

He, Being Dead, Yet Speaketh: Images and Invocations of Lincoln's Ghost, 1865-1877

Kimberly N. Kutz

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Approved by:

John F. Kasson

W. Fitzhugh Brundage

Heather A. Williams

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Abstract

KIMBERLY N. KUTZ: *He, Being Dead, Yet Speaketh: Images and Invocations of Lincoln's Ghost, 1865-1877*

(Under the direction of John F. Kasson)

In this thesis, I examine the iconography of Abraham Lincoln's ghost in images produced in the immediate post-Civil War period. I posit that the spiritualist movement of the mid-nineteenth century provided the context within which ghosts of prominent Americans returned to voice their opinions on contemporary events, and that Lincoln's ghost took on a different and special role as a national patron saint. Drawing from lithographs, paintings, sheet music covers, cartoons, and spirit photographs, I argue that images of Lincoln's spirit performed a role in comforting grieving Northern families as well as African Americans by counteracting the ugly reality of death in the Civil War. Furthermore, this unique cultural milieu forged the posthumous image of Lincoln that has endured until the present.

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Introduction: The Ghost and Mrs. Lincoln

William Mumler hardly blinked when a mysterious woman in black entered his photography studio in Boston. The year was 1870, and by then he was no stranger to bizarre goings-on, let alone the eccentricities of his well-to-do clientele. “Mrs. Lindall,” as she introduced herself, swept to the portrait chair with all of the authority of a queen, tapping her toe with impatience while Mumler readied his famous photographic process. His plates in place, his lighting perfect, Mumler finally inquired whether Madam would remove her shawl so that he might capture her face. With a storied flourish, Mrs. Lindall shed her disguise to reveal Mary Todd Lincoln, widow of the deceased president—and ardent believer in Spiritualism.¹

Mumler and Mrs. Lincoln made for a strange pair. One a hapless mystic turned charlatan, the other a bereaved widow turned *enfant terrible*, neither had survived the turbulent years after the Civil War with reputation intact. Mumler credited himself as the inventor of spirit photography, a self-professed innocent who had stumbled across the first visual evidence of the Great Beyond one day when he discovered the translucent image of a young girl in an 1861 self-portrait. When a prominent Spiritualist circulated the photograph in newspapers as the first documented image of a spirit, Mumler achieved instant celebrity and moved to New York to set up shop on Broadway. Charging exorbitant prices for spirit photographs (with no guarantee that the spirits would choose

¹ Mumler’s account of his sitting with Mary Todd Lincoln does not give a precise date, though the photograph has been dated from between 1870 to 1875. See William Mumler, *The Personal Experiences of William H. Mumler* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1875), 92-93, in Louis Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler, Spirit Photographer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

to show themselves on film), Mumler made a good living until he found himself on trial for fraud in 1869. The City of New York's deployment of an all-star prosecution featuring Elbridge T. Gerry as attorney and P.T. Barnum as a witness evokes the currency of the debate over the existence of spirits during this time period in America as well as Mumler's central role in it.² The court dismissed his charges when the prosecution could not expose his process as counterfeit, but even though Mumler walked away without a blemish on his record, the stain on his character proved permanent. He was on a downward slide toward obscurity and eventual poverty when Mrs. Lincoln darkened his doorstep.³ The former first lady was not faring much better herself. Unpopular while her husband lived, after his death Mary Todd became something of a national embarrassment as she demanded outrageous sums from the government for her personal pension, exposed herself to ridicule for attempting to auction off her secondhand clothing, and frequented disreputable spirit mediums from Chicago to New York.⁴

Mumler and Mrs. Lincoln must have felt blessed when the spirit of Abraham Lincoln "appeared" with his hands upon her shoulders on the developed photographic plate (fig. 1). Mumler promptly printed the photograph on a carte-de-visite and circulated it throughout the country. Despite Mumler's run-in with the law, the American

² Andrew Devine, *Argument of Mr. Elbridge T. Gerry, of Counsel for the People, Before Justice Dowling, on the Preliminary Examination of Wm. H. Mumler, Charged with Obtaining Money by Pretended "Spirit Photographs."* May 3rd 1869. New York: Baker, Voorhis, & Co., 1869; "Spiritual Photographs." New York Times ; May 4, 1869; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 1.

³ See Crista Cloutier, "Mumler's Ghosts," in *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 20-22; "Spiritual Photography," *Harper's Weekly* 8 May 1868; Devine, *Argument of Mr. Elbridge T. Gerry*.

⁴ See Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 206; Merrill Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 50-52.



Figure 1. William Mumler, *Mary Todd Lincoln with the spirit of Abraham Lincoln*. c.1870-1875. The College of Psychic Studies <<http://www.collegeofpsychicstudies.co.uk>>.

public still had an immense appetite for such a sentimental image of their beloved president. Mumler's was far from the only ghostly image of Lincoln produced in the aftermath of the Civil War. Prints, photographs and literary representations of Lincoln as a spirit abounded in the months and years after his assassination, chronicling his passage into the afterlife from the moment the Angel of Death appeared above his bed. Lincoln's ghost remained present on the American scene through the images and invocations of artists and writers for years after the Civil War, and indeed has lingered through representations in popular culture to comment on national events into the twenty-first century.

As the first president to be captured in broadly-published photographic stills, and furthermore as the most photographed individual in the nineteenth century, Lincoln has acquired a small body of literature devoted to his iconography.⁵ Hal Holzer, Gabor S. Boritt and Mark E. Neely, Jr., have catalogued the myriad Lincoln archetypes, from the trend to depict Lincoln's western boyhood as a "railsplitter" to his eventual apotheosis into a godlike character after his assassination.⁶ In *Lincoln in American Memory*, Merrill Peterson has chronicled the stages of Lincoln representation in public memory down to the present through his many roles as Savior of the Union, Great Emancipator, Man of the People, the First American, and the Self-made Man.⁷ But analyzing Lincoln's status

⁵ See Alan Trachtenberg, *Lincoln's Smile and Other Enigmas* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 74.

⁶ Harold Holzer, G. S. Boritt, and Mark E. Neely, *The Lincoln Image: Abraham Lincoln and the Popular Print* (Fort Wayne: Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum, 1984); Holzer, et. al., *Changing the Lincoln Image* (Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum, 1985); Gabor Boritt, ed., *The Lincoln Enigma: The Changing Faces of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Holzer, *Lincoln Seen and Heard* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

⁷ Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 27.

as a myth and his elevation to martyred sainthood does not quite encapsulate the significance of Lincoln's spirit in the United States in the years after the Civil War.

Biographies and biopics, memorials and movies, artists and admirers have elevated Lincoln's words, actions, and craggy visage to a reflection of the supreme character and moral compass of America. A political address, be it a garden-variety stump speech or a presidential inaugural, hardly merits the name without a quotation from Lincoln. The "spirit of Lincoln" has become, in essence, the spirit of America, the ultimate referent for the national conscience. Curiously, nothing would have seemed more unlikely during Lincoln's hard-fought road to the White House or his rocky presidency, when the needle of his public opinion meter twitched dismally between "bungler" and "scoundrel." Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., recalled a debate with his friends in the trenches during the Civil War over whether the War had produced a great man; when someone suggested Lincoln, derisive laughter ensued.⁸ Willard Saulsbury, the Democratic senator from Delaware, felt Lincoln merited artwork of a very different sort than the glowing portraits his death soon would engender. "If I wanted to paint a despot, a man perfectly regardless of every constitutional right of the people," he fumed, "I would paint the hideous form of Abraham Lincoln."⁹

Needless to say, Lincoln's assassination forever changed his form in the American mind. But it need not have catapulted him into immortality or sainthood. Immediately after Lincoln's death, Americans engaged in a nearly frantic refashioning of

⁸ See Lewis Einstein, Introduction to *The Holmes-Einstein Letters: The Correspondence of Mr. Justice Holmes and Lewis Einstein, 1903-1935*, ed. James Bishop Peabody (New York: St. Martin's, 1964), xvii, quoted in Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002), 39.

⁹ David Donald, "Getting Right With Lincoln," in *Lincoln Reconsidered, Essays on the Civil War Era* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 4.

his image, transforming him from a mere politician into a patron saint. The trauma caused by Lincoln's death produced scores of eulogies, lithographs, songs, poems, and newspaper tributes, which sought to solve happily the mystery of what happened to Lincoln's soul once it departed from his gawky body. Why were Americans so concerned about the fate of Lincoln's ghost?

Perhaps because his was the chief ghost in a nation of ghosts. 620,000 people died in the Civil War, an unprecedented loss of life that upended the traditional nineteenth-century process of mourning: separating families, displacing corpses, and shattering religious ideals.¹⁰ Lincoln's sudden and devastating death seemed the average soldier's death writ large, and Americans projected their desires for the souls of their sons, husbands, and fathers into the national process of mourning and commemorating Lincoln. At war's end, bereaved families longed for the return of their loved ones to home, sought comfort in a sentimentalized view of death that erased pain, and hoped that national reconciliation would continue despite Lincoln's assassination, ensuring that such tremendous loss of life had not been in vain. Images of Lincoln's spirit emerged as a ghostly reflection of these desires.

Of course, not all Americans wished for the continuation of Lincoln's reign, ghostly or otherwise, past his untimely death. White Southerners in particular felt more relief than despair at the assassination of their most dogged adversary; a Northern paper reported (perhaps with some exaggeration) that in Texas rejoicing Confederates built a mock grave for Lincoln in the street, on its headstone "pasted the picture of a large negro head, cut from an Ethiopian show-bill, the board being marked, 'To the memory of the

¹⁰ See Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), xi-xii.

d—d Ape Lincoln.””¹¹ But the outpouring of grief occasioned by his death subsumed all dissent on the matter, silencing former Confederates and Northern Democrats alike. When Henrietta Price, of Essex County, New Jersey, remarked to her soldier brother Elias that citizens who had criticized Lincoln now festooned their homes with black mourning crepe as ardently as their neighbors, he scathingly replied that they hardly dared do otherwise.¹²

Still, though Lincoln did not survive to accomplish the mission he laid out in his Second Inaugural Address, “to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations,” as artists and writers imagined him in numerous posthumous incarnations in print culture, he went on to do exactly that.¹³ Rendered as a father figure in a bereaved national family, his spirit did not abandon but abided with the American people, consoling them with his continued presence in the tumultuous years after the Civil War. In this unique cultural milieu, they formulated the enduring image of Lincoln as national patron saint.

¹¹ “Rejoicing over the Assassination.” N.D. Elias Winans Price Papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library, Southern Historical Collection.

¹² Henrietta Price, letter to E.W. Price, April 19, 1865. Elias Winans Price Papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library, Southern Historical Collection.

¹³ “The Inaugural Address.” *New York Times*, March 6, 1865. ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 1.

The Ghosts of Politicians Past

Ghosts were a hot topic in mid-nineteenth century America. Though it seems difficult to believe that Americans so would have so readily endorsed as genuine the image of Lincoln's spirit in Mary Todd's portrait, the phenomenon of spirit photography was but the latest facet of a craze for communication with the dead that had been going on for over twenty years by the time Mumler arrived on the scene. The new religious movement known as Spiritualism, combined with novels and tracts examining the individual experience of life after death, ushered in a new way of thinking about the role of the dead in everyday life that revolutionized the American notion of heaven and deeply influenced depictions of Lincoln's ghost.

The Spiritualist movement first appeared in 1848, after sisters Kate and Maggie Fox (then just nine and twelve years old) claimed that the spirit of a murdered peddler had been communicating with them through 'rappings' in their Hydesville, New York home.¹⁴ News of the extraordinary powers of these young 'spirit mediums' spread quickly, and so did interest in the extraordinary powers and voices of the spirits themselves. Their parents sent the Fox sisters to live in Rochester with Amy and Isaac Post, a family deeply committed to social reform whose paths crossed with the likes of Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison in the 1850s. Soon, along with their older sister Leah, they made their debut in front of a packed house at Corinthian Hall with a demonstration of their unique rapping conversations with spirits, under whose

¹⁴ Emma Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism, A Twenty Years' Record of the Communion Between Earth and the World of Spirits* (New York: University Books, 1970), 30-36.

direction they shocked antebellum audiences by answering difficult questions and discoursing far beyond the power of children on topics of the audience's choice. With the attention of such notable figures in an era of broad social reform, it was hardly a coincidence that spirit-rappings and séances spread across the country. Nor was it any surprise that when the spirits, great and ordinary alike, spoke from the séance rooms of reformers, they spoke of reform.¹⁵

From its humble beginnings in Hydesville, Spiritualism acquired a mass following in the 1850s, attracting at least two million devotees in the northeast.¹⁶ By the 1860s Spiritualism had a place at even the highest table in the country. Abraham Lincoln, though likely not a believer himself, at the very least attended séances in the White House held by his wife in hopes of contacting their son Willie, who died in 1862 at the age of twelve, probably of typhoid fever.¹⁷

Hopes for reunion with family members in the afterlife frequently brought the bereaved into Spiritualism's fold. Many scholars have attributed the movement's extraordinary appeal among nineteenth-century Americans to a kind of retaliation against hellfire Calvinist doctrine that consigned the souls of their loved ones, especially innocent children, to eternal damnation.¹⁸ In this era, American Christians increasingly began to reject the central role of the wrathful Old Testament God in favor of the more forgiving tones of Jesus and the New Testament, and Spiritualism seemed to offer

¹⁵ Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

¹⁶ R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 14.

¹⁷ Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead*, 206.

¹⁸ See Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 2-6; Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, 3-5.

concrete proof of a peaceful afterlife for all believers.¹⁹ Moreover, the very practice of spirit communication through séances reassured adherents that deceased family members remained emotionally and intellectually available to them after their deaths, giving advice and offering comfort by way of spirit mediums to grieving mothers and sisters left stranded on Earth. After a lapse in public interest during the sectional crisis of the 1850s, Spiritualism's mass appeal resurged in the late 1860s once the Civil War's horrific death toll ensured that virtually everyone had someone worth contacting on the Other Side.

Often, Americans who frequented spirit mediums went to hear that their dearly departed had achieved happiness in death. During séances, parents received messages from the spirits of children, who assured them of their heavenly bliss and continued development in the next world, where they often learned to read and write (thus explaining infants' ability to communicate articulately). The bereaved individuals who sought to contact ghosts in the séance room desired reassurance that their deceased loved ones had transcended earthly ills and were neither suffering in hell nor even temporarily lost to living family members.²⁰

The cultural historian Ann Douglas has described Spiritualism as "a manifestation of a complex retransfer of force from the living to the dead," one symptom of an overall domestication of death taking place in the mid-nineteenth century, in which depictions of heaven began to resemble middle-class parlors and cemeteries began to resemble scenic

¹⁹ For the new emphasis on the gentleness and humanity of Jesus in the mid-nineteenth century, see Barbara Welter, "The Feminization of American Religion: 1800-1860," in *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary S. Harman and Lois Banner (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 137-157.

²⁰ See Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 1-2, 32-41.

gardens.²¹ Mourning literature—obituary poems, memoirs, and books about heaven—
inflated the importance of the dead and sentimentalized the afterlife as a sphere of
emotional and aesthetic gratification.²² These writings, particularly those which
described heaven at length, also helped to change the way that Americans conceptualized
the afterlife, giving it a new emotional, rather than moral, function.

For example, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's bestselling 1869 novel *The Gates Ajar*
featured as its heroine a young Massachusetts woman named Mary Cabot, who lost her
beloved brother Roy in the Civil War. Tormented by the notion that his unexpected death
on the battlefield might have prevented him from entering heaven, no less than by the
realization that even if he had been saved he would, according to Scripture, lose all
“special selfish affections” and cease to love her as a sister, Mary withdraws from life.²³
Though chided by the local minister for failing to accept the will of God, Mary cannot to
leave her house, much less attend church, until her widowed aunt Winifred arrives.
Winifred confides her knowledge of a very different sort of heaven to Mary, a heaven
where the affections of the home and family continue to reign. She comforts Mary that:
“Roy loved you. Our Father, for some tender, hidden reason, took him out of your sight
for a while. Though changed much, he can have forgotten nothing. Being only out of
sight, you remember, not lost, nor asleep, nor annihilated, he goes on loving. To love
must mean to think of, to care for, to hope for, to pray for, not less out of a body than in

²¹ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 207.

²² *Ibid.*, 201.

²³ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Gates Ajar* (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1869), 71. Early American Fiction Full-Text Database, University of Virginia, 2004 <<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/eaf/>> University of North Carolina Libraries.

it.”²⁴ Mary quickly grasps the implications of Winifred’s assertion: that in spirit form, Roy remains near to her—as her brother, interested in Mary’s everyday life and personal development, and as her guardian angel, assisting in her salvation. Winifred adds, “I cannot doubt that our absent dead are very present with us. . . . What more natural than that we shall spend our best energies [in heaven] as we spent them here, --- in comforting, teaching, helping, saving people whose very souls we love better than our own?”²⁵

When Mary wonders if Roy has met President Lincoln in heaven, Winifred replies that she does not doubt it—in fact, she believes that all of the soldiers (though presumably only those who fought for the Union) must be crowding up to meet him: “What a sight to see!”²⁶

Novels like *The Gates Ajar* helped to bring the family-interest formula of spirit communication into the process of mourning over the Civil War. No longer lost souls in the unimaginable wasteland of a distant battlefield, the imagined spirits of brothers, husbands, and fathers traveled home after their deaths, even if their bodies did not. As Drew Gilpin Faust has written in her recent treatment of death and the Civil War, soldiers as well as their families worried deeply about the spiritual consequences of the bodily remains left on battlefields. Escalating casualty rates as the war progressed necessitated the abandonment of orderly burial practices in favor of hasty interment, so that increasing numbers of soldiers went nameless and neglected to the grave. “The death of relatives far away from families and kin was,” she writes, “particularly disruptive to fundamental

²⁴ Ibid., 87.

²⁵ Ibid., 88.

²⁶ Ibid., 83.

nineteenth-century understandings of the Good Death, assumptions closely tied to the Victorian emphasis on the importance of home and domesticity.”²⁷ Imagining the spirits of soldiers who died far from home returning to perform the emotional work of consoling, protecting and guiding their loved ones in the wake of the war’s destruction eased the anxiety of families who were unable to locate their dead. Spirit communication aided in closing the gaping hole left by family members who were not only deceased but absent, whose abrupt off-stage demise deprived their relations of the material reality of death as well as the mourning process, which traditionally took place in the home. If relatives far from the battlefield could not hold or bury their soldiers, at least they still could communicate with them.

Not all spirit communication happened within the context of the family, however. Although most ordinary mediums and adherents of Spiritualism spoke to deceased relatives when conducting séances, over the course of the 1850s there were a few notable cases when figures of national or international importance emerged from beyond the veil in order to rebuke or to impart wisdom to willing listeners. Famous spirits from Francis Bacon to John Quincy Adams stepped far afield from the common “family interest” formula of spirit interaction, setting a distinctive precedent for encounters with the renowned dead.²⁸ Their role was not to comfort listeners but to instruct them; they returned not as creatures of emotion but as vehicles for ideology—sometimes the same ideology they espoused in their lifetimes, sometimes quite blatantly the ideology of the spirit medium through which they conveyed their messages. Personally unknown but

²⁷ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 85.

²⁸ See Joseph Stiles, *Twelve Messages from the spirit of John Quincy Adams* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1859), John W. Edmonds and George T. Dexter, *Spiritualism*, vol. 1 (New York, Partridge and Brittan, 1853).

nationally notable figures called up by Spiritualists were not contacted on behalf of their families but on behalf of the nation, and accordingly they commented upon and advised in matters of the country's material and moral progress.

Famous ghosts often began by entreating listeners to marvel at the opportunity afforded to them by Spiritualism to accelerate the progress of humanity through communion with the spirit world. Spiritualists drawn from the highest ranks of society provided an added incentive for Americans to join the movement, not to mention credibility for messages purporting to issue from the famous dead. New York judge John Worth Edmonds teamed up with Nathaniel Pitcher Tallmadge, former U.S. senator and governor of Wisconsin, to produce one of the first monographs devoted to Spiritualism, in which they conducted an ongoing conversation (consisting mainly of lengthy missives explaining the scientific and philosophical reasoning that made spirit communication possible) with Francis Bacon and eighteenth-century visionary Emanuel Swedenborg.²⁹ The appendix, however, featured communications from the trinity of great nineteenth-century American orators, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun, received through automatic writing by members of Edmonds' and Tallmadge's Spiritualist circle. Tellingly, dead American statesmen used their first opportunity to speak from beyond the grave to lend their support to the Spiritualist movement. "Already in my short journey," confided Clay, "I can perceive how great the happiness and welfare of the nation is to be

²⁹ Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, vol. 1; Benjamin Franklin was also a favorite spiritual personality contacted by mediums, owing to his discovery of electricity, the scientific principle upon which spirit communication purported to function. See Werner Sollors, "Dr. Benjamin Franklin's Celestial Telegraph, or Indian Blessings to Gas-Lit American Drawing Rooms," *American Quarterly* 35, 4 (Winter, 1983), 459-480.

promoted by a knowledge of the truth, when they shall reap the benefit of the communion of spirits from the highest to the lowest in the land.”³⁰

More significantly, these illustrious dead called for positive social action, however vague. John C. Calhoun announced the spirits’ intentions in returning to the earthly plane as not only a demonstration of the immortality of humankind but also as a plea for universal cooperation among nations and peoples—a bit rich coming from him.³¹ Daniel Webster, for his part, unveiled a prophecy that attempted to allay fears in the tumultuous political environment of the 1850s that the passing away of great figures had left the country without a captain:

You speak of your statemen’s having left you, of your having none to fill their places. Do not think so. Greater than they will fill their places. Mightier than they shall speak to the nation, in language bringing flowers of truth for man to live by and to die by. To die; the word will be banished from earth. It is but an exchange, a putting off the worn-out frame, and entering the new and beautiful spirit-covering which is prepared for us as we emerge into the world—not of shadows, but of bright realities.³²

Using florid oratorical language to espouse these elevated if somewhat murky ideals, Spiritualists primarily sought to employ deceased political figures to further the appeal of the movement itself.

But the shades of Clay, Webster, and Calhoun paled in the national pantheon beside another spirit Edmonds contacted in his career as a Spiritualist, one who was considerably more specific about his political goals for returning to purvey ghostly counsel. In 1851, Judge Edmonds wrote that a robed, gray-haired spirit had appeared to

³⁰ Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, vol. 1, 400.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 424-431.

³² *Ibid.*, 414.

him “like living flame” within the mist of a vision.³³ He recognized at once the spirit of George Washington, who soon made it clear that he had returned with the express purpose of delivering a jeremiad to his wayward nation on behalf of the abolitionist movement.

Apparently having renounced his living stance on slavery, Washington’s ghost confessed that

Bound up as my heart even yet is in the continuance of its freedom; looking on its institutions as the great fountain of freedom that was yet to flow over the whole earth, I ask myself, ‘Where now is the spirit that made us free?’ and from dark and dismal depths alone a voice answers, ‘Here, buried beneath the load of oppression and selfishness which has grown up and overwhelmed us.’³⁴

Abolitionists, whose numbers to a large extent overlapped with those of the Spiritualists, mobilized Washington’s voice, imbued with the authority of the Father of the Nation, in the fight against slavery.³⁵ Not only were the spirits of ordinary individuals who had achieved further enlightenment in heaven speaking out against the evils of contemporary America, so too were the ghosts of Founding Fathers past.

Still, Washington’s ghost remained above the petty needs of the masses. P.T. Barnum, in his ongoing project to debunk the fraudulent activity of Spiritualists, wrote about peace advocate William Cornell “Colorado” Jewett’s meeting with Mumler in his 1866 book of exposés, *The Humbugs of the World*. Jewett, Barnum reported, went to

³³ John W. Edmonds and George T. Dexter, *Spiritualism*, vol. 2 (New York: Partridge and Brittan, 1853), 261-263. Robert S. Cox has discussed George Washington’s posthumous activism on behalf of abolitionists in *Vox Populi: Spiritualism and George Washington’s Postmortem Career*, *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 230-272.

³⁴ Edmonds and Dexter, *Spiritualism*, vol. 2, 261-263.

³⁵ For the Spiritualist connection with the abolition movement, see Howard Kerr, *Mediums, and Spirit-Rappers, and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 11.

Mumler in 1864 in hopes of consulting with “the spirits of distinguished statesmen,” whose counsel he believed might help to end the Civil War.³⁶ From John Adams to Napoleon, Jewett allegedly invoked the greatest departed political and military minds from the United States and abroad, and Mumler accordingly produced their shades on film. Jewett was so pleased with the images of Adams, Webster, Jackson, Clay and Douglas he received that he implored Mumler to produce a spirit photograph of the most sacred American spirit. Barnum writes that

The whole affair was so entirely satisfactory to Jewett, that after paying fifty dollars for what he had witnessed, he, the next day, implored the presence of George Washington, offering fifty dollars more for a ‘spiritual’ sight of the ‘Father of our country.’ This request smote upon the ear of the photographer like an invitation to commit sacrilege. His reverence for the memory of Washington was not to be disturbed by the tempting offer of so many greenbacks. He could not allow the features of that great man to be used in connexion with an imposture perpetrated upon so deluded a fanatic as Colorado Jewett. In short, the ‘conditions’ were unfavourable for the apparition of ‘General Washington;’ and his visitor must remain satisfied with the council of great men that had been called from the spirit world to instill wisdom into the noddle of a foolish man on this terrestrial planet.³⁷

Washington’s spirit was not to be trifled with; mere mortals dared not demand pictures of him to satisfy their curiosity or edify the nation. But, just a few years later, Mumler judged the spirit of Lincoln to be fair game.

³⁶ P.T. Barnum, *The Humbugs of the World* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1866), 80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

The Ghost of Lincoln

Unlike his storied predecessor Washington, the early incarnation of Lincoln's spirit proved emotionally available to the public. After Lincoln's assassination in April 1865, his ghost manifested itself within the traditional familial paradigm of spirit interaction, effectively casting him in the role of a beloved family member lost. In appearing in Mumler's photograph to comfort Mary Todd, his spiritual return conveyed tender reconciliation, evidently designed to assure his wife that he looked after her still. Furthermore, Mumler's Lincoln is *happy*: his craggy features retain their enigmatic solemnity, but the hint of a smile curves his lips. His hands rest on her shoulders in a gesture of personal guardianship. Lincoln, like the preponderance of American spirits that communicated with their loved ones from beyond the grave, primarily was concerned with reassuring his family. By proxy, he reassured the nation.

The tender, gentle portrayal of Lincoln after his death sharply contradicted much of his wartime iconography. Lincoln the horse-trading senator from Illinois and Lincoln the prevaricating president were far more common representations in the popular press during his lifetime. Certainly, Currier & Ives's lithographed cartoon posters of Lincoln were more critical than celebratory, the most famous of which being their 1860 lithograph "*The Nigger*" in the *Woodpile* (fig. 2)³⁸ In it, a young, beardless Lincoln perches atop a pile of split rails, in which a grinning slave hides in plain sight. In mockery of his campaign image as a simple "rail splitter" from Illinois, the cartoon

³⁸ See Holzer et. al., *The Lincoln Image*, 37.

Lincoln quips, “Little did I think when I split these rails, that they would be the means of elevating me to my present position.” In front of him, Horace Greeley, gripping his newspaper the *New York Tribune*, assures a voter representing “Young America” that the Republican Party is in no way affiliated with Abolition. “It’s no use old fellow!” the young voter replies, “You can’t pull that wool over my eyes, for I can see ‘the Nigger’ peeping through the rails.”³⁹ This image of a bantering Lincoln, propped up by a thinly-veiled platform of abolition, propagated the idea that Lincoln’s down-home demeanor and folksy speech patterns concealed a crooked politician, while simultaneously playing upon the racial fears of white laborers in North and West.

By 1864, the growing casualty rate led to recriminations that Lincoln was mismanaging the war and callously sacrificing the sons of the North, culminating in the New York City Draft Riots. *Columbia Demands Her Children!*, a political cartoon from 1864, drew upon the righteous indignation of thousands of families who had lost soldiers in the war, made manifest in Columbia, the symbolic embodiment of America. Wearing a skirt made of the American flag and carrying a sword and shield, Columbia advances on Lincoln pointing an accusatory finger. “Mr. Lincoln,” she demands, “give me back my 500,000 sons!!!” Disheveled and disconcerted, with one leg draped over the back of his chair, Lincoln at his desk resembles nothing so much as a melancholy jester. Amid crumpled papers, including a request for more troops, Lincoln stammers, “Well the fact is—by the way that reminds me of a STORY!!!” As the war progressed, the image of Lincoln as a folksy banterer had a new, dire resonance: it echoed Nero fiddling while Rome burned.

³⁹ Currier & Ives, “*The Nigger*” in *the Woodpile*, New York, 1860. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, <<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html>>

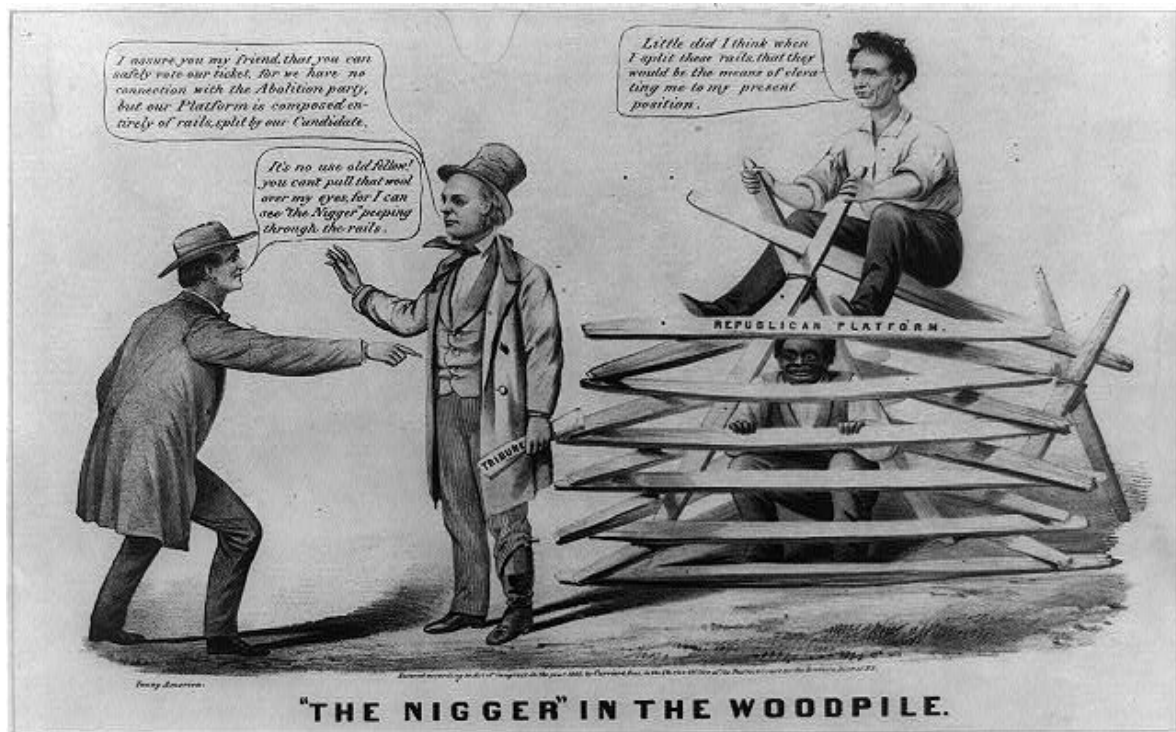


Figure 2. Currier & Ives, *"The Nigger" in the Woodpile*, New York, 1860. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, <<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html>>



Figure 3. Joseph E. Baker, *Columbia Demands Her Children!* Boston, 1864. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division , <<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html>>

But Lincoln's assassination at the very moment of his victory rendered an instant and immutable change in his public perception, and consequently in his iconography. Brought down in retaliation for his unswerving devotion to a righteous cause, Lincoln instantly assumed the status of a martyr, and citizens ascribed to him characteristics typical of those most well-known martyrs, the Christian saints. The extremity of this shift is understandable in that the very nature of the Civil War's battle over slavery tended to inflate the perception of the conflict into a battle between good and evil. After all, abolitionist sentiment had been born among the religious leaders of the North. They saw slavery as a national sin that separated families and damned slaveowners into becoming evil tyrants: in their eyes, the mission of the war had always been to do the work of God.⁴⁰ Furthermore, religion's currency in everyday American life had not yet waned; if anything, the sense of religious crisis intensified during the Civil War as ordinary citizens attempted to make sense of death on an incomprehensible scale. "Saint," notes Ann Douglas, "was a term that had not lost its vitality in Victorian religious thought."⁴¹ Across the North, ministers preached memorial sermons casting Lincoln's assassination as a trial by fire that, like the jeremiads of old, should rededicate Americans to the cause of truth, justice, and piety.⁴² On April 23, 1865, Edward Payson Powell preached to his congregation in Plymouth, Michigan, that Lincoln

had a right to reap the fruit of his labors. But he cannot! Dead! Dead! Would to God I had died for thee! Oh Lincoln! My Father! My Father! Assassinated! Oh how an American hates that cowardly word. Henceforth he will hate it with a double detestation. But alas we needed the blow. We needed it to waken us to the

⁴⁰ See Ann Douglas, "Introduction," in Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 22.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴² See Sacvan Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*.

horrid nature of treason. We were so tired of war that we were willing to buy peace at a sacrifice of justice and safety. We needed it to unite the people, and under a common loss, to bind us for a common effort.⁴³

Phineas D. Gurley, a Presbyterian minister from New York who preached over Lincoln's body in the East Room of the White House, had a similarly devotional message when he reminded the attendees that, though Lincoln had died, "he, being dead, yet speaketh" through his faith and believers' faith in him.⁴⁴ Through his "steady enduring confidence in God, and in the complete ultimate success of the cause of God, which is the cause of humanity, more than by any other way, does he now speak to us and to the nation he loved and served so well."⁴⁵ Ministers exhorted their listeners to believe that Lincoln's spirit had been raised up by God to guide the nation, and that it was their duty to unite with one another in order to complete Lincoln's difficult task of stamping out the slave power while still retaining the South.

Magazines such as *Harper's* reproduced the notion that Lincoln's death was of deep religious import. In June 1865, *Harper's* printed a six-panel memorial spread for Lincoln by Thomas Nast entitled *Victory and Death* (fig. 4). In the largest panel, titled "Our Martyred President," a knight symbolizing Victory kneels tearfully before the throne of the ghostly skeletal figure of Death. Below him, a placard reads "Victory and Death. Death levels all things in his march, nought can resist his mighty strength/The palace proud, -Triumphal Arch, shall mete their shadows length." Five smaller vignettes ring the central scene: at the top left, a white family cries piteously into handkerchiefs

⁴³ E.P. Powell, *Sermons on recent national victories, and the national sorrow.: Preached, April 23d, 1865, in the Plymouth church.* (Adrian, Michigan: Smith & Foster, 1865). University of Michigan Library, Making of America Books, available at <<http://name.umdl.umich.edu/ACK9066.0001.001>>

⁴⁴ Phineas Gurley, *White House Funeral Sermon For President Lincoln*, April 19th, 1865.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

with the legend “Thy will be done,” while at the top right, a black family kneels in prayer with the caption “Our Saviour.” At the bottom, three panels shaped as a triptych depicts the symbolic figures of Europe and America weeping by Lincoln’s casket flanked by citizens celebrating the Union victory in the streets at left and Lincoln’s funeral procession at right. The depictions of Lincoln’s casket (black, with silver stars) as well as his catafalque in the parade are true to the factual record, which readers would have recognized from the broad coverage of Lincoln’s funeral rites.⁴⁶ The powerful image of Death reigning over Victory resembles a *memento mori*, mirroring the emotional turmoil that characterized the month of April, 1865, when devastation came so swiftly upon the heels of elation. Tellingly, Death is the largest figure in this representation of the Civil War’s finale. But it is interesting to note that the two family vignettes interpret the conflict in strictly Biblical terms: the white family mourns Lincoln, attempting to accept the will of God, while the black family prays for their fallen savior.

Juxtaposing families mourning with the scenes of the funeral procession was particularly appropriate because so many families did turn out to view Lincoln’s funeral train. On that final journey, Lincoln’s corpse made its trek from Washington, D.C., to Springfield, Illinois through nearly every major city in the Northeast. The train featured a specially-built Pullman car with glass sides so that Lincoln’s casket could be viewed by the gathered mourners as it stopped for memorial ceremonies in Baltimore, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, New York, Albany, Buffalo, Cleveland, Columbus, Indianapolis, and Chicago, not to mention the smaller towns where it paused for shorter viewings.

⁴⁶ “President Lincoln’s Funeral Procession in Washington City.” *Harper’s Weekly*, May 6, 1865, 217.



Figure 4. Thomas Nast, *Victory and Death*. *Harper's*, June 10, 1865, 360-361. HarpWeek, Duke University Libraries.

Hundreds of thousands of mourners filed past Lincoln's body at ceremonies in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago alone.⁴⁷

In this way, the citizens of the Northeast and West personally participated in Lincoln's funeral procession. They gathered to watch the process of sending Lincoln home, which mirrored the railway journeys of thousands of soldiers' corpses that had been sent home after undergoing the new technological process of embalming.⁴⁸ But not all bodies made it home; many were interred in mass graves, some were never even found. In turning out to witness Lincoln's passage to Springfield, citizens displayed both their respect for the man himself and their approval of his long voyage home. In returning for burial to the state to which he had bid fond farewell at the beginning of the war, Lincoln was doing what many could not. The *New York Herald* reported that as the funeral train passed through Bridgeport, Illinois, the torches of the onlookers illuminated a banner emblazoned with the motto "Come Home."⁴⁹

R.E. Harris, a Union soldier whose regiment led the funeral procession for Lincoln in Washington, D.C., described the experience in a letter to his mother. "The Presidents Body was placed under the dome of the Capitol and the day following the funeral he lay in State for the purpose of permitting all the American people who desired to see him to do so," he wrote. Noting that hundreds of thousands attended the viewing, Harris added "I never wept so much over the death of any person as his." He also commented upon the process of Lincoln's sudden transformation from charlatan to saint,

⁴⁷ See Thomas J. Craughwell, *Stealing Lincoln's Body* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 16-18.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁴⁹ "The Funeral Train. The Reception of the Remains at Mr. Lincoln's Home." *The New York Herald*, 4 May 1865. The Civil War Collection, Accessible Archives <<http://www.accessible.com/accessible>>.

remarking that “I have had men say to me since who had before denounced him as a corrupt man that they felt so miserable since his assassination that they could neither sleep nor eat and were satsfied [sic] that he was a pure honest and good man.”⁵⁰

Marching in Lincoln’s funeral procession helped to relieve these naysayers’ feelings of guilt for having despised a man now widely admired for his devotion and suffering.

Though the funeral train carried Lincoln’s body to its final resting place, it was left up to artists to ensure his spirit made it there as well. Two Chicago lithographers, J. Gemmel and Gustav Fuchs, printed similar images of Lincoln’s spirit arriving at his tomb in 1867.

Both are quiet, peaceful scenes, depicting the immediately-recognizable shape of Lincoln’s burial monument framed by woods. Gemmel’s *The Tomb and Shade of Lincoln* (fig. 5) features a transparent figure of Lincoln’s ghost, beardless as in his youth, wearing a waistcoat and staring into the distance at his own grave. With his hands in his pockets and one knee bent as if about to take a step forward, the shade of Lincoln looks as if it has been walking awhile in thought and has reached the last league before returning home. Fuchs’ version, *The Spirit of Our Martyr Visiting His Tomb* (fig. 6), takes the metaphor one step further, erasing even the slightest trace of Lincoln’s features and instead representing him as a silhouette formed by two willow trees intertwined, standing just outside his tomb. Here, Lincoln’s spirit has not only gone home, it has assimilated into the very landscape of the country.

Images and rituals of bearing Lincoln’s body and spirit home fulfilled Americans’ desire to complete the traditional process of mourning interrupted by the Civil War. Mourners did for him what they wished to do for members of their own family: lay him

⁵⁰ R.E. Harris, letter to mother, April 23, 1865. Nathaniel Harris Harrison papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries, Southern Historical Collection.



Figure 5. J. Gemmel, *The Tomb and Shade of Lincoln*. Chicago, 1867. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Archive, Washington, D.C.



Figure 6. Gustav Fuchs, *The Spirit of Our Martyr Visiting His Tomb*. Chicago: Joseph Kuhn, 1867.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Archive, Washington, D.C.

to rest in his native ground.

In fact, after his death, Lincoln began to be characterized as family member, particularly as a father figure in the national family. Despite an apparent lack of interest in appearing as one during his lifetime, Lincoln developed a reputation in prints and photographs as a family man after the Civil War. Lincoln never sat for a photograph with his wife, and not until 1864 did he allow any occasion for a photographer to take his portrait in a domestic milieu. That picture, Mathew Brady's 1864 photograph of a bespectacled Lincoln reading with his son Tad, only became famous when *Harper's Weekly* published it after Lincoln's death in 1865.⁵¹ Nevertheless, it enjoyed repeated interpretations throughout the balance of the century, along with a host of lithographs and paintings depicting Lincoln in family scenes, many of which expanded the portrait of Lincoln with Tad to include a whole family tableau.⁵² Artists frequently chose to project the Lincolns back in time to 1861, presumably so that they could capture the family in a state of greater happiness, before the outbreak of war and before Willie's death.⁵³

Representations of Lincoln on his deathbed continued the theme of family at the expense of the historical record of the event. In the weeks after Lincoln's death, artists produced scenes of his assassination and deathbed with astonishing rapidity, playing fast and loose with the details of the tragedy in their hurry to sell lithographs to a public hungry for visual representations of a story they had read voraciously as it emerged in

⁵¹ Holzer et. al, *The Lincoln Image*, 174-175.

⁵² For examples, see Haskel & Allen, *The Lincoln Family*, (Boston: Haskel & Allen, c. 1865), Francis Bicknell Carpenter, *The Lincoln Family*, (New York: J.C. Buttre, 1867), D. Wiest, *Lincoln and His Family* (Philadelphia: William Smith, 1865).

⁵³ Francis Bicknell Carpenter, *The Lincoln Family in 1861* (1865). In Holzer et. al., *The Lincoln Image*, 176.

special bulletins. Currier & Ives' lithograph entitled *Death of President Lincoln at Washington, D.C., April 15th 1865, the nation's martyr* depicted Mary Todd Lincoln, as well as Tad, sobbing with a troop of statesmen over her husband's prone form.⁵⁴ A lithograph of the "Death Bed of Lincoln" showed Mary Todd on her knees beside the bed, crying into the coverlet as Lincoln died, while more than a dozen members of his Cabinet posed awkwardly around the bed.⁵⁵ In actuality, the tiny room in which Lincoln drew his last breath held no more than a handful of people at a time, and Mary Todd had been removed from the vigil shortly after arriving due to her hysterical outbursts. She was not present when her husband died.⁵⁶

Many of the Lincoln family and deathbed scenes were not originals—in fact, painters and lithographers often poached them from preexisting images of American statesmen, most notably those depicting George Washington.⁵⁷ Engravings of the Washington family similar to the ones produced portraying the Lincolns had a brief popularity in the 1790s, and lithographers in the 1840s and 1850s depicted Washington's

⁵⁴ Currier & Ives, *Death of President Lincoln at Washington, D.C., April 15th 1865, the nation's martyr*, 1865. Emmet Collection of Manuscripts Etc. Relating to American History, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs Print Collection, Humanities and Social Sciences Library, New York Public Library Digital Gallery <<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/index.cfm>>.

⁵⁵ Brett & Co., *Death Bed of Lincoln*. N.D. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Online, <<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html>>.

⁵⁶ The *New York Herald* reported that "Mrs. Lincoln took her last leave of him about twenty minutes before he expired, and was sitting in the adjoining room when it was announced to her that he was dead.": "Our Loss. The Great National Calamity. Death of the President. Details of the Calamity. The Herald Despatches." *The New York Herald*, 16 April 1865. The Civil War Collection, Accessible Archives <<http://www.accessible.com/accessible>>.

⁵⁷ In addition, artists frequently substituted Lincoln's face for that of John C. Calhoun when updating earlier lithographs. For example, see Henry S. Sadd, *Union* (New York: William Pate, 1852), depicting the Compromise of 1850 with Calhoun at center, and *Union* (New York, c. 1861), a reprint in which Lincoln has been depicted in Calhoun's stead. In Holzer, et. al, *The Lincoln Image*, 68-69.

peaceful deathbed in a manner similar to that employed by those who later would render images of Lincoln.⁵⁸

Yet Lincoln's posthumous iconography differed from Washington's in crucial ways. To begin, Washington had no children, which did not lend him well to domestic scenes. In essence a military man, contemporary notions of Washington's personality and style of leadership lent a solitary, formal aspect to his representation. "Washington was characterized by an almost unapproachable loftiness of bearing," remarked *The Christian Advocate and Journal* in a comparison of the two presidents in Lincoln's obituary, adding that his martial deportment "gave to him the aspect of a Roman rather than of an American."⁵⁹ Paintings like Rembrandt Peale's 1824 portrait of Washington depicted him in uniform, eyes focused in the distance, his expression of noble dignity appropriate to his military station and rank as an American hero.⁶⁰ Washington stood alone, as in Jean Nicolas Laugier's 1839 print, in which the General surveys the battlefield from an elevated vantage point while an awed soldier leads his charger to him.⁶¹

Nevertheless, the American populace linked the spirits of Washington and Lincoln in the national consciousness, and imagining their reunion in heaven had deep emotional resonance. "If Lincoln possessed not his forerunner's unmatched and almost

⁵⁸ For an example of paintings of the Washington family similar to those produced about the Lincolns, see Edward Savage and David Edwin, *The Washington Family./ George Washington his Lady, and her two Grandchildren by the name of Custis* (Philadelphia and London, c. 1798) National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. For examples of Washington's deathbed see Regnier, *Life of George Washington/ The Christian*. (Paris: Lemercier, 1854), N. Currier, *Death of Washington, Dec. 14th A.D. 1799* (New York: 1846). Library of Congress. In Holzer, *Washington and Lincoln Portrayed*, 52-54.

⁵⁹ "Death of President Lincoln." *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 20, 1865, 124.

⁶⁰ Rembrandt Peale, *George Washington*, c. 1824. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. In Holzer, *Washington and Lincoln Portrayed*, 37.

⁶¹ Jean Nicolas Laugier, *Washington* (New York: James Herring, 1839). The Old Print Gallery, Washington, D.C. In Holzer, *Washington and Lincoln Portrayed*, 43.

superhuman grandeur, he was more gentle and sweet,” pronounced Reverend C. A. Bartol in a sermon reproduced in *The Monthly Religious Magazine* in July, 1865, “He was not Washington’s fac-simile, but counterpart. Heaven be blest for them both!”⁶²

Lincoln’s assassination on Good Friday and unintentional martyrdom for his nation quickly led to his spirit’s assumption of a status akin to that of Jesus Christ, and the parallel prompted writers and artists immediately to cast Washington and Lincoln in the Biblical roles of creator and redeemer of the nation, respectively. In 1865, Currier & Ives produced a lithograph of Washington shaking Lincoln’s hand in front of the eternal flame of liberty, entitled “Washington and Lincoln, the Father and the Saviour of Our Country.”⁶³ The New York Herald reported that the room in the Illinois Capitol building designed for Lincoln’s lying-in-state included but two inscriptions on its walls:

SOONER THAN SURRENDER THIS PRINCIPLE, I WOULD BE ASSASSINATED ON THE SPOT.

WASHINGTON THE FATHER. LINCOLN THE SAVIOR.⁶⁴

The instant connection between Washington and Lincoln in American national mythology generated an immediate desire to depict their spirits together. Though enterprising artists once again co-opted earlier images of Washington’s apotheosis to depict Lincoln’s ascent to his heavenly throne, for the first time artists could envision a face-to-face meeting between the two great presidents.⁶⁵

⁶²C.A. Bartol, “The Significance of Abraham Lincoln as Man and President.” *The Monthly Religious Magazine*, July 1865, vol. 34, no. 1, APS Online, 31.

⁶³ Currier & Ives, *Washington and Lincoln, the Father and the Saviour of Our Country*. (New York, 1865). Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Online, <<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html>>.

⁶⁴ “The Funeral Train. The Reception of the Remains at Mr. Lincoln’s Home.” *The New York Herald*, 4 May 1865. The Civil War Collection, Accessible Archives <<http://www.accessible.com/accessible>>.

⁶⁵ See for example D.T. Wiest, *In Memory of Abraham Lincoln./ The Reward of the Just* (Philadelphia: William Smith, c. 1865) after John James Barralet, *Apotheosis of George Washington* (Philadelphia: Simon Chaudron and Barralet, 1802).

And they did more than merely meet. It was Washington's spirit that welcomed Lincoln's to heaven; Washington's spirit the angels sent as an emissary to collect Lincoln from earth and bring him to his rightful place among them. In John Sartain's 1865 painting *Abraham Lincoln. The Martyr./ Victorious*, a solemn Washington, along with a small legion of winged angels bearing palms and a crown of olive leaves, opens his arms to Lincoln (fig. 7). His right arm holding Lincoln's elbow, his left gesturing to heaven with Lincoln's palm on his shoulder, Washington both points the way to heaven and assists in Lincoln's ascension.⁶⁶

Lincoln seems to have brought out Washington's tenderness through their spiritual reunion. The spirits of Washington and Lincoln display a marked intimacy with one another, especially in images such as S.J. Ferris's 1865 *Washington & Lincoln. (Apotheosis)* in which the two leaders share a close embrace (fig. 8).⁶⁷ In the next world, as artists imagined it, Washington solaced the pained soul of Lincoln. More than anything, these artists fulfilled an apparent need to see Lincoln cared for in the next world, brought to rest and honored for the long battle he had fought and won.

A peaceful and dignified death was at a premium during the Civil War. Both soldiers and civilians knew that just as bullets could end life suddenly, before one had a

⁶⁶ John Sartain, *Abraham Lincoln. The Martyr. /Victorious*. (New York: W.H. Hermans, 1865). Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Online, < <http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html>>

⁶⁷ Ferris, S. J. *Washington and Lincoln (Apotheosis)*. Philadelphia: Phil. Pho. Co., 1865. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Online. <<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html>>.

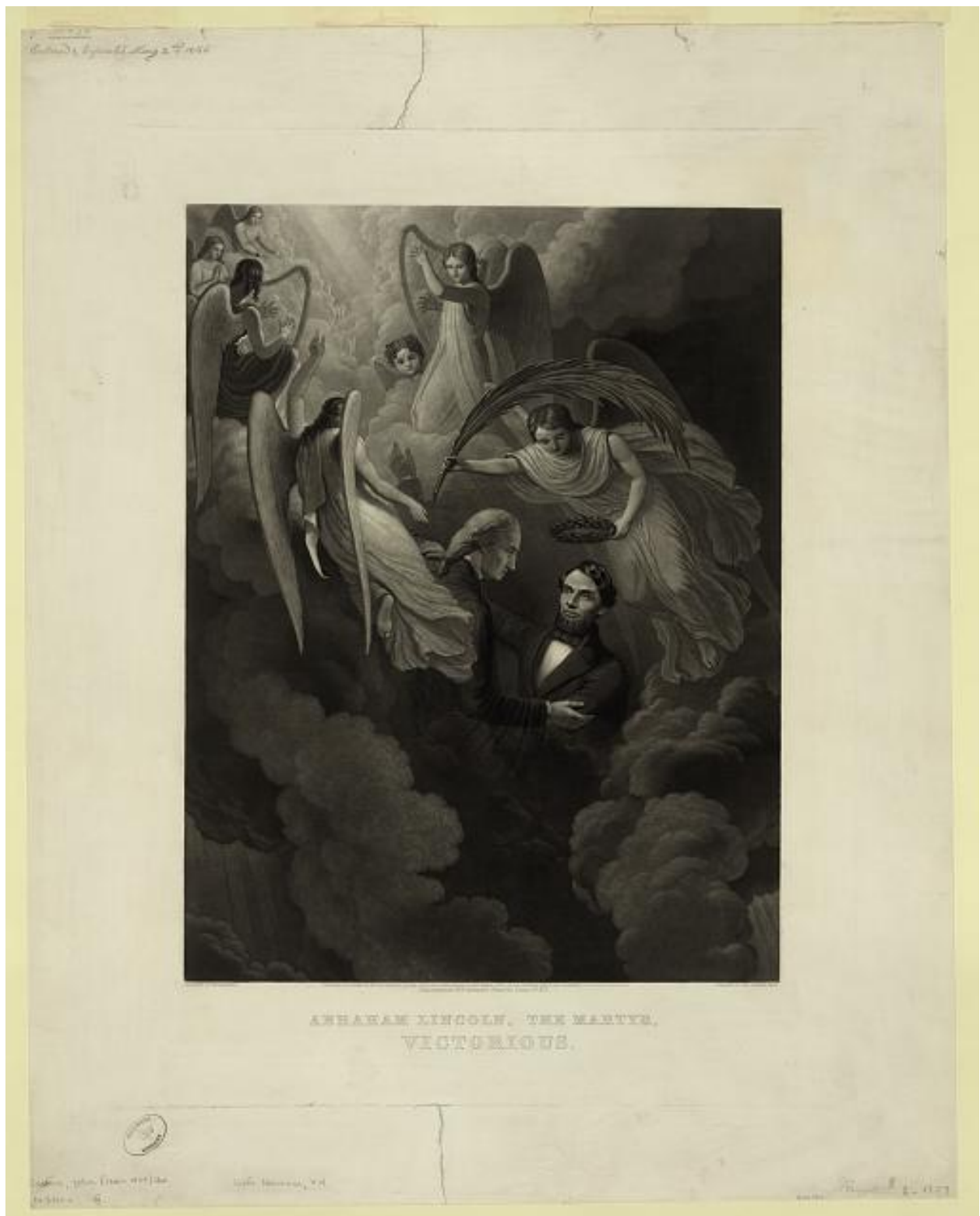


Figure 7. John Sartain, *Abraham Lincoln. The Martyr./Victorious*. New York: W.W. Hermans, 1865.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Online,
<<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html>>.



Figure 8. Ferris, S. J. *Washington and Lincoln (Apotheosis)* Philadelphia: Phil. Pho. Co., 1865.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.
<<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html>> .

chance to prepare to meet death, disease and malnutrition could end life slowly, inducing dangerous melancholia and eroding one's relationship with God. To die well in the nineteenth century, one had to demonstrate calm acceptance of his fate as well as faith in God's promise of salvation.⁶⁸ Such a peaceful end was difficult to muster on the battlefield or in camp hospitals, and citizens on the home front were confronted with images that suggested that soldiers' deaths were anything but regal and decorous. Mathew Brady's famous photographs of the battlefield dead, which were displayed in New York City in 1862, revealed a grisly and meaningless world of empty bodies in various states of decay (fig. 9). The ugly reality of death undermined the perceived glory of battle and threatened the valor of the nation's sacrifice.

Representations of Abraham Lincoln's death, however, retained the serenity and magnitude that Americans hoped to accomplish on their deathbeds, and in doing so both ameliorated the shock of his assassination and restored the epic significance of the war's death toll. Newspapers reported the silence and dignity with which Lincoln passed into the next world, according him a beatific happiness that he scarcely could have mustered in his comatose state. "At twenty-two minutes past seven A.M. his muscles relaxed and the spirit of Abraham Lincoln fled from its earthly tabernacle to that bourne from which no traveller returns," reported *The New York Herald*:

As he drew his last breath the Rev. Dr. Gurley addressed the Throne of Grace with a fervent prayer for his heartbroken family and his mourning country. The countenance of the president was beaming with that characteristic smile which only those who have seen him in his happiest moments can appreciate; and except the blackness of his eyes his face appeared perfectly natural. He died without a struggle, and without even a perceptible motion of a limb. Calmly and silently the

⁶⁸ See Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 17.



Figure 9. Mathew Brady, *Confederate Dead behind a stone wall at Fredericksburg, Va.*, c. 1862-1863. National Archives, Mathew Brady Photographs of Civil War Era Personalities and Scenes Collection Online, <<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/brady-photos/>>.

great and good man passed away.⁶⁹

Artistic reproductions of the deathbed scene reinforced the notion that Lincoln smiled as he expired. In the 1865 print *Death Bed of Abraham Lincoln./ Died April 15th 1865*, Lincoln is wearing a clean white nightgown, his head tipped back in a regal position, a saintly smile upon his face (fig. 10).⁷⁰ He looks as if he is positively enjoying the experience of dying. Newspapers were quick to assure their readers that Lincoln had felt no pain during the hours between Booth's shot at Ford's Theatre and his death many hours later. "From the moment that the President was shot up to his death he was insensible, and exhibited no signs of pain," reported the *New York Herald*. "He was watched with tender care, and all that could be was done for him; but his fate had been ruled."⁷¹ Representations of Lincoln's death, rather than exhibiting the violence and terror that governed the event itself and its aftermath in Washington, D.C., instead emphasized the sentimental sweetness with which the great leader died and the dignity and sorrow displayed by those at his bedside.

Moreover, early tributes to Lincoln in the wake of his death reminded readers that Lincoln's presence—and therefore the ideals for which he fought—lived on, thus consecrating the sacrifices made by the Civil War dead and assuring their continued significance. That Lincoln's values would continue on despite his death had unique

⁶⁹ "Our Loss," *The New York Herald*, 16 April 1865. Note that here the *Herald* makes reference to Hamlet's famous "to be or not to be" soliloquy: "The undiscovered country from whose bourn/ No traveller returns, puzzles the will/ And makes us rather bear those ills we have/ Than fly to others that we know not of?" *Hamlet*, ed. Greenblatt et. al. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 3.1.81-84.

⁷⁰ *Deathbed of Abraham Lincoln/ Died April 15th 1865* (1865). Emmet Collection of Manuscripts Etc. Relating to American History, Prints and Photographs Print Collection, New York Public Library Digital Gallery <<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/index.cfm>>

⁷¹ "Our Loss," *The New York Herald*, 16 April 1865.

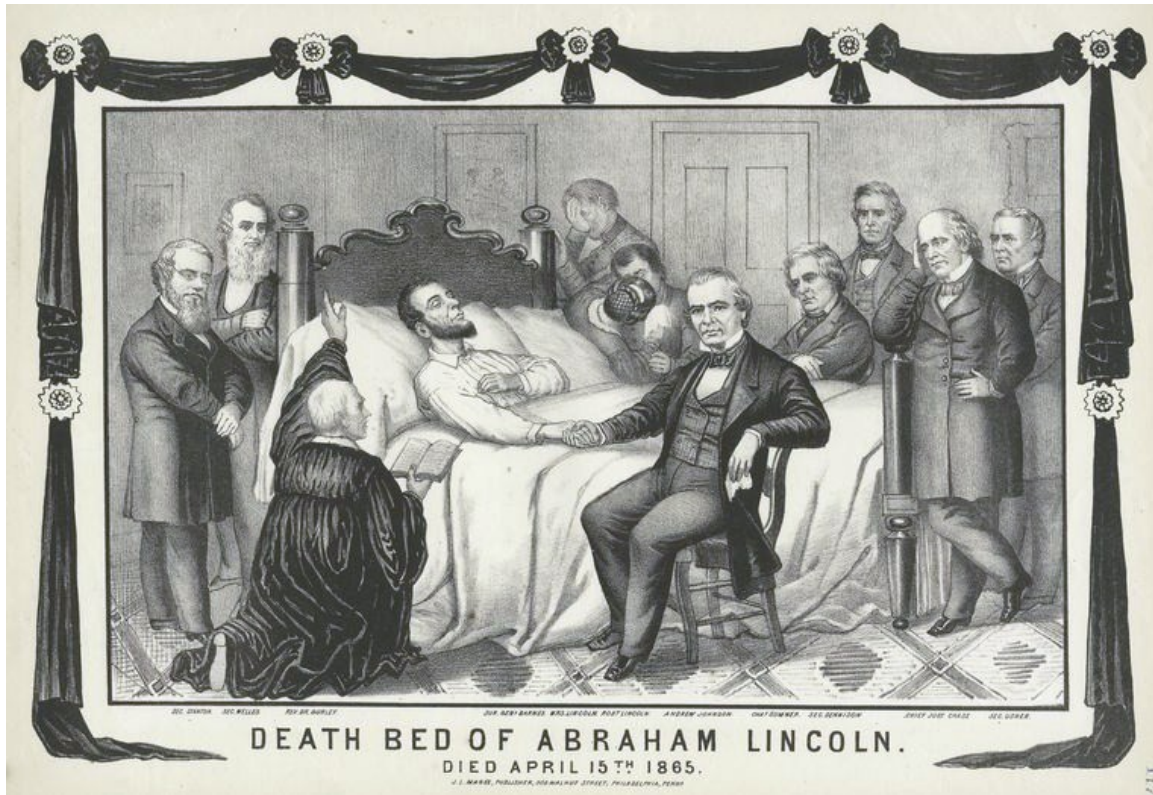


Figure 10. *Death Bed of Abraham Lincoln./ Died April 15th 1865.* Emmet Collection of Manuscripts Etc. Relating to American History, Prints and Photographs Print Collection, New York Public Library Digital Gallery <<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/index.cfm>>.

import to newly-freed African-Americans. A funeral ode by George Moses Horton, a former slave living in Chatham County, North Carolina, averred that an assassin's bullet could never truly kill Lincoln:

Still weep, my soul, remain to weep;
That one so noble thus should die;
His spirit mount into the sky,
His hallowed bones can only sleep.
Still, still, the praise to him we give,
Brave President forever live!

Whoever born must live to die---
The King, the Regent and the Peer,
And leave regardless of a tear,
Down trickling from the weeping eye!
The tears of sorrow may be shed,
But Lincoln will be never dead!⁷²

John C. Brock, quartermaster sergeant of the 43rd U.S. Colored infantry, wrote to *The Christian Recorder*, an African American newspaper printed in Philadelphia, exhorting, "Dry up your tears, ye weeping daughters of Columbia. Your Chieftain is not dead, he still lives," wrote.⁷³ Though he conceded that "President Lincoln is no more," he amended, "No more *as in former years*" (emphasis added). Though the physical body of the president was empty and his tenure on earth had ended, for Brock

He lives in the thousands of brave soldiers, who still keep step to the music of the Union, who are resolved to see that flag, he loved so well, planted victoriously over every foot of American soil, who are bound to see his great principle of Union and Liberty carried out to the letter, who are bound to see that treason is trampled out from off the face of this Union.⁷⁴

⁷² George Moses Horton, "Assassination of Abraham Lincoln," *Naked Genius* (Wm. B. Smith & Co.: Southern Field and Fireside Book Publishing House, 1865). American Poetry, <http://collections.chadwyck.com/marketing/home_ap.jsp>

⁷³ John C. Brock, "Death of the President." *The Christian Recorder*, 6 May 1865. African American Newspapers Collection, Accessible Archives <<http://www.accessible.com/accessible>>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

For African-American soldiers, Lincoln would stay alive in hearts and in principles. “God so willed it, that He has taken our beloved father, Abraham Lincoln, from us,” wrote Henry Carpenter Hoyle, a soldier from the 43rd Regiment of the United States Colored Troops. “But although dead, yet he lives. He brought liberty to the slaves, both North and South. He broke the chains of the oppressed in the South, and gave us in the North the freedom of speech. . . . Let us not care for man as long as God is on our side.”⁷⁵

Many visualized Lincoln fulfilling the Christian afterlife in heaven, even as he assumed religious overtones as a Christ to the nation and a Moses to the slaves freed by the Emancipation Proclamation. A writer in *The Christian Recorder* hoped to give comfort to readers with the idea that while his body was no more, Lincoln himself was “chanting heavenly praises around the throne of God.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, by virtue of his role as Lincoln’s successor, Andrew Johnson often inherited a symbolic mantle as well. “As Joshua was to Moses, so we expect Andrew Johnson to be as the successor of Abraham Lincoln,” declared the *New York Herald* immediately after Lincoln’s death. “We expect him to take up the mantle of the great leader of Israel, and to conduct his people triumphantly into the occupation of the promised land.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Henry Carpenter Hoyle, “Letter from Brownsville, Texas. Benefit of Colored Soldiers.” *The Christian Recorder*, 25 September 1865. African American Newspapers Collection, Accessible Archives, <<http://www.accessible.com/accessible/>>.

⁷⁶ “Our California Letter.” *The Christian Recorder*, 20 May 1865. African American Newspapers Collection, Accessible Archives, <<http://www.accessible.com/accessible/>>.

⁷⁷ “Our Dead President and Our Living President – The Spirit and Purpose of the Nation.” *The New York Herald*, 16 April 1865. The Civil War Collection, Accessible Archives, <<http://www.accessible.com/accessible/>>.

Lincoln, like Moses, had a glorious mission of salvation that ended with his being called back to heaven after he had fulfilled his duty but before he had a chance to enjoy the fruits of life within the nation he had saved. *The Christian Advocate and Journal* summarized the people's view of Lincoln and Johnson perfectly:

We have learned to consider the selection of our public agents, and the order of public affairs as too manifestly providential to allow us to separate them in our thoughts from the divine guidance. To our limited views it seems that Mr. Lincoln was as manifestly called of God to his high position for the salvation of this nation, as was Moses to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. . . . Like Moses, too, he was permitted to bring the people fully into sight of the great end of their labors and conflict, but not to bring them in. A mission was given him which he has most faithfully and successfully accomplished; but the consummation of the work now devolves upon another.⁷⁸

More often than not, writers simply imagined Lincoln's spirit sleeping. Given his exhausting role leading the country through the Civil War, and the premature age and misery it conferred upon him, the idea of Lincoln's spirit earning the rest his body rarely had enjoyed during the years of struggle must have been appealing. Songwriters composed a host of funeral dirges and mournful odes that granted Lincoln rest in song. For example, James M. Stewart and George A. Brown composed "Let the President Sleep" in 1865:

Let the President sleep! all his duty is done,
He has lived for our glory, the triumph is won;
At the close of the fight like a warrior brave,
He retires from the field to the rest of the grave.
Hush the roll of the drum, hush the cannon's loud roar,
He will guide us to peace through the battle no more;
But now freedom shall dawn from the place of his rest,
Where the star has gone down in the beautiful West.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ "Death of President Lincoln." *Christian Advocate and Journal*, 20 April 1865, vol. 40, no.16; APS Online, 124.

⁷⁹ James M. Stewart and George A. Brown, "Let the President Sleep." Providence: J.R. Cory, 1865.



Figure 11. John K. Paine, *In Memory of President Lincoln: A Funeral March*. New York: Beer & Schirmer, c. 1865. Sheet Music from the Alfred Whital Stern Collection of Lincolniana, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress.

Songs like these, which were intended for performance in the family parlor, allowed ordinary Americans to participate in the grieving process for the president in their own homes even as newspapers covered the funeral rites on the national stage. Songs of mourning replicated hymns to the departed that otherwise might have been sung in church, featuring memorial cover art that placed Lincoln as an angel among the clouds (fig. 11). Describing the mourning procession in the White House, the *Herald* added, “Every person moved along on tiptoe, as if fearful of disturbing the long and deep sleep of the great and good man whose body lay within those walls.”⁸⁰ The metaphor endured: when *The Farmer’s Cabinet* published a brief note in its January, 1866 issue on the passing of “the illustrious departed of 1865,” at the head of the list was “the noble Lincoln—the President, the Emancipator, the honest patriot and citizen. Peace to his ashes. He sleeps well.”⁸¹

Lincoln was sleeping, but his body was ash. Commentators were careful to discern the remains of Lincoln’s body from his spirit, playing up the absence of the late president’s soul when discussing his corpse. As Lincoln’s ghost had fled from its earthly tabernacle, leaving his shell empty, empty too were the earthly tabernacles that physically encased him. A description of Lincoln’s body lying in state at the White House commented only upon how much “the body” resembled the statesman whose soul it had once contained, as if Lincoln himself were in no way connected with it:

The body was dressed in the suit of plain black worn by him on the occasion of his last inauguration. Upon his pillow and over the breast of the corpse were

⁸⁰ “The Rites. Services at the White House. The White House in Mourning.” *The New York Herald*, 20 April 1865. The Civil War Collection, Accessible Archives, <<http://www.accessible.com/accessible>>.

⁸¹ “[President; Emancipator; Lincoln; Edward; Everett; Washington; Cowin].” *The Farmer’s Cabinet*, 4 January 1866, vol. 64, no. 24. Newsbank/Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers, 2.

scattered white flowers and green leaves, offerings of affection. The features are natural. A placid smile is upon the lips. The eyes and upper part of the cheeks are still discolored by the effects of the cruel shot which caused his death. The face, however, is natural, and the broad brow and firm jaw remain as in the portraits of the late President, so familiar to the people.⁸²

Lincoln, as just one more death within the greater national tragedy of war, had passed beyond the suffering of his body too.

Representations of Lincoln's spirit erased his pain and the collective pain of the nation after the Civil War, eschewing the gritty reality of death in favor of beautiful allegorical images that befitted the sacrifice of a martyr to justice. But further, images of Lincoln as a ghost demonstrate the break in American mourning practices occasioned by the Civil War. In picturing Lincoln's ghost, Americans recaptured a vision of noble and sacred death that the Civil War had challenged in every way, even harnessing the emerging technology of photography to ameliorate the trauma perpetrated by the emerging technology of war. The image of his spirit, like his body, returned to his home and family, when so many bodies could not; he died in restful peace, when so many had been cut down without an opportunity to make their peace with God; he died valiantly for a cause, when so many questioned the true meaning of this great war. Images and invocations of Lincoln's spirit as saint helped to confirm citizens' faith in the justness of the Union cause and ensured the bereaved that its many fallen soldiers had not died in vain. But they also bred his iconography for the ages, under the auspices of grief. It is this image of Lincoln that has come down to us today: not the Lincoln of victory, but the Lincoln of mourning.

⁸² "Our Grief. Additional Details of the Terrible Event of Friday Night. The Herald Despatches." *The New York Herald*, 17 April 1865. The Civil War Collection, Accessible Archives, <<http://www.accessible.com/accessible>>.

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