

Abraham Lincoln and the Problem of Progress

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Abraham Lincoln was as sociable as he was sad. An acquaintance recalled the young Lincoln as a store clerk, treating his “customers and friends . . . always . . . with great tenderness—kindness and honesty.”¹ Others knew Lincoln as a man haunted by nightmares, given to periods of deep melancholy, and obsessed with ambition and failure. Lincoln’s personal demons may seem more suited for study by a psychologist rather than a historian, but historians, in trying to make sense of the dead, focus on public categories of identity, such as race, gender, religion, or political party. Lincoln was a Whig; Lincoln was a lawyer; Lincoln was middle class; Lincoln was a Protestant, as if the sum of our public parts is enough to explain the whole. In this essay I want to try what Lincoln and his contemporaries were trying to do: to see the personal as the foundation of the public. What fascinates me most about Lincoln is his temperament, particularly his inclination to see the world in shades of gray rather than black and white. That temperament, I want to suggest, while a product of genetic codes, was also socially constructed.

Throughout a life that followed a classic nineteenth-century trajectory from rural childhood to urban respectability, Lincoln struggled to balance certainty and doubt, conviction and compassion, the need to *act* and the need to *reflect*. He never fully succeeded. But much of what he said and did flowed from his belief that we can never resolve a basic conflict between our ability to envision progress and our inability to control it. Lincoln’s self-consciousness and social awkwardness were commonplace; what made him unusual was his need to locate himself in a larger narrative of human history. Nineteenth-century middle-class people loved to talk about themselves. In

particular, they craved narratives, whether in the form of history, biography, or fiction, which united private character and public development. Their stories explained success and failure in highly personal terms. Lincoln, of course, was very much a part of that culture. Ironically, however, it was his inability to accept the basic assumptions of that culture, his failure to integrate himself fully into that culture, which allowed him to transcend it. Try as he might, he simply could not avoid the conclusion that history is contingent and ambiguous and that people who think otherwise, no matter how well intentioned, are not only foolish, but dangerous.

Lincoln was hardly opposed to action, as George B. McClellan learned to his sorrow and Ulysses S. Grant learned to his reward. He was, in fact, quite capable of posing a stark moral choice and demanding that people do something. The “real issue” between North and South, he said in October 1858, was “the eternal struggle between those two principles—right and wrong.” Let people not be “diverted” by efforts to find “some middle ground between the right and the wrong,” he asserted in February 1860, but “HAVE FAITH THAT RIGHT MAKES MIGHT, AND IN THAT FAITH, LET US, TO THE END, DARE TO DO OUR DUTY, AS WE UNDERSTAND IT.”²

Yet Lincoln distrusted action because it was so unpredictable. Even his opposition to slavery was expressed in glittering generalities and circumscribed with qualifications about what Americans should actually *do* about slavery. Duty was constructed by individual understanding; duty was not an absolute truth. Lincoln, in the words of David Donald, was “temperamentally averse to making bold moves. It was his style to react to decisions made by others rather than to take the initiative himself.”³ His genius lay in his instinct for empathy and ambivalence.

Lincoln *always* worried about the fragility of the American republic and its precarious place in the larger narrative of human history. “If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide,” he said as a young man. And there was much at risk. “We are a great empire,” he continued almost twenty years later, “We stand at once the wonder and admiration of the whole world.” Lincoln later invoked a popular trope to clinch his point. “Just now, in civilization, and the arts, the people of Asia are entirely behind those of Europe; those of the East of Europe behind those of West of it; while we, here in America, *think* we discover, and invent, and improve, faster than any of them. *They* may think this is arrogance; but they cannot deny that Russia has called on us to show her how to build steam-boats and railroads—while in the older parts of Asia, they scarcely know that such things as S.Bs & RR.s. exist.”⁴

Running through this thoroughly conventional paean to progress is an idiosyncratic theme of doubt that makes Lincoln interesting. During the Civil War, Lincoln constructed the United States as a noble experiment with an uncertain future. To believe that people could control their destiny was hubris, and dangerous to boot. Lincoln might have “high hope for the future,” but he would make “no prediction” about it. He had come to understand history as ironic, full of unanticipated developments. Neither North nor South, he concluded in his second Inaugural Address, had “expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained.” Neither “anticipated” the end of slavery. “Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding.”⁵ Only God could understand the meaning and outcome of the conflict, and

His ways were beyond human understanding. “I claim not to have controlled events,” the president had written a year earlier, “but confess plainly that events have controlled me.”⁶

Lincoln had been contemplating this position for years. In the late 1850s, he noted that Americans *thought* they were more inventive than other human beings. But were they really? Americans celebrated speed and the novel. But what mattered most was the “*habit* of observation and reflection.”⁷ It was that habit that young Americans in the 1850s seemed to lack. To make oneself was not to become rich or powerful or happy; it was to accept one’s duty as a respectable citizen acting within a larger narrative of human, not merely American, history. It was to be cautious rather than rash, thoughtful rather than impulsive, and to see oneself as serving the whole rather than the other way round.

Young Americans, Lincoln thought in 1859, desired territory without thinking about the impact of their actions on others. Young America, Lincoln stated, “owns a large part of the world, by right of possessing it; and all the rest by right of *wanting* it, and *intending* to have it. . . . He is a great friend of humanity; and his desire for land is not selfish, but merely an impulse to extend the area of freedom.” But the eager pursuit of land trapped the American in a sticky web of ironic complications. He was “very anxious to fight for the liberation of enslaved nations and colonies, provided always, they *have* land, and have *not* any liking for his interference. As to those who have no land, and would be glad of help from any quarter, he considers *they* can afford to wait a few hundred years longer. In knowledge he is particularly rich. He knows all that can possibly be known; inclines to believe in spiritual rappings, and is the unquestioned inventor of ‘*Manifest Destiny*.’”⁸

Lincoln's sarcasm was directed at Southerners. During his one term in the U.S. House of Representatives, he vigorously opposed the war with Mexico as “*unnecessary*, inasmuch as Mexico was in no way molesting, or menacing the U.S. or the people thereof; and that it was *unconstitutional*, because the power of levying war is vested in Congress, and not in the President.” Lincoln thought the war about territory, notwithstanding President James K. Polk's insistence that it was about “national honor, the security of the future, the prevention of foreign interference, and even, the good of Mexico herself.” Polk started the war to get land, Congressman Lincoln asserted, and achieved his goal by fixing “the public gaze upon the exceeding brightness of military glory—that attractive rainbow, that rises in showers of blood—that serpent's eye, that charms to destroy.”⁹

This was a consistent theme in the life of the man who presided over the deadliest war in the history of North America. Opposed to force, Lincoln loved order. He celebrated a liberal vision of a nation, a state, or a town as a community of autonomous individuals. In such a world, the premium must be on mutuality and change must occur through *persuasion*. History demonstrated what happened when people, individually or collectively, acted from coercion or impulse without regard to others. Rhetoric taught that persuasion was as much about style as substance. Law was the foundation of a predictable society; like history, law sought not to predict the future, but to organize the past in order to ensure justice in the present.

Progress involved nurturing a society that was uniform and predictable in its political and legal operations, a society that through uniform education encouraged people to choose to respect laws as the distilled wisdom of history. Lincoln despised mob

law, whether it took the form of antiabolitionist riots in the 1830s or secession in 1861, because it was impulsive and unpredictable. Human action, after all, was dangerous and destructive enough when reasoned and orderly. Progress was about convincing larger numbers of people to reflect before they acted, to consider the unanticipated consequences as well as the anticipated ones. It was to reverse “the growing disposition to substitute the wild and furious passions, in lieu of the sober judgement of Courts.” It was to supplant passion with “Reason, cold calculating, unimpassioned reason” and create “*general intelligence, sound morality and, in particular, a reverence for the constitution and laws.*”¹⁰

Lincoln worked hard to engage other people because he believed conversation critical to progress. People needed to empathize, to share what they felt as well as what they thought. “If I be in pain I wish to let you know it, and to ask your sympathy and assistance; and my pleasurable emotions also, I wish to communicate and share with you.” The sine qua non of progress was sympathy. “When the conduct of men is designed to be influenced, *persuasion*, kind, unassuming persuasion, should ever be adopted. . . . If you would win a man to your cause, *first* convince him that you are his sincere friend” because his “heart . . . is the great high road to his reason.” But “assume to dictate to his judgment, or to command his action, or mark him as one to be shunned and despised, and he will retreat within himself, close all the avenues to his head and his heart; and tho’ your case be naked truth itself, transformed to the heaviest lance, harder than steel, and sharper than steel can be made, and tho’ you throw it with more than Herculean force and precision, you shall no more be able to pierce him, than to penetrate the hard shell of a

tortoise with a rye straw.”¹¹ The key to change was to lead by example and to respect the struggles of those who could not embrace change.

For Lincoln’s largely rural-born generation, the coming of the railroad was a kind of cultural Rubicon. Railroads opened “eyes widely” to the “quickened pulse of a more commercial life.”¹² And how could it have been otherwise? It is difficult to imagine anything, including the Civil War, that more directly affected the lives of more people.

From the beginning, even those who celebrated the railroad worried that it took progress out of human hands. A Massachusetts newspaper noted at the opening in June 1854 of the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad, that “the road makes the villages wherever it pleases, instead of the villages governing the line and the stations of the road.”¹³ These villages housed the new professional men and their families who attended, facilitated, and managed the growth of the railroads owned by investors hundreds if not thousands of miles away. A separation of ownership and management alienated both consumers and laborers from identification with the people who operated the railroads. Like Dorothy and her companions approaching the Wizard of Oz or Americans today calling the Social Security Administration, people experienced railroads as necessary, frightening, and utterly unreasonable. Railroads changed everyone and everything so thoroughly—liberating human beings, in William Cronon’s words, from geography while subjugating them to the tyranny of the clock—that in common parlance “their power to transform landscapes partook of the supernatural, drawing upon a mysterious creative energy that was beyond human influence.”¹⁴ By the 1870s, many residents of Chicago’s hinterland paid the railroad tribute by aggressively protesting its power.

The railroad accelerated and intensified change. Springfield, Illinois, in the 1850s was a place in between old and new worlds. Its population doubled in the 1850s, the decade in which the miles of track in Illinois grew from 118 to 2,799, ranking the state second only to Ohio in total mileage. The respectable Lincolns lived in a two-story house with a white picket fence, an entry hallway, two parlors, and elegant furniture that amounted to an oasis in a city that had the feel of a barnyard. The fences protected homes from dogs and hogs as well as robbers, arsonists, the poor, and unsupervised boys. The streets of Springfield echoed with vulgar and angry voices. In 1860, half of its citizens were immigrants, most of them from Ireland and Germany; 10 percent of all males were unemployed.¹⁵

Heralding a new era with the railroad, many people soon blamed it for every problem of the new era. Not unlike our current attitudes toward the Internet, people moved with regard to railroads from awe and enthusiasm to ambivalence, frustration, and then hostility in a matter of years. Development is always a Pandora's Box, and it always has unanticipated consequences. The railroad was an apt symbol of nineteenth-century transformation in that it encouraged both a profound faith in human beings' ability, or rather duty, to make progress morally and materially *and* a nagging sense that the ways of the world were beyond human ken, let alone direction. Many boosters in the 1850s were former Whigs who shared, among other things, apprehension about undirected, educated men in search of immediate gratification. They believed that "real progress was not likely to occur automatically," that "it required careful, purposeful planning" from educated men gathered together in either governments or corporations or both who cultivated what they "valued" and suppressed what they did not.¹⁶

Lincoln, a former Whig, shared this sensibility—up to a point. He contemplated the possibility that the future could not be planned. Nineteenth-century change was a global phenomenon that human beings experienced more than they directed. Lincoln thought as broadly as possible about perennial universal questions to which he knew there were no easy answers, if, indeed, there were any answers at all. Beyond the issues of slavery and railroads in the 1850s lay the troubling issue of human nature and whether people were capable of restraining themselves from destroying what Lincoln would later call “the last best hope of mankind.”

Today we understand Lincoln’s musings within patterns of historical development explicated by a generation of scholars. We know that the nineteenth century was all about consolidating and interpreting global transformations that had been under way for generations.

In the 1700s, people throughout the Atlantic World wrestled with the implications of two centuries of European expansion, international trade, and contact among the diverse peoples of the world; they attempted to gather data about everything on the planet, reducing everything—plants, animals, government, marriage—to a science. They produced encyclopedias, devised constitutions, issued proclamations, wrote pamphlets, and composed novels and poems and operas, almost all of which considered and fretted about democracy, sexuality, manners, love and emotion, and religion. Whether in music or literature or science or politics or love, they experimented with new forms of relationships and new institutions and asked daunting questions. Were human beings capable of substituting reason and sensibility for force and superstition? Were human beings capable of elevating friendship and mutuality over distrust and fear?¹⁷

Men and women such as Lincoln were not merely testing the viability of a middle-class capitalist republic. They were testing an eighteenth-century western European obsession with new forms of social relationships and new understandings of history built around a faith in commerce, choice, and the inevitability of progress. All over the world so-called middle-class men and women participated in the same processes, processes that gave solidity and borders to the modern world we inherited in the twentieth century. They included the massive relocation of millions of people, the explosion and dominance of urban life, the growth of what the historian Jan de Vries has termed “an industrious society,”¹⁸ the proliferation of associations in everything from evangelical Christianity to political parties, and the triumph of the imperial nation-state. Despite the bitter violent intracontinental conflicts—the Mexican-American War, the American Civil War, the Taiping Rebellion, the Franco-Prussian War, the turmoil of the Meiji restoration, the unification of Italy, the Sepoy Revolt in India, not to mention countless armed conflicts between citizens and governments, between workers and managers, between respectable people and criminals, between rural bandits and police, everywhere from the streets of Paris to the mountains of Peru—or perhaps because of these conflicts—the people of Earth found themselves living in an increasingly uniform society.¹⁹

By the middle of the nineteenth century, self-defined respectable people such as Lincoln wore the same clothes (dark suits, ties, bowler and stovepipe hats, the latest Paris fashions in dresses and bonnets); ate the same foods (beef and pork, breads and rice); drank coffee and tea sweetened with sugar; spoke increasingly standardized languages; lived in cities and towns that in terms of appearance and organization were variations on

a global theme; and took refuge from dirty, crowded public streets, teeming with people speaking different languages and worshipping in different churches, in the consumer domesticity of elaborately decorated private homes. Ironically, as migration and commerce brought people into regular contact with each other and encouraged beliefs in scientific racism, ethnic hatred, and belligerent nationalism, they found themselves living in a world whose institutions and values were converging. Of Young America, Lincoln said in 1859:

Men, and things, everywhere, are ministering unto him. Look at his apparel, and you shall see cotton fabrics from Manchester and Lowell; flax-linen from Ireland; wool-cloth from Spain; silk from France; furs from the Arctic regions, with a buffalo-robe from the Rocky Mountains, as a general out-sider. At his table, besides plain bread and meat made at home, are sugar from Louisiana; coffee and fruits from the tropics; salt from Turk's Island; fish from New-foundland; tea from China, and spices from the Indies. The whale of the Pacific furnishes his candle-light; he has a diamond-ring from Brazil; a gold-watch from California, and a spanish cigar from Havanna.²⁰

Nothing was more important as agent and symbol of this new uniformity than the railroad. "The iron horse is panting, and impatient, to carry him everywhere, in no time; and the lightning stands ready harnessed to take and bring his tidings in a trifle less than no time." Railroads certainly defined Lincoln's career. The young man advocated canals, roads, and railroads. His commitment to internal improvements was hardly novel; only people who had struggled to get crops to market or themselves to another place could appreciate the awesome experience of moving quickly and cheaply from one place to another. Their conflicts were not over development but who would pay for them and who would benefit from them. As one of the "long nine" in the Illinois legislature in the 1830s and a leading Whig in the 1840s, Lincoln worked tirelessly to connect central Illinois

with the rest of the world. In the 1840s and 1850s, fees from railroads helped raise his annual income to roughly \$5,000 in the 1850s.

In return, Lincoln served railroads by defending them against the attempts of communities to tax them, as in the *Illinois Central Railroad v. The County of McLean* (1853–56), or to get redress for damages, as in the *Effie Afton* case (1857). “As a lawyer, Lincoln consistently argued that both the special prerogatives of railroad corporations and the limits on those prerogatives must reflect the primacy of the public interest over private claims of right.” He thus participated in a process of reconstituting the common law in the North. “From the good of a set of individuals, *salus populi* was extended to mean the future prospects of a national people, a corporate entity possessed of a collective will and a collective future that superseded any individual’s interests.” “The model of the citizen thus became that of a kind of shareholder” in a society in which “railroad companies were ‘citizens’ just as much as their passengers or employees.” However, corporations “had special jobs to do, and the duty of everyone else was to accommodate them in their work. This was the Duty to Get Out of the Way—out of the way of moving trains, out of the way of the organization of the railroad business, out of the way of the rumbling wheels of progress. These duties applied to everyone, everywhere, at every time. . . . They were not the subjects of aspiration to be bred in political rhetoric, they were legal obligations that were imposed as threshold requirements for the protection of the law in public life.”²¹

By providing concrete infrastructure that facilitated rapid and inexpensive transportation, railroads made the American Union into a community well beyond what George Washington or Henry Clay might have imagined. Railroads, however, were not

without unexpected consequences; even as they brought people together, they drove them apart. The desire for a transcontinental railroad from Chicago to San Francisco sparked Senator Stephen Douglas to introduce the act for organizing the Nebraska and Kansas territories that led directly to the formation of the Republican Party. The speed and scope of railroads made it possible for Lincoln to travel widely in 1859 and 1860, giving speeches from Wisconsin to Massachusetts that secured his national reputation as a critic of the South. Railroads were critical to the victory of the Union in the Civil War, allowing the North to expand and exploit its vast advantages to move munitions and soldiers quickly and efficiently; and the Republican Congress returned the favor by encouraging the completion of continental railroads and lining the deep pockets of railroad men. Lincoln's presidency was framed by railroads. It was from the back of a train that he bade farewell to the citizens of Springfield in early 1861, and it was a train that bore his coffin on the long journey home through the major cities of the North four years later.

Nineteenth-century Americans explained these developments, including the railroad, largely in terms of individual behavior, tending to emphasize the uniqueness of Americans and explaining their success as the product of their differences from other peoples. The cosmopolitan universalism of Franklin and Jefferson's generation succumbed to an imagined national community rooted in provincialism and the supposedly exceptional nature of the United States. Americans were successful in promoting change because they were free to choose to educate themselves and exercise the necessary self-discipline. Increasingly, Americans constructed their history in terms of the personal character of their parents' generation, people who had migrated west of

the Appalachians, defeated Indians, cut down forests, and planted corn. Americans believed in the cultural significance of westward expansion long before Frederick Jackson Turner, himself a grandson of that generation, theorized it succinctly in 1893.

Mid-nineteenth-century events affirmed and deepened the story of exceptionalism. The defeat of American enemies—Indians, Mexicans, and eventually white Southerners—was explained in cultural terms as much as the threat posed by Irish and German immigrants. They were lazy, pagan, Catholic, patriarchal; abusive in their treatment of women, children, and slaves; above all, they were uneducated. Soldiers from Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan noted the absence of schools as they conquered both the valley of Mexico and the southeastern quadrant of North America. No wonder progress flourished in the northern United States, for only in the North was there a large number of people committed to the flourishing of character. Confronting these others allowed men to celebrate their achievement as peculiar to them.

Today scholars are working to reverse this equation. We focus on the global dimension of nineteenth-century history. Railroads developed more quickly and more extensively in the United States, but railroads were everywhere by midcentury, most of them supported on some level by European, particularly British, capital and advocated and built by variations on what the economic historians P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins have termed “gentlemen capitalists.” Emphasizing the neglected importance of professional men in financial and service jobs in the growth of British imperialism, they stress the blending of aristocratic traditions and the new energy of an educated middle class, which was also a “gentlemanly class.” Illinois was not Britain and therefore Lincoln and his peers formed no alliances with landed aristocrats, nor did they have the

clubby connections of common schools and one major city. But they did share worship of progress and of education as the foundation of progress. They did value “control over their own time, their ability to charge fees rather than to depend upon salaries or wages, their contempt for mere money-making and the personal rather than mechanical nature of their work.” They believed deeply in individualism and free labor at the same time that they scorned physical work in “an almost desperate desire for a status untainted by ‘Trade.’”²² In terms of world history, railroads consolidated European colonization, completing efforts to tie regions conquered and exploited by Europeans into a global political economy and culture centered in London. In 1860 Europeans owned three-quarters of the stock of the Illinois Central Railroad.²³

In our construction, Lincoln and his peers in this sense were postcolonial agents of a new world order whose long-term implications were toward international uniformity along lines—the nation-state, commercial capitalism, middle-class domesticity, and universal liberty—developed in western Europe in the eighteenth century. In European colonies such as Haiti and the United States, indigenous interests in autonomy and self-government modified and reconfigured European ideals and institutions. Nevertheless, the significance of the nineteenth century lay in the consolidation of a new global order defined largely in European terms. By the 1870s, most continents had a coterie of men in dark suits and neckties wearing top hats and spectacles and marshaling the wisdom of Blackstone, Locke, and Paine, not to mention the Bible, in order to justify the transformation of local landscapes into cities linked together by railroads, steamships, and telegraphs. While individuals consented to and directed the transformation of the world in the 1800s, they did so within the cultural hegemony of Europe, a culture defined

by literacy, republican government, Christianity, and capitalism. The true genius of European culture lay in its celebration of individual choice and its construction of education, broadly understood, as liberating individuals rather than constraining them within acceptable parameters. Individuals were free to accept or reject much in their life, but success and failure were understood in a narrative beyond their control.

The American Midwest became the embodiment of this new world order. But the origins of the Midwest's rise to power lay less in the character of its citizens than in geographic and political factors that encouraged the flourishing of a middle-class, capitalistic culture. What other place was blessed with as many long, navigable rivers or so many miles of flat, fertile soil? How many interior places were so accessible? Early settlers understandably emphasized hardships, including impassable roads, low water levels, the backbreaking labor involved in leveling forests and cultivating prairies, loneliness, isolation, and Indian conflicts. Triumph over these obstacles formed the basic narrative of nineteenth-century transformation. No one seeks to minimize the contributions of thousands of people. From the long view, however, what is amazing about the transformation of the Midwest is how rapid and thorough it was.

The entrenchment of European values elsewhere in the world took longer because physical obstacles were greater, because populations were more heavily concentrated, and because their expansion was more ferociously contested. If we could have designed a place likely to make progress, as nineteenth-century middle-class people understood it, possible, we could not have done better than the region north and west of the Ohio River in the early nineteenth century. In short, the Midwest emerged not because of the character of individuals or the uniqueness of Americans but because the landscape they

encountered was so easily and quickly transformed. The Midwest was malleable. It was not Mexico, Brazil, or India. It was relatively uninhabited and unimposing.

Lincoln, of course, did not think like a twentieth- or twenty-first-century academic. But, like others of his class, he was fascinated by the ways in which people made sense of what had happened in the past and by their efforts to guide the future.²⁴ A good citizen of the nineteenth century, Lincoln focused on individuals as the keys to progress. But Lincoln's notion of progress—and of history itself—was as conflicted as his own emotional life. Indeed, his view of progress reflected his internal turmoil. In Lincoln's world, conflict was universal, conflict that at the bottom centered on human beings' capacity for duty, which meant, capacity for seeing themselves as connected to others. Conflict between the parts of our nature and between different human beings drove history. But the plot was neither linear nor progressive. People make mistakes, and never more often than when they seek to advance their own interests impulsively, without any sense of their own fallibility. Such was the course of the South in the 1850s, a region whose leaders seemed to be conspiring to control the present and dictate the future. They were wrong because slavery was wrong. They were also wrong because they thought, albeit foolishly, that they could control history. In an imperfect world, people could only rely on the uniform predictability of law and the lessons of the past; they had no business attempting to exercise dominion over anyone else.

"We cannot escape history," Lincoln famously warned Congress in 1862.²⁵ Like his peers all over the world, Lincoln believed in narratives of progress founded on individual character. But what mattered most to him were narratives that incorporated multiple perspectives and that understood human nature as an unstable compound of

nobility and hubris. To be a member of the American middle class was to seek improvement through self-discipline, reform, and freedom. To be human, however, was to look for progress less in railroads or cities or temperance or politics than in the cultivation of qualities of mercy, compassion, and empathy. It was to fight hubris and to honor irony.

No wonder then that Lincoln spent so much time meeting with the thousands of ordinary citizens who flooded the White House during his tenure in office, seeking jobs, favors, and advice. Lincoln did so, he explained, because people “dnt want much and dont get but little, and I must see them.”²⁶ They wanted nothing more than his attention, nothing less than his respect. In moments such as these, we glimpse a convergence, however fleeting, of the ways in which Lincoln’s loneliness informed his sociability. And we come to see his sense of history as a narrative of acceptance, constructed by human beings who know only that they were as fallible as they were forgivable.

Notes

1. Quoted in David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 41.
2. “From Seventh Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Alton, Illinois” (October 25, 1858), in Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *Lincoln: Selected Speeches and Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 193; “From Address at Cooper Institute, New York City” (February 27, 1860), in *ibid.*, 251.
3. Donald, *Lincoln*, 286.
4. “Address to the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois” (January 27, 1838), in Fehrenbacher, ed., *Lincoln*, 14; “Speech at Kalamazoo, Michigan” (August 27, 1856), in *ibid.*, 111; “Lecture on Discoveries and Inventions, Jacksonville, Illinois” (February 11, 1859), in *ibid.*, 207.

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5. "Second Inaugural Address" (March 4, 1865), in *ibid.*, 449, 449–50.
 6. "To Albert G. Hodges" (April 4, 1864), in *ibid.*, 421.
 7. "Lecture on Discoveries and Inventions," 202.
 8. *Ibid.*, 200–201.
 9. "Autobiography Written for Campaign" (ca. June 1860), in Fehrenbacher, ed., *Lincoln*, 270; "From Speech in the U.S. House of Representatives on the War with Mexico" (January 12, 1848), in *ibid.*, 63.
 10. "Address to Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield," 18, 21.
 11. "Lecture on Discoveries and Inventions," 202–3; "Address to the Washington Temperance Society of Springfield, Illinois" (February 22, 1842), in Fehrenbacher, ed., *Lincoln*, 36.
 12. Milton Hay, quoted in John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 221.
 13. *Springfield (MA.) Daily Republican*, June 19, 1854, quoted in Curtis C. Roseman and Elizabeth M. Roseman, eds., *Grand Excursions on the Upper Mississippi River: Places, Landscapes, and Regional Identity after 1854* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004), 51.
 14. William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: Norton, 1991), 74, 78, 72.
 15. Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Young Eagle: The Rise of Abraham Lincoln* (Dallas, TX: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2001), 272–80.
 16. Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 21.
 17. G. J. Barker-Benfield, *Sex and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Knopf, 1995); Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992).
 18. Jan de Vries, "The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution," *Journal of Economic History* 54 (1994): 249–70.
 19. Much of what I say here reflects the influence of C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).
 20. "Lecture on Discoveries and Inventions," 200.
 21. Howard Schweber, *The Creation of the American Common Law, 1850–1880: Technology, Politics, and the Construction of Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 42, 33, 117. See also John Lauritz Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 225–64.
 22. P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688–2000*, 2nd ed. (Harlow Gate: Longman, 2002), 120.
 23. Lance C. Davis and Robert J. Cull, "International Capital Movements, Domestic Capital Markets, and American Economic Growth, 1820–1914," in Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of the United*

States, vol. 2, *The Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 751.

24. Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

25. "From Annual Message to Congress" (December 1, 1862), in Fehrenbacher, ed., *Lincoln*, 364.

26. Donald, *Lincoln*, 285.