatham and Burke and Franklin and Washington stood together” (remarkably managing to celebrate the American Revolution without directly mentioning it). Root further underscored the logic of friendship between the British and the Americans when he mentioned slavery for the first time in the program. Lincoln’s declaration that slavery was “eternally wrong,” Root informed the crowd, was a sentiment wrought by his English inheritance. The “souls of both Britain and America prove themselves of kin to the soul of Abraham Lincoln, friendship between us is safe; and the statue of Lincoln the American stands as of right before the old Abbey where sleep the great of Britain’s history.”

After the Prime Minister formally accepted the statue on behalf of the British Empire, he encouraged those gathered to celebrate Lincoln not so much as an American but as an international hero. “In his life he was a great American,” Lloyd George told the audience, but he “is no longer so.” He is one of those giant figures, of whom there are very few in history, who lose their nationality in death.”33 The British leader seized on the opportunity to call for Americans to resist the isolationist mood that had set in after the world war. Diplomatically, he pronounced that the good judgment to choose leaders such as Lincoln and Robert E. Lee was a reflection of the type of people “needed now more than ever in the settlement of the world.” In closing, he declared, “to the great people of America . . . This torn

and bleeding earth is calling to-day for the help of the America of Abraham Lincoln.”

By this point in the program, Central Hall was reportedly buzzing with “electrically charged enthusiasm” as people exited the hall into the “steady rain of the grey afternoon.” The large crowd in Central Hall was led out of the building and to the location of the unveiling by twenty-four Civil War veterans, some of whom were wearing their “old Federal uniforms and [carried] old cartridge boxes with ‘U.S.’ upon them.” The old soldiers led the group to the statue, which was covered by the flags of Great Britain and the United States.

Once the crowd had reconvened in Parliament Square, the Episcopal bishop of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Dr. James Henry Darlington, offered a prayer. Then, as president of the Anglo-American Society, the Duke of Connaught said a few words before the unveiling of the statue. After commending the speech given by Root, thanking the American people for the gift, and complimenting the work of Saint Gaudens, he eloquently shared his thoughts about Lincoln. He considered Lincoln to be among the “greatest and noblest” of men, “humble in origin, he was great in soul.” Up to this point, Darlington’s talk did not depart significantly from the speeches that had preceded it, but he noted that not only was it given to this simple man to keep Americans united, it was also to affirm Americans’ “abhorrence of the institution of slavery.”

Following the Duke of Connaught’s short speech, the “most moving moment of the day” took place when “the flags fell away” and “the statue was revealed” to the crowd. As Saint Gaudens’s Lincoln stood with “dignity and modesty, with slightly bowed head,” the band played “God Save the King.” A reporter wrote that the “wonder of the thing” would have appealed to everyone except a “dead soul.” The Times of London gushed that it was “as if Lincoln himself, in his seemingly devotional attitude, was astounded. . . . How little, indeed, can he, in his essential simplicity, have dreamed of such a situation in

34. Ibid., 23; The utilization of Lincoln’s name and image in “foreign lands corresponded with the projection of American power,” writes Jay Sexton. For the British, the “heyday” was the early twentieth century when they called for—just as Prime Minister David Lloyd George did during the dedication of the statue—a more robust American engagement in world affairs. See Jay Sexton, “Projecting Lincoln, Projecting America,” in The Global Lincoln, edited by Richard Carwardine and Jay Sexton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 293.

35. “Lincoln Statue Unveiled; A Moving Ceremony; ‘of such stuff are the English made,’” Times (London), July 29, 1920.

his life!” The band then played “The Star-Spangled Banner,” followed by a rendition of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” by the Abbey Choir. The musical portion of the ceremony ended with a replaying of “God Save the King.” It rained throughout the ceremony, but according to one reporter, “no rain could dampen the enthusiasm or lessen the emotion of a memorable and wonderful afternoon.” The next day, five organizations placed wreaths at the base of the statue: the Anglo-American Society, the Pilgrims, the Lancashire Cotton Spinners, the Native Races of Africa, and the Veterans of the American Civil War in England.37

Curiously, speakers mentioned slavery only in passing during the London program. This was an odd omission. Not only was there a common history of antislavery between the two nations, but a recollection of that movement could have served to reinforce ideas about cooperatively facing international problems following the Great War. Moreover, notably absent from the British celebration of Lincoln was any mention of the tense relations between Great Britain and the United States during the Civil War. While much more cautious about recognizing the Confederacy than their neighbor, French emperor Napoleon III, the British nonetheless were in a complicated diplomatic position. Not overly eager to see a Union victory but not willing to support the Confederacy, the British managed to avoid alienating the United States without giving it support. Although not directly engaged, Britons nevertheless crossed the Atlantic to fight for one side or the other, and the Confederacy managed to have raiding ships built in England that wreaked havoc on Union merchant ships, most famously the Alabama. Lincoln’s shrewd and vociferous secretary of state, William Seward, repeatedly stated the United States would not take lightly British meddling. But Lincoln knew not to push too hard, so as to avoid war, as almost occurred during the Trent Affair.38

During the war and afterward, Americans continued to think that Great Britain sought to undermine the United States. Even though public opinion in Great Britain was divided and complicated regarding the

37. “Lincoln Statue Unveiled; A Moving Ceremony.”
38. George C. Herring, From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 224–50. In an attempt to stave off British intervention during the Civil War, the Lincoln administration tried to frame the conflict in America as one between those who would be antislavery and those who would make slavery a national foundation. In addition to the Emancipation Proclamation, the Lincoln administration made an agreement in February 1862 to cooperate in halting the trade in human beings between Africa and Cuba. See Louise L. Stevenson, Lincoln in the Atlantic World (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 143.
American Civil War, vicious attacks on Lincoln in British periodicals like *Punch* and the safe haven provided to Confederates in Canada encouraged this impression. Despite that fact, or perhaps because of it, former British ambassador Bryce and former United States secretary of state Root (whose tenures overlapped) chose not to discuss Civil War diplomacy at the Saint Gaudens dedication ceremony. As Kirk Savage contends, public monuments “were meant to yield resolution and consensus, not to prolong conflict.” The Lincoln remembered in London was a man who demonstrated greatness during a time of national crisis—not the caricature depicted in *Punch* and discussed in the corridors of Parliament during the Civil War.39

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The Lincoln commemorated in London in 1920 was not the Great Emancipator or the martyred leader. He was the great man who led a country through a troubled time and now served as an inspiration during Europe’s recovery from the Great War. He was great for having emerged from a humble background to national leadership. While the Americans would—and did—argue that this is what made Lincoln a distinctly American product, it was this very characteristic, the British said, that gave him mass appeal to people around the world—and herein was his true legacy.

Even though the allies had recently concluded a war to make the world safe for democracy, the 1920 celebration of Lincoln in London was a bit ironic and paradoxical because of what participants sought to shape out of Lincoln’s life and memory. For the British, Lincoln was born great. Despite his humble origins, they saw a certain nobility in him. Several months after the dedication, a member of Parliament

39. Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: Britain’s Crucial Role in the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2010); Gabor Boritt states that Lincoln was the foreign leader most often depicted in the pages of *Punch* during the early to mid-1860s due to British interest in the American Civil War. “In no small part he became the symbol of the United States,” writes Boritt, “and his image grew uniformly and ever more sharply negative.” The editor of *Punch*, and the author of anti-Lincoln cartoons, Tom Taylor, also happened to have written “Our American Cousin,” and therefore provided the last words Lincoln heard before being assassinated. Contributors to *Punch*, like the inhabitants of Great Britain, Canada, and even America, were greatly shocked by the death of Lincoln and began to reassess their feelings toward the martyred president. See Gabor S. Boritt, “Punch Lincoln: Some Thoughts on Cartoons in the British Magazine,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 15 (Winter 1994), 1–21, and Cheryl A. Wells, “Icy Blasts to Balmy Airs: British North America and Lincoln’s Assassination,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 36 (Summer 2015), 26–47; Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 253; Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 4.
wrote in the *Telegraph* that whether Thomas, an illiterate laborer, was Lincoln’s real father or not, clearly the American president “derived most of his qualities” from his mother, who was of “genteel stock of the Southern aristocracy.” Historical inaccuracies aside, the writer’s comment suggested that the assumed classist inequality that America’s Founders had so eloquently rejected in the Declaration of Independence was still part of the British mindset. Indeed, it is this same rejection that Americans, including Abraham Lincoln, so enthusiastically embraced, albeit with fits and starts along the way. Lincoln’s life was an indictment of the British class system and aristocracy as much as it was a fulfillment of the meritocracy put forth in the Declaration of Independence—a document that Lincoln stated was the starting point for all of his beliefs.40

Not surprisingly, both in Chicago and in London, speakers took the opportunity afforded by the dedication of the statue to associate Lincoln with all that was right and good about their respective nations. For the British, it was his English inheritance of respect for representative government, freedom, justice, and courage. For the Americans, Lincoln was a product of their democratic institutions, which he both benefitted from and bolstered. Lincoln fulfilled the Jeffersonian belief that a talented backwoods kid could serve the state. The means envisioned by Jefferson were educational institutions. While Lincoln did not follow this line, his life proved that there were other means available for the fulfillment of the meritocracy promised in the Declaration of Independence.

This then begs the question—were the commemorations really about Lincoln? The Chicago event was meant to remember two successful Illinoisans. Participants and people in the audience knew Bates or Lincoln, or both. The event in Chicago was a memorial to assuage still-heavy hearts for a personal loss, but it was also to help “bind the nation’s wounds.” In London the commemoration had a grave undertone as well but for different reasons. Aside from the very elderly Civil War veterans in attendance, Lincoln was no longer part of living memory—and not discussed as such. People did not comment on whether his likeness was well-captured by Saint Gaudens or assess the clothes Lincoln was depicted as wearing. By then, the sculptor, like Lincoln himself, belonged to the ages. Rhetorical acrobatics were

unnecessary in Chicago, whereas in London it was necessary to turn a proud American and steadfast Republican into a man with English roots, although his rise from poverty to the Executive Mansion stood in stark contrast to England’s traditional stratified society. What was perhaps more important was what the London speakers did not say. When David Lloyd George pleaded for American leadership, he and his audience knew the stakes were high. The United States Senate had rejected the Treaty of Versailles eight months earlier, and Americans were preparing to elect a new president four months later that would have an effect on America’s participation in the League of Nations, which they ultimately rejected.

As happens with all monuments and the ceremonies that surround them, the dedication of Saint Gaudens’s *Lincoln* in Chicago and of its replica in London looked both forward and backward. Speakers at monument dedications often use the occasion as vehicles to send a message to contemporary society.41 While the speakers in 1920 attempted to utilize Abraham Lincoln as a bridge between the two countries, the connection beyond rhetoric remained unfulfilled because there simply remained too much of a cultural, historical, and political difference between Americans and Britons—despite the best efforts to present Lincoln as an Englishman in American skin.

41. Casey, “Public Memory in Place and Time,” 17–18.