

ADAM I.P. SMITH\* *University College, London*

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# The ‘Cult’ of Abraham Lincoln and the Strange Survival of Liberal England in the Era of the World Wars

## *Abstract*

This article explores the significance of what George Bernard Shaw called the ‘cult’ of Abraham Lincoln in England in the aftermath of the First World War. It argues that the effort to ‘Anglicize’ Lincoln by rooting him in English traditions, values and genealogy, was a way of ‘domesticating’ the larger meaning of ‘America’, reflecting a search for reassurance that the rising power of the United States was an extension, not a threat, to British cultural and political power. The article also suggests that the imagined Lincoln offered a way of understanding and validating the sacrifice of the ‘One Million Dead’ of the British Empire and that liberalism as a framework through which to understand the world had popular currency even into the inter-war period. Lincoln was important in large measure because he was represented as having pursued liberal and moral ends through the means of war. As such he provided an inspiration for Lloyd George and, later, for Churchill.

## *The English ‘Cult’ of Lincoln*

In understanding national consciousness, it can be rewarding to pay attention to the ways in which the imagined ‘other’ can be a source of fascination or identification as well as antipathy. It is in this light that we should consider the claim of George Bernard Shaw that, in the aftermath of the First World War, there was, ‘a cult of [Abraham] Lincoln in England’.<sup>1</sup>

\* a.i.p.smith@ucl.ac.uk. For their comments on earlier drafts of this article, the author would like to thank: the late John Ramsden, Keith McClelland, Kathy Burk, Robert Cook, Michael Collins, the participants in the ‘Global Lincoln’ conference at Oxford in July 2009, and the anonymous reviewers for this journal.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Mark E. Neely Jr, *Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia* (New York, 1982), 53. Lord Charnwood, *Abraham Lincoln* (London, 1916); John Drinkwater, *Abraham Lincoln* (London, 1918).

Nothing encapsulated this 'cult' better than the grand ceremony that took place in Parliament Square in July 1920 to unveil a copy of Augustus Saint-Gaudens' elegant statue of the sixteenth American president. At that occasion, Prime Minister David Lloyd George, a lifelong admirer of Lincoln, had tried to explain why the statue was appropriate and necessary in the capital of the British Empire. 'In his life', said Lloyd George, '[Lincoln] was a great American. He is no longer so. He is one of those giant figures of whom there are very few in history, who lose their nationality in death. They are no longer Greek or Hebrew, English or American; they belong to mankind.' In tone and form, this event resembled the countless ceremonies that had occurred all over Britain since the guns fell silent on the Western Front less than two years earlier; all involved formal speeches, flags, the national anthem and the unveiling of a monument. In its own way, the Lincoln statue ceremony was as much a part of the process of post-war healing as was the unveiling of Sir Edwin Lutyens' temporary cenotaph less than half a mile away on Whitehall the previous summer.<sup>2</sup> *The Times* reporter, for one, was impressed. 'He must have had a dead soul to whom the mere wonder of the thing did not appeal', he told his readers, 'it seemed as if Lincoln himself, in his seemingly devotional attitude, was astounded at and almost deprecated it.'<sup>3</sup>

If this unveiling marked the ceremonial aspect of the 'Lincoln cult', the high priest, as it were, was an Oxford academic and Liberal peer, Godfrey Rathbone Benson, elevated to the peerage as Lord Charnwood, whose 'penetrating' 1916 biography Shaw credited with generating the British fascination with Lincoln.<sup>4</sup> Charnwood's biography was well received by those inside and outside the academy on both sides of the Atlantic: in 1947, Benjamin P. Thomas called it 'the best one volume life of Lincoln ever written'.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the greatest popularizer of the 'cult', however, was John Drinkwater, a young playwright, poet and actor who achieved his greatest success with a play called *Abraham Lincoln*, inspired, he freely acknowledged, by Charnwood's book.<sup>6</sup> The play opened at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in late 1918, then transferred to the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith, and was revived again and again over the next thirty years. 'Nobody can dine out in London today and admit without a blush that he has not seen "Abraham Lincoln"', wrote the playwright Arnold Bennett.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 21 Jul 1919.

<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, 29 Jul 1920; *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Jul 1920.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Neely, *Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia*, 53.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin P. Thomas, *Portrait for Posterity: Lincoln and his Biographers* (New Brunswick, 1947), 208.

<sup>6</sup> Drinkwater organized a private reading of his play at Charnwood's house before the play opened in Birmingham. Charnwood to Drinkwater, 15 Aug 1918, John Drinkwater Papers, Bienenke Library, Yale University.

<sup>7</sup> *New York Times*, 21 Dec 1919.

Lloyd George sent his congratulations and Charnwood told the playwright that his work 'stands the test of one's reflections in one's tub the next morning'.<sup>8</sup> The play apparently cast such a spell over its audience that night after night 'the audience somehow cannot leave its seats and the thought of the worry of the journey home and last "busses and trains is banished"'.<sup>9</sup> So great was the emotional impact of the play on a generation of theatregoers that a reviewer of a 1950s revival admitted that it was 'hard to judge objectively' since it was 'like some high summer pageant remembered from childhood'.<sup>10</sup>

The English 'cult' of Lincoln in the era of the world wars can be explained, up to a point, in terms of the specific political functions it served. Lloyd George's passionate eulogy for Lincoln in 1920 was no doubt coloured by his desire to bind the United States into a post-war alliance with Britain, just as twenty or so years later the wartime Anglo-American alliance led to a resurgence of Lincoln celebration. For Liberals, Lincoln was also an emblem of a non-socialist radical tradition. He could be presented as democratic but also individualistic; nationalist but also internationalist; from common stock but also of exceptional genius. Lincoln's popularity just after the First World War demonstrated the continued popular appeal of liberalism as a framework through which to understand the world even after it had supposedly perished alongside much other Edwardian optimism on the battlefields of Flanders. Lincoln, for Charnwood and Drinkwater's generation, was important in large measure because he chose to pursue liberal and moral ends through the mechanism of war. As such he provided an inspiration and a template for Lloyd George and, later, for Churchill.

In a larger sense, the meaning of Lincoln's image in England, as illustrated by the work of Charnwood and Drinkwater, is also the story of the place of America in the English imagination.<sup>11</sup> The ways in which

<sup>8</sup> David Lloyd George to Drinkwater, 17 Sep 1919; Charnwood to Drinkwater, 20 Feb 1919, Drinkwater Papers.

<sup>9</sup> Arnold Bennett, "'Introduction', to John Drinkwater", in *Abraham Lincoln* (London, 1919), iv.

<sup>10</sup> Review of the revival of *Abraham Lincoln* at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Oct 1952.

<sup>11</sup> This essay is primarily concerned with 'English' rather than Scottish, Welsh or Irish representations of Lincoln, but it is not always possible to avoid the elision of 'English' and 'British' that was commonplace among inter-war contemporaries and, as shall be suggested below, obtained particular meaning during the Second World War. It is, in any case, precisely this characteristic 'English' ambiguity about who exactly constitutes the 'other' with which this essay is concerned. 'England's evasion of popular nationalism', it has been suggested, 'is partly explained by a historical willingness to subordinate national expression to broader domestic and global structures of colonial and imperial power.' Simon Featherstone, *Englishness: Twentieth-Century Popular Culture and the Forming of English Identity* (Edinburgh, 2009), 3. The case of the 'cult' of Lincoln illustrates how foreign subjects could be simultaneously embraced as 'one of us' while also rarefied for their exoticism.

the United States has been represented in English culture has usually been at least as much a product of tensions and yearnings in English society as it has of the 'real' America. This was particularly true in the aftermath of the shattering experience of the Great War and in the moment when, for at least a few hopeful months during President Woodrow Wilson's triumphal European tour in 1919, it appeared that a new liberal world order would be created on the basis of American, or perhaps 'Anglo-American', values. This essay analyses the 'cult of Lincoln' as perhaps the most tangible expression of the ways in which the imagined America served the emotional and political needs of the post-Great-War moment—and continued to do so, to a greater or lesser extent, into the Second World War. Lincoln, as imagined by Charnwood, Drinkwater and other British admirers in these years, reflected but also played a critical symbolic role in creating the imagined America. By re-casting the Illinois rail-splitter as an 'Anglo-American' figure, one who, as Drinkwater put it, could have emerged just as easily on the banks of the Thames as the Mississippi, his British inter-war interpreters helped to domesticate the meaning of America, making it an alternative conduit for English liberties and English values, rather than a geopolitical threat. Lincoln, through his words as much as the tales of his deeds, also, crucially, offered a way of understanding and validating the sacrifice of the 'One Million Dead' of the British Empire. By articulating the values of democracy more eloquently than could any comparable British figure, Lincoln was to play the same rhetorical role after 1939. As is so often the case, the construction of a foreign figure illuminates much about the contests over national identity in this period.

### *Lincoln and Anglo-American Liberalism*

Fundamental to the British 'cult of Lincoln' was the recovery of his English roots. All Lincoln works published in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century located their subject genealogically in an Anglo-Saxon bloodline. A children's biography published just after the Great War emphasized that its subject was 'of English stock, being descended from Samuel Lincoln, who in 1638 had emigrated from England and settled in Massachusetts'.<sup>12</sup> In 1919, a bust of Lincoln was installed in the church in the village of Hingham in Norfolk, from where his ancestors were supposed to have emigrated.<sup>13</sup> Identifying

<sup>12</sup> Frank Mundell, *The Man Who Freed the Slaves: The Story of Abraham Lincoln* (London, n.d.), 2.

<sup>13</sup> On Lincoln's ancestry, see Ida M. Tarbell, *In the Footsteps of the Lincolns* (New York, 1924). On the erection of the Lincoln bust in Hingham, see *The Times*, 16 Oct 1919, 23 Sep 1923.

Lincoln's racial 'Englishness' was the purpose of such exercises, and he became the pre-eminent symbol of the idea that Britain and America were indissolubly bound together by ties of kinship. The notion of kinship in this sense implied much more than blood ties: it was a wider cultural and political concept suggesting a unity of values. And while it was an idea embraced by an Anglophile elite in the United States, it had the comforting implication, viewed from the eastern side of the Atlantic, that America was a straightforward outgrowth of England.

If one of the stumbling blocks to foreign admiration of Lincoln has been his status in American culture as a quintessentially American figure, this problem was overcome in early twentieth-century Britain by this expedient of recasting him within Anglo-Saxon racial ideology.<sup>14</sup> The idea that the United States was part of a 'Greater Britain', and that the American people were 'one branch of the great Anglo-Saxon family' had been a familiar one throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Initially, it was an idea most associated with radicals who saw the United States as a democratic model to be emulated. At the mass public meetings held all across Britain to mourn the assassination of Lincoln—meetings that were generally organized by radicals who had been most vocal in their support for the Union cause—the underlying assumption was that, in the words of a speaker at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 'this was not an assassination that had taken place in some foreign country, but it was an assassination in a land kindred to our own, speaking the same language, moved by the same impulses, and animated by the same principles'. The deep impact of Lincoln's death on the British public was reason to be optimistic, the speaker continued, that 'the two great nations of Anglo-Saxons would [henceforth] be united together, and on common principles and with common love should lead the civilisation of the world'.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Historians have only recently begun to explore the ways in which Lincoln's image travelled abroad after his death. See Eugenio F. Biagini *et al.*, 'Interchange: The Global Lincoln', *Journal of American History*, 96 (2009), 462–99; Richard J. Carwardine and Jay Sexton (eds), *The Global Lincoln* (New York, 2010). On the notion of Anglo-Saxonism and its relationship to English and American national identity, see Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, CT, 2006), especially 59–105; Robert Colls, 'Englishness and the Political Culture', in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds), *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880–1920* (London, 1986), 29–61.

<sup>15</sup> On the idea of a 'Greater Britain', see Duncan Bell, *The Idea of a Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton, 2008). The phrase was popularized by Sir Charles Dilke's best-selling book, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries*, 2 vols (London, 1868). For the phrase about the two branches of the 'Anglo-Saxon race', see *Daily News*, 30 Jan 1899.

<sup>16</sup> *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 5 May 1865.

This 'transatlantic ideology', an international sense of community and solidarity, did not simply run alongside nationalist feelings, in some respects it reinforced them.<sup>17</sup> British observers reinforced the notion that America was indissolubly linked to Britain through ties of race and language. Writing in the 1880s, the Oxford medievalist E.A. Freeman explained that the United States was simply 'England with a difference', a 'mighty commonwealth of our own blood and speech'.<sup>18</sup> In *Greater Britain* (1868), perhaps the most influential exposition of the idea of a world-encircling Anglo-Saxon race, Sir Charles Dilke argued that in America, 'the peoples of the world are being fused together, but they are run into an English mould: Alfred's laws and Chaucer's tongue are theirs... Through America England is speaking to the world'.<sup>19</sup> The national historical imaginations of each drew on similar ideas and many of the same events. Both countries shared a Whig narrative of their own pasts in which English liberties were tested, and ultimately triumphed, against enemies at home and abroad. The Magna Carta became, in American school textbooks, an early battle in the struggle for American liberty, just as by the early twentieth century, George Washington was being re-evaluated in England as a landed Anglican gentleman fighting for traditional English liberties as his forefathers had done back home. The American Revolution was increasingly reinterpreted as a regrettable and unnatural schism, caused at least as much by the 'obstinacy of a not yet bitted and bridled king' as by the 'folly' of a few Americans.<sup>20</sup> For the English at least, the expansion of the story of English freedom to include America had prospective as well as retrospective purposes; as well as a great past, the two nations together had 'a great common destiny... to make plain to the world the word of righteousness, peace, liberty, and religion'.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See Mike Sewell, "'All the English-Speaking Race is in Mourning': The Assassination of President Garfield and Anglo-American Relations", *Historical Journal*, 34 (1991), 665–86.

<sup>18</sup> E.A. Freeman, *Some Impressions of the United States* (London, 1883), 62.

<sup>19</sup> Dilke, *Greater Britain*, ix.

<sup>20</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Sep 1919. The new-found respect for Washington paralleled but was always overshadowed by the 'cult of Lincoln'. Its most obvious manifestation was the creation of the Sulgrave Institution, a joint British and American venture to restore the Washington family's ancestral home in Northamptonshire. See Marquis of Crew, *The Sulgrave Institution and the Anglo-American Society* (London, 1922). The liberal intellectual Goldwin Smith had advocated ever-closer Anglo-American co-operation since the 1860s and in all his writings deplored the fact that something as unsavoury as a revolution had been necessary back in the 1770s. Goldwin Smith, 'The Schism in the Anglo-Saxon Race', an address delivered before the Canadian Club of New York, in G.M. Fairchild (ed.), *Canadian Leaves: History, Art, Science, Literature, Commerce: A Series of New Papers read before the Canadian Club of New York* (New York, 1887).

<sup>21</sup> Horne C. Silvester, 'The Cromwell Tercentenary', *The London Quarterly Review* 92 (1899), 124–39.

In 1907, this imagined Anglo-American community provided the leitmotif for the first full-length biography of Lincoln written by a British author, Henry Bryan Binns, a minor poet. Binns had not conducted any original research, but intended his book to convey his deep admiration for American democracy and its promise of authentic personal freedom. Lincoln was a man who, for Binns, was truly free because his 'acts emanated from...and expressed [his] whole personality'; he was to be admired and understood as a Whitmanesque exemplar of how democracy could transform the self.<sup>22</sup> The Anglo-Saxon roots of the Great American Democrat were, however, never far from the surface. 'We cannot...allow America to monopolise Abraham Lincoln', wrote Binns, 'the English have a claim upon him prior even to the American; for if in tracing back his path to its starting place...we find ourselves among the Lincolns on this side of the sea'. For Binns, Lincoln's English identity was synonymous with a radical liberal tradition. 'In spirit, as by origin, he is of that household of liberty which sojourned for so many centuries in this England of ours', Binns wrote; 'his republicanism comes of the stock of that of our Pymys and Hampdens, it is of the same spirit as are the songs of his favourite Burns'.<sup>23</sup> Lincoln's image in early twentieth-century Britain reflected the vibrancy of the rhetorical tradition of imagining Englishness in terms of a long battle for Anglo-Saxon liberty. As John Drinkwater was later to write, 'To see Lincoln moulding himself in the quiet and unsensational landscape of his homeland is to remember another figure so little like him in appearance, and the long, lonely fens among which Cromwell brooded upon his country's destiny until he too rose from middle age to the direction of a troubled people.'<sup>24</sup>

The looming anniversary of a century of peace between the United Kingdom and the United States since the 1815 Treaty of Ghent stimulated a rash of publications celebrating the Anglo-Americans as the guarantors of world peace and liberty. Some explicitly predicted a formal political reunion between the two countries; others simply an ever greater harmony between the two 'branches' of the Anglo-Saxon race. H.S. Perris, the author of one of the most influential texts in this genre of Anglo-American exegesis argued that the beneficence of Anglo-American power should not be interpreted in too narrowly

<sup>22</sup> From the introduction to the 1927 Everyman edition: Binns, *Abraham Lincoln* (London, 1927), x. Binns' first biographical work was *A Life of Walt Whitman* (London, 1905) which had also emphasized this central idea of 'authenticity' as the essence of freedom and attainable only in Democratic culture. Binns, *Freedom as Creative Power* (London, 1920) develops this philosophical theme at length. Binns also edited a selection of the works of John Greenleaf Whittier: Binns (ed.), *John Greenleaf Whittier: Selected Poems* (London, 1908).

<sup>23</sup> Henry Bryan Binns, *Abraham Lincoln* (London, 1907), 2–3.

<sup>24</sup> John Drinkwater, *Lincoln: The World Emancipator* (Boston and New York, 1920), 80.



racial a way. His was, at root, an argument about culture and values, the outlines of which would have been recognizable to the mid-nineteenth-century free-trader and Americanophile Richard Cobden: a liberal order that was the guarantor of peace and prosperity. In this vision, Lincoln also came to the fore, as much for his 'character' as for his deeds: humane, liberal, reasoned and determined.<sup>25</sup> Within the ambit of the community of transatlantic liberals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Lincoln was celebrated for championing quintessential liberal causes: abolitionism, democracy, meritocracy and national self-determination within an internationalist moral framework. Lincoln's American exceptionalism notwithstanding, his vision was praised for its universalism. Lord Bryce, hailed as the 'British Tocqueville' for his massive work *The American Commonwealth*, told an American audience in 1907 that Lincoln 'belongs not to the United States but to the whole of civilised mankind. It is no exaggeration to say that he has, within the last thirty years, grown to be a conspicuous figure in the history of the world. ... The guidance he gave has affected the march of events ever since.'<sup>26</sup>

In Britain, the United States and Canada, committees were formed to organize the celebration of the century of peace among the 'English speaking peoples'.<sup>27</sup> The coming of the Great War prevented the scheduled celebrations but only intensified the feelings that had prompted the committees to form in the first place. By the summer of 1918, with British Empire and American troops fighting side by side on the Western Front, the 'Anglo-Saxon' community seemed a more tangible reality than ever before and it was in this context that Charnwood's evocation of Lincoln as the embodiment of the values for which the British and the Americans were together fighting hit home. At the unveiling of the Lincoln statue in Westminster in 1920, speakers sought to locate Lincoln in a transatlantic racial and political community, emphasizing his English ancestry and the qualities of 'steadfastness and courage ... which men of British stock have so often displayed in war and peace'. In his speech at that occasion, Lord Bryce turned dramatically to Elihu Root, the President of the Carnegie

<sup>25</sup> H.S. Perris, *A Short History of Anglo-American Relations and of the Hundred Years' Peace* (London, 1914), 230, 299–300.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 14 Feb 1909.

<sup>27</sup> On the Peace Committees, see *New York Times*, 31 Dec 1911 and 16 Mar 1916; American Committee for the Celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of Peace Among English Speaking Peoples, 1914–15, *General prospectus of the project to celebrate the centenary of the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, which established lasting peace between America and Great Britain; as well as the plan to signalize in fitting manner, the peace which has existed between the United States, Great Britain and other nations* (New York, 1913); Henry Cabot Lodge, *One Hundred Years of Peace* (New York, 1913); Stuart Anderson, *Race and Rapprochement: Anglo-Saxonism and Anglo-American Relations, 1895–1904* (Rutherford, NJ, 1981).



Endowment for International Peace and the leading American representative at the statue unveiling, and declaimed of Lincoln: 'he is ours, sir, almost as much as he is yours!'<sup>28</sup>

Abraham Lincoln—'that knightly son of our blood' as *The Times* once called him—with his conviction that freedom could be advanced through struggle, and that true freedom must be combined with law, was the ideal Anglo-American symbol, who, as the *Manchester Guardian* put it, 'may well be taken to typify much that is strongest and most characteristic in the race'.<sup>29</sup> His embrace by the English people would, in turn, help to secure the destiny of the two 'branches of the Anglo-Saxon people'. The very Lincolnian idea of the special mission, or covenant, of the American people—the idea that the American Union was the 'last, best hope of earth'—closely resembled, in form, the Victorian English sense of the unique God-given role of the British Empire as the upholder of liberty in the world. The ideology of 'Anglo-Saxonism' in effect blurred these two parallel conceptions of special election into one civilizing mission. Liberals could embrace these kinds of racial concepts as easily as conservatives and so the precise political content of Anglo-Saxon liberties varied tremendously. For the liberal *Manchester Guardian*, for example, Anglo-American liberties involved the defence of the working man and the liberation of undeveloped or oppressed people while *The Times* stressed the themes of national greatness. For both, Lincoln served as a universal embodiment of the idea of Anglo-Saxon moral purpose and, implicitly or explicitly, of the moral and material superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race.

### *The Statue Controversy*

The political differences that could be encompassed within the context of this Anglo-American Lincoln were exposed by the controversy that raged during the First World War over which particular Lincoln statue should be erected in London.<sup>30</sup> In 1914, the American Peace Centenary Committee agreed to raise funds to donate a replica of the Saint-Gaudens statue, but the war disrupted their plans and nothing had happened by 1917 when a faction of the American Committee led by John A. Stewart proposed to their British counterparts, the British Peace Centenary Committee, to send a copy of George Gray Barnard's new Lincoln statue instead.<sup>31</sup> Barnard was a modernist sculptor whose

<sup>28</sup> *The Times*, 29 Jul 1920.

<sup>29</sup> *The Times*, 23 Apr 1918; *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Sep 1919.

<sup>30</sup> The fullest account of this bizarre controversy is Frederick C. Moffatt, *Errant Bronzes: George Grey Barnard's Statues of Abraham Lincoln* (London, 1998), especially 108–20.

<sup>31</sup> 'The Barnard Lincoln', *American Magazine of Art*, 9 (1918), 160; 'The Proposed Lincoln Statue Again', *American Magazine of Art*, 9 (1918), 292; 'The Proposed Gift to Great Britain of a Statue of Lincoln', 9 (1918), 374–6.

Lincoln statue had polarized opinion when it was erected in Cincinnati. If the Saint-Gaudens Lincoln could be hailed as the embodiment of virtuous Anglo-Saxon liberal statesmanship, Barnard's was, as he put it himself, 'far from the official Lincoln'.<sup>32</sup> As the art historian Frederick Moffatt has argued, it was an 'anti-statue': not the representation of a hero in the conventional mode, but the defiant celebration of the homely, ordinary man.<sup>33</sup> Barnard's principal financial backer was Charles A. Taft, brother of the former president, and the enthusiasts for the statue included Theodore Roosevelt who acclaimed it as the 'living Lincoln, the great Democrat...the Lincoln of the Lincoln-Douglas debates'.<sup>34</sup> Stewart assured the chairman of the British Committee that the Barnard statue 'will appeal to your people, because it will present a man and not an idealized effigy'.<sup>35</sup>

The two very different statues aroused strong emotions. A friend of Barnard denounced the Saint-Gaudens statue as an 'artistic autocrat', while the plan to send a copy of Barnard's Lincoln to England mobilized an extraordinarily vociferous and well-organized lobby to oppose it.<sup>36</sup> Lincoln's only surviving son Robert denounced the statue as 'simply horrible' and freely told correspondents that he was 'doing everything possible' to prevent it going to England.<sup>37</sup> The British government was heavily lobbied to refuse the Barnard Lincoln. 'Mr Barnard', wrote the prolific collector of Lincoln memorabilia, Judd Stewart, had perpetrated nothing less than a 'monstrosity' by 'depicting President Lincoln as a weakling with an immature body, with atrocious hands and feet and with a face that instead of showing the greatness of character possessed by Abraham Lincoln shows an almost painful expression of insipidity and weakness'. If the statue were erected in Parliament Square, Stewart wrote to the British Commissioner of Public Works, 'it will be a lasting shame to the donors and to the people of London'.<sup>38</sup> The British Ambassador to Washington, Sir Cecil Spring Rice, drily summarized the controversy to A.J. Balfour in the Foreign Office:

<sup>32</sup> George Gray Barnard to Henry D. Rankin, 15 Jan 1917, George Gray Barnard Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

<sup>33</sup> Moffatt, *Errant Bronzes*, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Copy of telegram, John A. Stewart to George Gray Barnard, 30 Mar 1917, Barnard Papers.

<sup>35</sup> TNA: PRO Work 20/106, John A. Stewart of the 'American Peace Centenary Committee' to Lord Weardale, chair of the 'British Peace Centenary Committee', 30 Mar 1917.

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Humphrey to George Gray Barnard, 14 Jun 1919, Barnard Papers.

<sup>37</sup> Copy of Robert Todd Lincoln to Isaac Markens, 28 Aug 1917, Barnard Papers.

<sup>38</sup> TNA: PRO Work 20/106, Judd Stewart of the American Smelting and Refining Company to Sir Alfred Mond, 20 Oct 1917; Judd Stewart to Mond, 22 Nov 1917.

The statue is of colossal size, especially as regards the extremities – the hands, feet and neck. Mr Barnard has never seen Lincoln but he obtained the services of a model of a professional rail splitter of many years standing. The shape and size of the hands is especially remarkable and their pose suggests a severe attack of intestinal trouble. The critics of this work of art argued that Lincoln was by profession a lawyer, not a rail splitter (although he helped his father erect a fence round his farm) and that what that distinguished statesman suffered from during the civil war, was rather heartache than the stomach ache. In the opinion of these critics the size of the statue and its striking character will not fail (if it is erected on the proposed site) to attract universal and possibly accentuated comment, especially from the nomadic street population in the neighbourhood of Westminster.

He added that Robert Todd Lincoln was of the view that the proposal, if carried out, would be nothing short of an ‘international calamity’.<sup>39</sup> In the end, the Saint-Gaudens Lincoln won the day and was duly erected in London, but, since a copy of the Barnard statue had already been cast, a home for it was found in Manchester, where it was unveiled in a strangely low-key ceremony in 1919.<sup>40</sup>

While this controversy is revealing about the tensions within the American construction of Lincoln, it also highlighted the different purposes to which the notion of an Anglo-American Lincoln could be put. For the British author H.S. Perris it was Lincoln’s democratic man-of-the-people credentials that made him the embodiment of the Anglo-American community. On a visit to the United States in 1917, he was shown the Barnard statue by members of the American Peace Centenary Committee and declared, ‘Abraham Lincoln, of all men, typifies the ideal we fight for’. The piece of art in front of him, he thought, would ‘do more for humanity...than any other statue existing’ and ‘will give the people of England a great lesson in Democracy’.<sup>41</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* mounted a stout defence of the controversial monument, arguing that ‘London, in possessing the St Gaudens statue, will have Lincoln the President; Manchester has Lincoln the man.’<sup>42</sup> Yet it was precisely this representation of Lincoln as Everyman that offended so many British Lincolnophiles. ‘It is claimed

<sup>39</sup> TNA: PRO Work 20/106, Cecil Spring Rice to A.J. Balfour, 29 Nov 1917.

<sup>40</sup> On the Manchester statue unveiling see Moffatt, *Errant Bronzes*; H.S. Perris to George Gray Barnard, 19 Sep 1919, Barnard Papers.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Mr Perris...spoken before the statue and the American Committee’, typescript in the Barnard Papers. Frederick C. Moffatt thinks that the remarks were probably made on a visit on 19 Oct 1917 to the foundry to view the statue intended for London, although Perris also saw the original Barnard statue *in situ* in Cincinnati a few days earlier. Moffatt, *Errant Bronzes*, 218, n. 32.

<sup>42</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Sep 1919.

that [the Barnard statue] represents "the man of the people", and not the statesman', sniffed a correspondent to *The Times*, but 'it is the statesman who...gave freedom to the slaves; the statesman...who lives in history and...should be commemorated in this country, and not merely the awkward, shambling figure the sculptor has chosen to hand down to future generations.'<sup>43</sup> Lord Charnwood, who was personally friendly with Robert Todd Lincoln, entered the fray on behalf of the Saint-Gaudens Lincoln, noting, during a debate on the matter in the House of Lords, that Barnard had used as his model for Lincoln a man who had been born and raised on a farm in Kentucky only a few miles from Lincoln's birthplace, and that 'a more insufficient recommendation for a portrait I can hardly conceive'.<sup>44</sup>

The strong feelings engendered by the Barnard statue were undeniable, yet at the same time they should not obscure the more important point, which was that both statues were embraced (albeit by different people) as the embodiment of the Anglo-American union. Identical rhetoric—toasts to 'Anglo-American friendship, the foundation of the world's peace'—accompanied the unveiling of both statues.<sup>45</sup> The political differences between the supporters of each work of art can easily be exaggerated; while the effigies became convenient shorthand for opposing Lincoln 'types' (Barnard's Lincoln as the unrefined man of the people and Saint-Gaudens' as the great statesman), in practice these images overlapped. Although he became the Barnard statue's most vociferous British critic, Lord Charnwood was, nevertheless, cited by Barnard's supporters as an inspiration. His biography—widely read and admired in America as well as in Britain—had, after all, emphasized Lincoln's humble origins and his refusal thereafter to 'introduce tidiness or method into his office'.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, to his friend the Canadian-born sculptor R. Tait McKenzie, Charnwood defended the Saint-Gaudens statue because it was a *better* representation of a working man than Barnard's: 'The St. Gaudens' statue was really like a working man in the clothes which a working man would wear as President or to be sculpted, while Barnard's was not in the least like a working man but much more like a minor poet who had gone under.'<sup>47</sup>

Both the 'Barnard' and the 'Saint-Gaudens' Lincoln were of value to David Lloyd George. Long an admirer of Lincoln, as were many others from his nonconformist Welsh background, Lloyd George conceived of himself as a warrior-statesman who, like his hero, could reconcile

<sup>43</sup> Letter to the editor from F. C. De Sumichrast, *The Times*, 2 Oct 1917.

<sup>44</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), Vol. 27, 11 Dec 1917, 99.

<sup>45</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 16 Sep 1919.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Moffatt, *Errant Bronzes*, 116.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Moffatt, *Errant Bronzes*, 117.

liberalism with war, and he quoted Lincoln tirelessly to make the point that the war must continue until the worthy object for which it was being fought was won.<sup>48</sup> As Winston Churchill was later to do in the Second World War, Lloyd George turned instinctively to Lincoln in his rhetorical efforts to persuade America to join the war effort, but it is clear that for both men this was no cynical ploy. Lincoln's example was deeply felt.<sup>49</sup> In February 1918, with the United States finally committed to the fight, Lincoln's birthday was marked at a gala celebration in London. Woodrow Wilson, proclaimed one speaker, to cheers, was 'another Lincoln' in his 'aversion to war' but who 'faced its immeasurable trials and sacrifices unflinchingly and unafraid'. Both Lincoln and Wilson had 'gone to war for democracy, and they could only wage it successfully if they tackled it from every standpoint in a democratic manner'.<sup>50</sup> Both also offered the emotionally powerful hope of a redemptive purpose to the suffering. In Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, a remarkable speech in which he had talked about the meaning of the war and his vision for post-war reconstruction, *The Times* found a text for the times: "'with malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right'", we also should set ourselves to the work of tomorrow'.<sup>51</sup> The evening concluded with the singing of a 'Reunion Anthem', the first verse of which was 'God Save the King', the second was 'My country, 'tis of thee' and the third, written for the occasion, began 'United now to save/The rights our fathers gave'.<sup>52</sup>

Although this Anglo-American ideology was essentially British in origin, the participation of the United States in the Great War reinforced Anglophile feelings in the United States too. The American Defence Society organized local chapters to celebrate 'British Day' on 7 December 1918. At the lunch of the Pilgrims of the United States at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in New York, toasts were made to the King, the flags of Britain and the United States stood entwined, and the chairman, Chauncey Depew, got a cheer from the audience when he declared that there 'already was a league of nations—the union of the English-Speaking Peoples of the world—and that league encircled the globe'. In theatres across the United States, a message was read out acknowledging the gratitude of the United States to Britain and the Empire for 'duty seen and duty done in spirit of self-sacrifice which

<sup>48</sup> On Lloyd George's admiration for Lincoln, see Lloyd George to Drinkwater, 17 Sep 1919; and Kenneth O. Morgan's essay in Carwardine and Sexton (eds), *The Global Lincoln*.

<sup>49</sup> For Lloyd George's 'Lincoln Day' message to the American people in 1917, see *New York Times*, 12 Feb 1917. A critical review of the letter appears in *Manchester Guardian*, 12 Feb 1917.

<sup>50</sup> *The Times*, 13 Feb 1918.

<sup>51</sup> *The Times*, 29 Jul 1920.

<sup>52</sup> *The Times*, 13 Feb 1918.

forms one of the most glorious pages of history'. Meanwhile in Bennington, Vermont, descendants of the men who defeated the British in a Revolutionary war battle in 1777 held a ceremony to mark the 'formal burying of all the old-time prejudice against England'. The *New York Times* reported that British flags were flying from the public buildings and most of the residences and British songs were sung.<sup>53</sup>

By the time the Saint-Gaudens statue of Lincoln was erected in Westminster, some of the hopes raised in the immediate aftermath of the Armistice had already faded, not least because of the US Senate's rejection of the League of Nations Treaty. Yet the power of Lincoln's image was only enhanced by the gap between the idealized America he represented and the isolationist contemporary reality. As David Lloyd George put it, 'this torn and bleeding earth is calling today for the help of the America of Abraham Lincoln'.<sup>54</sup> In retrospect it seems rather ironic that the Westminster statue unveiling—a great symbolic moment of Anglo-American unity—should have coincided with the beginning of the long, slow disentangling of that sense of a shared past. Lincoln represented not only the 'America England wanted', but the common ground between the two nations.

### *Charnwood and Drinkwater*

It is within this context of an imagined Anglo-American political and racial community, and of an embattled but still potent transatlantic liberalism, that Charnwood's *Lincoln* should be understood. Godfrey Rathbone Benson combined scholarly work with a political career. His involvement in the Liberal Party and brief period as an MP was recognized by his elevation to the peerage by Prime Minister Herbert Asquith in 1911 and, as the first Baron Charnwood, he was thereafter an active member of the House of Lords known for his strong support for Irish Home Rule and Imperial Federation.<sup>55</sup> Like Binns before him, Charnwood did not do any archival research for his Lincoln book, but he made extensive use of Nicolay and Hay's multi-volume biography and read widely in American history and contemporary published sources. *Abraham Lincoln* is an elegantly written and deeply shrewd book, placing Lincoln fully in his political context and with a sure appreciation of the pressures he faced and the ways in which he grew as a leader in office.

<sup>53</sup> *New York Times*, 24 Nov; 6, 7, 8 Dec 1918.

<sup>54</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Jul 1920.

<sup>55</sup> Humphrey Sumner, 'Benson, Godfrey Rathbone, first Baron Charnwood (1864–1945)' rev. Marc Brodie, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30715, accessed 15 Sep 2008].

Charnwood argued that his 'outsider' status gave him a greater scholarly objectivity than previous authors had been able to bring to the subject. Yet what gave Charnwood's *Lincoln* its popular impact in wartime and post-war Britain was less the author's scholarship and more his appreciation of Lincoln's contemporary relevance. Ever since he first visited the United States as a young man Charnwood had been captivated by Lincoln, whom he regarded as the perfect embodiment of the Christian graces of 'honesty, humility [and] generosity'.<sup>56</sup> More broadly, Charnwood's admiration of and fascination with the American republic and its history underpin the book. American democracy, he once wrote, was 'the most helpful agency for uplifting man everywhere' and it was through Lincoln that the universalism of the promise of the United States found its purest, least parochial expression.<sup>57</sup> With his Shakespearean eloquence, Lincoln's genius, in Charnwood's view, was to encapsulate profound and complex truths in simple terms. This, of course, made him a man of universal significance, not a purely American figure.

According to Lady Charnwood, her husband conceived of his book as a 'war service'.<sup>58</sup> That was certainly how it was received. The host of writers whom Charnwood inspired to attempt their own Lincoln interpretation often had an even more overtly presentist purpose. 'In saving the Union,' wrote J. Alfred Sharpe in a 1919 Lincoln study, '[Lincoln] enabled America to play her role in the world, [making it] safe for democracy. His achievement becomes all the greater as time goes on.'<sup>59</sup> Another author, Herbert R. Allport, was moved to poetry as he rejoiced that

England, which has fought abreast with the United States in the day of Armageddon now associates herself with the homage which they have rendered to the memory of Abraham Lincoln: 'For such a leader lifts his times/Out of the regions of the night/And falling grandly as he climbs/Falls with his face towards the Light'.<sup>60</sup>

And so Lincoln became the guarantor of Anglo-American unity even as he enabled the rise of the United States to a position where it could challenge British supremacy.

John Drinkwater's play, *Abraham Lincoln*, was by far the most successful of the British Lincoln works that appeared in the wake of Charnwood's influential volume. Of its initial run in Birmingham in

<sup>56</sup> Lord Charnwood, 'Address in Springfield, Illinois', *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 12 (1920), 498–502.

<sup>57</sup> Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York, 1995), 200–1.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 200.

<sup>59</sup> J. Alfred Sharpe, *Abraham Lincoln* (London, 1919), 13–14.

<sup>60</sup> Herbert R. Allport, *Abraham Lincoln* (London, 1923), 80.



1918, the local press reported that 'no audience at [this] theatre has been so moved'.<sup>61</sup> While Lincoln's own words feature heavily in the script, Drinkwater sought to heighten the epic quality of the piece by introducing the potentially distracting device of two 'Chroniclers' to comment at the beginning and end of each scene in doleful verse like a parody of a Greek Chorus. This was widely regarded as a dramatic failure (Charnwood told Drinkwater that they were an unnecessary 'interruption') and they were removed from most revivals of the play, but their words offer a commentary on Drinkwater's perception of Lincoln's significance.<sup>62</sup> The play does not attempt historical accuracy, nor did Drinkwater make any concessions to American idiom or what he called 'local colour'. As one reviewer remarked about a later revival, 'this is a very English play, and to try to make it anything else would be to falsify it'.<sup>63</sup> This deliberate Anglicization of Lincoln may have been a decision born of necessity, but it could be turned to a didactic purpose. 'If we set aside for the moment what we call the local idiom of his character', wrote Drinkwater, 'there is but one country in the world outside America that could by any chance have produced a man of the exact intellectual cast and moral significance of Lincoln, and it is England'.<sup>64</sup> In his reluctance to go to war, but his determination to fight for what was right once the battle was joined, Drinkwater's Lincoln reflected back to English audiences the way in which they liked to imagine themselves. He was 'a man driven by conscience to do what most of all things in the world he hated doing'.<sup>65</sup>

For Drinkwater, the important point was that this rough-hewn, humble man had what one reviewer called a 'reconciling sweep' that encompassed the whole world. A couple of years after the play was first performed, Drinkwater published a short book, *Lincoln: The World Emancipator* (1920), a romantic meditation, some of it in verse, which elaborated the world-historical significance of his hero. The animating idea, for Drinkwater, was that Lincoln was 'the concrete symbol' around which 'abstract aspirations' about Anglo-American unity could take shape. Nationalism, Drinkwater argued, was essential to liberty because it gave everyone, even those critical of the government, a 'spiritual mooring'. Only in England and America, he argued, did

<sup>61</sup> *Birmingham Post*, 14 Oct 1918, Arnold Ridley clippings file, Theatre Collection, Bristol University Library.

<sup>62</sup> Charnwood to Drinkwater, 20 Feb 1919, Drinkwater Papers. One critic later observed 'in soaring up, [the Chroniclers] left the landscape flat'. Herbert Farjeon, 'Abraham Lincoln', *Time and Tide* 24 (1943), 16. The Chroniclers do not appear in the cast lists in the programmes produced for the production at the Old Vic and Saddlers' Wells in 1931–32, for example. The programme is in the Theatre Collection, Bristol University Library.

<sup>63</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Oct 1952.

<sup>64</sup> John Drinkwater, *Lincoln: The World Emancipator* (Boston and New York, 1920), 45.

<sup>65</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Oct 1952. Review of the revival of *Abraham Lincoln* at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

liberty and national unity perfectly reinforce one another. Lincoln's 'instinctive discovery of the great principle of individual liberty within national unity' was possible because this 'guiding principle' had been 'permeating the life of one people more dominantly than that of any other for generations when Lincoln's nation was born, and that people was the English'.<sup>66</sup> This 'strange' synthesis of liberty and national unity, Drinkwater argued, was the 'profoundly mystical idea' at the 'very roots' of the two nations.<sup>67</sup> 'If there is one force above all others that can foster the future political and social well-being of the world', Drinkwater wrote, 'I have no hesitation in saying that it is a right understanding and cooperation between the American and English peoples. ... The two races together make up an agency that is in the forefront of the world in physical vigour, in commercial enterprise and experience, in public spirit, in artistic vitality, and in reputation for personal integrity.'<sup>68</sup> And 'Honest Abe' Lincoln was the perfect embodiment of those virtues. Drinkwater's Lincoln was a great philosopher in his own way, but he was as unlike the *philosophes* of the French Enlightenment as it was possible to be. His mission, as expressed by the Chroniclers in Drinkwater's play, was not abstract theorizing but to 'Make as one the names again/Of Liberty and Law' and to do so in a practical, real sense.<sup>69</sup>

The *Times*' critic's observation that Drinkwater's Lincoln was 'more Barnard statue than Saint-Gaudens', though it was probably intended pejoratively, captured something important—and, indeed, Drinkwater himself once commented that the Barnard Lincoln was 'perhaps the greatest' work of art 'that America has produced'.<sup>70</sup> What Drinkwater conveyed very well, both in the play and in *World Emancipator*, was the juxtaposition of transcendent wisdom with Whitmanesque (or Shakespearean) humanity.

<sup>66</sup> Drinkwater, *Lincoln: The World Emancipator*, 79.

<sup>67</sup> Drinkwater, *Lincoln: The World Emancipator*, 7. Drinkwater explored these ideas further in a less commercially successful, but more dramatically effective play, *Robert E. Lee* (London, 1923), in which the Confederate General is sympathetically portrayed as opposed to slavery and ambivalent about secession, but determined to do his duty as he saw it.

<sup>68</sup> Drinkwater, *Lincoln: The World Emancipator*, 30.

<sup>69</sup> Drinkwater, *Abraham Lincoln*, 6.

<sup>70</sup> *Touchstone*, Feb 1920, quoted in George Gray Barnard to F.W. Biersheim, 19 Feb 1920, Barnard Papers. Drinkwater also wrote of the Barnard statue that 'in every basic principle of the art it is as profound and as exact as are the creations of Michael Angelo himself', *Lincoln: The World Emancipator*, 107.

*England and the 'America of Abraham Lincoln'*

By promoting Lincoln as, in effect, one of the great poets as well as the great statesmen of 'Anglo-America', Charnwood and Drinkwater anticipated some of the most important ways in which Lincoln's image would be used when war broke out again. Lloyd George's plea in 1920 for the 'America of Abraham Lincoln' was repeated with even greater urgency after 1939. In 1941, the Ministry of Information film *Words for Battle*, directed by Humphrey Jennings and with a voice-over by Lawrence Olivier, offered a potted history of the idea of liberty in English history. Images of the white cliffs of Dover, rolling hills, sleepy villages and magnificent cathedrals, are accompanied by the words of Milton, Browning, Blake and Kipling. We hear Churchill's words too, but it is not an Englishman but the Kentucky-born Lincoln who provides the climax. The camera focuses on the Saint-Gaudens statue, gradually panning out so that we see it in its very English wartime setting. People hurry past on their way to work carrying umbrellas while military vehicles trundle through Parliament Square in front of Lincoln's impassive gaze. Olivier then reads the final sentence of the Gettysburg Address with one small but significant alteration: 'this nation' becomes the more universal 'the nation'.<sup>71</sup> Blake and Milton evoked a tradition of English liberty and Churchill offered defiance, but it was to Lincoln that Jennings had to turn to find words to express the democratic idea that it was the ordinary people of England—not rulers or landscape or beautiful buildings—who made England worth fighting for. Just as Drinkwater found in Lincoln a figure that embodied the English spirit of liberty, so Jennings needed Lincoln's authentic democratic faith to bring home grand words about freedom and democracy, to make them seem real and everyday.

The frequency with which Lincoln's image and Lincoln's words appeared in Britain during the Second World War suggests that in this respect Jennings was not alone. The John Ford film *Young Mr Lincoln* starring Henry Fonda opened in England just as war began, a juxtaposition that Graham Greene, for one, found fortuitous. 'There now seems an added value in this attempt to draw in the simplest of least rhetorical terms a man who cared passionately for justice', he wrote in the *Spectator*.<sup>72</sup> When, in 1940, British cinemas showed *Spirit of the People*, a film version of Robert E. Sherwood's play *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, the critics agreed that the film was worth seeing just to

<sup>71</sup> Copies of the film are held by the National Archives and by the British Film Institute and can be viewed online at <<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/727923/>> (accessed 4 Oct 2008).

<sup>72</sup> *Spectator*, 22 Sep 1939. A similar point was made retrospectively by *The Times* film critic when *Young Mr Lincoln* was re-released after the war. *The Times*, 7 Oct 1955. 'Young Mr Lincoln' clippings file, British Film Institute Library.

hear some of Lincoln's words despite 'an almost total lack of dramatic structure or emotional power'.<sup>73</sup>

The United States' eventual declaration of war was interpreted as evidence that the 'spirit of Abraham Lincoln' had returned.<sup>74</sup> The King quoted Lincoln in his Christmas Day broadcast in 1942 and when American GIs arrived in Britain the Anglo-American alliance was reinforced by 'friendship services' in churches, joint military parades and countless civic events from which Lincoln's legacy was rarely absent.<sup>75</sup> Lincoln's letter to the Manchester working men with its useful expressions of Anglo-American friendship probably became the most familiar Lincoln text in these years. Lincoln's birthday was marked in 1943, 1944 and 1945 with church services in London, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle and other places.<sup>76</sup> On Lincoln's birthday in 1944 the BBC mounted a technically ambitious broadcast combining Vice-President Wallace's Lincoln Day Address from Springfield, Illinois, with a sermon on Lincoln's legacy by the Archbishop of Canterbury (who quoted the Gettysburg address) in Westminster Abbey, and, from beside the Lincoln statue in the square, a talk about Lincoln, democracy and the cause of freedom by the young Tory MP Quintin Hogg.<sup>77</sup> Drinkwater's ubiquitous play was revived in the West End in 1940 and ran continuously through the Blitz and until the end of the war. It was simultaneously performed at the Bristol Old Vic (with Herbert Lomas, who later found fame in horror movies, in the lead role), at the Liverpool Playhouse in 1943 and then toured in rep for the rest of the war.<sup>78</sup> The BBC broadcast a radio adaptation in 1943.<sup>79</sup>

Audience research for the BBC showed that the wartime listening public regarded the American people as pampered, materialistic and self-interested.<sup>80</sup> Since the Lincoln statues had been erected in Manchester and London, the America of Abraham Lincoln had been overwhelmed, in the British public imagination, by glamorous Hollywood images of material abundance and technological superiority.

<sup>73</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 11 Jun 1940.

<sup>74</sup> Jan Smuts quoted in *The Times*, 2 Jan 1941.

<sup>75</sup> *The Times*, 28 Dec 1942. The King quoted Lincoln telling a story about a boy carrying an even smaller boy up a hill. When asked if the burden was not too much for him, he replied 'it's not a burden, it's my brother!' This alleged Lincoln quote was recycled in several compendiums of quotations and proverbs published around that time, but its origins are unclear. Bernhardt Wall, *Following Abraham Lincoln, 1809–1865* (New York, 1943); William Gurney Benham, *Book of Quotations, Proverbs and Household Words* (New York, 1949).

<sup>76</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Jan 1943, 6 Feb 1943, 14 Feb 1944.

<sup>77</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Feb 1944; *The Times*, 14 Feb 1944.

<sup>78</sup> Bristol Old Vic, programmes file, Theatre Collection, Bristol University Library; *Manchester Guardian*, 18 Apr 1940, 6 Feb 1943.

<sup>79</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 19 May 1943.

<sup>80</sup> Siân Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC* (Manchester, 1996), 177.

The popular cultural expansion of American influence in the inter-war years coincided with the waning of the old radical image of the United States as a land of opportunity for working men. Whereas radicals in the 1860s had lamented Lincoln's death as the loss of a working-class hero in a kindred country, by the era of the Great Depression America had become synonymous in British minds with excessive consumption. Conscious of the need to counter these apparently widespread ideas, the BBC made two further important contributions to the propagation of Lincoln's image in wartime. The first was Ronald Gow's sentimental radio play about Lincoln's early years, *The Lawyer of Springfield*, which was first aired on the Home Service on 1 July 1940.<sup>81</sup> Gow's Lincoln, like John Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*, was a homespun country lawyer, underestimated by others who did not at first recognize that his folksiness was accompanied by a great wisdom that came not from book learning but from a deep understanding of ordinary people. The second, much more original, piece was an adaptation for radio of Eric Linklater's *The Cornerstones*, first broadcast on Sunday 15 March 1942, and repeated several times thereafter.<sup>82</sup> The play consisted of a discussion in the Elysian Fields between Lincoln, Lenin, Confucius and a British airman who had been killed early in the war. The optimistic argument of this extraordinary piece was that Britain, the United States of America, Russia and China, the powers that would shape the post-war world and which each, in their different ways, embodied modernity, would be able to work together after they had defeated fascism to create a stable and lasting peace. The dramatic climax of the play was the ghostly appearance of a soldier who had fought at Thermopylae as well as Flanders, at Agincourt as well as in the current war. His name, the British Tommy kept asking? 'My name', said the unknown soldier in the final line of the play, 'is courage'.<sup>83</sup>

If there was one thing that gave political power to Lincoln's image it was that his life and death, and his promise of a 'new birth of freedom', could be formed into that most satisfying of all narrative forms: redemption through suffering and with courage. 'Shall this heroism be in vain? Shall the suffering of so many nations be in vain?' asks the commentator at the end of Linklater's *The Cornerstones*. It is Lincoln who provides the answer: 'Let [our four countries] bring to being, by the union of their armed forces, peace in our time and the continuance of peace.'<sup>84</sup> Gow's play was a dramatized episode from Lincoln's early

<sup>81</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 1 July 1940. A copy of the script as re-broadcast on 15 May 1945, is in the BBC Written Archives, Caversham.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Parnell, *Eric Linklater: A Critical Biography* (London, 1984), 232.

<sup>83</sup> Eric Linklater, *The Cornerstones* (London, 1942). There is an enthusiastic review in the *Manchester Guardian*, 18 Mar 1942.

<sup>84</sup> Linklater, *Cornerstones*, 65.

life, and in that sense resembled the nineteenth-century 'man of the people' Lincoln narratives. Linklater's play, in contrast, dealt with grandiose themes in a fantastical setting. But it is possible to see in both pieces the re-emergence of, as it were, the 'Barnard Lincoln' rather than the 'Saint-Gaudens Lincoln'. In both plays, Lincoln represents democracy and practical knowledge; in *The Cornerstones* he is juxtaposed with Lenin's abstract, if well-meaning, theorizing and Confucius's equally well-intentioned, but slightly surreal, turns of phrase. Like the ordinary British Tommy, a regular soldier catapulted in Linklater's imagination into a conversation with the immortals, Lincoln is full of commonsense and utterly without pretension. In 1916–18, Lincoln had offered a model of muscular determination combined with a grand vision of the moral purpose of war. By 1942–45, in the context of the Beveridge Report and the determination to build a new kind of democratic society after the war, Lincoln—especially in Linklater's play—also became an emblem of the idea that governments should exist only for 'the betterment of their people'. Towards the end of the war, the phrase 'new birth of freedom' from the Gettysburg Address became ubiquitous as the ultimate expression of the meaning of the war. Publications aimed at children seemed especially prone to find in Lincoln the words to offer hope for the post-war order. The BBC reinforced this by re-broadcasting Gow's *The Lawyer of Springfield* in Children's Hour in 1943.<sup>85</sup> Lincoln's image during the Second World War illustrates the persistent elision of England and Britain in wartime rhetoric.<sup>86</sup> He was still, more often than not, rooted in quintessentially English contexts, as in Jennings' film, which primarily situated national identity in images of the English countryside, but increasingly often, as in Linklater's play, Lincoln was also put to the service of giving ideological meaning to Britishness.

In 1940, Christ Church in Lambeth was almost completely destroyed in an air raid. All that remained, defiant against the Nazi bombs, was the 'Lincoln Tower', which had been dedicated in the 1860s by Christ Church's abolitionist congregation to the martyr's memory. Meanwhile, in Parliament Square, all the statues were removed for safe storage for the duration of the war apart from those two that best represented the spirit of democratic and parliamentary defiance against fascism: those of Cromwell and Lincoln. Both remained unscathed through the war. Like the miraculous survival of St Paul's Cathedral when all around it was in flames, the symbolism did not go unnoticed. In a passionate

<sup>85</sup> For examples of 'the new birth of freedom' and of references to Lincoln as an inspirational figure for the generation who would build the post-war order, see D.M. Northcroft, 'Mary Todd Lincoln', *The Guide* 22 (1942), 382–3; 'Address given by Mr Evan Davis', *G.S. Review* 730 (1941), 72. I am extremely grateful to Jessica Seldon for kindly sharing with me these sources from her own research.

<sup>86</sup> See Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939–1945* (Oxford, 2003), 218–38.



speech in 1944 Isaac Foot imagined Cromwell and Lincoln 'in high colloquy' as they stood unbowed through the Blitz. Foot was the President of the Cromwell Association and a former Liberal MP. He thus represented a long strain of liberal admiration for Lincoln and, like others before him, he argued that Lincoln and Cromwell were both 'bridge[s] across the Atlantic'. Both had a deep conviction of the importance of unity and nationality, argued Foot, but their 'vision stretched far beyond their own frontiers. They were conscious of the vocation of their nation in the world'. And 'just as Cromwell would have had little sympathy with the war cry "England for the English", Abraham Lincoln could never have become the patron saint of those who love to call themselves 100 per cent Americans'. Both were lovers of peace who, 'possessed with a sense of the urgency of the time', prosecuted war. Both looked to Providence, both interpreted history and events as a guide to His will. Both were 'simple men with seemingly a complete unconcern for the trappings and paraphernalia of high office'; both were marked by that rarest of virtues, 'freedom from vanity and from egotism'. Both were also, in this reading, men of great personal compassion. Cromwell and Lincoln were 'conservative' in the deepest sense—both feared anarchy, both wanted to avoid revolution unless it was necessary, both had a 'deep reverence for the Law' and both 'knew the value of public opinion and always relied upon it'.<sup>87</sup> Foot's pamphlet was an effort to provide a unified framework for interpreting Anglo-American history—one based soundly on liberal values—in order to provide a context for understanding the momentous issues of the post-war world and the centrality of Anglo-American friendship to dealing with those problems.<sup>88</sup>

### Conclusion

For Isaac Foot, as for Lloyd George, Lincoln was pre-eminently a 'man of the people'. Yet perhaps precisely because the Lincoln 'cult' had such robust Liberal champions, it did not seem to have been shared by the Left. Foot and two of his sons all stood as Liberal candidates in the 1945 General Election and both failed to be elected while another son, Michael, was returned for a Plymouth seat for Labour. Isaac does not

<sup>87</sup> Isaac Foot, *Oliver Cromwell and Abraham Lincoln: A Comparison* (London, 1945), 21–2, 12.

<sup>88</sup> In a letter to Foot congratulating him on his pamphlet, Lord Astor spelt out the problem that Foot's work would, he hoped, help to alleviate: 'that when the military menace presented by the aggressors is out of the way there is a serious risk that competition between commercial and other interests in America and the British Commonwealth will lead to jealousies and misunderstanding'. Lord Astor to Isaac Foot, 30 Jan 1945, in Michael Foot and Alison Highet, *Isaac Foot: A Westcountry Boy—Apostle of England* (London, 2006), 262.



appear to have transmitted to his most politically successful son his admiration for Abraham Lincoln. Whereas nineteenth-century Radicals had hung pictures of the martyred Lincoln on their walls, the 'Rail Splitter' from Illinois was noticeably absent from the Labour movement's pantheon. On the role of government in the economy, perhaps the principal dividing line of inter-war politics, Lincoln's image could not easily be deployed. What he did offer, however, was a model of non-ideological statesmanship and, at the same time, a reassuring way of rooting the still-unfamiliar practice of mass democratic politics in pragmatic 'English' values. In this context, Charnwood's telling description of Lincoln as a 'practical statesman' seemed especially apt and appealing, and was widely adopted and quoted. 'Practical statesmanship' was a concept that captured a distinctively 'Anglo-Saxon' balance of pragmatism and moral purpose. Juxtaposed against dogmatic, irrational leadership (whether of the left- or the right-wing variety) on the one hand, and cynical, unprincipled populism on the other, 'practical statesmanship' became a synonym for what was imagined to be a very British style of pragmatic but principled leadership in the inter-war years. Thus, when, at a meeting of the Conservative Party's Primrose League in 1929, the Tory leader Stanley Baldwin was toasted as the statesman who 'in temperament, character, outlook and exposition... resembled Abraham Lincoln more closely than any other great statesman', the compliment implied exactly this Charnwood-style blend of moderation and principle.<sup>89</sup> A bulwark against the rise of ideological politics, the Lincoln 'cult' may have offered a way of validating the pragmatism and rhetorical nationalism of the National governments.

Lincoln's image served important functions in English culture in these years: validating war for progressive purposes and articulating the democratic cause as no English voice could do. Above all, Lincoln came to personify the powerful idea that there was a fundamental unity to Anglo-America and that the rising republic in the west represented continuity with, rather than a challenge to, the English past. In the hands of Charnwood, Lincoln was an outstanding example of a leader prepared to fight for liberal values; Drinkwater's Lincoln was spiced with a radical Cromwellian tradition; but for both, only Shakespeare, in the Anglo-American pantheon, could be compared to Lincoln in his ability to understand an ideal of freedom and the essential dignity of mankind that was perceived to be fundamentally English in its origins.

<sup>89</sup> *The Times*, 9 Apr 1929. After the war, however, when Baldwin's reputation was lower, he was sometimes negatively contrasted with Lincoln: 'It was precisely on the central test of leadership [over re-armament against the dictators] that the comparison [with Lincoln] founders.' *The Times*, 14 Nov 1952.

Only an American could have served this purpose, and only Lincoln, it seemed, was the American figure who could do so.

Lincoln—as the idea of America itself had often been—came to be both an idealized representation of a possible future and a reflection of, to use Lincoln's own phrase, the better angels of their nature. It was as if Lincoln symbolized not just, as Lloyd George had thought, a 'better America' but a 'better England' as well. 'In Lincoln', wrote one reviewer of Drinkwater's play, 'we have a specifically English mind, a Bunyan, a Cromwell, and in his wisdom we receive our own impersonal purification.'<sup>90</sup> Lincoln could perform this redemptive role in inter-war Britain because his life story could be convincingly reinterpreted through the prism of 'English values', because his democratic demeanour resonated with the political imperatives of the age and, above all, because he offered the hope that through war could come liberal progress. Even when it became clear that the 'war to end all wars' was no such thing, Lincoln remained steadfast—literally so in the case of his statue facing the Houses of Parliament—as a reminder of the hope that war could, when led by the right men and fought for the right reasons, be the ally, not the destroyer, of the cause of liberalism in the world.

<sup>90</sup> 'The Success of Abraham Lincoln', *English Review*, 30 (1920), 186–8.