CHAPTER 1

Monuments, Memorials, and Americanism

Although the particulars have now grown hazy, older portions of the American public recall that the genesis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1980–83 prompted considerable controversy. It seemed quite shocking at the time that the design competition could be won by a twenty-one-year-old architecture student. Even more provocative, because her plan seemed so austerely postmodern, it failed to fulfill customary notions of what a suitably heroic memorial should look like. Hence the harsh criticism that a "black gash of shame" actually *dishonored* those who had died in Southeast Asia (fig. 4). A mere list of names placed in a wide-angle pit, with a plaque referring only to an "era" rather than an actual war? Could the nation do no better?

Although H. Ross Perot had initially funded the design competition, he joined traditionalists in denouncing Maya Lin's winning entry and calling for a representational monument showing U.S. soldiers and an American flag. Secretary of the Interior James Watt, who had the power to veto the whole project, allowed it to go forward, but only on condition that a compensatory statue be commissioned and situated nearby (fig. 5). Watt forced his compromise on the federal Fine Arts Commission, which genuinely did not want to upstage Lin's design with what commission chairman and National Gallery of Art director J. Carter Brown called a "piece of schlock."[1]

By 1983 the interchange between Maya Lin and Frederick Hart, the sculptor for the figural addition, served only to intensify ill-feelings underlying two conflicting visions of what might be the most appropriate ways to memorialize a massive number of deaths in an unpopu-

4. Site plan for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D.C.
Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

5. Frederick Hart, *The Three Servicemen* (1984), Washington, D.C.
Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

lar war. When asked her opinion of Hart's work, Lin candidly replied: "Three men standing there before the world—it's trite, it's a generalization, a simplification. Hart gives you an image—he's illustrating a book." Hart became even harsher when asked whether "realism" was the only way to reach the disaffected veterans and politicians.

> The statue is just an awkward solution we came up with to save Lin's design. I think this whole thing is an art war. . . . The collision is all about the fact that Maya Lin's design is elitist and mine is populist. People say you can bring what you want to Lin's memorial. But I call that brown bag esthetics. I mean you better bring something, because there ain't nothing being served.[2]

In the decades since those two interviews took place, Americans have voted with their feet, but more powerfully with their hearts and minds. Lin is a winner.

In 1987 Congress finally began its initial and pedestrian reaction to long-standing requests for a World War II memorial situated in a suitable place of honor in Washington, D.C. By the mid-1990s likely designs received a critical response for several reasons: first, they seemed too grandiose and therefore reminiscent of conservative monuments in Europe; second, they would likely obstruct the widely cherished two-mile vista between the U.S. Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial; and third, they would bisect the Mall by straddling its entire width. There were traditionalists on *both* sides of the issue: those who wished to preserve the uncluttered "purity" of the Mall and those eager to honor the "greatest generation" with a genuinely worthy plan consistent in merit with others in that coveted location. This conflict boiled up a full head of steam between 1997 and 2000, but Friedrich St. Florian's winning design finally received presidential approval when many pleaded that World War II veterans were rapidly dying and *something* should be completed before they had disappeared entirely (fig. 6).[3]

Too few Americans are aware that most of the issues raised between 1980 and 2000 had been hashed out long before when initial plans were unveiled for the Washington Monument and the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials. Moreover, major statues meant to honor Wash-

6. Friedrich St. Florian, The World War II Memorial (2004), Washington, D.C.

ington and Lincoln had also aroused the most intense feelings on similar grounds: sheer size (gigantism), style (classical versus "modern"), location, and even nudity in the case of Horatio Greenough's seated *George Washington*, commissioned by Congress in 1833, completed in Florence, Italy, in 1839, and placed in the Capitol Rotunda in 1841. Scale, style, site, and apparel (or lack thereof) would become persistent and volatile issues in American art ever after. *Monumental* is a more neutral euphemism for *gigantic* and *colossal*, of course. Many artists, sculptors, and architects who we might find guilty of gigantism were only striving to do monumental work. Suitable scale seems to lie in the eye of the beholder yet also reveals the ambitious needs of a principal stakeholder.[4]

Greenough's *Washington* touched off one of the earliest conflicts in the United States involving aesthetic criteria, and one of the most representative. A particularly problematic question involved style: how should the Father of His Country be depicted, as an idealized deity or

as a revered native statesman? Classical or "American"? Godlike and spiritual or secular yet like-no-other? Greenough's solution turned out to be a hybrid: the head based upon Houdon's life mask certainly resembled Washington, but the body evoked Jupiter and Roman statuary (fig. 7). Hence the work got nicknamed George Jupiter Washington when it wasn't given more insulting designations. Greenough's inspiration was actually the Elean *Zeus* by Phidias, one of the greatest Greek sculptors, a work known only by description. Greenough was apparently seeking purity and simplicity rather than the pomposity that so many critics seemed to see in the statue. The snarls that ensued would demonstrate that compromise leaves almost no one satisfied.[5]

Greenough's statue as well as Robert Mills's Washington Monument emerged in the wake of failed attempts to commemorate the centennial of the founder's birth by unearthing his body from Mount Vernon for reburial in the Capitol crypt in 1832. The cult of Washington as a superheroic if not immortal figure remained exceedingly strong, though strife persisted over the relative merits of his role as a

7. Horatio Greenough, *George Washington* (1841), Washington, D.C. Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

symbol of national unity and his symptomatic value to southerners as a Virginia-based protochampion of states' rights. The Nullification Crisis early in the 1830s, prompted by South Carolina's threatened secession over tariff issues, added sectionalism to the mix of aesthetic differences and complicated them. Similarly it has long been forgotten that several significant sources of friction in the decade following 1911 involving the Lincoln Memorial arose from sectional tensions left unresolved by the Civil War. That monument, which is virtually devoid of references to slavery and the conflict it generated, was meant to serve as an emblem of national unification. The intertwined boughs of southern pine and northern laurel that gracefully encircle the frieze provide just one indication of that quest. (Because laurel is a symbol of victory, of course, the northern Republicans who called the shots enjoyed a not-so-subtle triumph.)

Serious debate would persist for more than a century following the 1820s: namely, whether monuments and architecture in the United States should pursue styles that feel native and new or should appropriate motifs from antique Greece and Rome. Horatio Greenough received interesting and revealing advice as he embarked upon his impassioned career as the premier American sculptor in the early republic. When he first attempted to model a figure of George Washington, he received wise counsel from a patron, the novelist James Fenimore Cooper: "Aim rather at the natural than the classical."[6] That same heated issue would stay situated at the core of a decade-long quarrel over the most suitable design for the Lincoln Memorial. "Natural" meant more than avoiding stylistic imitation of the ancient world. It also meant having a heroic figure clothed in modern dress, and standing rather than seated like some emperor, Roman or Napoleonic.

Greenough got mixed signals, however, because his fellow New Englander Edward Everett advised him to "go to the utmost limit of size. . . . I want a colossal figure." That muscular word *colossal* and its synonyms would recur over and over again in intensely heated discussions about the Washington Monument, the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials, and the memorial for Franklin Delano Roosevelt finally unveiled in 1997. Midwestern opponents of the Lincoln Memorial design that ultimately prevailed (albeit scaled back in size owing to considerations of cost and weight) pleaded instead for a "colossal statue" of the man who saved the Union. But in 1969 William Walton, chairman of the Fine Arts Commission, epitomized more than a century of polemics when he wrote to the chairman of the FDR Memorial Commission, a member of Congress: "I urge that we get away from bigness as a manner of memorializing great men. A man's place in history is never determined by the size of his monument."[7]

When Fenimore Cooper discovered the dimensions that Greenough had in mind, he considered them grandiose and advised his friend accordingly. The sculptor stuck with Everett's wishes, however, which reinforced his own aspiration, and designed a massive marble chair from which his seated Washington figuratively contemplated the ship of state he had brought into being. His gestures followed a classical formula seemingly well suited to a brand-new republic. Whereas Washington's right hand points heavenward, the source of law by which men live, the left hand returns his sword to the people because he has completed his service to them. It was not such a bad compromise, actually, between imperatives ancient and modern.[8]

Skeptics scoffed that the oversize statue would not even be able to enter the Capitol for placement in the Rotunda. They were wrong, and initial responses to the monumental piece in 1841–42 seemed more favorable than not, though critics certainly made themselves known. When Greenough arrived from Florence in 1842 and saw how dim the Rotunda lighting was, however, he tried to have torches illuminate his work; but they only made matters worse. Flickering lights in a dim chamber do not enhance greatness. He then pleaded with Congress to move the monument out of doors so that it could be bathed in natural sunlight—a serious error, as it turned out—and that is when the harshest condemnations began to be heard. Maximum visibility only encouraged calumny.[9]

Fierce blasts came from Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, who had offered stiffer warnings than Cooper's concerning size as well as nudity, and from Philip Hone, the former mayor of New York, who recorded the following in his diary:

> It looks like a great herculean Warrier—like Venus of the bath, a grand Martial Magog—undraped, with a huge napkin lying on his lap and covering his lower extremities and he is preparing to perform his ablutions in the act of consigning his sword to the care of the attendant. . . . Washington was too prudent, and careful of his health, to expose himself thus in a climate so uncertain as ours, to say nothing of the indecency of such an exposure on which he was known to be exceedingly fastidious.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was pithier: "Did anyone ever see Washington naked? It is inconceivable. He had no nakedness, but I imagine was born with his clothes on and his hair powdered, and made a stately bow on his first appearance in the world." Being unclothed from the waist up was nude enough for the 1840s but particularly so for the Father of His Country, a man renowned for his dignified reserve as well as other self-possessed qualities. On this matter also, however, consensus could not be achieved. Ralph Waldo Emerson described the work as "simple & grand, nobly draped below & nobler nude above."[10] He declared that it "greatly contents me. I was afraid it would be feeble but it is not." In many different ways and for numerous reasons, nudity would become a prime cause of controversy during the century and a half that followed.

Once it was determined that *Washington* would sit out of doors, exposed to extremes of weather and the uncontrollable excretions of birds, the figure became a prime target for pranksters. One inserted "a large 'plantation' cigar between the lips of *pater patriae*, while another had amused himself with writing some stanzas of poetry, in a style rather more popular than elegant, upon a prominent part of the body of the infant Hercules." Exactly which body part is unclear; but quite obviously political graffiti did not originate the day before yesterday. This monumental statue increasingly became an occasion for mockery, and Greenough's poignant letter to Robert Winthrop in 1847 sums up his frustration at having his motives and skills misunderstood by a nation so lacking in artistic sophistication.

> A colossal statue of a man whose career makes an epoch in the world's history is an immense undertaking. To fail in it is only to prove that one is not as great in art as the hero himself was in life. Had my work shown a presumptuous opinion that I had an easy task before me—had it betrayed a yearning rather after the wages of art than the honest fame of it, I should have deserved the bitterest things that have been said of it and of me. But containing as it certainly *must* internal proof of being the *utmost effort* of my mind at the time it was wrought, its failure fell not on me but on those who called me to the task.[11]

Washington's state of undress also made him appear pagan—not exactly proper in a society where evangelical Christianity enjoyed wide

appeal. Although Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and many others praised it, the statue continued to inspire wags and scoffers throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. The early rumor that it was too large to pass through the door of the Capitol gradually became a popular legend. Stories were repeated that it had to be moved outside because it threatened the very foundation of that big building and even that it sank the first ship that attempted to load it for "home" in Leghorn, Italy. The ultimate insult occurred in 1908 when Congress ordered that it be moved to the Smithsonian Institution's "Castle," ironic in turn because of Greenough's disdain for the Gothic style.[12] A monumental mismatch of art and architecture.

During the later twentieth century, when certain works of public sculpture became crazily controversial, such as Claes Oldenburg's *Free Stamp* in Cleveland, their defenders insisted that they could not be moved because they were "site specific," that is, designed with a very particular place in view. To change their venue would be tantamount to destroying them. This, too, was not a new issue. Greenough had been commissioned to create his work specifically for the Capitol Rotunda.

8. Frances Benjamin Johnston, Greenough's *George Washington* admired by children on the U.S. Capitol plaza (1890s).
Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

It got moved outside at the sculptor's own request, though swiftly to his profound regret; and it was resituated once again more than half a century after his death. Relocation alone, however, had not denigrated it. Dissensus already had. The country simply could not agree on the most suitable aesthetic for honoring its foremost citizen with a prominently placed statue (fig. 8).

In 1833, when Congress initially gave Greenough this coveted professional opportunity, a private association also had under way a plan to erect a major monument commemorating the first president. The

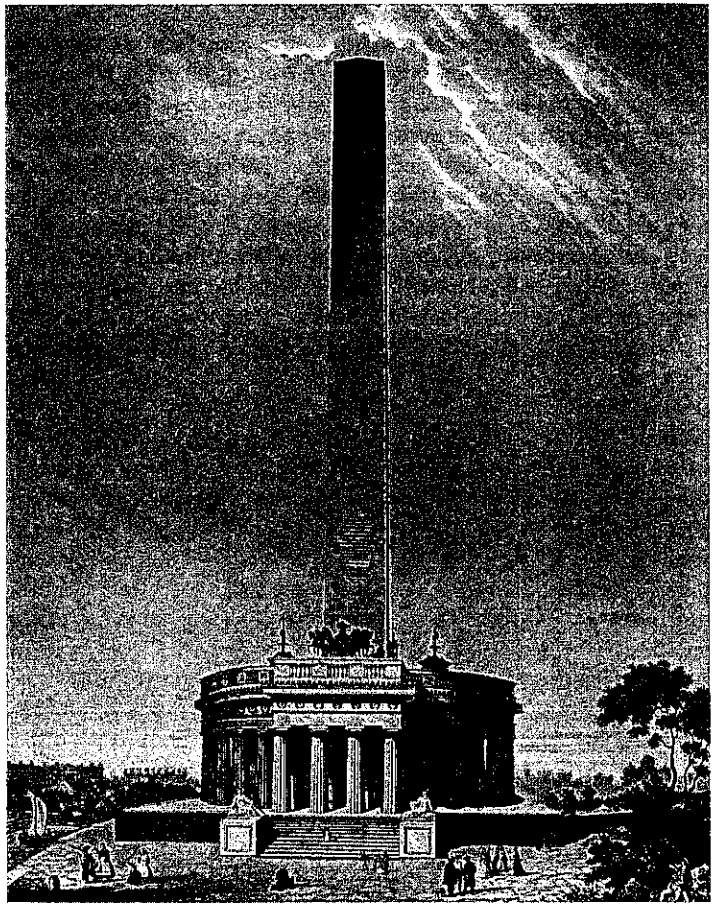
9. Robert Mills (1781–1855) and his wife, Eliza Barnwell Smith.
Courtesy of the Archives of American Art.

initial document to be released, drafted hastily by Robert Mills (appointed by Andrew Jackson to be the nation's official architect [fig. 9]), envisioned a massive, four-sided rusticated pyramid, a thousand feet square at the base, soaring to a height of 650 feet, and supporting a "collossian" statue of George Washington, the whole thing insanely envisioned as a thousand feet tall. At each corner there would be obelisks 45 feet square and 350 feet tall, with the pyramid separated into seven "grand states of terraces" diminishing in height as they ascended. The rest of Mills's description might be succinctly summarized as seeking the sublime through "shock and awe." The proportions were simply mind-boggling, even by modern standards.[13]

Because fund-raising proceeded privately and poorly, and because there were competing plans, no progress occurred for more than a decade, a harbinger of woeful delays to come. In 1845 the Washington National Monument Society approved Mills's revised design, slightly more modest than his first but stupendously grand nevertheless. It called for an Egyptian obelisk rising well over five hundred feet in the air, surrounded by a massive, circular, and Doric pantheonlike rotunda, itself sitting on a deep base and entered through a portico four columns wide and two deep (fig. 10). Because the circular-pantheon concept came from Rome, Mills had managed to fuse all three of the ancient civilizations deeply admired for their symbolic cachet by many Americans during the first half of the nineteenth century.[14]

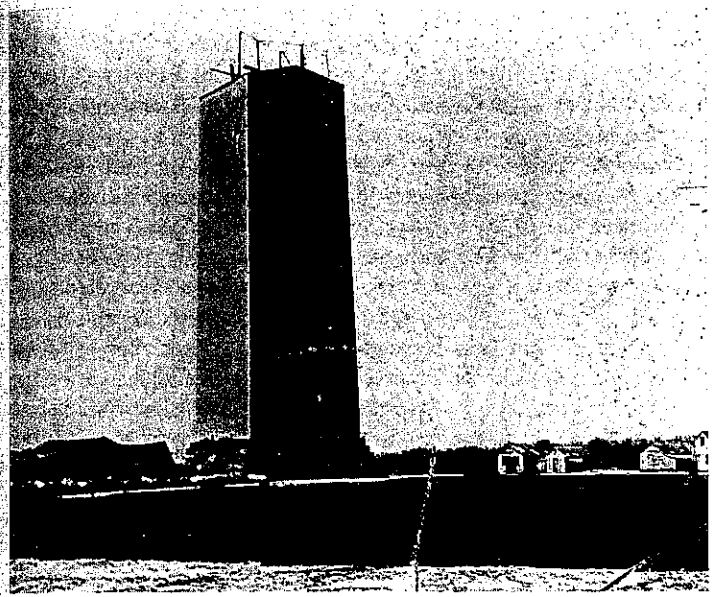
So much stylistic fusion caused considerable confusion, however. Some critics objected to the impurity of combining an obelisk with a colonnade. And the cost of such an undertaking was unthinkable in any case. So in 1848 the society proceeded with the obelisk alone, though even that would remain an unfinished stump from 1854 until 1884 because Congress did not authorize funds to complete the undertaking until the centennial of Independence in 1876. One year earlier, in 1875, the *New York Tribune* called the curtailed curiosity an "abortion." Still others, shifting the imagery, designated it a "big furnace chimney." Both analogies were fairly apt (fig. 11).[15]

The authorities had been able to agree on very few basic questions. In response to whether there should be any shaft at all, one senator proclaimed in 1832 that George Washington's monument "is in our hearts." Others, however, had argued for some sort of cenotaph or column rather than an equestrian statue because Europe already had lots of the latter. A huge column would be preferable because "we might



10. Robert Mills's plan for a monument to George Washington (1845), Washington, D.C.
Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

erect the largest and finest in the world," whereas there would be "a hundred [equestrians] to rival us." Many preferred an obelisk to a column, however, because it is easier to inscribe writing on the flat surfaces of an obelisk; and so the debate went round and round for more than half a century.[16]



11. The Washington Monument under construction (ca. 1855).
Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

The painter Thomas Cole entered these thoughts in his notebook on October 10, 1835.

> As to the design of such a monument, I would say, let it not be a statue; for however great its size, its many parts and projections would render it less durable than something more simple: time would destroy the original beauty of the sculpture of a statue. I would not have a column; for that is only an architectural member, and not a complete whole. Although it were crowned with a statue, it would not appear to me either consistent or in good taste. A pyramid would answer in durability of structure; but that is unmeaning. To my mind a colossal altar would be the most appropriate, and the most capable of uniting beauty of form with durability. Let it be hundreds of feet in height; let a fire burn upon it perpetually; let it never expire while the nation recognized Washington as the Father of his country.[17]

The remarkable Washington Monument designed by Mills that had been erected in Baltimore between 1815 and 1829 was already a very tall column, 220 feet high. So the next effort, national rather than local, would surely need to be more than twice as tall, and shaped differently, of course.[18]

And so it came to be, though not an altar and not without a long line of serious skeptics and harsh dissenters. Here is what one anonymous critic had to say in 1855, writing for the preeminent journal devoted to the arts. The author clearly assumed that Mills's original and highly elaborate plan from 1845 had not yet been abandoned. "It is a tasteless, unmeaning jumble of columns surmounted by an obelisk; there seems to have been no aim in its design, except to erect something *high*, and to accomplish this, to sacrifice every noble and worthy motive belonging to a work of this character. What have Greek and Egyptian symbols to do with Washington?"[19]

That was a representative view for a full generation. Here is what *The Nation* had to say a decade later.

> The obelisk has generally been injured in effectiveness as a monument by the addition to its simplicity of other members, making it part of a composition. The simplest and lowest base is the best. And any attempt at union between this and other architectural forms is sure to fail, as in the noted instance of that most inappropriate and offensive design for the great monument to Washington at our national capital; a circular temple, over a hundred feet high, surrounding the base of an obelisk-shaped tower rising four hundred feet above the temple's roof.[20]

By the mid-1870s, when Congress finally accepted the idea of using public funds to finish a simplified version of what had been proposed two generations earlier and actually been begun in 1848, critics called for the monument to be "characteristically American" even though they could not readily define just what that might actually mean in such a project. In 1873, while the original design languished, a serious plan for an alternative one proposed four Egyptian sphinxes "of colossal proportions [of course] . . . nationalized by the head and breast of our national bird." A bald eagle-sphinx—now that was *really* mix and match.[21]

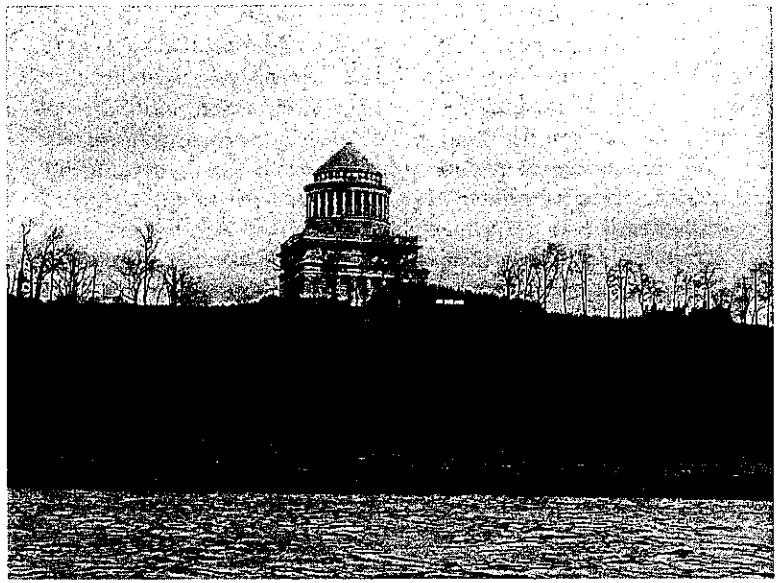
If stylistic devices from the ancient world had lost some of their appeal, so had sheer size simply to satisfy national chauvinism at great

cost. To some, at least. As work went forward, *American Architect and Building News* sneered that the immense obelisk "will doubtless assert itself to the common mind as a clear achievement (in the vernacular, a *big thing*)." As it turned out, one politically astute man from the Army Corps of Engineers supervised the final design through to completion of the monument and kept it reasonably austere even though he could not resist crowning the 555-foot shaft with a heaven-pointed pyramidion.[22]

Turning to the moment of completion, we get a clear sense of the country's ambivalence about what had ultimately been wrought. After criticizing the obelisk quite fiercely late in 1884, the *New York Times* reversed itself for the monument's dedication a few months later in 1885, acknowledging that there was "something characteristically American" about finishing the tallest structure in the world, even towering above "the highest cathedral spires designed by the devout and daring architects of the Middle Ages."[23] So size still mattered to many people. Big was beautiful because national competitiveness made it a point of pride. And a little touch of antiquity could go a long way. Somehow the Washington Monument managed to seem, well, monumentally American.

Following the death of Ulysses S. Grant in 1885, an elaborate tomb site became virtually inevitable because of his personal popularity and an outpouring of sympathy for his courageous battle with cancer; but the optimal or most logical form it should take was not at all clear. One of the earliest admirers to weigh in was Clarence King, a polymath much admired by Henry Adams. King wrote a prompt and impassioned public plea rejecting Greek, Renaissance, and Gothic models. Instead, almost anticipating the Jefferson dispute that lay more than half a century ahead, he argued that the middle period of the Roman Empire was most suitable for Grant and the United States. The truly fitting tribute, according to King, would be a "round Roman tomb of noble dimensions treated as to its details in Romanesque style."[24]

Although the mausoleum site on Riverside Drive was designated almost immediately, Grant was temporarily buried in Central Park while a debate over design and intensive fund-raising took place. What eventually emerged as Grant's Tomb in 1897 would contain substantial elements of imperial Rome on top of a massive but modified Greek temple below, the whole thing amplified with elements from other



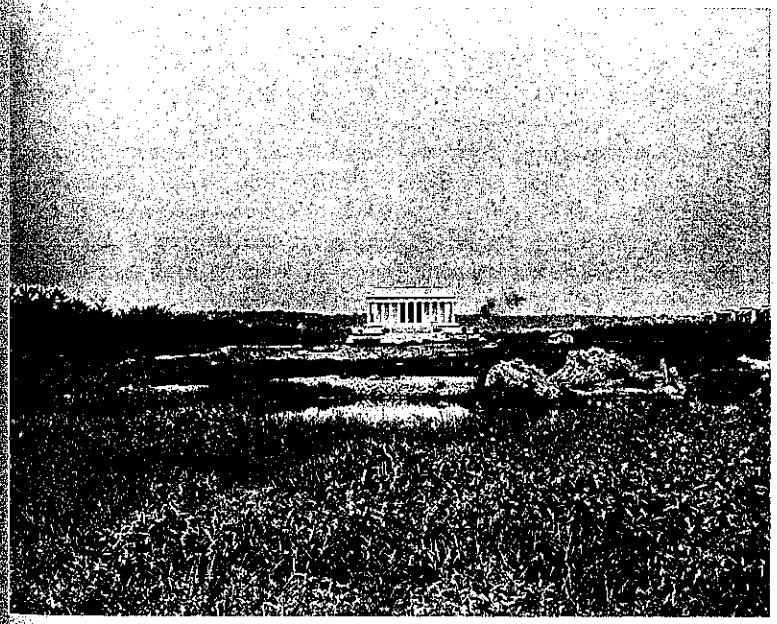
12. The dedication of Grant's Tomb (1897), New York City.
Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

stylistic traditions (fig. 12). The net effect was a curious amalgam magnified by gigantism. It pleased some but bitterly disappointed others. Grand it was, indeed Grant-worthy in the eyes of many; but distinctly or definably anything in particular it was not.

Early in the twentieth century, as the nation neared the centennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth, discussion turned to the prospect of a major memorial in his honor. The controversies that ensued for almost a quarter of a century involved all the familiar issues except nudity. No one wished to revisit that one. If Washington stripped to the waist had been difficult for many to accept, the martyred rail-splitter must have seemed well beyond such degradation. In any event, times had changed on that score, but site, size, and style remained tough topics. Many enthusiasts of a memorial, advocates of the McMillan Plan of 1901 for elaborating the topographical heart of Washington, had their

eye on what became the west end of the Mall, eventually known as Potomac Park because it borders the river.

At that time, however, it wasn't a park at all but rather an exceedingly marshy area that had not been drained. "Uncle Joe" Cannon, Speaker of the House, was a midwesterner and a fervent Lincoln fan. Regarding Potomac "Flats" as remote and malarial, he declared that the "monument itself would take fever and ague, let alone a living man." Cannon swore to oppose anything "that will not place that monument where all the people will and must see it." As he warned one powerful Republican in the cabinet, "There is a fight on about the location of the Lincoln Memorial and you keep out of it; it's none of your damned business. So long as I live I'll never let a memorial to Abraham Lincoln be erected in that God damned swamp."[25] Cannon would subsequently do battle with the winning neoclassical design; but



13. The Lincoln Memorial in the marsh, West Potomac Park (mid-1920s), Washington, D.C.
Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

still later, in his dotage, he acknowledged that both the site and the style had turned out well! Such honest reversals haven't happened very often (fig. 13).

The next issue to arise was not exactly an "art" controversy, but it did involve both site and style—the question of what is most distinctively American once again. Some advocates of honoring Lincoln's memory proposed to build a seventy-two-mile highway that would connect Washington, D.C., with Gettysburg. Supporters of that alternative argued that doing something useful would honor the Emancipator far more than creating something merely symbolic, and they received considerable support from the nascent automobile industry and touring associations. Curiously, that proposal would surge and then ebb in 1908, yet get revived by impassioned backers once again in 1912. Eventually the idea died following a congressional hearing, but not until it had been thoroughly hashed out in several forums, including the press. To its ardent enthusiasts, a Lincoln Road represented the future, whereas a marble memorial merely bowed to a belabored past.[26]

During 1911–12 an intense struggle took place, most notably in Congress but also in newspapers, over the two options. Once the Republican traditionalists prevailed, they turned their attention to gaining approval for architect Henry Bacon's neoclassical temple design from the Fine Arts Commission and the Lincoln Memorial Commission. That goal was eventually achieved, though it had to surmount challenges from midwesterners, especially, who pleaded for a memorial style that would be more "home-grown" and hence American. Perhaps the most vocal among them was sculptor Gutzon Borglum, a Lincoln enthusiast best known for the four massive presidential heads he created at Mount Rushmore between 1926 and 1939. Borglum actually wanted the opportunity to create a "colossal figure of [Lincoln] in Greek marble" but lost that bid because the political powers gradually lined up behind Bacon and his concept of a temple to anchor the west end of the Mall.[27]

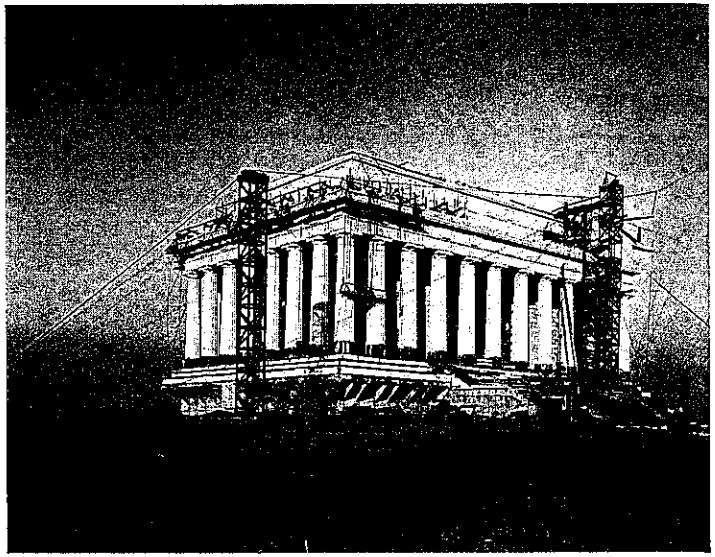
Many aspects of this conflict suggest that two irreconcilable groups of purists sought any possible pretext to ridicule each other. Members of Congress who opposed Bacon's design, for example, pointed out that Lincoln had never even learned the Greek alphabet. How bizarre, then, to honor him with a temple derived from the Parthenon. No one seemed to notice or be bothered, however, by the fact that, in the centennial year of 1909, Lincoln's birthplace, a rustic log cabin (of

14. Lincoln's "birthplace" cabin, Hodgenville, Kentucky (1940).
Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

dubious authenticity), had been encased in a white marble, classical temple (fig. 14).

The seated statue designed for the memorial in D.C. by Daniel Chester French appeared as an interior colossus at thirty feet high (including the pedestal). The sculptor had also designed a massive, boxy throne reminiscent of Greenough's for *George Washington.* The facings for the armrests were prominently adorned with the ancient Roman fasces, a symbol of unification, of course. As art critic Royal Cortissoz remarked when he composed the epigram inscribed above Lincoln's head: "The memorial must make common ground for the meeting of the North and South. By emphasizing his saving the union you appeal to both sections. By saying nothing about slavery you avoid rubbing old sores."[28]

When the groundbreaking ceremony occurred on Lincoln's birthday in 1914, a former Confederate cavalry officer, now a U.S. senator from Kentucky, spoke briefly about the reunion of North and South. He regarded the temple, still eight years from completion, as an important emblem of unification. Superficial consensus about the meaning of the memorial masked deep-seated divisions over style, site,



15. The Lincoln Memorial under construction (ca. 1919), Washington, D.C.
Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

the choice of a symbolic structure rather than a road, and even size. When the footings sank down through the marshy land in search of bedrock, a prudent decision was made to diminish the building's projected dimensions and stupendous weight (fig. 15).[29]

Following the dedication on Memorial Day in 1922, an array of interested observers weighed in with lavish praise as well as scornful criticism. On the laudatory side, those who had been longing for years to approve it were joined by converts who confessed their surprise and pleasure. The *Washington Post* proclaimed the Potomac end of the Mall the "predestined site" for the memorial and thereby justified its hitherto marginal location, away from the hurly-burly because of the "eminent and isolated position Lincoln occupies in our history." In May 1923 the American Institute of Architects awarded Henry Bacon its gold medal for achievement, only the third time it had done so in its history. The pageant on that occasion involved eerie floodlighting and included a torchlight procession in which the honor party was towed to the memorial on a barge on the reflecting basin. Christopher

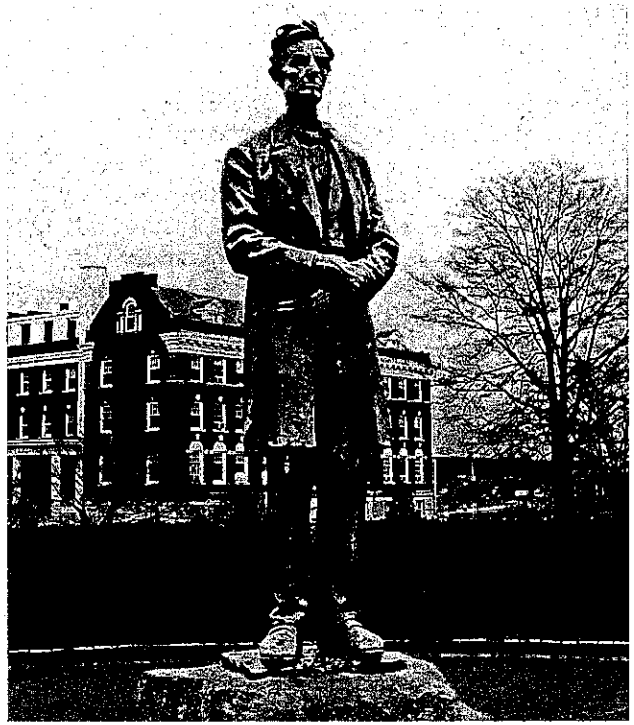
Thomas suggests that this served as "an expression of the otherworldliness imputed to the memorial and Lincoln."[30]

Strong and strident dissenting voices were raised by some very distinguished older as well as new members of the architectural community. Louis Sullivan, one of the best known and a midwestern devotee of contemporary design, regarded the memorial with disgust: "Architecture, be it known, is dead," he said. "Let us therefore lightly dance upon its grave, strewing roses as we glide." More lugubrious words followed. Frank Lloyd Wright heaped derision with the mid-American pride of a pioneering modernist: "Depravity sees a Greek temple as [a] fitting memorial to Abraham Lincoln. He is the Greek antithesis. Nothing is Greek about his life or work or thought." Perhaps the young Lewis Mumford, an easterner with eclectic taste, offered the harshest condemnation of all:

> In the Lincoln Memorial . . . one feels not the living beauty of our American past, but the mortuary air of archaeology. The America that Lincoln was bred in, the homespun and humane and humorous America that he wished to preserve, has nothing in common with the sedulously classic monument that was erected to his memory. Who lives in that shrine, I wonder—Lincoln, or the men who conceived it?[31]

What happened in this case followed the pattern of the Washington Monument and anticipated that of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, for there was surprisingly swift public acceptance and within less than a generation only dim memories survived of the intense disagreements sparked by the commemorative designs. Greenough's *Washington* remained an exception to that pattern. It was fated to be scorned, not feted.

As construction of the Lincoln Memorial was getting under way in 1917, a little-known parallel drama unfolded in Ohio and New York with high intensity and international implications. This conflict hinged starkly upon an issue that had social, cultural, political, and aesthetic dimensions: Should Lincoln be represented in sculpture in idealized fashion as a dignified statesman in his maturity? Or with homely realism as a country lawyer with his potential for greatness yet to be realized? The American Peace Centenary Committee, formed during the centennial of Lincoln's birth in 1909, decided to mark the anniversary of peace with Great Britain (scheduled for 1915) by sending to



16. George Grey Barnard, *Abraham Lincoln* (1917), Lytle Park, Cincinnati, Ohio.
Photo by Courtney Ritter.

London a replica of Augustus Saint-Gaudens's elegantly brooding statue of the late president (1879) from Lincoln Park in Chicago.[32]

When no benefactor emerged to bear the cost, Charles P. Taft, half brother of the former president and of current chief justice William Howard Taft, offered to supply a replica of a Lincoln statue that he had commissioned in 1910 by George Grey Barnard for placement in Cincinnati's Lytle Park. The work was viewed briefly in New York before being unveiled in Cincinnati less than a week before Congress declared war on Germany in 1917. The elite in that conservative Ohio city received the image quite positively even though this was a humble, almost ungainly version of Lincoln as a man of the people, an unrefined commoner with an elongated neck, beardless, looking rather

unworldly (if not world-weary), and perhaps yearning for divine guidance (fig. 16).

Barnard, a midwesterner, explained that his vision of the Emancipator derived from his youth, shaped by the recollections of a grandfather who had known both Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas. Barnard's image reflected "the mighty man who grew from out of the soil and the hardships of the earth." Traditionalists, however, and especially members of the art establishment detested the work. They were horrified, moreover, at the prospect that this ungainly rustic figure would be the visible emblem of the United States in London. Hostile partisans like Robert Todd Lincoln condemned it as "a monstrous figure which is grotesque as a likeness of President Lincoln and defamatory as an effigy." Curiously, statesmen like Wilson and Roosevelt, as well as major artists like John Singer Sargent and Frederick MacMonnies, rather admired the Barnard statue.[33]

Barnard spoke quite openly about his identification of Lincoln with the working classes, almost as a kind of low-key and unkempt antihero. "He must have stood as the Republic should stand, strong, simple, carrying its weight unconsciously without pride in rank or culture. He is clothed with cloth worn, the history of labor. The records of labor in Lincoln's clothes are the wings of his victory." Swiftly, however, prominent antimodern artists like Kenyon Cox and Frederick Wellington Ruckstull, the latter a cofounder of the National Sculpture Society, mobilized and publicized savage attacks. After seeing Barnard's *Lincoln* in New York, Ruckstull published an indictment. His views seem to have been representative of the appalled nationalists, horrified that an unkempt and earthy Emancipator might be displayed in London and Paris, perhaps permanently, and possibly even in Moscow as well.

> Because Lincoln was born in a log-cabin, split rails, built and pushed a flatboat, was a Captain in the Black Hawk War and conformed to the indifference to dress which inevitably was forced upon the pioneers in every frontier region by the hardness of their life, he has been so often represented as a "slouch," as a "hobo-democrat," and as a despiser of elegant social forms, that it has found general credence among the unthinking—to the detriment of our country.[34]

In November 1917 the *Independent*, a widely read journal of opinion, invited readers to rank six statues of Lincoln. The Saint-Gaudens