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ICONOGRAPHY AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY: Lincoln's Image in the American Mind

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Existing approaches to collective memory explain away images of the past by relating them to their economic, political, and social "sources." The present case study of Abraham Lincoln suggests a modification of these views, one that includes as a key element the agents who connect memory and social structure. As the U.S. entered World War I, the agents of Lincoln's memory debated which version of the Lincoln image to commemorate—the epic hero or the folk hero; the strong, dignified Lincoln or the tender-hearted, common man. The public controversy over George Gray Barnard's and Augustus Saint-Gaudens's statues articulated the tension between these two images. Different conceptions of Lincoln's appearance reflected different public views of modern democracy. Since this limited the range of Lincoln images that commemorative agents could promote, a structure-centered approach that treats public readiness to appreciate or reject different ways of portraying the past must supplement the agent-centered approach to collective memory.

Thoughts about society are almost always invested in personal images. History is realized in the same way: remembrance of the past begins with the remembrance of men (Cooley [1902]1964, pp. 113–114). The intensity and warmth of such remembrance is unstable. On the 1909 centennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth, for example, Henry Cabot Lodge expressed the desire "to detach Lincoln from the myth, which has possession of us all, that his wisdom, his purity and his greatness were as obvious and acknowledged . . . in his lifetime as they are today" (*Savannah Evening News* 12 Feb. 1909, p. 7). Lodge's assessment was correct. Lincoln did not become a complete national idol until the period in the twentieth century that began with Theodore Roosevelt's presidency and ended with Warren Harding's. (For detail, see Schwartz 1990.) These years brought the great Progressive Era economic and political reforms and fell between the Spanish–American War and World War I—the period in which America became a world power.

Exercise of expanding international power and redistribution of domestic power elevated Lincoln but also limited the kind of man Americans could make of him. Common, weak men cannot represent great and powerful nations; elitist strongmen cannot represent democracies. Lincoln's image was for these reasons pulled in contrary directions: toward

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stateliness, authority, and dignity on the one hand, and toward plainness, familiarity, and homeliness on the other.

This dualism showed up in countless biographies and articles about Lincoln's life, but it was revealed more vividly by pictorial devices.¹ For many people at the turn of the twentieth century, these devices were not just elaborations of verbal accounts about Lincoln; they were the principal medium through which they interpreted him. Among the many likenesses of Lincoln publicly displayed during the early twentieth century, none warrant closer consideration than those produced by George Gray Barnard and Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Controversy over the relative merits of their statues of Lincoln reflected fundamental disagreement over how he was to be remembered. To understand that controversy is the purpose of this case study. Conflict between the admirers of Barnard's and Saint-Gaudens's statues is important not only for what it tells about the historical development of Lincoln's image but also for what it contributes to understanding of a more general problem: the relationship between political culture and collective memory. Statues embody memory. They stand for the events and times, the achievements and values, that society chooses to look back on. Focusing thought on one statue after another evokes different categories of remembrance. Arguments about statues often turn out to be arguments about the past and its legacy.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY

"Collective memory" is a metaphor that formulates society's retention and loss of information about its past in the familiar terms of individual remembering and forgetting. Part of the collective memory is, in fact, defined by shared individual memories, but only a small fraction of society's past is experienced in this way. Every member of society, even the oldest, learns most of what he knows about the past through social institutions—through oral chronicles preserved by tradition, written chronicles stored in archives, and commemorative activities (making portraits, statues, and shrines, collecting relics, naming places, observing holidays and anniversaries) that enable institutions to distinguish significant events and people from the mundane, and so infuse the past with moral meaning. These processes, chronicling and commemoration, constitute the subject matter of collective memory research.

The most important feature that existing approaches to collective memory share is analytic strategy—all relate images of the past to their "sources" in economic, political, and social life; all contend that our understandings of the past are projections of our own social experience. Defined as "reflections" or "reproductions" of present concerns, these understandings are assumed distorted and beyond the rememberer's control. The past, then, is never an autonomous and consequential cultural force. A surprisingly broad range of theoretical orientations embrace this assumption. For neo-Marxists, representations of the past provide "cultural ratification of a contemporary order" (Williams 1977, pp. 116–117; see also Alonso 1988). Emile Durkheim's phenomenologically-minded followers, notably Maurice Halbwachs, define collective memory as "essentially a reconstruction of the past [that] adapts the image of ancient facts to the beliefs and spiritual needs of the present" (1941, p. 7; see also Halbwachs [1950] 1980; Douglas 1986, pp. 69–80). Symbolic interactionist George Herbert Mead declares that every conception of the past is construed "from the standpoint of the new problem of today," and Charles Horton Cooley observes that "present function, not past" determines how famous people and events are

preserved in the collective mind (Mead 1929, p. 313; see also Mead 1932, 1938; Miller 1973; Maines, Sugrue, and Katovich 1983; Cooley 1918, p. 15).

These conceptions make the past precarious, always hostage to present conditions. However, attempts to explain collective memory by analyses of society's least mutable features rely on this same correspondence theory of memory and society. Cooley (1918) is the one symbolic interactionist who thought deeply about collective memory in light of the settled past as well as the unsettled present, but it is Edward Shils's recent (1981) concept of the past as a tradition sustained by "guiding patterns" that did most to align the stable elements of collective memory to the stabilizing elements of society.

Concentrating on conflict, utilitarian contemplation, reflection, or tradition, each theory uniquely formulates the link between memory and society, but none include conceptual terms that attend to the agents who actually carry out the conflict, use the past, or reflect in their historical accounts the conditions of the present or of tradition. Granted, certain theories assume the past is negotiated and shaped by the activities of individuals, and for Cooley and Mead this assumption is central. Yet, even their efforts make no use of commemoration work and its agents as theoretical categories. These categories alone afford contact with the world in which commemoration takes place, alone reveal the process connecting social structure and social memory. As existing theories presume rather than describe such dynamics, the correspondence between a society's conception of its present and past is made to appear closer and more secure than it may be.

Existing theories of collective memory obscure the lessons to be drawn from the 1917–1918 debate over the proper Abraham Lincoln commemorative statue. The men who took part in this debate were more than passive mediators mechanically translating cultural and social pressures into conceptions of Lincoln. These men were moved by a desire to make sense of their nation, to discover its destiny and ultimate purposes, its moral origins, the rightful conditions of its existence. They knew their arguments about Lincoln entailed a construction of the past, and they raised their own questions about its validity, its significance, its purpose, its affinity with the contemporary global situation. Their outlook was reflexive and they focused not only on how their own but also on how other societies regarded Lincoln and on how these various impressions might be effectively managed. The present case, then, intimates a theory that places the collective memory in a more active relation to the world.

TWO DEPICTIONS

In 1917, the centennial anniversary of peace between Great Britain and the U.S. drew Augustus Saint-Gaudens's and George Gray Barnard's statues of Abraham Lincoln into a commemorative project. Observed during a world war in which the two countries fought as allies, the Peace Centenary marked the most important world role America had ever played and intensified the realization (taken for granted today but then a cause of contemplation and wonder) that America had become the world's most powerful nation.

The American Peace Centenary Committee formed during the 1909 centennial of Lincoln's birth. In 1913, it chose to mark the peace anniversary (scheduled for 1915) by sending to England replicas of Augustus Saint-Gaudens's statue of Lincoln (Figures 1 and 2) and Antoine Houdon's statue of George Washington. The state of Virginia bore the cost of replicating the Houdon statue, but no benefactor appeared for Saint-Gaudens's. The 1914 onset of war delayed the entire project, but as its resumption approached the fund for

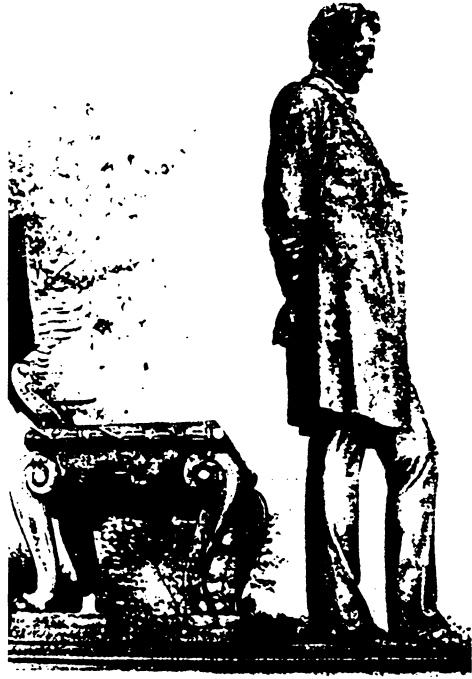


Figure 1. Abraham Lincoln by Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Front View. Source: *Art World* 17 Aug. 1917, p. 419.

Figure 2. Abraham Lincoln by Augustus Saint-Gaudens. Side View. Source: *Literary Digest* 13 Oct. 1917, p. 31.

a Saint-Gaudens replica remained empty. Realizing this, Charles Taft, half-brother of the former President, offered to supply the committee a replica of Barnard's Lincoln (Figures 3 and 4), and his gift was immediately accepted.

These proceedings assumed that statues can be a highly effective mode of political commemoration, depending on their likeness to the individual portrayed. By virtue of this likeness, the centenary's participants believed, the statue (and political portraiture in general) has a special power to manifest its subject's moral qualities. As these qualities invoke cherished national ideals, the commemorative statue is deemed sacred, deserving dignified placement and serious contemplation. That a statue's life-likeness is key to its mnemonic effectiveness is evident in certain imperfections attributed to George Gray Barnard's portrayal of Lincoln.

Originally in 1910 Charles Taft commissioned Barnard's statue for the city of Cincinnati. In December 1916 it was completed at a foundry in New York and was briefly displayed in that city before shipment. Its stark, awkward lines puzzled many New Yorkers, and its first national exposure, in *Literary Digest* (6 Jan. 1917, p. 18), provoked



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Figure 3. Abraham Lincoln by George Gray Barnard. Front View. Source: *Literary Digest* 6 Jan. 1917, p. 18.

Figure 4. Abraham Lincoln by George Gray Barnard. Side View. Source: *Literary Digest* 13 Oct. 1917, p. 30.

an immediate stir. "Is it a faithful presentation in bronze of the real Lincoln?" asks a Milwaukee newspaper editor. Having surveyed some who actually saw Lincoln, he reports, "The consensus of usually indignant testimony is that it is fearfully and wonderfully unlike Lincoln as they knew him" (10 Feb. 1917, p. 338). The term "indignant testimony" suggests that what was wrong with this sculpture was not only a matter of likeness, or artistic competence, but also perspective. Barnard chose to portray 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.

Former President William Howard Taft officially dedicated this statue in Cincinnati on March 31, 1917—a few days before the U.S. entered World War I. Criticism, however, continued. In June, a periodical dedicated to cultivating traditional art forms, *Art World*, launched the first professional attack against Barnard's work, condemning it as a "mistake

in bronze." Shortly afterward, when the American Peace Committee reported its decision to place this work on the British Parliament grounds, the merits of Saint-Gaudens's statue were rediscovered and the dispute over Barnard's statue intensified. The *New York Times*, for example, printed 49 articles on the disagreement, the majority during a three-month period—September–November 1917. Popular magazines lagged newspapers by about a month. The *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature* lists 24 articles on the statue dispute, two-thirds published during October through December 1917. Thus, media coverage peaked with the Peace Committee's initial choice of Barnard's statue, strong challenges to and defenses of that decision, and the Committee's final, if not formal, statement on the matter in late December 1917. These events, however, do not explain the debate's broad and intense fervor, why so many people so profoundly cared whether one statue or another was sent to London—a place few Americans had ever visited or even thought much about.

The political context provided energy and relevance to discussions about Lincoln's portrayal. Debate peaked six months after the U.S. entered the First World War, four months after its first troop contingent arrived in Europe, but several months before these troops would be fighting and sustaining heavy casualties. In other words, the argument raged hottest at the height of martial enthusiasm. The argument assumed such importance because it resonated with the values of democracy—values for which sake, presumably, the war was being fought.

The argument itself follows two lines. The first concerns refinement and simplicity as alternative prerequisites of political greatness. Many Barnard critics state their position rhetorically: Is Lincoln to be remembered as a man of dignified tastes and manner or as a backward man who never really outgrew the rudeness of his early environment? An *Art World* commentary puts the question in political context:

First—Was Lincoln a clean, dignified member of the bar, dressing in reasonably good taste and having a respect for common-sense social forms and beauty of environment, or was he a rough-necked slouch, dressing like a despiser of elegance in life and beauty of social environment?

Second—Does democracy mean club-footed, inelegant, vulgar ugliness to the destruction of all social forms, or does it mean grace, dignity, self-respect, and ever-increasing beauty of social form and environment? (quoted in *Literary Digest* 13 Oct. 1917, p. 30)

The issue could not be stated more clearly. Must democracy bring leveling and mediocrity, as many American intellectuals believed, or can it be reconciled with a culture of high achievement and good taste?

That Barnard had debased democracy as well as Lincoln is, in *Art World's* opinion, undisputable. His statue suggests that "even in its greatest hero democracy breeds nothing but a stoop-shouldered, consumptive-chested, chimpanzee-handed, lumpy footed, giraffe necked, grimy-fingered clod-hopper, wearing his clothes in a way to disgust a ragman." A well-articulated theory of art and society underlies this apparently emotional outburst: human body features represent social categories; they visibly express the ideas and values that society's members treasure. Statues of great men like Lincoln are therefore not "good to look at" but, in Levi-Strauss's words, "good to think with" (1963, p. 89).

Since long necks, big hands and feet, and stooped shoulders degrade democracy, it

becomes an urgent matter to show Lincoln free of such defects. *Art World* set forth a series of photographs to show his real appearance, and underneath each photograph is a caption urging the reader to look closely: “Note how small the hands were”; “Note the graceful fingers”; “Note the square shoulders”; “Note throughout a neck of ordinary length” (Dec. 1917, pp. 198–199).

Revelation of Lincoln’s true physical traits, *Art World* believed, entails an appreciation of his gentility, of the fact that he was never “a sufferer from the hookworm,” that his “father and mother did not belong to the white trash but were really from Virginia stock passing through Kentucky.” Thus, Lincoln was “fully aware of the importance of elegant social forms.” People in general think of the young Lincoln as a man “bent from hard labor,” but this was not so. From the day he became a lawyer, “he never again did another day’s work of rough manual labor.” Also, he “hated ugliness, disorder and vulgarity,” loathed beyond measure “the class of hobo-democrats and the mobocrats who, together, imagine that slouch-democracy is the salvation of the world, and the last expression of what democracy should mean” (*Art World* Aug. 1917, p. 416; Dec. 1917, p. 190; June 1917, pp. 191, 208, 213, 217, 218).

While *Art World*’s criticism states the case against Barnard with unusual force and coherence, that case also appeared elsewhere. If Lincoln were a rail splitter for so long, one *New York Times* (28 Oct. 1917, sec. 7, p. 7) observer writes, “we should have never heard of him.” Another observer declares in his letter to the *Times*, “To me, [the Barnard statue] portrays a brainless dullard who has never risen above the toil of rail-splitting. . . . [I]t is un-American; there is no go to the fagged-out sufferer—none of the alertness that characterized our pioneers . . .” (11 Nov. 1917, p. 10). This gives the Lincoln symbol a new twist. It does not evaluate but disparages the common man as an un-American weakling, a failure. Such a man cannot represent democracy—only those who rise above him can. Success: that is what democracy means and what Lincoln stands for (for detail, see Schwartz 1990).

The kind of democracy Lincoln stands for could not be the kind Barnard’s statue depicts. The real Lincoln believed “in regulated political liberty”; Barnard’s Lincoln represents radical democracy, a “brand of sans culottism, of the downward, levelling type” (*New York Times* 28 Sept. 1919, p. 11). Behind these criticisms of a sculptor and his statue is the belief that a democracy governed by common men cannot match Old World achievements and power. Such an idea might seem arrogant today, but was engaging when America’s position as a world power was new and precarious, when many intellectuals (Persons 1973), including sociologists (see, e.g., Cooley [1909]1962)—not to mention the people at large—took reactionary ideology about democracy’s shortcomings seriously.

In this context, American democracy’s vitality became an important issue, and around that issue formed the second dimension of the controversy: power versus weakness. Is Lincoln to be remembered as a man of capacity and initiative or as a weakling distinguishable mainly by his good nature? Since Barnard never appreciated democracy’s moral energy it was no surprise that his Lincoln statue, according to the first in a series of *Times* editorials, portrays “a long-suffering peasant, crushed by adversity.” It will not, and cannot, “symbolize to the coming generations the true spirit which animates the militant democracy of our times” (26 Aug. 1917, sec. 2, p. 2). On this same point, another commentator declares that a statue of Lincoln should represent “the triumph of the democratic principle” and depict “not the humble and despairing Lincoln, but the power-

ful, unshrinking, heroic, and triumphant Lincoln" (3 Oct. 1917, p. 12). Although treacherously assassinated, this man deserves our "stern admiration," not our tears; a loving man, his was yet "virile love"; magnanimous, he was never a "weeping willow." Throughout his public life, "Lincoln was a conqueror"² (*Art World* Dec. 1917, pp. 190, 192).

These concerns reveal not only why so much was said about the Lincoln statues but also why so little was said about the other statue sent to London: Houdon's George Washington. Begun in 1785 at Mount Vernon and completed in France, the Houdon image depicts a landed gentleman returned from war, dressed in coattails and breeches, leaning gently on his walking stick—irrefutably an idealized, pre-democratic effigy. That not a whisper opposed it reflects a general admiration for the statue's respectable mien. No artist, as one of *Nation's* commentators (13 Dec. 1917, p. 658) puts it, would dare insult Washington's memory by depicting him as Barnard does Lincoln: "a great splay-footed, raw-boned, long-legged frontiersman." Thus a new wrinkle in the debate developed through the symbolic relationship between Washington and Lincoln. Previously contrasted to Lincoln's simplicity and commonness, Washington's aristocratic dignity and power is now deemed appropriate for Lincoln and even required for his accurate portrayal.

TWO VALUES

Not all Americans in 1917 and 1918 were concerned with making the world safe for democracy; yet the World War was fought in a highly idealistic climate that accentuated the tension between two traditional ways of thinking about the relation between leaders and masses. These two conceptions do not fully capture the multifarious character of American political culture, but they do convey an important part of it. Alexis de Tocqueville articulates the first conception. Prominent citizens, he (1946, p. 111) observes,

take care not to stand aloof from the people; on the contrary, they constantly keep on easy terms with the lower classes; they listen to them, they speak to them every day. They know that . . . in democratic ages you attach a poor man to you more by your manner than by benefits conferred . . . and even want of polish is not always displeasing.

Based on observations made in 1832, midpoint of Andrew Jackson's presidency, this account reflects the Democratic-Jacksonian view of democracy, one that stresses the common man's dignity and capacity for self-rule. But de Tocqueville overlooks the strain of American democracy legitimated by America's "hierarchical," as opposed to "equalitarian," values (Ellis and Wildavsky 1989). The hierarchical, elitist aspect of American political life was rooted in Federalism and cultivated throughout the antebellum years by the Whigs, who, by Daniel Howe's (1979) account, represented a culture as well as a political party. Hierarchical values promoted distrust of the common man and belief that the nation's "best men" alone were fit to govern. Believing also in the essential evil of privilege and caste, the hierarchs, no less than the equalitarians, celebrated the ideal of social mobility, of men rising up from poverty to affluence and privilege.³ Yet, they upheld a respect for individual superiority never matched in the equalitarian mind.

To infer that the endurance of hierarchical values undermined the Jacksonian revolution would be a mistake: America's political and economic democracy greatly expanded after Jackson, especially during the early twentieth century. Yet, the industrial revolution and its

excesses, the very forces that brought Progressive reforms, also engendered a new elite—a class of businessmen, managers, and professionals (Mills 1951, pp. 3–76) who set themselves above the common run of urban and rural laborers and sought cultural dominance by preserving a portion of the manners (Veblen [1899]1934) and hierarchical values of earlier times. As the U.S. developed into a world power and as its Progressive government became more centralized and more active, these manners and values gained salience. And as both the cultural and political frames of reference shifted to Europe, America's doubts about its own achievements and refinement grew as fast as its pretensions. World War I was a pivotal point in this development, a point at which the carriers of equalitarian and hierarchical democracy achieved a cultural parity never known before. Debate over the merits of Barnard's and Saint-Gaudens's portrayals of Lincoln expressed the tension of this uneasy balance.

Barnard's defense of his statue revealed a conception of Lincoln and of democracy that critics considered obsolete, unworthy of America's new world-power status. He made an icon of equality when hierarchical values were, in their view, necessary. He celebrated the crude and weak commoner when the nation needed gentility and strength. Not only did Barnard's critics and the privileged class hold this belief. Popular writings, drama, and poetry since the turn of the century gentrified Lincoln and transformed him from folk into epic hero (Basler [1935]1969; Schwartz 1990). Such depictions reflected a widespread desire among people of Lincoln's working class background to share also his success in transcending it. Yet, the gentrified image never replaced but was rather superimposed upon the common Lincoln. The original conception of Lincoln as a man of the people continued to inform the people's understanding of him, and it was this original, realistic conception that Barnard sought to recapture.

To ignore the real Lincoln, Barnard explained, insults the people and thwarts democracy's essence. And it was democracy alone—American democracy—that he intended to represent. Having studied Lincoln's life for years and contemplated his life mask for three months before starting work, Barnard found in Lincoln's face "the song of democracy written by God." This face, neither Old World nor Olympian, utterly opposed "those of the Emperors of Rome or a Napoleon." In demeanor and dress as well as physical appearance, Lincoln was of the New World, he "carried his weight unconsciously, without pride in rank or culture." His clothing, "worn, baggy trousers, forgotten, unthought of, honored their history . . . of labor" (*Literary Digest* 16 Jan. 1917, p. 18). And so Barnard portrayed and made understandable the freedom that American democracy ensures. Expansive personal liberty shows up in physical parallels; political looseness, as it were, in looseness of personal appearance. It would not do to portray Lincoln along the symmetrical lines of classical art. The model must be the common man, and ungainliness, even ugliness, is his characteristic attribute. Barnard invoked Isaiah's messianic prophecy to add force to his point:

The common man's Redeemer "shall grow up . . . as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." (*New York Times* 18 Nov. 1917, sec. 2, p. 2)

The same could be said, and must be said, about Abraham Lincoln.

Beauty is to homeliness what elitism is to democracy: Barnard's logic made good sense to many. Lincoln's defects and inelegance make him the perfect symbol of America: the

awkwardness of his body enhances the beauty of his spirit (*Outlook* 27 Dec. 1916, p. 891; 17 Oct. 1917, pp. 117, 241; see also *North American Review* Dec. 1917, p. 838). Barnard's supporters reiterated as well as embraced this logic. They revealed it to "the unimaginative patriots who have no power to evoke mentally the simple figure of Lincoln" as well as to "ignorant aliens" who know little about the country's traditions (*Outlook* 27 Dec. 1916, p. 891). For these and other people, Barnard's sculpture provides a gripping lesson, a revelation of democracy. Barnard himself was a great democrat, his admirers explained. He opposed the Czar and supported the democratic revolution in Russia. Once, on his way to Europe, "he hurried through England without eating so he would not have to sleep in a land ruled by a king." His portrayal of an undignified Lincoln was accordingly "the people's Lincoln and the people will know it as their own." Barnard's Lincoln is "not pretty," Mary Roberts concedes in *Touchstone*, but this is precisely what puts his statue rather than Saint-Gaudens's "in America's heart." The appeal is in the details. Lincoln's hands awkwardly placed across his groin were so positioned when he debated Douglas on slavery. His large and "bulbous" feet are "like roots of an oak spreading into the common sod" (Oct. 1917, pp. 54, 59, 60).

Lincoln's closeness to the soil symbolized the poverty and manual labor Barnard's critics openly despised. "It is amazing," observes Ida Tarbell, "to see this old dislike to leanness and poverty and rough clothes . . . expressing itself in an organized campaign against an interpretation of Abraham Lincoln which not only admits the poverty and meagerness of his early life but glories in it" (*Touchstone* Dec. 1917, p. 225). At stake, Tarbell adds, is how democracy is to be conceived. "To many of us, democracy exists in no class below our own" (p. 227). On this same point Edwin Markham brings his weight to bear: "Do we not speak in song and story of the dignity of labor? This statue is an eloquent expression of that great idea, and if that idea is a mistake, then . . . the democratic ideal is a hollow bubble" (p. 228).

This theme, the celebration of the common man, also had an ugly, nativistic tone, evinced in the claims Barnard's supporters made about his critics—for example, that the "art lords'" complaint that Barnard is *too* democratic derived from their own foreignness. In this connection, the public was reminded that *Art World's* editor, F. Wellington Ruckstuhl, is an "adopted American" born in Germany and committed to the kind of autocratic statuary displayed in Berlin's *Sieges Allé*. That Lincoln's bitterest enemies condemned him for his homeliness and commonness—the same foreign grounds that Barnard's critics used to condemn his statue—was also brought to public attention (*Touchstone* Oct. 1917, pp. 57, 58, 62; *New York Times* 27 Sept. 1919, p. 13).

The Northern aristocrats who during the Civil War denounced Lincoln's vulgarity also criticized his indecisiveness and meekness. They believed him a weakling and their views reappeared decades later in criticism of Barnard's statue. Charged that his Lincoln image would look pathetic beside that of real men, like the fearsome Oliver Cromwell, Barnard could only agree. Not only was Lincoln's nature more tender than Cromwell's; it was also shaped by a definite maternal strain. As his own mother "left on Lincoln's memory an overwhelming impression, so Lincoln himself physically and mentally 'mothered' his neighbors, his State, his country" (*Literary Digest* 6 Jan. 1917, p. 19). Correspondingly, in Lincoln's many acts of personal kindness, including his famous letter of consolation to Mrs. Bixby for the loss in battle of her sons, "he displays an understanding of motherhood unsurpassed in English literature" (*Outlook* 17 Oct. 1917, p. 241). Indeed he "embodied

the universal motherhood as no man has since Christ" (*Outlook* 27 Dec. 1916, p. 891; see also Lemmon 1909).

Capturing these and other Lincoln traits—rough appearance and manner, modest ability, persevering will, tender heart—Barnard gave the American people a tangible portrayal of their democracy. Theodore Roosevelt, at least, saw in Barnard's accomplishment "the living Lincoln, the Great Democrat," as did noted sculptor Frederick MacMonnies, painters John S. Sargent and Abbot H. Thayer, illustrator Charles Dana Gibson, and art critic Richard Fletcher. As the debate wore on, other distinguished people, including President Woodrow Wilson and former President William Howard Taft, sided with Barnard.

TWO TRUTHS

"If that weird and deformed figure [by Barnard] really represents the results of democracy, we can hardly expect Europe to fight that democracy may be made safe" (*New York Times* 1 Jan. 1918, p. 17). This statement reflects the concern not only that Barnard's Lincoln portrays national weakness rather than strength but also that it confirms belief in America's cultural inferiority. A letter to the *Times* editor puts it squarely: "Don't give Britons proof of what they believe about the crudity of American democracy." Likewise, *Art World* argues that "this slouchily dressed and presumably democratic despiser of elegant social forms will certainly give to every European reactionary and enemy of democracy a justification for saying: Do you see the disgusting fruit of the vulgar social life of Democracy?" (Aug. 1917, p. 416). Such talk alarmed Barnard's supporters: "Are we ashamed of Our Commoner, so that we want to hide his hands and feet and gaunt figure from British eyes?" (*Touchstone* Oct. 1917, p. 62). The answer was a resounding yes.

Although many distinguished artists and politicians, and a few art journals, supported Barnard, the major art establishments and even certain political bodies opposed him. The National Academy of Design, the American Federation of Art, and the Fine Art Federation of New York passed official resolutions against Barnard's work. Many individual art authorities publicly condemned it. The U.S. Department of State decidedly opposed it. In December 1917 the National Academy of Design polled the American Peace Centenary Committee—the very body that had officially accepted the Barnard statue—to determine how it felt about its original choice of the Saint-Gaudens statue. Of 76 replies (about half the Committee's membership), only one favored Barnard over Saint-Gaudens; 51 were either against him or for Saint-Gaudens. The remainder expressed no preference. As soon as he received this result, Howard R. Butler, Academy vice-president, wrote Sir Alfred Mond, the British Commissioner of Works responsible for receiving and placing Barnard's statue, describing the findings and urging him to prevail upon the British committee to reject it for Saint-Gaudens's work. The American Committee, for its part, did not officially withdraw endorsement of Barnard's statue but came to recommend Saint-Gaudens's as well. About this time, however, a four-member "American Commission," including J.P. Morgan, Jr. and Elihu Root, formed for the purpose of getting Saint-Gaudens's Lincoln into London and keeping Barnard's Lincoln out.

These activities fairly well represented public opinion. In November 1917, a few weeks before the National Academy of Design's Centenary Committee poll, *Independent* magazine, a general periodical, invited its readers to assess six Lincoln statues. Of more than

20,000 replies, 49% preferred Saint-Gaudens's. Statues by J. Patrick, Gutzom Borglum, Daniel Chester French, and Thomas Ball received 7–17% of the votes, and Barnard's only 6%, ranking last (29 Dec. 1917, pp. 590–591). Although no model public opinion survey, the study's one-sided results justify the tentative conclusion that Saint-Gaudens's image better reflected the public's conception of Lincoln than Barnard's. The only real question is precisely what that conception consisted of, and what statue features expressed it.

Uncertainty in the public's perception impedes understanding its preference for Saint-Gaudens's Lincoln. Barnard's stark portrayal of Lincoln's commonness allowed for little interpretive variance, but the Saint-Gaudens image was ambiguous. Unveiled in Chicago in 1887, its observers tended to appreciate the very attributes Barnard emphasized. A *Chicago Tribune* reporter, for example, notes delightedly the democratic shabbiness of Saint-Gaudens's portrayal: "the carelessly rolled collar," the "wrinkled vest, none too well fitted," the "baggy" coat sleeves, the "loose trousers, ill fitting at the ankles." Overall, Lincoln appears "lank, grave, careworn, Yankeeish, and homely. . ." (23 Oct. 1887, p. 9). Although not everyone saw the statue in this way, descriptions regularly mentioned elements of shabbiness. The sculptor M.G. Van Rensselaer, for instance, finds nothing "baldly commonplace" in the portrayal, but neither is it "sculpturesque." "Neither physical facts nor facts of costume are palliated or adorned." The statue thus revealed the entire range of Lincoln's distinguishing traits: not only "dignity," "strength," "inflexibility," "courage," and "intellectual confidence," but also "simplicity," "tenderness," "humility," "homely vigor," "sadness of spirit." Beneath Lincoln's manifest greatness "lay the heart of a child and the tender instincts of a woman" (*Century* 1887, pp. 37–39). As late as 1911 poet F.B. Eddy describes Saint-Gaudens's Lincoln as "gaunt and tall," "carelessly arrayed/In loose, ill fitting clothes," with a face whose "deep lines tell/His suffering and unimagined woe" (*Outlook* 11 Feb. 1911, p. 311). What could better symbolize democracy? However, years later, against a new social and political background, the statue's quaint features seemed to fade, its more dignified aspects to dominate. Selective perception concealed from an equalitarian mentality what it later revealed to a mentality grown more appreciative of elitist qualities.

If the strong preference for Saint-Gaudens's Lincoln was a reaction against equalitarian democracy, subsequent Lincoln portrayals should suggest whether this was a temporary adaptation to war pressures or a permanent result of fundamental social changes. This is crucial to understanding what the Barnard and Saint-Gaudens statues meant and what the conflict between their respective admirers was about.

Of first importance, in this regard, is that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the portrayal of prominent political leaders followed neoclassical conventions: formal attire and cloak; body and head erect, one leg slightly bent; one hand resting upon a pillar or fasces, or upon an ornate table or chair, or holding a scrolled public document, or pointing in some direction; if seated, the figure's back and arms fully supported by a symbolic chair of state. These features define the genre of Saint-Gaudens's work (and Daniel Chester French's more familiar Lincoln Memorial statue).⁴ Prior to Lincoln's death, and for many years after, neoclassicism shaped every statue of the American public figure. Few sculptors then knew how to depict public men in any other way. Different media thus conveyed different conceptions of Lincoln. The printed media, notably biographies and magazine commentary, usually portrayed him as a man of the people; the pictorial media, notably sculpture, a man above the people.

At the turn of the century, however, new elements entered into the neoclassical Lincoln

statuary. Seated, Lincoln is portrayed with legs crossed, or leaning forward as if to rise up, or with body twisted and one arm resting on the back of the chair; standing, with weight distributed equally (and ungracefully) on both legs, or leaning against a wall, or without his presidential beard.⁵ Designated as mixed forms, these statues combine neoclassical with realist conventions that affirm equalitarian values.

Equalitarian statues, unveiled after 1910, portray Lincoln as a common man, closely identified with common people. One such statue shows Lincoln seated, slightly stooped, on a simple bench rather than an ornate chair of state; others portray him with head lowered and body hunched forward in despondency and grief, or in the company of his wife, with a shawl draping his legs to warm them, or reading to his son, or sitting with his arm around a black child. Some portray Lincoln as a youth, patting a dog on its head or holding an ax in front of a tree stump.⁶ Barnard's Lincoln statue was an early manifestation of this democratic genre. Through it, the "weeping willow" representative of "slouch democracy" took his place beside the virile symbol of refinement and "militant democracy."

As Table 1 shows, the neoclassical genre in Lincoln statuary dominates until the century's turn. Of the 11 statues unveiled before 1899, 10 are neoclassical, 1 unclassifiable. The next 30 years bring 16 neoclassical images, 48% of the total; and 1930 to the present only 5, or 21%. Conversely, the equalitarian and mixed-form statues' percentage (excluding two unclassifiable) increases from 0% through 52% to 78% over these same intervals.⁷ Thus, the equalitarian element in Barnard's statue is not anomalous but rather begins an equalitarian trend in Lincoln statuary.

Early twentieth century verbal as well as iconic depictions reveal that elitist views never replaced equalitarian views of American democracy. Through popular literature, children's books, newspaper commentary, holiday oratory, and films, the equalitarian Lincoln retained hold of the people's imagination. Not only did the immigrant "feel drawn close to the ragged boy whose childhood was filled with struggle and hardships" (*Outlook* 7 Feb. 1917, p. 237); the native American, too, saw Lincoln as essentially one of his own. Lincoln's "greatness of mind and heart," explains Congressman Rubey in a 1919 House

Table 1
Statues of Abraham Lincoln by Type and Year of Dedication

Year of Dedication	Type				Total	% Neoclassical
	Neoclassical	Mixed	Equalitarian	Unclassifiable		
–1899	10			1	11	91
1900–1909	2	3			5	40
1910–1919	8	2	7		17	47
1920–1929	6	4	1		11	54
1930–1939	3	2	9	1	15	20
1940–1949	1		4		5	20
1950– ^a	1		3		4	25
Total	31	11	24	2	68	

Notes: ^aLast entry: 1961.
Sources: Bullard, Frederic L. 1952. *Lincoln in Marble and Bronze*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation. Feb. 1962. (Replicas excluded.)

of Representatives speech, "was not derived from modern education or from schools and colleges. It came from the very soil from which he sprang. He did not look over the people's head; he sympathized with them in all their thoughts, their ideals, and their aspirations. He was of the people and for the people and therein lay his greatness of soul and thought and action" (*Congressional Record* 12 Feb. 1919, p. 3196). Likewise, when the English playwright John Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln* reached New York two years after the *Independent* poll showed most Americans rejecting Barnard's sculpture, the critic Montrose Moses notices that "the actor who portrays Lincoln often stands as though he had studied the Barnard statue for every wrinkle of his coat" (*Independent* 31 Jan. 1920, p. 170). The general makeup of this actor, Moses adds elsewhere, reproduces "the Lincoln of Barnard" (*Bookman* Feb. 1920, p. 544). Another critic finds that Drinkwater's depiction of Lincoln conforms to "what we might call the Barnard statue side of the man. [T]he huge hands sticking out from shirt sleeves, the slovenly clothes, the shocking hat [and] the general behavior is far more Barnard than Saint-Gaudens" (*New York Times* 16 March 1919, p. 4). This depiction took New York by storm.⁸

The iconic, verbal, and dramatic portrayals of Lincoln thus testify to the selective character of America's self-portrayal. What many people wanted concealed from Europe they embraced enthusiastically themselves. Learning to appreciate Lincoln's epic qualities, Americans never lost sight of the folk qualities that initially drew them to him.

If controversy over Barnard's statue was not a rejection of the image of Lincoln or the conception of democracy that Barnard portrayed, how is the uproar to be understood? The major clue is that not one word opposed the idea of placing the statue in Cincinnati, even from those who believed it a travesty of both Lincoln and democracy. The storm broke only with the prospect of its erection in London.⁹ A *New York Times* (28 Sept. 1917, p. 10) editor explains: "We have often greatly admired [Barnard's] statuary, and to his Lincoln the only objection we have to make now is that it is not a fitting embodiment of the Emancipator to place publicly in London." And in a widely distributed public letter, Robert Todd Lincoln, the President's only surviving son, says he understands "that the completed statue has gone to Cincinnati to be placed. As to that I have nothing more to say, but I am horrified to learn just now that arrangements are being made for a statue of President Lincoln by the same artist, and I assume of a similar character, to be presented for location . . . in London" (*Literary Digest* 13 Oct. 1917, p. 30). These statements imply that Barnard accurately depicted at least one side of American democracy—its belief in the common man's dignity. The issue was in what context this facet was to be displayed. Although no absolute agreement on the matter was reached, a working consensus did develop. To the local monument went the task of portraying the nation's commonness; the national monument, its greatness. This is what the critics seemed to be saying. Whatever Barnard's statue of Lincoln meant to the American viewer, it could only undermine America's dignity if viewed abroad.

Late December 1918, a year after the National Academy of Design survey and an "American Committee" supporting the Saint-Gaudens statue was established, the British centennial committee declared both statues acceptable, both to be placed in fitting locations. Late summer 1920, Saint-Gaudens's statue was unveiled in London's Parliament Square before a group of distinguished citizens and high British and American officials. Barnard's statue had been affectionately received ten months earlier by Manchester, a city, as one observer puts it (*Literary Digest* 4 Oct. 1919, p. 29) "closer to America in thought than any part of the British Isles." Thus, the two memorials, each representing a different

facet of America's self-conception, found suitable foreign display in places that amplified one aspect of the democratic dualism they respectively embodied.

Independently of its outcome, then, the Barnard/Saint-Gaudens debate cultivated key elements of Lincoln's image—the remote and the intimate, the genteel and the common—that had subsisted from the very time of his death. Tradition conveyed dual images of him; reiterating this duality the debate preserved it.

TWO PUBLICS

The Barnard/Saint-Gaudens controversy raises questions about how to theoretically formulate collective understanding of the past. Currently, collective memory is regarded as a thought mode that “reflects” or “reproduces” society's conditions and concerns. This study, however, reveals a more complex relation between memory and society. Interpreters of Lincoln's memory were not passive objects in a field of social forces; they were active agents, fervent conveyors of the past. In considering their efforts, the major task is to clarify the social circumstances within which they contemplated the past and devised their memorial activities.

Foreigners' views of America were important parts of this context. In the 1909 Lincoln Centennial celebration, for example, foreign representatives spoke in most large American cities. Presumed objective, their assessments of Lincoln, validated national self-conceptions in a way that internal assessments alone could not. Preoccupation with the 1917 packaging of America's past for consumption abroad is a different aspect of the same matter. The peculiarities of the age, however, amplified the past's relevance and gave to the management of historical impression an importance and moral seriousness it never before possessed.

The question of how America should appear abroad became explicit as its influence as a leader, if not *the* leader, of the Western democracies grew greater than ever. With this condition some types of art are more compatible, more “ideologically convergent,” than others. As Gladys and Kurt Lang (1988, p. 100) put it, “Those whose art can be made to serve a broader cause, such as defining emerging identity or dramatizing new aspirations, are more likely to be granted a prominent place in the collective memory.” Their country's broader cause, emerging identity, and new aspirations did not impress all Americans in 1917 and 1918, but did impress most, including Saint-Gaudens's advocates. A conservative taste in monumental statuary, elitist approach to democratic politics, hawkish war attitude, and acute sensibility of their country's reputation characterized these people, as did apocalyptic thinking: a wrong decision in even so small a matter as a long-dead President's statue would “in the judgement of many wise men, bring down upon us so much ridicule as to prove a national calamity” (*New York Times* 28 Sept. 1917, p. 11).¹⁰ Most of Barnard's active supporters were, in contrast, progressive regarding art, equalitarian politically, and less engaged by the war. Few spoke of the nation's reputation or how Lincoln's portrayal might bear upon it. They pressed their case enthusiastically and coherently, but with neither urgency nor hostility against Saint-Gaudens.

Nonetheless, the two groups shared many important ideas. Men and women in both camps spoke articulately about the political uses of the past. They also believed eyewitness testimony, photographic evidence, life masks, and live models could establish Lincoln's true appearance. While all were sure Lincoln was in fact the man they imagined, no one substituted certainty of conviction for objective evidence. And as interpretation of

evidence promoted an ideological agenda, it animated professional and political interests. Saint-Gaudens's supporters within the art world contended openly that the cult of degenerate art that influenced Barnard sustained "hobo democracy," or the cult of the common man. Its extensive reach embraced everything from stark realism to "the neurotic, anarchistic Bolshevik 'artists,' denizens of the modernistic art camp and fabricators of cubistic, vortex-istic and future-istic degenerate art creations." This statement appears in *Art World* (Dec. 1917, p. 190), whose editor had himself represented Lincoln in a neoclassical deathbed sculpture complete with two angels. To defend neoclassical art against realist and abstract encroachments was plainly important for many Saint-Gaudens admirers. Just so, Barnard's admirers expressly challenged that tradition in public statements. But these were secondary concerns in a debate fundamentally moved by a determination to comprehend American society and gauge its new world role. Sharp distinctions were not always made between that larger world and the artist's and audience's smaller world. Controversies over art therefore acquired political meaning and served as a vehicle for political participation. Political meaning, not professional dominance, was at issue. Whether democracy was to be a haven appreciating common men, whether its ideals could tolerate cultural inequalities, whether a nation dominated by the tendencies of the mass could ever succeed in critical undertakings, like war—these matters were argued too fervently, too emotionally, by artists and nonartists alike, to have been contrived for ulterior reasons.

The Barnard/Saint-Gaudens controversy over collective memories of Lincoln took on salience as part of a broader process of identifying and understanding the cultural environment. A considerable part of these self-defining activities, however, involved efforts to influence the perception of Lincoln by anonymous people abroad rather than influential or powerful people in one's own environment. Into this enterprise the dramaturgical mechanisms of selection and idealization figured directly. In particular, Saint-Gaudens's Lincoln, as perceived by most people in 1917 and 1918, exaggerated the actual prevalence of genteel values in the society and at the same time muted aspects of the past that were incompatible with gentility. This statue was preferred because it compensated for cultural shortcomings that Barnard had correctly recognized as national virtues. Adapting William James's (1892, p. 190) notion, we may say a nation has as many identities and pasts as there are other nations about whose opinion it cares. Therefore nations do not always show to one another the symbols they create for their own citizens and do not always believe their own self-representations or include in them all important information. The aspects of collective identity included in self-portrayals are always, to some extent, linked to situations. During World War I, the American people wanted to represent itself one way to its allies, another way domestically. Affirming a "simultaneous multiplicity of selves" on a collective scale, Americans selected images of refinement and competence for "frontstage" state display, and of their common side for "backstage" local display. For the capital of England they turned to the stately Lincoln, for themselves, to the folk hero. The Lincoln portrayal they found most revealing of themselves, they considered a liability abroad.

CONCLUSION

No case study can establish decisively an object's meaning but can suggest alternative ways of studying it. The present case suggests an approach to collective memory that centers on the active construction and interpretation of commemorative objects. This

constructive and interpretive activity—generalizable from the present case—is undertaken by those who care more about the past than do others, wish to accurately represent it, and are offended by what they take as its distortion. Some commemorative matters, like the present one, mobilize relatively few; others, a larger and wider range of participants. On all matters, their activity is critical. Images of the past bear the imprint of the present not because of an impersonal affinity between them but because of the actions of people who feel deeply about both, and in some measure successfully impose their convictions upon contemporaries.

However, an agent-centered conception of collective memory cannot replace the prevailing structure-centered conception. Commemorative agents do possess autonomy as to how they represent the past, but there are definite limits on the kinds of memories they can convincingly propagate. However imaginative they may be, these agents must confine their portrayals within what Schudson (1989) calls “the available past.” They cannot conceive of Lincoln in a way totally unfamiliar and expect their ideas to be widely understood, let alone accepted. Since this available past reflects fundamental qualities of the social structure, believable individual conceptions of the past are not boundless. Two social forces dialectically shape collective memory: different people bearing different images of the past and social structures imposing limitations on those images. This essay emphasizes one part of the dialectic, the part that has been most commonly ignored in collective memory research—the role of individual agency. Subsumable under perspectives ranging from Blumer’s (1969, pp. 78–89) notion of society as symbolic interaction to Wuthnow’s (1987, pp. 18–65) conception of the “neoclassical” tradition in the sociology of knowledge and culture, this approach defines social structures not as causes by which memories are produced, but contexts in which memories are contested, selected, and cultivated. This newer approach stops trying to discover how portrayals of the past “reflect” present realities, and views the past as a vehicle for making these realities meaningful.

The practical import of such debates is not dramatic. Despite the heated controversy over the Lincoln statues, neither achieved what their proponents expected. Immigrants who gazed upon Barnard’s Lincoln were Americanized no faster than those who did not; Saint-Gaudens’s Lincoln neither increased nor decreased England’s willingness to defend democracy. At most, these statues provided ways of thinking about assimilation and democracy, ways of reading different aspects of American life. Like other commemorative devices, they were less instrumental, in the sense of producing practical effects, than semiotic, in the sense of formulating meaning.¹¹ Their coexistence constituted a dual symbolic structure that delineated and explained the dualism of the nation’s political culture.

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NOTES

1. For a general discussion of iconography and its use in representing political values, see Schwartz 1982; Miller and Schwartz 1985; Schwartz and Miller 1986.

2. The militant Lincoln image united power and democracy and appeared prominently in the promotion of World War I goals. On one poster, "True Sons of Freedom," an oversized, etherealized Lincoln looks down approvingly from the heavens as black soldiers fight hand-to-hand against the German enemy. "Liberty and Freedom Shall Not Perish" is inscribed over Lincoln's signature. In another poster, Lincoln and George Washington frame and enhance President Wilson's countenance, while two battleships make plain the object of the design. In yet another, Lincoln's call for "a new birth of freedom" is placed in service of the current President, who "fights for America and all Humanity." Elsewhere, a War-Bond poster shows Lincoln gripping a rod—an icon of personal strength reflecting national strength. With this virile man all could identify: "As your hand signs your application for one of these Bonds it becomes the hand of Abraham Lincoln."

3. These two strains of political culture are superimposed upon a consensus regarding both taken-for-granted values and the rules, procedures, and laws that realize and preserve these values. In the U.S., as elsewhere, consensus mitigates cultural conflicts by narrowing their range, diminishing their affective intensity, and promoting competitors' desire to resolve them without denying each other's essential interests and dignity (see Shils 1975, pp. 164–181).

4. Prominent neoclassical statues of the standing Lincoln are by Lot Flannery, erected in Washington, D.C., 1868; Henry K. Brown, New York City, 1870; Charles Mulligan, Rosamond, Illinois, 1903; and Adolph Weinman, Frankfort, Kentucky, 1911. Seated examples are by Randolph Rogers, Philadelphia, 1871; and Adolph Weinman, Hodgenville, Kentucky, 1909.

5. Examples of mixed form are by Charles Niehaus, Muskegon, Michigan, 1900; Merrell Gage, Topeka, Kansas, 1918; John Rogers, Manchester, New Hampshire, 1910; Leonard Crunelle, Freeport, Illinois, 1929; and Lorado Taft, Urbana, Illinois, 1927.

6. Equalitarian examples are by Gutzom Borglum, Newark, New Jersey, 1911; James Fraser, Jersey City, New Jersey, 1930; Frederick Hibbard, Racine, Wisconsin, 1943; Mr. and Mrs. Fred Torrey, Des Moines, Iowa, 1961; Charles Keck, New York City, 1949; Paul Manship, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1932; and Charles Milligan, Chicago, 1911.

7. A full, classified list of statues is available upon request.

8. For further discussion of the "Barnard statue side" of this immensely popular play, see *Literary Digest* 28 June 1919, p. 29; 25 Oct. 1919, p. 30; *Century* Feb. 1920, p. 450.

9. The plans for Paris and Saint Petersburg were also discussed, but never materialized.

10. So fateful was the matter that some believed the original Lincoln and Washington statues (by Saint-Gaudens and Houdon), not mere replicas, should be sent abroad (*Art World* Aug. 1917, p. 416). And at a Lincoln Memorial University meeting, someone proposed that the school's chancellor, Reverend Doctor John Wesley Hill, be appointed as "national censor and custodian of the plans, lines, proper figures, postures, etc., showing how Lincoln should be presented to the people of Europe or any other country" (*New York Times* 25 Nov. 1917, sec. 9, p. 5).

11. For detail on the semiotic conception of collective memory, see Schwartz, Zerubavel, and Barnett 1986.

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