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A Gentleman in Substance: Abraham Lincoln and Changing Perceptions about Presidential Appearance and Character

David Demaree

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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A GENTLEMAN IN SUBSTANCE: ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND CHANGING
PERCEPTIONS ABOUT PRESIDENTIAL APPEARANCE AND CHARACTER

A Thesis

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David Demaree

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
The School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of History

We hereby approve the thesis of

David Demaree

Candidate for the degree of Master of Arts

Joseph Mannard, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of History, Advisor

Wang Xi, Ph.D.
Professor of History

Gary Bailey, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of History

ACCEPTED

Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.
Dean
The School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: A Gentleman in Substance: Abraham Lincoln and Changing Perceptions about Presidential Appearance and Character

Author: David Demaree

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Joseph Mannard

Thesis Committee Members: Dr. Wang Xi
Dr. Gary Bailey

Throughout his life Abraham Lincoln displayed a casual indifference to his personal appearance and deportment that challenged the prevailing standard of what constituted a refined gentleman. This work therefore explores certain questions: How did Lincoln's exterior appearance break with the gentlemanly standard expected of a national leader? Why was Lincoln able to defy this standard? How did Lincoln change the standard for presidential appearance and behavior?

This thesis argues that Lincoln, if never a traditional gentleman in appearance, was before his death accepted as a "gentleman in substance," and that his successors inherited this new ideal of democratic leadership. The chief sources used in this study were contemporary newspapers, diaries, letters, and interviews which contain personal reactions to Lincoln by people from every walk of life. Etiquette manuals and guides for gentlemen identify the cultural prescriptions that Lincoln transgressed, and the voluminous secondary literature on the 16th President provides context.

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INTRODUCTION

I set out, in this campaign, with the intention of conducting it strictly as a gentleman, in substance at least, if not in the outside polish. The latter I shall never be, but that which constitutes the inside of a gentleman I hope to understand.¹ – Abraham Lincoln speech in Springfield, Illinois on July 17, 1858.

In 1888 Richard Watson Gilder, an editor for Century Company publishing, eagerly sought John Nicolay, Abraham Lincoln's former personal secretary, to publish a book on Lincoln's personal traits. In response to Gilder's letters Nicolay attempted to elude the request, claiming that the subject would be covered in the biography he was currently writing on Lincoln. But Gilder was persistent because he knew that the subject would interest readers. Two years later Gilder was still requesting Nicolay to write about Lincoln's external appearance and manners. As a loyal secretary and friend of the famed president, Nicolay felt torn by the relentless requests. He wanted to appease the company he had worked closely with publishing a biography on Lincoln, but he also did not want to undermine the legacy of Lincoln. The former President's personal traits were riddled with public controversy during his career, and after his death some of the disparaging opinions of his traits still lingered. But finally, after much persistence from Gilder, Nicolay published an article entitled "Lincoln's Personal Appearance" in the November, 1891 issue of *Century Magazine*, a publication owned by Century Company. Although Gilder and Century Company still wanted a book written on the subject, the article satisfied them briefly.²

Nicolay loyally defended the reputation of his former boss and friend with an overt sensitivity to the subject in his article, "Lincoln's Personal Appearance." He chronologically

¹ Abraham Lincoln, John Nicolay, John Hay, *Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln: Comprising his speeches, letters, state papers, and miscellaneous writings*, Vol. 1 (New York: The Century Company, 1907), 267.

² Helen Nicolay, *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Century Company, 1912), 306-309.

described Lincoln's manners and dress from his early days in Kentucky to his last years in the White House. By detailing the austere environment of the Trans-Appalachian, Nicolay provided the context to evoke sympathy for Lincoln. With vibrant prose the former secretary conjured up in the mind of the reader how difficult proper manners and dress would have been for young Abe. He placed the blame for Lincoln's slovenly appearance on the rugged way of life in the Old Northwest and his ill-bred family. Further in the article, Nicolay acknowledged accounts of the President wearing unbuttoned shirt and loose socks in front of guests, but he contended Lincoln appeared like this because visitors had "thrust themselves upon him at unseasonable and careless hours." Never once did the former White House secretary infer that Lincoln appeared slovenly in front of company. "Always and everywhere," Nicolay claimed, "he was sufficiently well-dressed to command the respect of those before who he appeared."³

In 1913 Nicolay's daughter, Helen, published the book that her father never did. The book, *The Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln*, was more honest than her father's work, but it still shied away from describing Lincoln's dress and etiquette in-depth. She wrote, "My father strongly denied that Lincoln was careless in his dress. He said that Lincoln's clothes were always scrupulous and neat." Her opinion was different. "He [Lincoln] never forgot the dignity of his office, but he could not take its pomp and ceremony seriously,"⁴ she admitted in her book. Helen Nicolay refused to engage how controversial Lincoln's lack of refinement was in the 1860s. Instead, she primarily focused on anecdotes about the friendly nature of Old Abe. What both Helen and John Nicolay left uncovered was the impact of Lincoln's appearance and manners on society during and following his presidency. John Nicolay's loyalty to Lincoln was what likely stopped him from confronting the controversy surrounding Lincoln's personal traits, causing his

³ John G. Nicolay, "Lincoln's Personal Appearance" *Century Magazine*, XLII (October, 1891): 932, 937.

⁴ Nicolay, *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln*, 228.

article to be partial and bland. Though Helen's *The Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln* was more honest than her father's article, she still was unwilling to address the vibrant subtext of Lincoln's appearance and manners. As a result, her book was timid because it skirted between siding with her father and admitting that in the 1860s many people found Lincoln slovenly.⁵

The Century Company's interest in publishing a book about Lincoln's personal traits provides only a hint of the social implications his western style and manners had for society from after his death and into the late nineteenth century. When Lincoln was elected to the presidency he inherited an office that had maintained a gentlemanly tradition since George Washington and even through Andrew Jackson. In 1860, the former rail-splitter from Illinois was introduced to the proper urban society of the Northeast, a realm of society that was heavily populated with gentlemen and aspiring gentlemen at odds with his slovenly deportment. Upon Lincoln's election refined America had to reconcile with a president that did not adhere to the conventional standards of the social elites in America. The former rail-splitter also had to reconcile with the fact that he did not mesh with the social standard expected of him by the social elites. The early emphasis on an elegant appearance and proper manners in America, also labeled gentility, was able to survive until the turn of the century. After that the deep roots of gentility still subsisted in a more inclusive social standard, coined "refinement," despite a democratic emphasis emerging in the colonies in the late nineteenth century resulting.

Much has been written about Lincoln's ability as an orator, military strategist, and leader but there is little written about his impact on the social-based ideology of gentility or refinement. During Lincoln's time urban American society utilized a social system, labeled refinement, comprised of manners, appearance, materials, lineage, and speech to indicate a person's intimate

⁵ Helen Nicolay, *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Century Company, 1912); Nicolay, "Lincoln's Personal Appearance," 932-936.

character. Gentility, and then refinement, was a telling indicator of sophistication, morals, respectability and social standing in mid-1800s society. However appearance alone was not a comprehensive indicator of social standing by itself, but it was essential in order to be classified as genteel. Dress, as historian Richard Bushman states, “Carried the marks of their social position on their backs.”⁶

Before he could secure his legacy in history Lincoln had to overcome rigid standards of social propriety and and etiquette. In order to shed light on this subject it will be important to understand how Lincoln presented himself, specifically in terms of his outer appearance. It will be my thesis that Lincoln’s physical appearance and personal style significantly contributed to a transformation of social refinement and altered the prevailing image of American Presidents regarding gentlemanly elegance.

When historians have written about Lincoln’s appearance they have primarily focused on how his appearance communicated that he was a man of the people. One notable Lincoln historian Richard J. Carwardine, in his book *Lincoln*, writes, “His [Lincoln’s] unprepossessing appearance and physical attributes did much to reinforce his appeal as a man close to the sons of the soil.”⁷ In a similar vein, biographer David Herbert Donald describes Lincoln’s careless appearance as an affirmation that the 16th President was a man of the people. In his two books, *The Eloquent President: A Portrait of Lincoln Through His Words* and *A. Lincoln: A Biography* historian Ronald C. White uncovers some of the public perception of Lincoln’s appearance by quoting numerous newspapers, letters, and diaries. At the same time, these scholars do not thoroughly examine Lincoln’s appearance in the cultural context of American society in the mid-1800s, leaving a gap

⁶ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1993): 73., John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990) 4.

⁷ Richard J. Carwardine, *Lincoln* (Harlow: Pearson Longman. 2003), 48.

in Lincoln scholarship. Romanticized depictions of Lincoln can obstruct understanding the significance of his triumph over social prejudice towards his appearance.

To understand the perspective of the social elites had towards Lincoln three works will be utilized throughout this study: Richard Bushman's *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, John Kasson's *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America*; and C. Dallett Hemphill's *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860*. Bushman work is useful because he provides a thorough examination of “gentility” in colonial America to the “refinement” of the antebellum period. He dives deep into the social significance of specific artifacts and social etiquette and their permeation into middle class homes.⁸ Kasson’s book uncovers how manners restricted development of a fully democratic society and the effects these class conventions had on the individual. He provides a thorough understanding of how changing standards of civility influenced individualistic ambition, instead of fostering a more pluralistic society.⁹ Lastly, Hemphill claims that manners were a system of regulation in American society to aid people attempting to better their social rank. She illustrates how nineteenth-century manners and etiquette undermined the basic meaning of democracy by creating a transparent code of class hierarchy.¹⁰ All three works conclude that cultural concepts of gentility and then of refinement in the nineteenth-century helped shape the formation of social classes and created cultural barriers between them. The division was rooted in the restrictions and privileges it allotted to individuals based on membership in certain social groups. All three authors emphasize how gentility and refinement were interwoven into every aspect, however private, of daily life. Kasson summarizes this point by stating, "The ability to present an

⁸ Bushman, *The Refinement of America*.

⁹ Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*, 3, 6.

¹⁰ C. Dallett Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3-4.

accomplished self in public through disciplined bodily management could not be separated from the management of feeling and from private life.”¹¹ It was from this mind-set that Lincoln, during his legal and political career, was evaluated from.

To identify the public perception of Lincoln before, during, and after the Civil War I have relied heavily on primary source material. Newspapers from across the North, both in the West and East have been invaluable sources. They offer the most insightful lens in understanding local communities. *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Lincoln* provides numerous personal accounts of Lincoln's intimate friends and acquaintances covering the duration of his whole life. Diaries, letters, and other manuscripts add the personal insight into the personal opinions of Lincoln. The books and articles published by Lincoln scholars like, David Herbert Donald, Michael Burlingame, Richard Carwardine, William C. Harris, Thomas Keneally, Larry D. Mansch, Ronald C. White, and many others have allowed a more well-rounded approach to this project.

The following chapters that chronicle Lincoln's life focus both on how a Northern society permeated with refined sensibilities and how Lincoln understood himself. Chapter One provides a brief historical scope of gentility in America and how it evolved during the antebellum period into the concept of refinement, especially in relation to the presidential office. It also points out the continuities and differences between respectable society in the North and in the South. Chapter Two transitions to Lincoln's life focusing on his early upbringing until the beginning of 1860. It reveals how his father influenced his attitude towards appearance Lincoln's careless personal appearance and his indifference to clothing, and how his early careers further shaped his opinion of refinement later in life. In addition, the chapter both identifies how Mary Todd's

¹¹ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 146.

elegant sensibilities interplayed with Lincoln's backwoods approach and describes early public reactions to Lincoln's slovenly manners and appearance.

Chapter Three concentrates on 1860, a momentous election year for Lincoln. More specifically this section addresses the Northern public's reaction, especially in regional newspapers, to Lincoln at critical occasions in his career, like his Cooper Union address in New York, the Republican Convention, and his presidential campaign. Chapter Four examines the media images produced of Lincoln around the presidential election as well as the improvements made to his personal appearance, namely the growth of his beard. The latter part of the chapter tracks the President-elect's by train from Springfield to Washington in 1861 and the public response to meeting him in the flesh. Chapter Five focuses on the casual approach of Lincoln in the traditionally cultivated presidential office. Notably the genteel events he attended with unrefined deportment and ill-fitting garb. In addition this chapter presents the opinion of prominent European observers and American gentlemen about Lincoln's appearance and how many of those opinions changed during the course of his presidency.

Finally, Chapter Six investigates public opinion of Lincoln after his martyred death. It traces Lincoln's funeral train as it traveled west to Springfield. Publics' adoration of the assassinated president manifested itself in the vast crowds that gathered at public memorials and railroad stations where the funeral train passed. Once he was deceased, Lincoln's external appearance and lack of social grace was hardly criticized. Every aspect of his being, even his manners and dress, was now recalled admiringly. The conclusion looks at how Lincoln's legacy of what it meant to be a gentleman and president was evident with ensuing presidents.

In my thesis I argue that Lincoln transformed the notions of refinement and elegance in the American presidency. The lasting stigma of a poor external appearance was challenged by

how the slovenly, former rail-splitter who became recognized as a formidable public figure. Ultimately, the acclaim Old Abe received helped bridge the social divide between the hinterland farmers and the metropolitan gentlemen. Perceptions founded on superficial genteel principles were challenged by the deeper relational qualities of Lincoln, who treated people as his equal.

Chapter 1

FROM GENTILITY TO REFINEMENT IN THE NORTH

The origins of gentility in America can be traced back to post-Renaissance England. In seventeenth-century England a surge of males from the middling and upper strata of society attempted to acquire genteel behavior, like proper etiquette and a polished appearance. The result was a shift away from the rigid hierarchical society that had previously dominated England. Lorinda B. R. Goodwin in *An Archaeology of Manners: The Polite World of the Merchant Elite in Colonial Massachusetts*, attributes this increased attention to gentility “to the increasingly large middle class, the debated issue of rank, and the changing definition of a ‘gentleman.’”¹² The growth of the middling sort and an increase in leisure time and material goods in eighteenth-century England provided an opportunity for a male of middling social status to ascend to a greater rank in society. This enabled meager opportunities for social mobility to exist. While bettering social rank was difficult and gradual, over generations greater social mobility could be accomplished. The consequence of this was men from the most humble social level were almost completely unable to elevate their social status because of their poor family lineage, lack of financial means, and the difficulty of imitating the polished etiquette of the social elites. Even women abided by a similar genteel standard, but they could not easily improve their social rank without a genteel father or husband.

Many English males were motivated by social opportunity offered to gain a greater social rank and by the possible economic benefit. But bettering social position was a tedious and

¹² Lorinda B. R. Goodwin, *An Archaeology of Manners: The Polite World of the Merchant Elite in Colonial Massachusetts* (New York: Kluwer and Plenum, 1999), 16.

expensive process. A disciplined performance comprising graceful body control, meticulous dress, proper etiquette, and eloquent speech created a transparent rubric of the respect and honor a person upon which they would be judged.¹³ It also required abandoning any hint of rude or slovenly habit associated with the plebeian sort.¹⁴ It was not a system based heavily on wealth, although some wealth was typically necessary to acquire genteel attributes. The external genteel characteristics were used to evaluate the inner person. The perception of “passionate men” was associated with rude, lower sort men.¹⁵ For genteel men, or gentlemen, to distance themselves from an uncouth image, every aspect of their performance would be under strict inspection and scrutiny. Controlled and graceful demeanor communicated a superiority to common society. This system derived by the socially elite was forced upon the unprivileged because they lacked influence in society. As a prescribed system, gentility served as a code that distinguished the social nobility to an elevated place in society.¹⁶ Richard Braithwaite, an early English writer on manners, wrote in his conduct manual, *The English Gentleman* (1630), “The very body expresses the secrets of the mind.” He further claimed that through the control and action of the body the heart of a person was “transparent.”¹⁷

A large number of etiquette manuals were written and published in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to provide instruction for young men of genteel lineage. One popular English author, Philip Dormer Stanhope Chesterfield, wrote letters to his son which later became widely published as instructional lessons. As a prominent nobleman, Chesterfield

¹³ H.J. Habakkuk, *English Population in the Eighteenth Century*, accessed from, *Population in History* ed. by D.V. Glass, (Chicago: Edward Arnold, 1965), 281.

¹⁴ Goodwin, *An archaeology of manners*, 25.

¹⁵ M.F Thwaite, *Little Pretty Pocket book* (New York: Hardcourt, 1967), 60; Braithwaite contends that men should maintain, “a posture of distemperment.” Richard Braithwaite, *The English Gentleman* (London: Published by I. Haviland, 1630), 257,

¹⁶ Kenneth L. Ames, *Death of the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 1992), 211.

¹⁷ Braithwaite, *The English Gentleman*, 2.

received his education at Cambridge and served in the English Parliament and the House of Lords, making him a significant figure among elite society. “A man of fashion” he wrote in a letter to his son, “makes himself easy and appears so, by leaning gracefully, instead of lolling supinely; and by varying those easy attitudes, instead of that stiff immobility of a bashful booby. You cannot conceive, nor can I express, how advantageous a good air, genteel motions, and engaging address are.”¹⁸ Chesterfield's instructions on gentility appeared in printed in both England and America in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century. Eventually his seminal work evolved into the standard for what constituted gentility and served as the benchmark for future etiquette manuals in antebellum America.

Colonial America inherited the same social structure of gentility from England, especially as urban populations grew in the colonies. Social elites practiced the pretentious traits to maintain their status as ‘gentlemen.’ But gentility was not limited to men in the upper strata of local communities. Historians like Alfred Young, Alan Taylor, and John Fea have uncovered how men of lower and middling sort during the colonial period and the Early Republic were deeply affected by the genteel ethos. Many who wanted to improve their social status in their community were motivated to adopt genteel behavior. While class fluidity was dependent on region, adequate adherence to the genteel code would bestow greater social standing.¹⁹ But as the ideology of democracy grew in the young country, the social structure of gentility was gradually weakened. The result of the conflicting social standards –of gentility and democracy– was a more pliable system for men in America than in England, especially those that wanted to better

¹⁸ Philip Dormer Stanhope Chesterfield. *The Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, with the Characters* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Company, 1779), 449-501.

¹⁹ Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Knopf, 1995); Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); John Fea, *The Way of Improvement Leads Home: Philip Vickers Fithian and the Enlightenment in America* (University Park, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

their social position, a common endeavor for men without a distinguished social position or income.

The first American presidents also inherited the English tradition of gentility. Inexperienced like the new country, George Washington and John Adams mimicked the only political and social tradition that they knew. Since the social elites of America already assumed the standard of gentility from England and utilized it as way to distinguish themselves and maintain social structure, it was natural for the president to do so as well. In the same way the courtly gentry who held political offices in England set the precedent for English elite society, the presidential office of America also had a strong influence in the Early Republic. Washington, who was born into a proper family and raised to abide by gentlemanly principles, innately followed the principles of gentility. In his youth he read detailed etiquette manuals that informed him of genteel attributes. For the rest of his life he practiced these principles.²⁰ As president he would buy fashionable clothing from Europe and perform elaborate etiquette.²¹ Succeeding Washington as President, John Adams did not have the advantage of coming from an elegant family or being trained in the genteel principles. But as a diplomat and president Adams worked fervently, and successfully to display in manner and dress the part of a refined gentleman.²²

A determining shift away from gentility in America occurred during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. He used his influence as president to depart from the rigid English genteel standard based heavily on lineage and courtly aristocracy and advocated for a more accepting, democratic social standard. While departing from the traditional idea of gentility, Jefferson consequently separated himself from the aristocratic Federalists, his political opponents. His

²⁰ William Roscoe Thayer and William M. Thayer, *George Washington* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1922), 9.

²¹ Henry Cabot Lodge, *George Washington*, 2 Vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), II: 56, 346.

²² John P. Diggins, *John Adams* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), 38.

belief in social mobility would enable future presidents, like Lincoln, to ascend from lower social standings to positions like the presidency. Concerned with how the Federalist embraced the same gentility that inhibited mobility in England, Jefferson saw traditional gentility as a contradiction to the American ideal of democracy. In turn Jefferson attempted to promote a new, more egalitarian sort of gentility in America. He aspired to establish an elite society founded on democratic principles.²³ He used his political position to create what he coined as the “natural aristocracy.” In a letter to John Adams in 1813, Jefferson expressed that an aristocracy founded on “wealth and birth” was disadvantageous to a democratic society. He believed that men who were by birth naturally talented would ascend to the positions of power and lead.²⁴ Using the presidential office as a place of influence Jefferson promoted a more egalitarian society and departed from the more stratified genteel system. But the newer system –like the former– gauged each person on exterior qualities, revealing little difference between the two.

To foster a society based on natural ability Jefferson supported public education to the chagrin of Southern gentlemen and those who fervently upheld genteel customs. He fought for the educational and land ownership rights for young white males in Virginia during much of his political career. Motivated by his desire of social rank being based on ability, Jefferson founded the University of Virginia to promote the European style of education that he esteemed so highly.²⁵ For Jefferson education would enable individuals to be evaluated on their natural ability instead of their ancestry. In this system those who had self-discipline and natural ability would rise to the level of a gentleman regardless of their heritage. The system of natural aristocracy

²³ Edwin Harrison Cady, *The Gentleman in America: A Literary Study in American Culture* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1949), 60.

²⁴ Lyman Tower Sargent, *Political Thought in the United States: A Documentary History* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 161.

²⁵ Susan Dunn, *Dominion of Memories: Jefferson, Madison, and the Decline of Virginia* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 69-72; Christopher Mulvey, *Transatlantic Manners* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 90.

enabled certain individuals in plebian society to elevate to the upper rank by having the opportunity to emulate every aspect of a gentleman, including the etiquette. Although Jefferson did not advocate for exhaustive training in etiquette, like he had witnessed when he served as a diplomat in Europe, he practiced a less formal, but still graceful manners than his predecessors. This less formal form of gentility would later become widely practiced and better known as “refinement.”²⁶

Jefferson was a seemingly unlikely person to discredit the traditional English hierarchical system of gentility. Like most gentry Jefferson was formally taught Chesterfield's instruction on conduct and social grace.²⁷ This provided Jefferson with formal and detailed instruction of genteel conduct like sitting, dancing, dress, and speech.²⁸ From his upbringing he developed a love of luxury and leisure which were both epitomized in his Virginian home and lifestyle at Monticello. He had a learned grace, smooth manners, a passion for European education, a taste for expensive wine and food, and always an elegant air about him even if he was in casual attire.²⁹ As the author of *The Gentleman in America* writes, “He was in one fashion an Archetypal Southern Gentleman.”³⁰

Even though Jefferson advocated for a more democratic social system instead of gentility, he did not attempt to undermine most of the established American genteel manners or appearance. He disproved only of the gaudy and lavish forms of etiquette, dress, and behavior of English courtly society. He carried himself in a simple manner that reflected American principles of democracy while maintaining a genteel etiquette and appearance. According to James Bryce,

²⁶ Thomas Jefferson to John Adams October 13, 1813; accessed from Sargent, *Political thought in the United States*, 161; Fawn McKay Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1974), 67.

²⁷ Mulvey, *Transatlantic Manners*, 86.

²⁸ Samuel E. Forman, *The Life and Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Company, 1900), 5.

²⁹ Mulvey, *Transatlantic Manners*, 29.

³⁰ Cady, *The Gentleman in America*, 90.

English author of *The American Commonwealth*, he presented himself with an “ostentatious plainness.”³¹ Although Jefferson was casual he exhibited a general grace and sophistication. As president he broke genteel customs with his casual manners.³² On one occasion he slighted the formal protocol for White House levee's with his nonchalant behavior. Instead of formally leading his elegant guests into the dining room, which was the custom, Jefferson called the guests closest to the room, who were women, to usher themselves in first before the men, which was a breach of etiquette.³³

Jefferson set the precedents for future presidents to be graceful, but not with a lavish style of gentility. Combining the grace and detail of gentility with aspects of a democratic casualness, Jefferson seemingly attempted to combine two opposing fashions. The new, less exclusive form of gentility coupled with democratic sensibilities was significant. It communicated the training in the elegance and sophistication of gentility but also an association with the political and national rhetoric of the new republic. It was a careful method, one that was cautious not to side too much with the extremes of gentility or a democratic style.

By being calculatedly common in appearance Jefferson helped pave the way for presidents like Andrew Jackson in 1828. Born an orphan and raised in a socially lower environment, Jackson would not have been able to reach such a significant social rank in genteel minded England. The exclusive positions of political power were guarded by the social elites, but as the masses gained more political control in antebellum America there was a growing appeal for a leader of ordinary caste. During his presidential campaign Jackson capitalize on his humble heritage and heroic military career to win the Presidency. By publicizing that he was not raised in elegance but in toil, Jackson found favor with the constituents of western states. Eligible voter

³¹ James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), 76.

³² Cady, *The Gentleman in America*, 26.

³³ Dunn, *Dominion of Memories*, 85-87.

turnout rose from twenty-seven percent during the presidential election of 1824 to fifty-five percent in the election of 1828. The public identified with the former orphan and military hero, causing them to vote Jackson into office.³⁴

But once Jackson ascended the social ranks he quickly abandoned the coarse social practices associated with his humble upbringing and adopted the elegant polish of the social elites. Well before his presidency he did not typify any part, politically or socially, of the humble, laboring sort. This was evident on the night of his inauguration in 1828 when the White House was bombarded by a plebeian mass, the type of hinterland folks that Jackson would have likely grown up with as a youth. The throng crammed into the White House for the inauguration levee traditionally reserved for the social elites of Washington. In disgust Jackson tried to have the uncouth and unwelcomed mass removed but with no avail. In a display of abandonment Jackson quickly removed himself from the crude mob, not wanting any part of the inferior company that he had once belonged to.³⁵

In the presidential election of 1840 William Henry Harrison, the Whig Presidential nominee, also appealed to the middling and lower sort for votes. Although Harrison was raised in elegance, his campaign emphasized that he was born in a log cabin and exploited the image of a humble upbringing to win votes. He displaced the impression that he had the advantages of genteel training for the façade of a common laborer. A local newspaper from Marshall, Michigan found favor with this, contending, “A man, who by his capacity and industry has raised himself from a log cabin to eminent stations in his country, is of more than ordinary merit.”³⁶ The paper found the appearance of Harrison's social mobility favorable. Breaking the precedents set by all

³⁴ Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.), 15-17.

³⁵ Schlesinger, *Leaning How To Behave*, 16-17.

³⁶ *Calhoun County* [Marshall, Michigan] *Patriot*, April 24, 1840.

previous presidential nominees, Harrison appealed directly to the lower sort even though he was far from them. He forsook the traditional approach that training in gentility allowed him to separate himself from the rougher laboring sort as their superior. Ultimately by appealing directly to the plebian sort Harrison won the Presidency. Although Harrison won the election many found his common appearance to be a façade. His deceiving appeal to the lower classes of society frustrated his political opponents. Harrison would put on western garb during his “Log Cabin Campaign” in western states but once he was among refined society he passed as a gentleman. *The Adams Sentinel* from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, criticized Harrison attempt to appear as part of the lower sort while being an established gentleman.³⁷

What Jefferson believed in, Jackson exemplified, and Harrison gave the impression of was social mobility and equal opportunity for white males. Ultimately Jefferson set the precedents that later white males could ascend to the Presidential office regardless of lineage or lack of proper social training. Once these men elevated to the level of high social rank, they were to conform to the prescribed elegant standard for gentlemen during the antebellum period. But once men of poor or middling beginnings rose to an elite status they were expected to abandon their old uncouth habits and conform to the genteel regulations of the social elites. Jackson illustrated this by forsaking his socially unbecoming past and Harrison did as well by presenting himself as a “common man” only in front of the rugged voters in the hinterlands, not in front of polished gentlemen. The appeal of social mobility attracted constituents to vote for Jackson and Harrison. Even though these men had the opportunity to weaken the genteel regulations used to mark a sharp distinction between the lower classes and the elites, they refused. The presidency was held by men who protected the pretentious attributes of gentility, attributes that drove a wedge between the lower laboring sort and the pretentious elites. Even though social mobility

³⁷ *The Adams Sentinel* [Gettysburg, Pennsylvania], August 31, 1840.

was possible it was more difficult because of the growing divide between social classes and the repugnance elites had towards characteristics of the laboring sort. It was not until Lincoln that the vast social gap between the uncouth working class and the pretentious social elites was directly challenged by a presidential candidate.

Even with most voting restrictions lifted for white males by the mid-antebellum period, only those with genteel sensibilities ran for the presidency. Historian Rufus R. Wilson asserted, “The earliest presidents of the United States had many points of resemblance to those of the English country gentleman.”³⁸ Groomed to be gentlemen, these men sustained a presidency for only the social elite. Despite the laboring sorts' desire for a president who was bred and raised as a common man, as evident by the support Jackson and Harrison received, the presidency remained an office reserved for elites. Historian Stuart Blumin contends that leaders “continued to dominate the political sphere in ways that conveyed to ordinary folk the feeling that the routine conduct of politics –the selection of candidates for public office, the shaping of political coalitions, the conduct of elections campaigns, the definition of the public agenda – was not really the people’s business.”³⁹ Presidents prior to Lincoln typically adhered to the elegant style of dress. President James Buchanan, who directly preceded Lincoln, “habitually wore a high cloth collar with a flowing white neckerchief.”⁴⁰ Even President Zachary Taylor, who was nicknamed “Rough and Ready” when he was a General, dressed genteelly as president. He was described as wearing, “high silk hat and a broad cloth suit,” on many occasions.⁴¹ For certain presidential occasions Taylor was noted as wearing “fine clothes.”⁴² The long tradition of

³⁸ Rufus Rockwell Wilson, *Lincoln in Caricature* (New York: Horizon Press, 1953), vi.

³⁹ Altschuler and Blumin, *Rude Republic*, 15.

⁴⁰ Shriver Philip Klein, *President James Buchanan: A Biography* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University. 1962): 206.

⁴¹ Brainer Dyer, *Zachary Taylor* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University. 1946): 397.

⁴² Edmond Hoyt, *Zachary Taylor: By Edmond Hoyt* (Chicago: Reilly & Lee Co. 1966): 256.

presidents carefully presenting themselves created a prevailing standard for how Lincoln was expected to appear and carry himself when he took office.⁴³

Jefferson's democratic ideal aided in transforming antebellum American society by encouraging the expansion of Northern middling sort from after his presidency until the Civil War. Democracy, coupled with the economic growth and regional expansion, created an enlargement of the middling class. Industrialization encouraged the rise of urbanization in the North. Between 1820 and 1860 the urban population grew three times faster than the general population, enlarging the middle class demographic.⁴⁴ Fewer homes were used as work places, as they had predominately been in rural settings in the eighteen century.⁴⁵ As the middling sort expanded there grew a greater desire for inclusion into elite society. With increasing urbanization, technological advances, and access to education a new hope developed among the middling sort that ascension to elite social status could be accomplished, causing the practice of refinement to grow substantially in antebellum America.⁴⁶

The growth of refinement and print culture naturally led to an increase in etiquette manuals published. Between 1820 and 1860, a consistent increase in the number of manuals published reflected the soar in readership of the budding middle class as well as the growth of cheap print.⁴⁷ A common interest grew among the new middling class to shed their unrefined habits and acquire the particular attributes of refinement in order to pass as gentlemen. Historian Authur Schlesinger describes this growth, "Aside from frequent revisions and new editions, twenty- eight different manuals appeared in the 1830's, thirty-six in the 1840's and thirty-eight

⁴³ Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, 83.

⁴⁴ Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 404.

⁴⁵ Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 157.

⁴⁶ Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 292.

⁴⁷ John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 47.

more in the 1850's.”⁴⁸ The proliferation of manuals was also a result of the shift away from the strict regulations of classical gentility.⁴⁹ Unlike the earlier English form of gentility, refinement was for the middling and to some extent the lower sort, a belief that was shared by Thomas Jefferson. It was more democratic, especially in the deference that was prescribed to render to a social superior. Using the label genteel or gentility became outdated. Social elites separated themselves from these terms because of the negative connotation they had with being an isolated social elite.⁵⁰ Although refinement broke down restricted barriers of gentility, it copied the traditional genteel philosophies for the exterior polish of a person, such as an elegant appearance and proper manners. Richard Bushman notes, “The qualities of refined people changed little from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century.”⁵¹ While there were differences between the gentility and refinement, the standard for a gentleman remained consistent. Chesterfield and other classic genteel writers continued to be emphasized as essential for refinement in antebellum American manuals.

The demand for conduct literature arose from an interest among the middle class in learning the intricate genteel traits. In order to pass as a gentleman careful study was required to compensate for a lack of socially elite ancestry and etiquette training as a youth.⁵² Dallett Hemphill, a leading historian of gentility in antebellum America writes, “The level of detail was new, this too was the continuation of an earlier trend- that of giving more instruction to the previously uninitiated.”⁵³ Like gentility, refinement was meticulous, but it had the perception of being less condescending towards the middling and laboring class than gentility. The social elites

⁴⁸ Schlesinger, *Learning How To Behave*, 18.

⁴⁹ Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 10-15.

⁵⁰ Count Alfred D’orsay, *Etiquette; or, a Guide to The usages of society with a Glance at Bad Habits* (New York: Wilson, 1843), 35.

⁵¹ Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 290.

⁵² John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 54.

⁵³ Dallett Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 146.

began to adjust to the growth of the middling sort. Etiquette manuals published during the mid to late antebellum period repeated meticulous instructions from traditional English conduct writers, like Chesterfield, in order for the middling sort to elevate themselves above their aspiring middling peers. As a result these manuals became widely popular.⁵⁴

Since there was dramatic growth of the middle sort all aspects of refinement became more commonplace.⁵⁵ Etiquette manuals published between 1820 and 1850 equipped society with a meticulous eye for aspects of refinement. While refinement spread rapidly in urban populations it also expanded into western parts of the country, although men on the frontier were typically less concerned with “refining” themselves than those from the Northeast. The Appalachian Mountains signified an approximate barrier between the refined society of the Northeast and the rougher farmers and pioneers of the west. Helen Nicolay in *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln* states that the “West was even less rigid and progressive than the East in matters of costume.”⁵⁶ Further into the antebellum period these borders became more fluid as population began to immigrate west. Refinement, removed from the urban population of the eastern cities, lost most of its social advantages. Although refined people were sprinkled throughout western cities, the criteria constituting refined behavior varied widely. Few concerned themselves with practicing the principles of refinement since it was expensive, time consuming, and not conducive to the struggle of surviving on the frontier. Eastern elite urban society saw western farmers and frontiersmen as lacking civility. Evaluating their coarse demeanor and appearance these elites promptly graded these westerners as primitive. Through the exhaustive examination of appearance and behavior, many social elites from eastern cities validated their

⁵⁴ Hemphill, *Bowing to the Necessities*, 68, 142.

⁵⁵ Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 252, 272, 295.

⁵⁶ Helen Nicolay, *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Century Company, 1912), 228.

superiority over unkempt westerners.⁵⁷

Despite refinement being less extravagant than gentility, it reinforced social divisions as much as gentility did. It recruited the middling classes by abolishing the genteel requirements that social inferiors pay deference to their superiors by bowing or in other forms. The formal costume and etiquette were not as elegant for the refined gentleman as it had been for the genteel man, but, by appearing as a more egalitarian, refinement disguised itself. The increase of people subscribing to the rules of refinement, rules that varied only slightly from the traditional genteel standards, reinforced the elevated rank of social elites. Whereas only a small portion of society in the eighteenth-century America subscribed to the standards of gentility, a much larger portion of antebellum Americans complied with the regulations of refinement. Refinement, like gentility, was as Bushman asserts, “a standard for exclusion as well as a mode of association.”⁵⁸ Even though the rules of refinement were less rigid they still upheld a stratified social structure that degraded those less acquainted with the finer points of detail in etiquette manuals. Accordingly, as proprietors of refinement, the social elites were more legitimized because more of society were attempting to mimic their mastery of refinement.⁵⁹

Through the vast number of etiquette manuals published and the increase of elegant personal possessions, there emerged a middle class striving for acceptance by adequately passing as part of the gentry. Consequently, a continuous anxiety over being accepted surfaced among the middling sort. This was because, as Richard Bushman writes, “The genteel lived by a standard outside themselves and their own circle. They could not break the colonial and provincial habit

⁵⁷ A description of the humble manners of various settlers from different ethnicities and in various western regions is provided in, James Hall, *Sketches of History, Life, and Manners in the West; Containing Accurate Descriptions of the Country and Modes of Life, in the Western States and Territories of North America* (Cincinnati: Hubbard and Edmands, 1834), 23-36; Taylor, *William Cooper's Town*, 143-146.

⁵⁸ Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, xv.

⁵⁹ Hemphill. *Bowing to the Necessities*, 156.

of looking upward and outward for leadership.”⁶⁰ Ultimately the growth of the refined middling sort had huge implications for Lincoln’s presidency. By the time Lincoln ran for the presidency cultivated sensibilities were not only the prescribed code of the elite minority, but also for the budding middle sort. As more people gained cultivated discernment, the divide between them and the crude frontiersman grew. Accordingly, critiques of Lincoln’s appearance and manners, fundamental requirements of a refined gentleman, increased in relation to the swelling middling sort.⁶¹

North and South

By the 1820s most Americans did not scoff at humble lineage, unlike the English gentry. A base social upbringing was not an insurmountable stigma. When Lincoln became president in 1861 he was exalted in the North because he was born in a log cabin but rose to the heights of the presidency. Although presidents conformed to the principles, they were evaluated differently by the rural parts of the North, mainly the Old Northwest, than by the predominately urban Northeast. When Lincoln first reached the presidential office, his lack of basic cultivated qualities was offensive to social elites in both the South and the North. Although the refined characteristics that the North and South valued were similar, there were major differences between the social values of the North and South. The understanding of why standard of gentility, followed by refinement, was different in the North and South will provide context for how Lincoln was viewed in his own time. It will also help uncover why his appearance and manners were typically more offensive to the South than to the North.

⁶⁰ Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 414.

⁶¹ Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 237, 410-411.

The myth of the North and South's differences extended back to the English Civil War. The South's identity was founded in the Cavalier myth and the North's in the Roundheads. During the English Civil War these two parties fought against each other. The Cavaliers were of the royal English heritage and upheld the more elegant and genteel standard, while the Roundheads were Puritans who found more value in a diligent work ethic.⁶² Ultimately the North's and South's belief in their respective tradition produced increasing acrimony between the two regions. The values and ideals of the regions were in opposition to each other.⁶³ By the early-and mid-1800s there was a significant discrepancy between how the antebellum South and North determined whether a person was of the social elite caliber. Because of this, Abraham Lincoln's presidential background and character were evaluated according to two separate standards.

As an industrializing economy in the mid-1800s the North encouraged diligent characteristics which were distinctly different from what the agrarian South valued. On a visit to France in the 1780s, Thomas Jefferson described to a Frenchman the difference between men in the North and the South. In his description Jefferson contended that Northern men were "cool, laborious, sober, persevering, and independent." Describing the South he asserted that the men were "fiery, voluptuary, indolent, generous, and candid." Even though there were differences in what the North and South valued in a gentleman, both regions derived their fundamental ideals of respectability from the traditional English gentry. According to historian Daniel Kilbride, "From colonial times until the Civil War, Northern and Southern aristocrats understood that

⁶² William Robert Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 15.

⁶³ Robert B. Bonner, "Roundheaded Cavaliers? The Context and Limits of a Confederate Racial Project," *Civil War History* 48 (2002): 42.

shared manners and tastes signified a commonly held conservative world view.”⁶⁴ While the gentry of the antebellum North and South had the same standards for manners and dress, other aspects like honor and self-determination were not valued equally.

What constituted a social elite in the industrial antebellum North was based heavily on Jefferson’s model of a “natural aristocracy.” Lineage was not as significant in the North after 1800 as it was for Southern social elites. A belief in social mobility motivated workers to be diligent in the hopes of improving their job and social status. This industrious spirit is evident in the support Lincoln received from the North for formerly being a rail-splitter when campaign for president. The image of Lincoln as a hero who pulled himself up from humble origins represented the self determination and industrious spirit of the North. As president, newspapers predominantly referred to Lincoln’s “rail-splitting” days endearingly. In contrast the South looked down upon the fact that Lincoln had held such a meager position and used his humble origins to restrict him from being accepted among the social elite.

The writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson embodied what the North considered to be a model gentleman in the early-and mid-1800s. Historian Edwin Cady asserts, “Emerson scrapped the class and made gentlemanliness purely a question of individual moral achievement.”⁶⁵ Employing Jefferson’s principles of natural aristocracy, Emerson believed that individuals, regardless of social standing, held the destiny of their social standing. He wrote, “the men of valor and reality are known and raised to their natural place.”⁶⁶ Other attributes that he believed a gentleman should possess were self control, honesty self-reliance, and an innate “force of will.”⁶⁷ Emerson did not believe in instructing youth in extensive detail how to be genteel. He believed

⁶⁴Daniel Kilbride, “Cultivation, Conservatism, and the Early National Gentry: The Manigault Family and Their Circle,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 19 (Summer 1999): 235-240.

⁶⁵ Cady, *The Gentleman in America*, 19.

⁶⁶ Cady, *The Gentleman in America*, 163.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 165.

that manners and appearance were a natural ability which would become apparent in individuals. “Manners are partly factitious, but, mainly, there must be capacity for culture in the blood.”⁶⁸

Emerson felt that once a gentleman elevated from a lower social order that his manners and attributes would assimilate with the style of other gentry. When Lincoln rose to the presidency, Emerson was not concerned with his humble upbringing; rather, he was concerned with Lincoln’s inability to adjust his manners and appearance to refined standards.

When those in the North considered the South’s view of a gentleman they found it very superficial and undemocratic. The emphasis on lineage in Southern society was created to inhibit the equal opportunity that the North sought to promote. Northerners viewed this rigid condition of the South as a social structure that made Southern elites lazy. As opposed to the “natural aristocracy,” the South was intent on controlling their elites by using ancestry as an important criterion. The South also placed a strong emphasis on traditional English gentry values, like appearance and manners. Hypocritically the North demeaned the South’s extravagant display of outer polish as superficial even though the gentlemen of the North, especially the Northeast, was equally superficial in their appearance and manners.⁶⁹ In 1860 the *Grant County Witness* of Platteville, Wisconsin, described some of the differences between the North and the South: “The peculiarity of language which distinguishes the Virginians—and most Southerners — from Northerners. Also, their dress and general demeanor.”⁷⁰

Southern standards for what constituted a gentleman were heavily founded on the classic English ideal of propriety. The regulations for Southern social elites were more demanding than those in the North. Lineage was an important aspect of the Southern gentlemen to protect their

⁶⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: comprising his essays, lectures* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1866), 383.

⁶⁹ Kilbride, “Cultivation, Conservatism, and the Early National Gentry,” 225; Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 390.

⁷⁰ *Grant County [Wisconsin] Witness*, June 7, 1860.

elite social. Unlike the North the South did not encourage an egalitarian society. By inhibiting social mobility the South secured its gentry and their ancestry.⁷¹ Deference visibly reinforced this hierarchical social system in which middle and lower sorts would defer to their social superiors. The code of deference varied and took a variety of forms. Some Southern etiquette manuals directed a male of a lower social rank not to approach a social superior, instead he should wait for his superior to make an advance first. Other instruction stated that superiors should be named first in an introduction.⁷² This stratified society reinforced the institution of slavery. To secure this type of society, formal education was also esteemed because it was not easily accessible in the South, it fostered social mobility, and it was not advantageous for an agrarian region.⁷³ Even though the South adopted many English standards of gentility, formal education was not one of them.⁷⁴

Another distinguishing characteristic of the Southern elites was leisure. It was typically only men of wealth who could afford the luxury of leisure time. Leisure was an extravagance that the laboring classes did not have. Leisure separated Southern gentry from the middle and lower sort as well as undermine the importance of formal education. The South believed that if gentlemen had time for leisure it would enable them to cultivate themselves through reading, conversation, and other casual endeavors. Leisure entitled the Southern men the right to honor, which was visually evident in deference. Unlike the North, the South believed that an assiduous white worker conveyed characteristics of a socially lower sort. For a Southern gentleman constant work was thought to inhibit leisure pursuits that cultivate virtue, civility, and intellect. Consequently most gentlemen in the South would view the rail-splitter image of Abraham

⁷¹ Hemphill, *Bowing to the Necessities*, 9.

⁷² Hemphill, *Bowing to the Necessities*, 136-7.

⁷³ Dunn, *Dominion of memories*, 53.

⁷⁴ Hemphill, *Bowing to the Necessities*, 5.

Lincoln disapprovingly.

According to Bertram Wyatt Brown's seminal book, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, "[Southern] gentility was best exemplified in the figure of Robert E. Lee."⁷⁵ A contemporary of Lincoln, Lee embodied the ideal Southern gentleman. Born to a refined and cultured ancestry in Virginia, Lee was well versed in the world of a Southern gentleman.⁷⁶ His life pursuit was the struggle for self-mastery in order to develop the Christian moral character pertinent to a Southern gentleman. Lee aspired to traditional Southern genteel attributes like virtue, inner character, and honor. He did not simply possess these traits, but he also displayed them in his elegant manners and proper dress.⁷⁷ It was Lee's deep veneration of the traditional genteel values adopted from Europe, like honor and lineage, that made him admired in the South. In *The Making of Robert E. Lee*, author Michael Fellman writes, "Generations of southerners remade Lee into a Protestant saint, the sum of all good in their culture."⁷⁸

It is important to point out that the Southern and Northern gentleman ideals were not concrete, there were exceptions. The life of Andrew Jackson reveals that social mobility did take place in the South. Rising above the stigma of being an orphan to join the Southern gentry, Jackson overcame the rigid stereotypes to eventually take the presidency.⁷⁹ But Jackson was quick to conform to the genteel code of manners and appearance as he ascended the social ladder. Even though the Southern elite identified with the myth of English Cavaliers and the North with the English Roundheads, both the North and the South had regional variations for

⁷⁵Bertram Wyatt Brown, *Southern honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 90.

⁷⁶ Philip Alexander Bruce, *Robert E. Lee* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Company, 1907), 15.

⁷⁷ Michael Fellman, *The Making of Robert E Lee* (New York: Random House, 2000), XV-XVII.

⁷⁸ Fellman, *The Making of Robert E Lee*, 303.

⁷⁹ Mark R. Cheatham, "The High Minded Honourable Man': Honor, Kinship, and Conflict in the Life of Andrew Jackson Donelson." *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (Summer 2007): 268.

what constituted the socially elite.⁸⁰ Generally the North and the South held to different views of how to ascend to the level of a high social rank.

A large difference between the North and South's understanding of a gentleman was based on social mobility. Jefferson's "natural aristocracy" that flourished in the middle class North was not compatible with the hierarchical slave society of the South. But once the North's "natural aristocracy" rose to become refined, they presented and conducted themselves with similar, if not the same, standards as Southern gentry. Even though there was a ideological divide between the North and South, creating the impression of two incompatible civilizations, the social elites from both the North and the South abided by the same polished standard of appearance and manners.⁸¹ Historian Daniel Kilbride contends, "From colonial times until the Civil War, northern and southern aristocrats understood that shared manners and tastes signified a commonly held conservative world view."⁸² Both the North and the South used the same etiquette manuals, like the popular writings of Lord Chesterfield, to distinguish the elite sort from the lower sort. The basis for these instructions were inherited from England and used by both the North and South to educate the future gentlemen. As a result both regions had almost identical standards of manners and dress for social elites.⁸³ But, the significant difference was that the North believed in social fluid mobility and the South's social system greatly restricted status improvement.

⁸⁰ Kilbride, "Cultivation, Conservatism, and the Early National Gentry: The Manigault Family and Their Circle," 224.

⁸¹ James M. McPherson, "Antebellum Southern Exceptionalism: A New Look at an Old Question." *Civil War History* 50 (2004): 423.

⁸² Kilbride. "Cultivation, Conservatism, and the Early National Gentry: The Manigault Family and Their Circle," 225.

⁸³ Brown, *Southern honor*, 89.

Chapter 2

THE FORMATION OF AN UNREFINED PRESIDENT

Whether on the platform in a Western town, or before a cultivated audience in New England, or at the very seat of authority of a great nation, he was ever the same, unaffectedly honest and open to every observer.⁸⁴ – Albert Blair; lawyer and native of Pike County, Illinois.

Lincoln's apathy about his appearance was unprecedented among politicians who were traditionally considered gentlemen. His blunt disregard for attempting to pass as a member of the social elite, a position to which he was entitled, was instilled in him from his youth. In this respect Lincoln was like his father, Thomas Lincoln. Uncovering aspects of Thomas's life provides insight into Abraham's indifference to manners and appearance.

Thomas Lincoln, born in 1778, was a pioneer and farmer his whole life. Raised in the rugged frontier of Kentucky, he remained distant from elegant society, wealth, and formal education because of his location and his common status. He was unconcerned with his dress and appearance; instead he was consumed with the necessities and the simple joys of life on the frontier.⁸⁵ A close friend and distant relative of the Lincoln family stated that Thomas was “[c]areless in his personal appearance,”⁸⁶ a description that would later be used to describe his son. The rugged, unkempt appearance of Thomas Lincoln caught the attention not only of his neighbors but most people he came in contact with. When William Herndon –one of the first

⁸⁴ Albert Blair's observation of Lincoln accessed from Walter B. Stevens, *A Reporter's Lincoln*, ed. Michael Burlingame (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 97.

⁸⁵ Emanuel Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln: From the Letters and Papers of William Herndon* (New York: Viking, 1938), 67.

⁸⁶ William Herndon, *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Lincoln*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson, Rodney O. David, Terry Wilson, Jesse William Weik (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 96.

Lincoln biographers— collected information on the life of Thomas Lincoln, it was his appearance that people who knew him remembered most vividly. Thomas's neighbor in Kentucky remembered him as an “excellent specimen of poor white trash.”⁸⁷ Although his appearance stuck out as unpleasant, he was still well liked by those around him.

Thomas’s slovenly appearance and raw demeanor gave the impression that he was apathetic, but that was not the case. He worked arduously as a carpenter and farmer to accumulate land for his own. In 1816, he relocated his family to a place just a few miles from Troy, Indiana, because he believed it was a better opportunity to gain land.⁸⁸ In Indiana Thomas became a part of his community. He participated in the local militia, sat on juries, and joined his community's church. Although his brother-in-law stated that “[h]e was a man who took the world easy,” it was not because of Thomas's work ethic.⁸⁹ His easy nature likely came from his enjoyment of humor, he was remembered as always being ready with a joke. This jovial spirit softened the grim realities of life on the frontier that Thomas knew so well, especially because he had witnessed Indians kill his father in Kentucky.⁹⁰

After Thomas's wife and Abraham's mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln died trying to survive the harsh conditions on the frontier, Thomas remarried, to Sarah Bush. Although the future President lost his birth mother when he was nine years old, he gained a second one in Sarah at ten. Embarking on her new role as mother, Sarah recalled that Thomas, Abraham, and Abraham’s sister “were Sufring greatly for clothes.”⁹¹ By devoting his life to the rewards and

⁸⁷ Interview with George B. Blach in, Herndon, *Herndon's Informants*, 596.

⁸⁸ Ronald Cedric White, *Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 2009), 23-25.

⁸⁹ White, *Lincoln: A Biography*, 14.

⁹⁰ Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, 59; William Herndon, *Herndon's Life of Lincoln* (Cleveland: World publishing Company, 1930), 12; Interview with Dennis F. Hanks and written statement by Augustus H. Chapman (Lincoln's former neighbor in, Herndon, *Herndon's Informants*, 27, 96.

⁹¹ A letter from Samuel Haycraft to William Herndon quoted in, *Herndon's Informants*, 68; A Written statement by Augustus H. Chapman (Lincoln's former neighbor) quoted in *Ibid*.

struggles on the frontier Thomas was concerned with the necessities of life instead of proper clothing. Like his father, young Abraham Lincoln “cared nothing for clothes,” as his stepmother said. “Fashion cut no figure with him --nor Color--nor Stuff nor material – [he] was careless about all these things.” Isolated in the perilous frontier of northwest Indiana, Abraham had neither the opportunity nor the desire to read etiquette manuals. He also never indicated an interest in presenting himself as someone other than a simple farmer. This indifference to his appearance was evident throughout the rest of his life.⁹²

As young Lincoln grew his humble means and lack of interest in fashion became more apparent. During his middle teen years his growth spurt was noticeable largely because he did not buy new clothes.⁹³ Those who saw him as a teenager collectively described his pants as “far better suited for a man much less his height.” His shirts were similarly too short for his long arms and struck people as looking odd.⁹⁴ As a young man, he worked an assorted number of laborious tasks which he performed in heavily-worn jean or deer-skin material.⁹⁵ The wear of the labor on his clothing was of little or no concern to him. A friend noted that at age seventeen Lincoln wore coarse clothes, which fit poorly, and crude shoes. This poorly pieced together outfit was accentuated by his droopy posture. All of these characteristics caused Lincoln's friend to assert, “His [a]pppearance was very od.”⁹⁶ His apathy about his dress was evident because his clothing was worn so extensively that it fell apart, and still Lincoln would not mend or replace it. Instead

⁹² Interview with Sarah Bush Lincoln in, Herndon, *Herndon's Informants*, 107-8.

⁹³ An interview with Nathaniel Grigsby about Lincoln quoted in, *Ibid.* 113.

⁹⁴ A statement from Menard Axis about Lincoln quoted in, *Herndon's Informants*, 24.

⁹⁵ “His [Lincoln's] long arms protruded through the sleeves of a coat which scarcely reached beyond the elbow.” Lincoln's clothing is described in a letter from Caleb Carman to Herndon quoted from, *Ibid.* 429; Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, 51; Herndon, *Herndon's Life of Lincoln*, 35.

⁹⁶ Herndon, *Herndon's Informants*, 429.

Lincoln's neighbors would take it upon themselves to sew and patch the tattered clothes.⁹⁷ Even though young Lincoln had a keen interest in educating himself, he never conveyed pretentiousness or even care in his appearance, as many educated people did. Lincoln was interested in improving himself through learning and had little concern about communicating status through his appearance.⁹⁸

By 1832 railroad development was threatening the bustling steamboat industry in New Salem. With his friends prodding him Lincoln entered the political race for the Illinois state legislature.⁹⁹ His diligence about educating himself paid dividends when he applied the knowledge he had gained through reading as a youth to the realm of politics. His campaign was one of his first opportunities to associate with polished society. Unfortunately Lincoln did not dress to the occasion. This was largely because he had been working on a flatboat and as a rail-splitter, which added to his already rugged appearance. Even William Butler, one of Lincoln's friends, recalled him as "ruff a specimen of humanity as could be found."¹⁰⁰ During his campaign, a friend described Lincoln as "curious" and "awkward."¹⁰¹ It was undoubtedly apparent to the voters of Illinois that Lincoln appeared very odd as he tried to gain votes while wearing ill-fitting clothes. His appearance caught the attention of so many people that his opponent used this to criticize him. Lincoln's friend J. Rowan Herndon recalled how Lincoln used his humor to respond to these criticisms, "In one of his speeches he [Lincoln] said 'fellow

⁹⁷ Herndon, *Herndon's Informants*, 557; Michael Burlingame, ed., *An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay's Interviews and Essays* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 20; Stevens, *A Reporter's Lincoln*, 7.

⁹⁸ Lincoln's desire to learn was evident when he purchased books like dictionaries instead of education manuals described in interviews with Sarah Bush Lincoln and Dennis Hanks quoted in, Herndon, *Herndon's Informants*, 104, 107.

⁹⁹ David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 40-41.

¹⁰⁰ William Butler interview in, David Mearns, *The Lincoln Papers: The Story of the Collection*, ?? Vols. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1948), I: 151.

¹⁰¹ In 1826, a friend noted, "His [Lincoln's] Appearance was very od his dress was a short Roundabout of Blew Janes Lite Blewe & pants of the same the pants very Short in the Leggs which Gave him a very curious Apperance with a corse pare of Stoga Shoes on a Low Crowned Brod brimmed Hat." Quoted in, Herndon, *Herndon's Informants*, 429.

Citizens I have Been told that some of my opponents have said that it was a disgrace to the County of sangamon to have such a Looking man as i am stuck up for the Legislator now I thought this was a free C[o]untry.”¹⁰² Although Lincoln made light of the situation, his poor appearance gave his opponents the opportunity to sway the Illinois voters to believe that it was an indication of his lack of ability and character. Whether the voters believed the criticism is hard to tell, but the race ended in a loss for the inexperienced and poorly dressed Lincoln.¹⁰³

Two years later Lincoln came back to run for the same seat in the Illinois state legislature and this time he won. His victory came in spite of the fact that he once again appeared poorly before his constituents. Lincoln’s friend Abner Ellis recalled, “He [Lincoln] wore a mixt Jeans Coat Claw hammer stile, short in the sleeves and bob tail in fact it was so short in the tail he could Not sit on it.”¹⁰⁴ After the election Lincoln realized his appearance would not bode well with the elegant Illinois politicians that he would be working with at the capital. Running as a Whig, Lincoln was a stark contrast to the generally elegant members of the party. He did not typify the gentleman persona that Whigs had been known for. His breach of the implied standards for a Whig politician likely caused him to be more self-conscious about the inadequacy of his clothes, hair, and manners.¹⁰⁵

In order to dress the part of a legislator, Lincoln visited his friend Colman Smoot to ask for a loan. He arrived at Smoot’s home wearing “[p]antaloon [that] were very Short Causing him to look very awkward.”¹⁰⁶ Lincoln asked Smoot if he voted for him in the Illinois legislature election. When Smoot told him he did, Lincoln replied, “Well...you must loan me

¹⁰² Letter from J. Rowan Herndon quoted in, Herndon, *Herndon’s Informants*, 7.

¹⁰³ Herndon, *Life of Lincoln*, 84-7; Donald, *Lincoln*, 50.

¹⁰⁴ Statement by Abner Y. Ellis quoted in, Herndon, *Herndon’s Informants*, 171.

¹⁰⁵ “Critical Notices.” *The American Review: A Whig Journal* 10 (1849): 548; Amos Miller, “Lawyers of Montgomery County, Illinois.” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 11, no. 1 (April, 1918): 382.

¹⁰⁶ In 1832, before Lincoln bought new attire, a friend recalled that Lincoln was “gawky and rough looking fellow then- his pantaloons didn’t meet his shoes by six inches.” Quoted in, Burlingame, ed., *An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln*, 35.

money to buy Suitable Clothing for I want to make a decent appearance in the Legislature.” The purchase of new clothes was probably the first time Lincoln put a considerable amount of money and effort into his appearance. Naturally Lincoln wanted to appear presentable in front of his coworkers in Vandalia, the then capital city of Illinois, something he never was concerned about before.¹⁰⁷ After buying new clothes, Lincoln was able to pass as a gentleman among his fellow legislators, but his clothing could not hide his lack of social refinement from the local elites familiar with the polish of the East. As his political career progressed after 1832, Lincoln became more exposed to elegant society, and familiar with proper etiquette, but he did not express any inclination to learn intricacies of proper manners or personal appearance.¹⁰⁸

After Lincoln began working in politics and law, his social environment changed drastically from his earlier years. Once elected to the Illinois legislature, he experienced a different social setting than when working on a flat-boat traveling down the Mississippi River to New Orleans or when he was splitting wood to make railroad ties. Unlike his days as a manual laborer, the political and legal fields were dominated by educated and wealthy men from elite families. The social worlds between these two different fields of work were polar opposites. While working manual labor jobs Lincoln’s appearance was supposed to be rugged, but as a lawyer and politician his appearance was believed to reflect his character and sophistication.¹⁰⁹ John Nicolay, Lincoln’s future personal secretary, noted, “At Vandalia he [Lincoln] saw convocation of samples of all the good clothes and good manners in the State.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ A letter from John McNamar to G.U. Miles regarding Lincoln quoted in, Herndon, *Herndon’s Informants*, 254; Donald, *Lincoln*, 53.

¹⁰⁸ Burlingame, ed., *An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln*, 30.

¹⁰⁹ William Herndon writes; “The society of Vandalia and the people attracted thither by the Legislature made it, for that early day, a gay place indeed. Compared to Lincoln’s former environments, it had no lack of refinement and polish.” In William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon’s Lincoln* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 111.

¹¹⁰ John G. Nicolay, “Lincoln’s Personal Appearance.” *Century Magazine* XLII (October, 1891): 934.

By the late 1830s Lincoln had created a reputation for himself as a young up-and-coming politician. Despite his appearance Lincoln became acquainted with, if not accepted by, refined social life in Illinois. In 1839 the state capital of Illinois moved from Vandalia to Springfield, causing Lincoln to relocate to a more metropolitan city. The refined sensibilities of Springfield, which were influenced from the cities in the northeast, clashed with Lincoln's demeanor. His future law partner, William Herndon, later wrote that "Lincoln was not appreciated in this city [Springfield]." ¹¹¹ A member of the community later stated, "The fact is that we considered ourselves a 'tony' crowd, and that Lincoln, although an extremely clever and well-liked fellow, was hardly up to our standard of gentility." ¹¹² But it was in this social setting that Lincoln's personal life changed. In 1839 Lincoln asked the polished Mary Todd to dance with him at a social gathering in Springfield, Illinois. ¹¹³ Nothing about Lincoln's grace was alluring to Mary Todd. His appearance and awkward practice of etiquette struck her as strange. After the evening Mary Todd reflected on how Lincoln approached her and blurted out, "I want to dance with you in the worst way." She later wittingly remarked to her cousin that "he certainly did." ¹¹⁴ But despite Lincoln's awkward demeanor, she took notice of him and his potential. His political ambition appealed to her since she had reportedly confided in a friend that she would "marry a future president." ¹¹⁵

After that evening the relationship between Mary Todd and Lincoln grew. It was a romance that is an anomaly to historians. Both had deep ambitions but little else in common. ¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Herndon, *Herndon's Lincoln*, 424.

¹¹² P.K. McMinn, "Lincoln as Known to His Neighbors," *Saturday Evening Post*, February 13, 1904 quoted in, Douglas Wilson, *Honor's Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 180.

¹¹³ Justin G. Turner and Linda Turner, *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters* (New York: Knopf, 1972), 16.

¹¹⁴ Jean H. Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1987), 83-87.

¹¹⁵ Jennifer Fleischner, *Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Keckly: The Remarkable Story of the Friendship Between a First Lady and a Former Slave* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004), 94.

¹¹⁶ Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln*, 120.

Lincoln's promising career no doubt was the rationale for Mary Todd to excuse his absence of refinement. Some, like Mary Todd's brother-in-law, Ben Hardin Helm a Kentuckian slaveholder, objected to their interest in each other. He told her multiple times that he opposed her relationship with Lincoln because his social standing disqualified him for such a refined woman as she. Albert Beveridge, one of Lincoln's biographers, claimed that Hardin's advice was "sage counsel, since few couples have been more unsuited in temperament, manners, taste, and everything else except mutual ambition."¹¹⁷ She was thoroughly accustomed to the detailed manners and graceful points of body control; a stark contrast from Lincoln. But Mary Todd did not heed this advice and eventually married the unrefined Illinoisan on November 4, 1842.¹¹⁸

Compared with Lincoln, Mary Todd held the opposite perspective toward refined sensibilities.¹¹⁹ She had a very formal upbringing which shaped her understanding of the importance of polish. By having the advantage of being born into wealthy Kentucky family, she received an education in "class, breeding, manners, from the feudal European viewpoint."¹²⁰ She was cultivated in manners and etiquette, and her appearance was of the utmost importance to her, to the degree that she would, according to Lincoln biographer Carl Sandburg, "crave above all else" particular fashions. Sandburg also noted that she had "a need for amusement and a passion for pretty clothes."¹²¹ Her understanding of appearance was the complete opposite of the ill dressed Lincoln, who as a child never wore clothes that fit.

Remarkably, Mary Todd's passion for fashionable clothes had only limited influence on Lincoln. Her meticulous eye for elegance is revealed in her clothing purchases and later in her

¹¹⁷ Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, 311,312,314.

¹¹⁸ Mary E. Hull, *Mary Todd Lincoln: Tragic First Lady of the Civil War* (Berkeley Heights, New Jersey: Enslow Publishers, 2000), 128.

¹¹⁹ "The Presidential Progress." *The New York Times*, February 25, 1861.

¹²⁰ Turner, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 5.

¹²¹ Carl Sandburg, *Mary Lincoln: Wife and Widow* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932), 29, 31.

remodeling the White House. An example of her adherence to refinement is provided in a letter she wrote to a storekeeper's wife. "Would you be kind enough also," she asked "to have me a drawn satin bonnet made of this brown, lined with white, I have some small brown feathers for the outside, also inside trimming... if fine black lace, [it] will be used this fall. I can put feathers and flowers inside myself."¹²² The descriptive order written to a shop in St. Louis instead of a local shop in Springfield illuminates how precise Mary Todd was in her dress and particular she was about where she shopped. Her taste in a bonnet provides an insightful example about her refined fashion sense. The importance of a fashionable bonnet is indicated in the *The Charleston Mercury*. "Refined eyes" the paper declared, "are delighted by the charming and rational spoon-bonnet." It added that "civilized and enlightened taste is gratified by the sight of the majestic crinoline so admirably adapted to the human figure." The ad was meant to attract an elegant female audience to the fashion of the bonnet, women like Mary Todd.¹²³

The different views Lincoln and Mary Todd had about personal appearance eventually created conflict in their marriage. One example of this tension was the debt that Mary Todd accrued in order to buy certain fashions when they lived in Springfield. Since Lincoln was unaccustomed to such large bills for clothing, he would question his wife about certain payments. But the most significant effect of their polar opposite concern for appearance was the fact that Mary Todd was ashamed of Lincoln's appearance in their home and, at times, in public. When among family and friends Lincoln was unconcerned about what he wore or the lack of clothes he wore. He was described as often having bare feet, an old pair of pants, and an undershirt when he was around his house or at the neighbor's house in Illinois.¹²⁴ Refined guests

¹²² A Letter from Elizabeth Dale Black to Mary Todd Lincoln quoted from Turner, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 42.

¹²³ "Fashions – Past And Present," *The Charleston Mercury*, January 14, 1864.

¹²⁴ A written statement by A.H. Chapman (Lincoln's former neighbor) quoted in Herndon, *Herndon's Informants*, 96.

who visited their house were often taken back when they were greeted by the poorly dressed Lincoln. Lincoln's neighbor, Augustus H. Chapman, contended, "Mr. Lincoln seldom ever wore his coat when in the house at home. And often went to the table in his Shirt Sleeves. Which practice annoyed his wife very much. Who by the way loved to put on Style."¹²⁵ At home Lincoln would typically wear socks without shoes and remove his button-down shirt. Such a casual appearance angered Mary Todd and motivated her to conceal the Lincoln home life out of fear of embarrassment.¹²⁶ Having been trained to act properly, she wanted her husband to be more careful about his appearance. She knew all too well how a poor appearance could communicate a poor intellect, rudeness, or even immorality.

Even after more than a decade of marriage and a transition to a more socially elite company, Lincoln still did not put effort into improving his appearance. Lincoln's law partner Henry C. Whitney recalled his appearance between 1854 through 1858. He noted that Lincoln wore ragged clothes that were too small for him, carried a faded umbrella, and donned a hat that had been worn so much that parts of it were missing.¹²⁷ Lincoln's legal associates even speculated about his personal exterior. Although Lincoln was apathetic about his appearance Mary Todd put pressure on him to appear more formal. As an elegant and adamant woman Mary Todd wanted her husband to avoid creating a poor reputation for himself. Her concern grew because Lincoln was a popular figure in Springfield as a successful lawyer and respected politician. Mary Todd's apprehension showed in 1857, when Lincoln had a formal portrait photograph taken for a Springfield newspaper. In the photo it is clear that Lincoln either had

¹²⁵ Interview with A. H. Chapman quoted in Herndon, *Herndon's Informants*, 512.

¹²⁶ Turner, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 39; Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln*, 50,105; In interview Harriet A. Chapman revealed that Mary Todd would get upset when Lincoln was not dressed appropriate when guest came, in a letter from Ella A. Thompson to Herndon it is revealed that Mary Todd was embarrassed by her home life with Lincoln, and an interview with John Hanks reveals how Lincoln appeared at home. quoted in, Herndon, *Herndon's Informants*, 644-5, 455, 462; "Current Literature," *New York Times*, February 9, 1868.

¹²⁷ A letter from Henry C. Whitney to William Herndon in, Herndon, *Herndon's Informants*, 617.

forgotten to comb his hair or did not care how his hair looked. When the photograph was published a few days later, Lincoln appeared with a mess of disheveled hair. On the day that the picture was printed, a boy selling the newspaper famously exclaimed, “Buy one [newspaper], only two shillings! [Lincoln] Will look a great deal better when he gets his hair combed!”¹²⁸ When Mary Todd saw the picture, one that she would have likely heard other people make remarks about, she was not pleased. In 1861 Lincoln wrote in a letter to a friend explaining that in spite of the fact that his wife and close friends were upset with his appearance, he thought the photo was a “true one.”¹²⁹

A formative event in Lincoln's political career occurred on May 29, 1856, at an anti-Nebraska Act Convention in Bloomington, Indiana, where the Illinois lawyer spoke to an estimated crowd of a thousand. The convention advocated for slavery's extension to be denied in all federal territory. Lincoln's performance caught the audience's attention for an hour and a half as he passionately spoke of the moral implications and political ramifications of slavery. Although his speech was a success, spectators were surprised by Lincoln's appearance. His hair was unkempt and his shoulders were hunched as he took the platform. J. F. Humphreys of Bloomington was in the audience that evening. He recalled the rigid movements of Lincoln's body but also his “seedy, old style clothing.” Even Lincoln's associates from the convention were aghast by his appearance. On the train leaving Bloomington Jonathan Birch recalled, “On his [Lincoln's] arm was the cloak that he was said to have worn when he was in Congress nine years before.”¹³⁰ This was a common reaction to the former rail-splitter. During the same year, 1856,

¹²⁸ Charles Hamilton and Lloyd Ostendorf. *Lincoln in Photographs: An Album of Every Known Pose* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1963) 7, 11.

¹²⁹ Paul Selby. *Lincoln's Life, Stories and Speeches* (Chicago: Thompson and Thomas, 1902), 153. A letter from Abraham Lincoln to James Babcock written on September 13, 1861 quoted in, Roy Basler, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 4 Vols. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1953), III: 34.

¹³⁰ Interview with Jonathan Birch quoted in, Herndon, *Herndon's Lincoln*, 628.

Annie Fox moved into the Springfield community. When she first met Lincoln at the First Presbyterian Church in Springfield, she recollected that he was “awkward in his movements” and “His clothing did not fit him well.”¹³¹

Between 1856 and 1858 Lincoln's low income enabled his family to be relatively affluent in the Springfield community. But even when his legal practice was thriving Lincoln kept a humble dress and deportment. It was noted that as a lawyer he would be “carrying an old carpetbag in his hand,” and wear “a weather-beaten silk hat” that was “too large.”¹³² But Lincoln's interest in politics motivated him to prepare for a comeback in the summer of 1857. In that year he organized a group of men that would advise him in his historic 1858 Illinois Senate race against Stephen Douglas. It was in this senate race that Lincoln gained widespread popularity in his own state and in other parts of the country. The attention of this campaign grew when Douglas and Lincoln traveled the state for seven informal debates. Practically the only things that Lincoln and Douglas had in common were their political aspirations. Douglas was a short, plump, and elegant man who always appeared in polished clothing and demonstrated refined manners. Lincoln on the other hand was the antithesis of Douglas. During the many debates Lincoln was as “careless of his dress” as he had been in previous campaigns. When Lincoln took the platform he not only appeared awkward, but also peculiar because of “his oddity of pose” and “his diffident movements.” William Herndon wrote that this unusual first impression caused “[e]verything seemed to be against him” from the start of the debates.¹³³

¹³¹ Burlingame, ed., *A Reporter's Lincoln*, 166, 173, 45; Richard Carwardine, *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 67.

¹³² Leonard Volk, “the Lincoln life-mask.” Quoted in Henry Bascom Rankin, *Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Putnam, 1916), 355.

¹³³ William Herndon wrote that, “He [Lincoln] was careless of his dress, and his clothes, instead of fitting neatly as did the garments on Douglas...hung loosely on his giant frame,” in, Herndon, *Herndon's Lincoln*, 248.

In the midst of the debate schedule the candidates headed to Quincy, Illinois, on October 13, 1858 to address an audience of roughly 10,000. On the train trip Lincoln met Carl Schurz, a native of Germany who had been recruited by the Republican Party to help win votes from German immigrants.¹³⁴ Schurz later recalled how Lincoln's dress was quite unusual. Lincoln wore "a rusty black dress coat with sleeves that should have been longer" and pants that "permitted a very full view of his large feet." Schurz further stated that he had been acquainted with the politicians of Washington, "but none whose looks seemed quite so uncouth, not to say grotesque, as Lincoln's."¹³⁵

Although Lincoln received the majority of the popular vote in the senate race he lost the election because senators were not then directly elected by popular vote. The pro-Douglas Illinois legislature carried enough power in their electoral votes to secure Douglas the victory. But the debates had gained widespread notoriety among the states surrounding Illinois. *The Weekly Hawk-Eye*, a Republican newspaper of Burlington, Iowa, wrote that after the Lincoln-Douglas debates, "Lincoln now is the most popular man in the northwest." The widely-acclaimed debates with Douglas enabled everyday people in the northwest to notice a politician who appeared to be like them. Consequently, that image was exactly what many voters in the Old Northwest wanted since Lincoln was the "favorite of the people."¹³⁶

After the campaigning in 1858, people were intrigued by Lincoln. Enough interest was generated in New York that Lincoln received an invitation in October, 1859, to speak at the Cooper Union Institute in New York City.¹³⁷ Although the Illinoisan hesitated at first, he eventually accepted. In preparation for the trip Lincoln knew that his appearance would

¹³⁴ William C. Harris, *Lincoln's Rise to the Presidency* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 138.

¹³⁵ Carl Schurz. *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz*, Vol. 3 (New York: McClure, 1908), I: 90-91.

¹³⁶ *The Weekly Hawk-Eye*, Burlington, Iowa, July 27, 1858.

¹³⁷ Herndon, *Herndon's Informants*, 273.

communicate much about his potential as a politician. Just like his first political victory in 1834, when he borrowed money to buy a proper suit in order to make a good impression on the Illinois Senate, he purchased a new suit for his trip to New York. Mary Todd likely also urged Lincoln to present himself elegantly at Cooper Union, since she was familiar with polished civility in the eastern cities. As historian Harold Holzer points out, “Lincoln was an ‘entire stranger’ to the East,” resulting in the former rail-splitter and those who knew him well to be anxious about the trip.¹³⁸

Upon his arrival in New York City on February 25, 1860, Lincoln immediately made an impression on the city. Most were unaccustomed to seeing a rough hinterland politician that exuded the coarse features of the west.¹³⁹ One of the first people to greet Lincoln in New York City was Henry C. Bowen, a newspaper editor for the *New York Independent*, who helped arranged Lincoln's visit. Struck by how Lincoln radiated a sense of uneasiness, which was accentuated with his rough manners and stained suit, Bowen was immediately concerned. “In the first view of him” he remarked, “there came to me the disheartening and appalling thought of the great throng which I had been so instrumental in inducing to come.” Bowen had an immediate fear that Lincoln would fail miserably at Cooper Union, and was stricken with the thought of sharing responsibility for bringing the uncouth rail-splitter to the city. But like most others, Bowen views of Lincoln grew more favorable with time.¹⁴⁰ The main organizer of the event, R.C. McCormick also noted the poor impression that Lincoln made, “He received us cordially,

¹³⁸ Harold Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech That Made Abraham Lincoln President* (Simon & Schuster: 2004), 53.

¹³⁹ Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper Union*, 71.

¹⁴⁰ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 230; Bowman noted that when Lincoln arrived, “I faced a very tall man wearing a high hat and carrying an old fashioned, comical-looking carpet-bag. My heart went into my boots as I greeted the tall stranger. His clothes were travel-stained.” Quoted in, Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper's Union*, 75.

apologizing for the awkward and uncomfortable appearance he made in his new suit.”¹⁴¹ Lincoln knew his appearance was odd, but never concerned himself enough to change his casual attitude towards his exterior image. It was his casual image that enabled him to connect with the laboring classes on an equal level.¹⁴² Northeast society was unaccustomed to a politician, especially one as prominent as Lincoln, dressing like a member of the lower class. It caught the attention of many people in New York as being very peculiar.

During the visit, New York elites made Lincoln the sources of much interest. His interaction with the proper and sophisticated sort exposed the western heritage that he personified. Even when he attended an elegant occasion Lincoln still dressed in an ill-fitting wrinkled suit. The day of his Cooper Union address Lincoln met George Bancroft, a familiar face in politics and refined society. Bancroft was a model gentleman who began his extensive political career under Martin Van Buren’s presidency and became an acclaimed scholar by 1860. The two men standing together caught the attention of McCormick who noted, “The contrast in the appearance of the men was most striking- the one [Bancroft] courtly and precise in his every word and gesture, with the air of a trans-Atlantic statesman; the other [Lincoln] bluff and awkward, his every utterance an apology for his ignorance of metropolitan manners and customs.”¹⁴³

On the morning of February 27, the day of his address, Lincoln was met by members of the Young Men’s Republican Committee. The committee took him to the photography studio of Mathew Brady. Brady a renowned photographer had taken portraits of men like Andrew Jackson, Daniel Webster, Edgar Allan Poe, and James Fenimore Cooper. But the picture of the

¹⁴¹ R.C. McCormick, a letter of his first meeting with Lincoln in New York City on April 29, 1960. Published in "Abraham Lincoln's Visit to New York in 1860," *Littell's Living Age* (May 20, 1965), 327-333.

¹⁴² Helen Nicolay, *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Century Company, 1913), 226.

¹⁴³ McCormick, *Littell's Living Age*, 329-330.

former rail-splitter would prove to be one of the most difficult for Brady. Lincoln's size, awkwardness, graceless manner, and slovenly dress caused Brady to remark that he had "great trouble" presenting Lincoln in an elegant manner. During the photo shoot Brady made adjustments to Lincoln's outfit and after the picture he had a retouch artists soften some of Lincoln's harsh facial features. By May 1860, the picture was printed in a number of weekly magazines, including, *Harper's Weekly* and *Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.¹⁴⁴

Later that night, in front of the crowd at Cooper Union, Lincoln gave no pretension of sophistication, but displayed only "the awkwardness of self-conscious rusticity." His hair that had been orderly for the photograph earlier that day was restored to its typical messy condition. The suit he purchased just before he left Springfield was wrinkled and slightly stained. His sleeves and pant legs left his forearms and ankles exposed. All of the peculiarities of his appearance caused the audience to be aghast.¹⁴⁵ Charles Nott, one of the organizers of the event, wrote, "His dress that night before a New York audience was the most unbecoming that a friend's ingenuity could have devised for a tall, gaunt man." Accustomed to the polish of New York, the audience could sense the former rail-splitter's insecurity over his slovenly appearance. Nott further observed "no man in all New York appeared that night more simple" and "more conscious of his own defect than Abraham Lincoln."¹⁴⁶ Helen Nicolay asserted in *The Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln* that it was Lincoln's experience at Cooper Union that likely caused him to be somewhat self-conscious on his visit. "The probability" she wrote, "is that he was fully

¹⁴⁴ George Sullivan, *Picturing Lincoln: Famous Photographs that Popularized the President* (New York: Clarion, 2000), 28-33; Roy Meredith, *Mr. Lincoln's Camera Man, Mathew B. Brady* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1946), 57-62.

¹⁴⁵ Gary Ecelbarger, *The Great Comeback: How Abraham Lincoln Beat the Odds to Win the 1860 Republican Nomination* (Thomas Dunne Books, 2008), 137.

¹⁴⁶ Rankin, *Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln*, 253.

aware of the worst aspect of his personal appearance, and regretted it; and had no notion of its best.”¹⁴⁷

After Lincoln’s lecture, the crowd left the Cooper Union with a changed opinion of the lawyer from Illinois. The simplicity, but poignancy, of his words had affected the audience. By the end of the evening, Lincoln had won over many people from both the lower and upper classes. Daniel Bidwell, the future editor of the *Harford Post*, noticed that Lincoln’s “gaunt, homely figure, unpretending manner, conversational air, careless clothing and dry humor made him at once a favorite of the audience, who felt he was indeed a man of the people.”¹⁴⁸ The New York Republican newspapers, many written and published by socially elite men, found Lincoln to be convincing and noticed his potential as a politician.¹⁴⁹ By the time Lincoln left the east coast he had generated strong support from Republicans outside of the western states. The momentous address at Cooper Union elevated Lincoln into the spotlight as a potential Republican presidential candidate.¹⁵⁰

Nevertheless Lincoln still had reservations about his aspirations to become president. In 1859, a year before his trip to New York, Lincoln wrote to a friend politely declining a suggestion to run for the presidency: “I certainly am flattered, and gratified, that some partial friends think of me in that connection.”¹⁵¹ A few months later Lincoln responded almost verbatim to another letter urging him to run for the presidency declaring, “I do not think myself fit for the Presidency.”¹⁵² Lincoln may have thought he was not qualified because of his lack of experience and formal education. But he also felt insecure because he already had faced criticism

¹⁴⁷ Helen Nicolay, *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Century Company, 1912), 226.

¹⁴⁸ Holzer. *Lincoln at Cooper Union*, 145.

¹⁴⁹ Holzer. *Lincoln at Cooper Union*, 155-6.

¹⁵⁰ Harris, *Lincoln’s Rise to the Presidency*, 190.

¹⁵¹ Lincoln’s letter to Thomas J. Pickett on April 16, 1859. Quoted in Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, III: 377.

¹⁵² Lincoln’s letter to Samuel Galloway on July 28, 1859. Quoted in Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, III: 395.

over his appearance and etiquette. He lacked the polished background and many of the refined qualities valued in past presidents. He also knew that he did not adapt naturally to the refined world of the social elites. When he was considering whether to run for the Presidency, this inability undoubtedly weighed heavily on his mind. Despite his hesitations only a year before, by 1860 Lincoln had a changed perspective.

On May 9-10, 1860, almost two months after his Cooper Union address, Lincoln was the focus of the Illinois Republican State Convention in Decatur. His performance debating Douglas a year before still energized the Republican core of his home state.¹⁵³ The convention crowd was enthusiastic because one of their own beloved politician had a chance to become president. During the convention John Hanks, an old friend of Lincoln, brought two railroad rails onto the stage. He claimed they were the same ones that Lincoln had worked on in 1830 when he was a rail-splitter. A delegate at the convention from southern Illinois stated that the two rails were a “banner” that “was to be the ‘battle flag,’ in the coming [presidential] contest between 'free labor' and 'slave labor,' between democracy—and aristocracy.” Interestingly, the sentiment that evening was that Lincoln was a challenge to the political aristocracy of Washington. Not only was it apparent in the former rail-splitter’s political rhetoric, it was also evident in his lack of exterior polish. As an archetypical westerner contesting for the Republican ticket, Old Abe undermined the traditional image of a presidential candidate. He presented himself as part of the common rank, a demographic that clashed with the traditionally refined politicians that governed the

¹⁵³ “Opinions of the Press,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1860, claimed, “Mr. Lincoln’s nomination will, we suppose, be especially strong in the West. He showed in his celebrated contest with Mr. Douglas, that he had great power with the masses.”

country, and the Republicans at the Decatur convention knew that their support for Lincoln was a defiance of the traditional genteel model.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ A letter from Johnson to William Herndon about the Decatur, Illinois republican convention in May of 1860 in, Herndon, *Herndon's Informants*, 462-463; Herndon, *Herndon's Lincoln*, 277.

Chapter 3

IN THE HUNT FOR THE WHITE HOUSE

Partly as a blind inference from his humble origin, but more from the misrepresentations made, sometimes in jest, sometimes in malice, during political campaigns, there grew up in the minds of many the strong impression that Mr. Lincoln was ugly, gawky, and ill-mannered.¹⁵⁵ –John Nicolay

The Republican National Convention of 1860

Carrying momentum from his address at Cooper Union and the enthusiasm of the Illinois Republican convention into the National Republican convention on May 16-18, Lincoln quickly became the favorite for the Republican presidential ticket. It was only a few weeks prior that William Seward of New York had been the Republican front-runner. But the rapid sweep of Lincoln's "Rail-Splitter" image and his political rhetoric through the North gained significant publicity and momentum entering the convention. The convention delegates also found these qualities favorable, moving them to nominate Lincoln as the Republican presidential candidate.¹⁵⁶

The appeal of Lincoln embodying the laboring citizens was a stark contrast from the rest of the presidential candidates. It was this type of candidate that most Republicans wanted in Washington to support issues like free-labor. Unlike Lincoln's experience at Cooper Union that February, his western appearance and mannerisms were not peculiar to the Republican officials in Chicago. To the delegates at the Chicago Republican convention Lincoln represented the ideal

¹⁵⁵ John G. Nicolay, "Lincoln's Personal Appearance." *Century Magazine*, XLII (October, 1891): 932.

¹⁵⁶ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 16.

illustration of a western laborer climbing the ranks to eventually emerge as the leader of the Republican Party and hopefully the nation.

Newspapers Coverage of Lincoln: May 1860- October 1860

Lincoln's appearance and lack of refinement were at the heart of a larger sectional political ideology tearing the country apart in 1860. His advocacy for free-labor in the Northwest was embodied in his exterior. The aristocracy controlling the South and scattered throughout the Northeast had a vested interest in hierarchical social structures. For many stationed in the upper social ranks, their economy would plummet without the profit making institution of slavery. In contrast, the hinterland farmers and frontiersmen in the Northwest viewed slavery as competition for their local economy. The tension between free labor ideology of the middle and laboring classes and the pro-slavery elites who were prospering, even Northern elites who were prospering indirectly from slavery in the South, reached its pinnacle in the election of 1860. During the race the laboring classes of the Republican Party disparagingly labeled the pro-slavery elites the "Slave Aristocracy."¹⁵⁷ The political interests of the laboring class threatened the social and political power that the elite minority was holding on to. During the Republican Convention in Chicago on May 16, 1860, Edwin D. Morgan summarized this division of power in a speech. He declared, "A great sectional and aristocratic party, or interest, has for years dominated with a high hand over the political affairs of this country." Morgan continued, "It is

¹⁵⁷ A Letter From John T. Graham to Abraham Lincoln, November 10, 1860 (Robert Todd Lincoln Collection of Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress)

our purpose, gentlemen it is the mission of the Republican Party and the basis of its organization, to resist this policy of a sectional interest.”¹⁵⁸

The attitude towards aristocracy and egalitarianism were largely aligned with sectional political views toward slave—and free—labor. Because of this national divide, historian James McPherson asserts that Lincoln’s “homespun ‘honest Abe’ image as a railsplitter were political assets.” Lincoln’s exterior appearance and casual deportment clearly communicated his political allegiance to free-labor. It symbolized the principles of the self-made-man and social fluidity.¹⁵⁹ Just after the Chicago Republican convention *The Cedar Valley Times* of Iowa claimed that Lincoln was now known as “The champion of freedom in the West.” It was not simply Old Abe’s political rhetoric that fostered this perception, it was his exterior image that affirmed in the minds of Northwest constituents that he truly embodied their interests.¹⁶⁰ The Northwest’s adoption of the former rail-splitter as their own during the presidential campaign of 1860, revealed the cultural and social divide between the rugged Northwest and the cultivated Northeast.¹⁶¹

Right after Lincoln won the Republican nomination he was the focus of national attention. However, it was only through newspapers that the magnitude of his national popularity was made possible. The country depended on local newspapers for information, especially for the presidential race of 1860. With the technology of the telegraph, western areas were no longer uninformed. Communities across the country could receive news within a day and purchase a local newspaper relatively cheaply. It was from this vantage point that local papers provide a lens

¹⁵⁸ Horace Greeley, *Proceedings of the National Republican Convention Held at Chicago, May 16th 17th and 18th* (1860 campaign literature accessed from the University of Illinois library): 85; Edwin D. Morgan at the Republican convention accessed from *The Monroe [Wisconsin] Sentinel*, May 23, 1860.

¹⁵⁹ Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford, 1981), 35-36, 45, 48-49, 74. James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 44, 119, 123.

¹⁶⁰ *The Cedar Valley (Iowa) Times*, May 24, 1860, 2.

¹⁶¹ “His Personal Appearance.” *The Agitator* [Tioga County, Pennsylvania] September 12, 1860.

to view the regional sentiment towards Lincoln in 1860. Historians Stuart Blumin and Glenn Altschuler write in their book, *Rude Republic: Americans and their Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, “The local party newspaper is the best source for examining the political process ‘on the ground,’ and the local community, where citizens read party papers, attended rallies, joined campaign clubs, and voted.”¹⁶²

One of the first national descriptions of Lincoln was provided by the *Chicago Tribune*’s article “Lincoln As He Is.” The article was printed only a few days after the former rail-splitter was chosen to head the Republican ticket, it was then reprinted in a number of other newspapers including the *New York Times*. The *Chicago Tribune*, a Republican paper claimed, “Ten thousand inquiries will be made as to the looks, habits, tastes, and other characteristics of Honest Old Abe.” While Lincoln attracted public interest the notable Democratic presidential candidates, Stephen Douglas and John C. Breckinridge, did not receive near the newspaper attention for their personal traits or appearance. In the *Chicago Tribune*’s detailed description of Lincoln favorable bias is apparent throughout. The article admitted that Lincoln “is careless” in dress but not “slovenly” and in his “politeness is always sincere, but never elaborate.” But the article was careful not to present Lincoln as a member of the social elite, while still portraying him as a man a polished audience would find acceptable.

Balancing Lincoln as man brushing shoulders with common laborers while also making him seem appealing to the traditional image of an elite politician, the article's objective was to make Lincoln appeal to greatest number of voters, regardless of social rank. The *Tribune* declared that Lincoln “will not be able to make as polite a bow as Franklin Pierce,” but will smooth political strife over the “slavery question,” a claim that turned out to be false. The paper

¹⁶² Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 18; Robert Mackenzie, *The 19th century: A History* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1892), 194.

continued to claim that Lincoln may not have “the ease and grace” of James Buchanan but will not be disgraceful. In addition, this balance is seen in how the article described Lincoln’s seemingly minor attributes. It described the speed at which Lincoln walked, his simple manners, and his smile. Towards the middle of the piece a more romanticized image of Lincoln began to appear. The article stated, “he [Lincoln] would be chosen from among the crowd as one who had in him not only the kind sentiment which women love, but the heavier metal of which full grown men and Presidents are made.”¹⁶³

Written accounts of Lincoln were likely to describe his appearance differently depending on the political affiliation of the newspaper. Henry Villard, a prominent correspondent for the *New York Herald*, *New York Times*, and *New York Tribune*, spent part of the summer of 1860 with Lincoln in Springfield. He later recalled in his memoirs how people received Lincoln in person. He witnessed that Lincoln disappointed “those who saw him for the first time.” Villard explained that “written on the faces of his rustic audiences” was their surprise of seeing “the most unprepossessing features, the gawkiest figure, and the most awkward manners.” He further noted that “Lincoln always had an embarrassed air, too, like a country clodhopper appearing in fashionable society, and was nearly always stiff and unhappy in his off-hand remarks.”¹⁶⁴ Villard’s observation correlates with other initial impressions of Lincoln. But it eventually was Old Abe’s ability to win the audience’s favorable opinion through his rhetoric and sincerity that compensated for his physical and social awkwardness.

During the presidential campaign the Northern public characterized Lincoln by his western heritage. Robert Brewster Stanton, an engineer, observed, “Through the whole campaign of 1860, while recognizing his [Lincoln’s] ability, he had been characterized as Old Abe, the

¹⁶³ “Lincoln As He Is,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 23, 1860, reprinted in *New York Times*, May 26, 1860.

¹⁶⁴ Henry Villard, *Memoirs of Henry Villard, journalist and financier, 1835-1900* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), 151.

long, lank, gawky rail-splitter.”¹⁶⁵ The Old Abe reputation quickly spread. In Washington during his presidential campaign he was “spoken of as that rough, uncouth Westerner from the prairies of Illinois who had dared to come among the exclusive, high-born, generally Southern people of the capital.”¹⁶⁶ Although it was evident to most impartial observers, regardless of political party, that Lincoln was awkward and unkempt in his appearance, a number of Republican newspapers disputed these claims.

Other Republican newspapers argued that he was not only non-repulsive in his appearance, but even that he was handsome and refined. The *Worcester Spy*, a Republican Massachusetts newspaper, contended that Lincoln had a, “strong, manly, cordial, winning look which attracts every one.”¹⁶⁷ Another newspaper claimed, “He [Lincoln] was dressed with perfect neatness, almost elegance—though, as all Illinoisians know, he usually is as plain in his attire as he is modest and unassuming in deportment. He stood erect, displaying to excellent advantage his tall and manly figure.”¹⁶⁸ The *New York Times* claimed that Lincoln appealed to those who saw him.¹⁶⁹ The attention placed on the topic among the newspapers that defended Lincoln suggests that his personal appearance was a subject of interest, even political importance. The *Daily Argus and Democrat* of Madison, Wisconsin published an article claiming that Lincoln’s appearance and manners appealed to cultivated society. The article quoted “a neatly-dressed New-Englander” stating, “I was afraid I should meet a gigantic rail-splitter, with the manners of a flatboatman, and the ugliest face in creation; and he’s a complete

¹⁶⁵ Robert Brewster Stanton, “Abraham Lincoln: Personal Memories of the Man.” *Scribner’s Magazine* 68 (1920), 35.

¹⁶⁶ Victoria Radford, *Meeting Abraham Lincoln: Firsthand Recollections of Abraham Lincoln by People, Great and Small, Who Met the President* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1998), 28.

¹⁶⁷ *The Worcester Spy*, accessed from David Emerson Fite, *The Presidential Campaign of 1860* (New York: Macmillan Co. 1911), 158.

¹⁶⁸ David W. Bartlett, *The Life and Public Services of the Hon. Abraham Lincoln* (New York: H. Dayton Publishers, 1860), 144.

¹⁶⁹ “Tour,” *New York Times*, October 6, 1860.

gentleman.”¹⁷⁰ This account exemplifies the concern Republicans had about Lincoln’s appearance. Deliberate defenses of Lincoln’s appearance were written by a number of Republican newspapers. These newspapers advocated that Lincoln was a candidate suitable enough to assimilate into the genteel political culture of Washington.

David W. Bartlett, a reporter for both the *New York Independent* and *Evening Post*, advocated strongly to the public that Lincoln appeared in every way a gentleman. Bartlett wrote favorably about Lincoln’s appearance, but he also compiled numerous newspaper articles and published them in his book, *The Life and Public Services of the Hon. Abraham Lincoln*. The book was put on sale at the beginning of Lincoln’s presidential campaign in June of 1860.¹⁷¹ The pro-Lincoln campaign literature compiled from Republican newspapers was also supplemented with Bartlett’s own favorable anecdotes of Lincoln. It is likely that these reports come from Republican newspapers. Bartlett wrote, “At rest, his [Lincoln’s] features, though those of a man of mark, are not such as belong to a handsome man; but when his fine dark gray eyes are lighted up by any emotion, and his features begin their play, he would be chosen from among the crowd.”¹⁷²

In the Northeast Democratic newspapers decried Lincoln for his lack of refinement and ignorance of social etiquette. The *Boston Traveler*, an independent paper, suggested that Lincoln “being an awkward man” was public knowledge, a statement that was reprinted in *The Journal* of River Falls, Wisconsin on June 13.¹⁷³ Republican newspapers from the Northeast attempted to defend Old Abe from these charges. Lincoln biographer Ida M. Tarbell wrote in her book *The*

¹⁷⁰ David W. Bartlett, *The Life and Public Services of the Hon. Abraham*. 144; Also published in *Daily Argus and Democrat* [Madison, Wisconsin], May 24, 1860.

¹⁷¹ An ad for the sale of David W. Bartlett’s book, *The Life and Public Services of the Hon. Abraham Lincoln* appeared in the *New York Times* on June 11, 1860.

¹⁷² Bartlett, *The Life and Public Services of the Honorable Abraham*. 104-105.

¹⁷³ *The Journal* [River Falls, Wisconsin], June 13, 1860.

Life of Abraham Lincoln that there was an “eagerness” by the “Republican press... to show that Lincoln was not the coarse backwoodsman.” Newspaper correspondents from New York were sent to Old Abe's home in Springfield to scrounge up evidence to discredit the reports that he was of “low Hoosier style.”¹⁷⁴ The *New York Herald* sent an editor to Springfield soon after Lincoln won the Republican ticket to write an article titled “Lincoln at Home” to invalidate condescending reports of Lincoln. It described Lincoln in his Springfield house as an “angular gentleman, with a profusion of wiry hair ‘lying round loose’ about his head.” It contended that pictures and published descriptions failed to communicate Lincoln’s gentlemanly qualities. The segment concluded by claiming that after being “five minutes in his company” Lincoln ceases appearing “awkward.”¹⁷⁵ The *New York Post* also published an account of a New York gentleman’s visit with Lincoln in Springfield shortly after the Chicago Republican convention. Like the *New York Herald*, the *Post* attempted to defend Lincoln’s reputation as a slovenly laborer from the west. The gentleman noted how three months earlier at Cooper Union Lincoln's manner had appeared “awkward and ungainly,” but in Springfield he had a “surprising urbanity” and politeness.¹⁷⁶

But the *Chicago Tribune* diverged from portraying Lincoln as refined. After its article “Lincoln As He Is,” the *Tribune* did not use the same tactic as urban Republican newspapers from New York. Many Republican newspapers with polished readership had difficulty advocating Lincoln –a western man with a graceless appearance– to social elites who were trained to have a refined exterior and correct etiquette. The *Tribune* believed Lincoln’s casual deportment and previous manual labor was an opportunity for Lincoln to gain the most voters.

¹⁷⁴ Ida M. Tarbell, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, 4 Vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1909), I: 365.

¹⁷⁵ The article written by the *New York Herald* was titled “Lincoln at Home” and republished *The Standard* [Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin] on July 5, 1860.

¹⁷⁶ The *New York Post's* article “A Visit to Lincoln” was republished in the *Athens Messenger* [Ohio] under the title “A Visit to Lincoln” on June 8, 1860.

The objective of the newspaper was to appeal to the “great body of voters,” even at the cost of alienating the elite minority in the Northwest¹⁷⁷

The *New York Times* found the *Tribune*'s approach of practically ignoring elite Republican voters to be harmful. The *Times* responded, “We ventured to suggest that some of our over-zealous Republican friends seemed inclined to rest their advocacy of Mr. Lincoln somewhat too exclusively on the fact that he had been, in early life, a Rail-splitter.” As a newspaper that circulated to a more dignified audience, the *New York Times* wanted to reveal Lincoln's cultivated qualities in order to prove that he was a capable presidential candidate by traditional standards. The emphasis on Lincoln as a rugged rail-splitter was disadvantageous to the *New York Times* objective to reveal Lincoln's appeal as a politician. “We do not believe that Mr. Lincoln's opinions... were formed while he was splitting rails,” the *Times* contended.¹⁷⁸

There was also political motivation among Republican newspapers to embellish Lincoln's appearance. Heroic descriptions of the Republican candidate were deliberate attempts to deceive the public and offset the criticism of his appearance. Newspapers like the *New York Times*, *New York Herald*, *New York Post*, and *Cleveland Leader* insisted that Lincoln was elegant and graceful when numerous observers described him as ugly and awkward. As a result these papers attempted to present a more advantageous image of Lincoln even if they had to misguide their readership. They feared that if the public thought Lincoln was not a gentleman then it would cause him to be rejected by many Republican voters. Even though Lincoln was glorified for rising from humble beginnings in the West, there was an expectation that his

¹⁷⁷ One Republican newspaper advocated for Lincoln to the large demographic of laboring class. It wrote, “If the laboring men of this State ever control the ballot-box” elect “Abraham Lincoln, a workingman like themselves.” Quoted in Bartlett, *The Life and Public Services of the Hon. Abraham*. 135.

¹⁷⁸ “Hair-splitting on Rail-splitting.” *New York Times*, June 12, 1860.

appearance should communicate respectability in order to indicate that he was qualified for the presidency.

In the Old Northwest many Republican newspapers advocated for Lincoln because he typified the regional constituents, both in his physical exterior and in free-labor ideology. His political ideas and exterior decorum were shaped by his life in the western part of the country. He would often display his endearing feelings for his western neighbors with his knack for casual conversations. As one reported observed, Lincoln would “sit down upon the door step in his shirt and sleeves and chat with his neighbors.”¹⁷⁹ Newspapers that were frustrated with typical Washington politics turned to him as a refreshing change. The *Cincinnati Gazette* captured Lincoln’s uniqueness in an article that was republished in the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*. “A political leader would not have stood so near the popular heart,” the paper contended. “Mr. Lincoln comes emphatically from among 'the workers,' and is himself a noble example of what that system of free labor can do, of which he stands as the champion.”¹⁸⁰

Supporting Lincoln for his “common” qualities broke the traditional cultural framework which presumed presidents had to radiate a refined appearance in order to prove they were worthy. Instead a number of western newspapers found favor with the former rail-splitter because he had been molded in the desolate landscape of the frontier. One newspaper that took this honest stance was the *Marysville Tribune* of Ohio. On July 4, 1860 the paper explained:

One argument our opponents use against Lincoln is that he is *ugly*. He is the very man we have been looking for. We want a man whose rough exterior, stern demeanor and honest look will be repulsive to the sneaking cormorants who crowd around the Capitol to look after the spoils. These bland, sleek looking, smiling Presidents, have not fared well in public estimation, so far as their

¹⁷⁹ Abraham Lincoln. *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy Basler, vol. 2. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1953), I: 513; *Washington Reporter*, August 30, 1860.

¹⁸⁰ *Cincinnati Gazette* reprinted in the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* [Milwaukee, Wisconsin], June 9, 1860.

administration was concerned. Therefore we will try one of the other kind-one of the working people's kind.¹⁸¹

This article was an outright rejection of the traditional belief that a refined appearance indicated a social and intellectual superiority over those that appeared coarse. Not only did the *Marysville Tribune* object to presidents having an elegant appearance, it suggested voters should look beyond the surface characteristics of refinement in candidates. It disregarded the tenets upheld by many etiquette manuals that the polished attributes of a person reveal their moral fiber. The article used the same standard that the elite sort had used to disqualify the lower class from political office and turned it around. Instead of abiding by the social rules of the elites, this article called for voters to be wary of the elite standard based on superficial appearance and manners only.

Once Lincoln was nominated newspapers from the Northwest attacked his political opponents for being pretentious aristocrats. The regional difference between aristocratic elites and the laboring class was made apparent in the presidential candidates. Social elites wanted to stifle Lincoln's image as a rail-splitter because it broke traditional social norm. While the Northeast was not opposed to the idea of social mobility, it scowled at those that did not abandon their uncouth working class sensibilities and imitate refined characteristics when ascending in social class. But the Northwest saw Lincoln's nonchalant appearance and manners as a sign that he was embracing his western qualities and rejecting the sleek, superficial performances of the social elites. The *Franklin Repository* of Pennsylvania, a Republican newspaper, said, "He was reared in the wilds of our new western country, and is an excellent proof that Freedom is the proper condition of our broad, smiling Territories. Had he been raised in the South -where he

¹⁸¹ *Marysville [Ohio] Tribune*, July 4, 1860.

was born- in all probability he would never have raised above the level of that abject.”¹⁸² The Republican frontiersmen and laborers despised the Democratic nominees because they represented the traditional refined elites who viewed the laboring classes as unqualified to be in places of authority. In Lincoln, the laboring classes found a representative that could break the traditional elite system that had dominated national politics and prevent slavery from spreading into Northern territories. As a result western Republicans went on the attack and undermined Lincoln’s opponents by caricaturizing them as snobbish elites. The *Oconto Pioneer*, a Republican newspaper from Wisconsin, claimed:

Mr. Hershell V. Johnson, the Democratic candidate for Vice President, turned up his aristocratic nose the other day, at Terre Haute, Ind., while making a speech, at the idea of electing to the Presidency a man who had worked as a manual laborer. “Abe Lincoln the rail splitter.” Said he, “why I OWN *twenty boys*, any one can beat him at a days work splitting rails, and give him two hundred. I would prefer one of them for President, so help me God, to Abe Lincoln.”¹⁸³

Other Republican newspapers from the rural Northwest advocated for Lincoln not out of spite for the traditional elite politicians of Washington, but because Honest Abe represented the interest of the common ranks. Farmers could identify with Lincoln’s rough appearance. He won no favor among social elites for having been a rail-splitter. Instead he was debased for doing manual labor. In spite of the unflattering reviews Old Abe received, the rural population of the North rallied behind him because they could identify with him.¹⁸⁴ *The Agitator* of Pennsylvania advocated for Lincoln because of the common bond he shared with the men in that region. It said:

¹⁸² *Franklin Repository* [Chambersburg, Pennsylvania], July 11, 1860.

¹⁸³ “Hershell V. Johnson Owns Rail Splitters.” *Oconto* [Wisconsin] *Pioneer*, October 20, 1860. Also published in *Grant County Herald* [Lancaster, Wisconsin], October 20, 1860.

¹⁸⁴ *M’kean Miner* [Smethport, Pennsylvania], October 27, 1860.

Among all the candidates for the Presidency of the United States now, Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois, seems to be regarded by the people here as the only one who presents the appearance, emphatically and literally, of the man of the people. Without ostentation without reserve, without any of those exquisitely polite attentions one finds in the man of the world, and especially in the aspiring politician, nurture in the atrician atmosphere of Washington.¹⁸⁵

Lincoln gave the common sort of man a sense of empowerment because they had the opportunity to elect a president that resembled themselves. The rural North responded in this fashion because only the elite sort had traditionally run for state and national political offices. The *Davenport Gazette* argued, “The people of the West will feel in voting for him [Lincoln] as though they were elevating from their own ranks one who thoroughly understands their interests and will faithfully represent them.”¹⁸⁶ Lincoln’s coarse appearance reassured many westerners that he embodied their political and personal interests. In response to Lincoln being described a “common frontiersman,” the rural population of the North endearingly referred to him as, “the former rail-splitter” and “Old Abe.” These names created a connection between hard working laborers and Lincoln. The *Chicago Tribune* wrote that the purpose of heralding Lincoln as a former rail-splitter “is an appeal, and, as it seems to us, a perfectly fair one, to the sympathy and the self-respect of that great body of voters who split rails or follow similar laborious employments. It is simply saying to the mass of the voters, here is a man who can be trusted.”¹⁸⁷

Although many Republican newspapers supported Lincoln there were others that were greatly disappointed that the polished William Seward of New York was not representing the Republican Party. A vast number of elite Republicans’ disdained the thought of a rugged man like Lincoln being president. Their choice for the party presidential candidate had been a simple

¹⁸⁵ *Agitator* [Tioga Country, Pennsylvania], September 12, 1860.

¹⁸⁶ *Davenport* [Iowa] *Gazette* quoted in the *Chicago Tribune*, May 23, 1860.

¹⁸⁷ The *Chicago Tribune*’s statements accessed from “Hair-splitting on Rail-splitting,” *New York Times*, June 12, 1860.

one. Seward had been the favorite to win the nomination up until only a few months before the National Republican Convention in Chicago to the chagrin of many East coast elite Republicans. Even after Lincoln was nominated some newspapers lamented that, unlike Lincoln, Seward had “many noble properties, both of head and heart.”¹⁸⁸ Another Republican paper, *Valley Spirit of Chambersburg*, Pennsylvania published an article entitled, “The Chicago Abortion,” that claimed the majority of Republicans truly wanted to nominate Seward instead of Lincoln. It contended that Lincoln’s presidential nomination was equivalent to the Republican Party aborting their chance for electing a president.¹⁸⁹

Although Lincoln was criticized by a few eastern Republican newspapers venting their frustration, he was predominately attacked by Democratic newspapers. His opponents and those that upheld refined principles generally believed that Lincoln’s appearance indicated that he did not have the sophistication or intelligence to hold the presidency. Since Lincoln’s first political race for the Illinois legislature in 1832, he had experienced attacks directed at his appearance. These attacks were damaging because they had the potential to discredit Lincoln regardless of his political views or actions. The *Illinois State Register* made such an attack. The Democratic newspaper stated that if Lincoln became president he would be “the laughing stock of the world.”¹⁹⁰ Another Democratic paper, *Gettysburg Compiler*, criticized Lincoln just before he entered the White House by asserting:

Mr. Lincoln’s appearance cannot be said to be prepossessing, while the manner and matter of his speaking indicate him to be a man of very ordinary cast of mind, far, far below the requirements of the exalted station to which he has (so unfortunately for and

¹⁸⁸ *Franklin Repository* [Chambersburg, Pennsylvania], June 6, 1860.

¹⁸⁹ “The Chicago Abortion,” *Valley Spirit* [Chambersburg, Pennsylvania], June 20, 1860, Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, 16, David Donald, *We Are Lincoln Men: Abraham Lincoln and His Friends* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 147.

¹⁹⁰ *Illinois State Register*, quoted from, Carl Sandbur, *Lincoln Collector: The Story of Oliver R. Barrett’s Great Private Collection* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), 233.

himself and the country) been chosen. He is unequal to the task, and we thought we could see it in him that he begins to realize the terrible fact.¹⁹¹

John Nicolay, Lincoln's presidential secretary, recalled that during the campaign "inferences from his [Lincoln's] humble origins" were made partly "in malice."¹⁹² For Lincoln's opponents his appearance and manners were a natural and easy source of criticism. The Democratic *Staunton Spectator* of Virginia published an article entitled, "Personal Appearance of Abraham Lincoln." It said, "A correct likeness of Mr. Lincoln would be condemned as a caricature by any one who did not know it was true."¹⁹³ The same newspaper also contended, "Mr. Lincoln has no elements of popularity, and certainly no special qualifications for the office...not, at one time at least in his life very particular in his associations or correct in his moral habits."¹⁹⁴ Another Democratic newspaper, the *Appleton Crescent* of Wisconsin, described the Illinoisan's appearance when he campaigned from a podium as having, "trembling limbs and tottering form" and, "uttered a few childlike sentences."¹⁹⁵

Many Democratic newspapers also used Lincoln's past to undermine his capability and character. Personal attacks were made because of the acclaim Lincoln was receiving for having been a rail-splitter. "Two men split three thousand rails in a whole year! Prodigious!" the *Appleton Crescent* exclaimed. "Two good rail splitters should have split as many in three days. But Hanks says that he split the rails while Lincoln sat around and bossed the job."¹⁹⁶ Lincoln's abstinence from alcohol was also challenged by these newspapers. The objective was to align Lincoln with the unflattering image of a rugged and unscrupulous western man. Lincoln's

¹⁹¹ *Gettysburg Compiler* [Gettysburg, Pennsylvania], February 25, 1861.

¹⁹² John G. Nicolay, "Lincoln's Personal Appearance" *Century Magazine* XLII (October, 1891): 932.

¹⁹³ "Personal Appearance of Abraham Lincoln," *Staunton Spectator* [Staunton, Virginia], June 12, 1860.

¹⁹⁴ *Staunton Spectator*, May 22, 1860.

¹⁹⁵ *Appleton Crescent* [Appleton Wisconsin], June 10, 1860.

¹⁹⁶ *Appleton Crescent*, July 28, 1860.

alleged alcoholism was one of the reasons given in *South Western Local Shellsburg's* article, "Why Honest Men Can't Vote for Lincoln."¹⁹⁷

After Honest Abe won the top spot on the Republican ticket, images of him were in high demand. On June 9, only two days before the *Sentinel* released a rugged looking image of Lincoln, the *New York Times* in an article titled "The Sorrows of a Candidate," criticized newspapers for "pictorial" portrait of Lincoln that "boil down the probable and possible ugliness."¹⁹⁸ The *Times* knew well that unflattering images could greatly harm Lincoln's presidential campaign. In a city heavily populated with social elites there was a fear among Republicans that rugged images of Lincoln might severely deter potential supporters. The public was extremely curious about Lincoln's appearance. Democratic newspapers used the opportunity to caricature his unflattering western features. Cartoons were circulated depicting Lincoln as a rough westerner. There were even disputes among Republican newspapers about printed likenesses of him.

On June 11, 1860, the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* published a woodcut image of Lincoln. The likeness of Lincoln revealed him only from waist up. It depicted him with his hair in disarray and had dark shadows around his face, furthering the impression that he was a coarse frontiersman. Within days the image gained national attention among Republican newspapers. Upon discovering the printed woodcut sketch the *New York Times* responded, on June 15, "Mr. Lincoln is by no means an eminently handsome man; but his countenance is at least human. If he looked like the picture the *Sentinel* gave, however, he could split rails by simply looking at them.

¹⁹⁷ "Why Honest Men Can't Vote For Lincoln," *South Western Local Shellsburg* [Iowa], September 14, 1860.

¹⁹⁸ "Sorrows of a Candidate," *New York Times*, June 9, 1860.

There have been a good many bad portraits of Mr. Lincoln published, but this on the whole, is decidedly the unkindest cut of all.”¹⁹⁹

After the *New York Times* criticized the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel's* image of Lincoln, the state of Wisconsin was in a buzz over the issue. The *New York Times* article was reprinted in three Wisconsin newspapers, *Daily Argus and Democrat* on June 19, the Republican *Oshkosh Courier* on June 22, and in the *Kewaunee Country Enterprize* on July 4. The *Daily Milwaukee* also reproved the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* for “putting up that horrid looking likeness of ‘Old Abe.’”²⁰⁰ By late June the *Alton Courier* of Iowa also published the same woodcut of Lincoln. The *Times* again responded on July 3 in disapproval. It declared, “Poor Mr. Lincoln is made to look as though he had been dragged through a very rough knot-hole, and subsequently beaten with a soot-bag.”²⁰¹ The controversy surrounding published images was an issue exclusive to Lincoln in the presidential election. Other presidential candidates during the campaign avoided public controversy over their appearance by presenting themselves in a traditional refined manner. The novelty of a former rail-splitter running for president made images of Lincoln a pivotal matter, causing Northeastern Republican newspapers to try to defuse the defamation of his rugged western appearance.²⁰²

The controversy surrounding the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* woodcut image of Lincoln symbolized part of the deep-seated divide between Republicans from the Northeast and those from the wilds of the Northwest. With the nomination of a former rail-splitter, the *Daily Sentinel* embraced the appeal of the common qualities of Lincoln as a political strength. The woodcut was

¹⁹⁹ The *New York Times* published an article on June 11, 1860 concerning the woodcut image of Lincoln in the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* on June 11, 1860. The article was republished in *Kewaunee Country* [Wisconsin] *Enterprize*, July 4, 1860 and in the *Oshkosh* [Wisconsin] *Courier*, June 22, 1860.

²⁰⁰ *Daily Milwaukee*, July 6, 1860.

²⁰¹ “Minor Topics.” *New York Times*, July 3, 1860.

²⁰² *Daily Argus And Democrat* [Madison, Wisconsin], June 19, 1860.

a sign, whether intentionally or unintentionally, that the newspaper was breaking with the tradition that political leaders demonstrated their superiority with polished manners and exterior. Instead of finding value in pretentious elite politicians, the *Daily Sentinel*, like many other newspapers and voters in the Northwest, favored Lincoln because he was like them. Manual laborers of the Northwest identified with the rough looking woodcut image of Lincoln. They saw in the *Daily Sentinel*'s woodcut a presidential nominee that supported their values of free labor, whereas the Northeast urban society that the *New York Times* represented viewed the rough looking woodcut image of Lincoln as an indication that he was socially and intellectually inferior.²⁰³ The *Times* readership was to abide by the refined instruction of etiquette manuals like, *The Gentlemen's Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness* which appeared in print in 1860. "Remember how much the appearance of a man aids a judgment of his character" its author Cecil B. Hartley wrote. "For a man who does not dress appropriately evinces a want of what is most necessary to professional men --tact and discretion."²⁰⁴ Although both the *New York Times* and the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* supported Lincoln as a presidential candidate their methods and reasons differed greatly.

The South generally detested the free-labor rail-splitter. But despite their anger most Southern newspapers did not give Lincoln's nomination much print.²⁰⁵ This was largely because there were far fewer newspapers in the less populous and less literate South than in the North. The newspapers that did cover Northern politics wrote disparagingly about Northern politicians

²⁰³ Richard Braithwaite, *The English Gentleman* (London, Published by I. Haviland, 1630), 2. Braithwaite wrote, "The very body expresses the secrets of the mind." He continued that through the control and appearance of a person, the heart is "transparent." Hemphill, *Bowing to the Necessities*, also provides examples from Lord Chesterfield and other conduct writers concerning the social implications of a uncouth appearance on page 187.

²⁰⁴ Cecil B. Hartley, *The Gentlemen's Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness: Being a Complete Guide for a Gentleman's Conduct in all his Relations towards Society, From the best French, English, and American Authorities* (Boston: G.W. Cottrell, 1860), 132.

²⁰⁵ William C. Harrison, *Lincoln's Rise to the Presidency* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 236.

that gave the slightest hint of endangering the institution of slavery. Since poor whites and slaves constituted a large part of the Southern population newspapers were written for the literate, which were predominately the social elites. Among the literate polished population was a collective repugnance towards Lincoln. Disgust with the former rail-splitter was not only because he opposed slavery's extension into the territories, but because he also undermined the Southern ideal of a traditional English gentry holding the presidential office. Although many Southern newspapers did not write about Lincoln, there were a few that vented their indignation over Old Abe's nomination.

The Charleston Mercury was one of the Southern newspapers that responded immediately to Lincoln's nomination. On June 9, 1860, the paper wrote, "A horrid looking wretch he [Lincoln] is, sooty and scoundrelly in aspect, a cross between the nutmeg dealer, the horse swapper, and the night man, a creature fit evidently for petty treason, small stratagems and all sorts of spoils."²⁰⁶ *The Augusta Chronicle* described Lincoln as "a rough specimen of the western Hoosier."²⁰⁷ There was a general scorn of Lincoln's appearance from Southern society as a whole. The *Richmond Daily Dispatch* also demeaned Old Abe by claiming that he was a "rough backwoodsman of the West, a flat boatman, a maunder of rails, and, worse than all, a man suspect of being honest."²⁰⁸ Two decades later Frederick Douglass recalled, "Its [the South's] papers teemed with the bitterest invective against the 'backwoodsman of Illinois,' the 'flatboatman,' the 'rail-splitter,' the 'third-rate lawyer,' and much else and worse."²⁰⁹ Lincoln's common appearance and manners were a blatant indication to the South that Lincoln was

²⁰⁶ *The Charleston* [South Carolina] *Mercury*, June 9, 1860.

²⁰⁷ *Chronicle and Sentinel* [Augusta, Georgia], quoted from the *Trempealeau* [Wisconsin] *Representative*, June 15, 1860; *Marysville* [Ohio] *Tribune*, June 13, 1860.

²⁰⁸ *Richmond Daily Dispatch* accessed from Harrison, *Lincoln's Rise to the Presidency*, 216.

²⁰⁹ Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to the Present Time* (Hartford, Connecticut: Park Publishing Company, 1881), 211.

unqualified and the subject of their personal attacks. But Lincoln's poor personal appearance and untrained manners were also a threat to traditional Southern planter society. Lincoln sought the highest position in the United States while not displaying a concern for traditional honor, personal refinement, or family lineage.

Northern newspapers relished the fact that Lincoln was radically different than what the South valued, spurring on the tension between the North and the South. The idea of a former rail-splitter who personified free labor ideology presiding over the whole country was an insult to Southern society. The *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, one of many pro-Lincoln newspapers further drew a wedge between the North and the South. On June 9, 1860, the *Sentinel* republished an article from another Republican newspaper:

A most fortunate circumstance that such a man as Mr. Lincoln has been selected as the standard bearer of the party whose aim is to defend and ennoble labor—to secure for the workman all his rights, and a due reward for his industry. It would have been difficult to have found an other man who would more completely represent in his own life; character and principles the exact antagonism to the Southern idea of a servile-laboring class than Abraham Lincoln.²¹⁰

By Lincoln maintaining aspects in his appearance that indicated his western origin instead of converting himself to appear as a dignified and pretentious gentleman, he created a strong rapport with rural Northerners. It resulted in a growing grassroots movement of younger Republicans supporting Lincoln over traditional Democratic candidates in Stephen Douglas and John C. Breckinridge running on conventional elite principles.²¹¹ Lincoln's campaign approach was a drastic contrast from what the cultivated elites of the North and South desired. By the Northern laboring sort predominately supporting a candidate like themselves, it directly threatened the traditional political system. Traditional elite ideology had created a distinct

²¹⁰ *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, June 9, 1860.

²¹¹ Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. 397.

separation between the workers who performed the manual tasks and the polished privileged few that came from respected families and received a refined education. The top-down social system imposed on the laboring classes had been established before the creation of the United States. Historian Jonathan Glickstein author of *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America* writes, “In antebellum America generally, middle-class attitudes encompassed some definite disdain for manual labor (nothing to do with slavery).”²¹²

The presidential campaign and his eventual election of Lincoln was a democratic symbol and implied that the social elites were losing their traditional grip on political power in the nineteenth-century. As the concept of democracy broadened and participation in the electoral process became less exclusive the laboring class gained political power. Once voting stipulations, like excluding white landless men from voting, were removed the social elites were forced to appeal directly to the middle and laboring classes for votes.²¹³ Social elites could no longer assume that they were entitled to rule over the laboring classes, elites now how to convince the poorer, less educated people to be subordinated to their rule. The result forced an attempt to combine two incompatible systems, democratic elections and the traditional hierarchical social system.²¹⁴ A clear example of the contradiction was the presidential campaign of 1840. During the campaign a polished William Henry Harrison tried to pass as one who had been a part of the common folk as a ploy to gain votes. Unlike Harrison, Lincoln’s presidential nomination was a severe challenge to the elites power hold. Lincoln, unlike Harrison or any

²¹² Jonathan A. Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 152.

²¹³ Stuart Blumin argues that class diminished in politics because democracy forced the social elites to also appeal to the middle and lower sort. Blumin writes, “the rise of a more participatory electoral system and a more democratic ideology removed most of the deferential elements that had traditionally confined middling folk to a role distinctly subordinate to that of the rich.” Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 255-6.

²¹⁴ John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 257.

other president prior to 1860 was not refined or genteel before or during his presidential campaign. Although there had been men like Martin Van Buren and Andrew Jackson who rose from humble upbringings to reach the presidency, none of these presidents had embodied the working sort as intimately as Lincoln in their appearance.

The marked difference between these former presidents and Lincoln was that they had ascended to elite status and conformed to the standards of elite society. Lincoln did not conform, he only would make half-hearted attempts to refine himself. He challenged the rule of the social elites because he did not present himself as a polished gentleman in his personal appearance and social manners. This polish had traditionally been an unwritten requirement to safeguard positions of power from the laboring classes. Historian Dallett Hemphill contends that the purpose of appearance and manners was orchestrated by the social elites “to silently accomplish the exclusion of the poor” which raised the elites “to a safely exclusionary level.”²¹⁵ When Lincoln gained massive support for being a common man during his campaign, it challenged the criteria of refinement. Lincoln’s image as a “Rail-Splitter” symbolized that the upwardly mobile were no longer excluded from the highest political offices. According to William C. Harrison, author of *Lincoln's Rise to the Presidency*, “Lincoln’s ‘Rail-Splitter’ image...carried an important symbol of democracy and opportunity for all classes.”²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Hemphill, *Bowing to the Necessities*, 157-158.

²¹⁶ Harrison, *Lincoln's Rise to the Presidency*, 225.

Chapter 4

THE NORTH'S PERCEPTION OF "OLD ABE" AS PRESIDENT

The earliest presidents of the United States had many points of resemblance to those of the English country gentleman, but the plain rugged Lincoln was fitted to be the butt of jesters who hung on the skirts of the nobility.²¹⁷ - Rufus Rockwell Wilson, *Lincoln in Caricature*.

By September of 1860 the North and much of the South became familiar with the description of Lincoln's western appearance, especially in newspapers. During October, November, and December of 1860, more images of Lincoln were printed than in the previous nine months.²¹⁸ As detailed descriptions of Lincoln's appearance decreased in newspapers, cartoon images of him increased. Historian Gary Bunker asserts in his book, *From Rail-Splitter to Icon: Lincoln's Image in Illustrated Periodicals, 1860–1865*, that "Northern comic magazines produced almost three out of every four images of Lincoln. Newspapers accounted for a far smaller percentage of images produced of Lincoln."²¹⁹

The images produced by magazines and newspapers furthered the opinion that Lincoln lacked refinement and social grace. Although many common laborers from the Old Northwest saw this as one of Lincoln's strengths as a candidate, most affluent Northeast citizens viewed it

²¹⁷ Rufus Rockwell Wilson, *Lincoln in Caricature* (New York: Horizon Press, 1953), vi.

²¹⁸ Gary L. Bunker, *From Rail-Splitter to Icon: Lincoln's Image in Illustrated Periodicals, 1860–1865* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2001), 24.

²¹⁹ Bunker, *From Rail-Splitter to Icon*, 25.

as an inadequacy. John Nicolay, Lincoln's personal secretary, addressed this in his diary on August 24, 1860. He recorded that "the impression prevails East that Mr. Lincoln is very ugly – an impression which the published pictures of him of course all confirm."²²⁰ These images damaged Lincoln's appeal in the Northeast. After the *New York Tribune* an unflattering picture of Old Abe, a local New York politician claimed it "lost him twenty-five votes in one township."²²¹

The vast majority of the images portrayed him as a rugged western man. They depicted Old Abe carrying an axe, indicating his rail-splitter persona. The coarse images incriminated him as inadequate and unqualified for the presidency to the Northeastern middle and upper class.²²² According to Gary Bunker "the frontier imagery conjured up an entirely different set of qualities: awkwardness, uncouthness, naiveté, incompetence, lack of sophistication, and proper breeding, inexperience, and want of education."²²³ In mid-July *Vanity Fair* published a harsh statement regarding Lincoln's published pictures. "We propose" the magazine asserted, "that authentic portraits of OLD ABE LINCOLN be posted up on the trees about. If these would not frighten any worm of ordinary nerves to death, we had best let them live."²²⁴ One image titled, "The 'Rail' Old Western Gentleman," debased the future President's western appearance.²²⁵ The illustration of Old Abe consisted of a crude drawing of Lincoln's head, rails forming his limbs

²²⁰John Nicolay's diary on August 26, 1860. From John Nicolay, *With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and Other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860-1865*, ed. Michael Burlingame. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 11.

²²¹Frances B. Carpenter, *The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln: Six Months at the White House* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1872), 47.

²²²Jonathan A. Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 152.

²²³Bunker, *From Rail-Splitter to Icon*, 17.

²²⁴"A letter from the hermit at Nixon's," *Vanity Fair* July 7, 1860, 17.

²²⁵Caricature drawn of Lincoln by Frank Bellew in July of 1860. From Rufus Rockwell Wilson, *Lincoln in Caricature* (New York: Horizon Press 1953), 15; Jane E. Brown, Richard Samuel West, "William Newman (1817-1870): A Victorian Cartoonist in London and New York." *A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 17, no. 2 (2007): 153-161.

and body, imitating the rails that Lincoln was famous for splitting. Unkempt hair and a rough collar were drawn to insinuate how unlike a “gentleman” he actually was. His opponents used this to attack his character, not just his poor fashion sensibility. Critics, primarily from the metropolitan Northeast, quickly linked his general frontier appearance as an indication of his inadequacy.²²⁶

After the election a cartoon drawn by a renowned cartoonist –William Newman– perceptively revealed the public's view of Lincoln. Entitled, “A Phenomenon of Portraiture,” the image depicted three portraits of Lincoln side by side, each one progressively more attractive. The first dated as May was captioned: “His first looks[:] hideous—cadaverous—repulsive.” The image above the caption showed Lincoln poorly dressed with disarranged hair. The next image dated August was captioned, “As his chances improve so do his looks.” Lincoln appeared better than the first image but his clothing and hair were still unkempt. And, the last illustration from November was captioned: “Being chosen, he grows quite handsome—even angelic.” While the former rail-splitter was drawn better in the last frame than he was in the first two, he is still not in a formal suit and his hair is disarranged.²²⁷ Interestingly this cartoon captured how people in the Northeast would eventually change their opinion of Lincoln. Refined audience’s who met him personally as President increasingly remarked that he was more appealing in person, despite his obliviousness to himself. Even though the scruffy depictions of the former rail-splitter were exaggerated, they still communicated to the polished citizens that the western Lincoln was incompetent.

²²⁶ Bunker, *From Rail-Splitter to Icon*, 17, 20; Tilden Lynch, “Boss” Tweed: The Story of a Grim Generation (New York: Boni and Liverwright, 1927), 132.

²²⁷ “A phenomenon of Portraiture,” *Frank Leslie’s Budget of Fun*, December 15, 1860; Bunker, *From Rail-Splitter to Icon*, 64.

After winning the November election, Lincoln retreated to his home in Springfield until February, 1861. During his time at home he received a few elegant gifts. On January 12, 1861 Lincoln was presented with a cane by a mechanic in California. John Hay described the present as an “exquisitely executed cane, the staff made of South American wood, and the carved head of solid gold, a perfectly polished specimen of the Nevada quartz being set in the massive metal. It is of great cost and unimpeachable taste.” Walking sticks or canes during this time, according to historian John Kasson, were “the emblem of bourgeois circumspection.”²²⁸ Old Abe also received a hat. A hatter in Brooklyn, New York inquired about the size of his head, and once he obtained the measurements he made Old Abe a fashionable top-hat. When the President-elect received the present in Springfield, just before he left for Washington, he exclaimed, “Well, wife, there is one thing likely to come out of this scrape, any how. We are going to have some new clothes!”²²⁹ Even with the elegant gifts, Lincoln never stuck Eastern audiences as dignified. During his presidency he was consistently provided with the formal attire and accessories, but failed to wear them gracefully.

On February 11, the Lincolns and members of the presidential party boarded a train for Washington. But instead of traveling a direct, practical route, the train zigzagged through Northern cities so people could have a chance to see the new President. The plan was to travel by train almost two thousand miles through Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Columbus, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Buffalo, Albany, Trenton, Philadelphia, and Harrisburg. Northern newspapers fueled the excitement by publishing reports of the trip often, even daily. The twelve-day excursion was Lincoln’s first opportunity to be seen by hundreds of thousands from across the North. Large

²²⁸ John Hay diary on Jan 12, 1861, accessed from John Hay, *Inside Lincoln’s White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay* ed. Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1999). 18; Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 121.

²²⁹ Carpenter, *Six Months at The White House*, 113.

crowds greeted the president at every stop, regardless of the weather, to catch a glimpse of the man they had read about and seen images of. For almost a year newspapers and other publications had mediated the outer appearance and manners of Lincoln to the public. Now, on a massive scale, people could see the former rail-splitter and form their own opinion about him.²³⁰

Before the trip began Lincoln made a significant change to his appearance. On October 15, 1860, Lincoln had received a letter from an eleven-year-old girl named Grace Bedell. She asked Lincoln to let his whiskers grow. She stated, “You would look a great deal better for your face is so thin.”²³¹ Lincoln responded by thanking Bedell for her advice on October 19.²³² Prompted by her letter, he began to let his facial hair grow. Almost four months later, the President’s train pulled into Buffalo on February 16, 1861. During the stop Lincoln was informed that Bedell was in the audience. After seeking her out from among the crowd, he told her, “You see, I let these whiskers grow for you, Grace.”²³³ A woman from Cleveland also wrote to the President regarding his facial hair and other external qualities. A few days earlier in Cleveland, Lincoln sought out the woman from the crowd to thank her. According to *The New York Herald*, she provided in the letter “some advice as to his whiskers and various other subjects germane to the advancement of the outer man.”²³⁴ The advice Lincoln received from both ladies was sound. His new whiskers caught the attention of the public and became a source of discussion among many who saw him on his rail journey to the White House.²³⁵

²³⁰ “Monthly record of Current Events.” *Harper’s Magazine* December, 1861. Vol: 22, 689.

²³¹ *Dear Mr. Lincoln: Letters to the President*, ed. Harold Holzer, (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1993), 44.

²³² Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 3, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 3:193.

²³³ Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 2 Vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008). I: 18; “Journey of the President Elect.” *Weekly Gazette and Free Press* [Janesville, Wisconsin], March 1, 1861.

²³⁴ “Inauguration Travels – Tours of the Presidents of the Southern and Northern Confederates.” *The New York Herald*, February 19, 1861.

²³⁵ *Weekly Gazette and Free Press* [Janesville, Wisconsin], March 1, 1861; *Berkshire County Eagle* [Pittsfield, Massachusetts], February 21, 1861.

Lincoln's facial hair was a well received improvement to his appearance. By 1861, the fashion of properly groomed beards and mustaches swept both Europe and America as a symbol of refinement.²³⁶ Ads for products that aided facial hair growth became popular in New York City. Northern periodicals, like *Harpers Weekly*, gave attention to facial hair in February 1861, the same month Lincoln was traveling to the White House.²³⁷ On February 7, the *New York Sunday Courier* noted, "Beard or No Beard- It is still a mooted question whether or not the beard is a proper adornment" and whether it reflects a man's "intellectual accomplishments." Rather than trying to answer these questions, the article asserted that a beard "is an ambition, and a very natural one too, in each man, young or old, to have a beard or moustache; with the latter, and with the former in many cases."²³⁸

Like clothing and graceful body control, well-groomed facial hair spoke to the interior quality of a man. One ad for *Bellingham's Celebrated Stimulating Ointment* published in New York City's *Sunday Mercury* on February 17, stated that their product was "exclusively used in London and Paris by all who yearn to possess luxuriant whiskers."²³⁹ Another article entitled, "A Fashionable Necessity," published in New York's *Sunday Times* claimed, "[T]he strength of Sampson was in his hair, and the strength of a man's claims to fashion are tested, now-a-days, by the luxuriance of his whiskers and moustaches."²⁴⁰ Fortuitously for Lincoln cultivated audiences were becoming more inclined to facial hair by early 1861, resulting in improved opinions of him by those that saw him on his rail trip to the White House. The description of any part of his

²³⁶ John Kasson in *Rudeness and Civility* contends on page 121 that "The fashion for full beards and mustaches that swept the United States as well as Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century added to the sense of weight, maturity in the face."

²³⁷ *Harpers Weekly*. April 27, 1861. Vol. 5, no. 226: 448.

²³⁸ *New York Sunday Courier*, February 7, 1861. Reprinted in the *New York Times* February 19, 1861.

²³⁹ *Sunday Mercury* [New York], February 17, 1861. Reprinted in the *New York Times*, February 19, 1861.

²⁴⁰ *Sunday Times* [New York], February 19, 1861. Reprinted in *New York Times*, February 19, 1861.

overall appearance as elegant was an unusual change for the typically carelessly put together Lincoln.

On January 7, 1861, John Hay, Lincoln's other personal secretary, wrote, "The President's whiskers continue to flourish vigorously. Some assume to say that he is putting on 'airs.'"²⁴¹ Those that made these comments probably did not know Lincoln well since it would have been unlike him to display an air of conceit because of his beard. But Lincoln received much attention for his new growth. "Mr. Lincoln with whiskers," declared a Philadelphia newspaper, "is anything but the reverse of good-looking. His beard should never again be laid aside; with it he is a fine-looking personage."²⁴² The public reacted fondly to the improvement. Within the first few days of the Presidential train's journey in Columbus the *Cleveland Herald* reported that Lincoln "has 'raised' a pair of whiskers; and, we must add, with a decided advantage to his personal appearance." It continued, "We think that under the load now so greatly pressing upon him, his face –always of a thoughtful cast– has assumed a still deeper shade of reflection."²⁴³ On the rail trip the public reacted favorably to Lincoln's new look. One person claimed, "a vigorous growth of comely whiskers has entirely changed Mr. Lincoln's facial appearance." And, because of the improvements, "Mr. Lincoln will go to Washington an exceedingly presentable man."²⁴⁴ His facial hair conveyed intellectual ability to polite society, making him more qualified –in their opinion– for the presidency.

Despite the fact Old Abe's whiskers made him more presentable, the other aspects of his appearance still struck many people as uncouth. A newspaper reporter observed an instance on

²⁴¹ John Hay diary on January 7, 1861, accessed from John Hay, *Lincoln's Journalist: John Hay's Anonymous Writings for the Press, 1860-1864* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 17.

²⁴² *North American and United States Gazette* [Philadelphia] quoted in, Hamilton and Ostendorf, *Lincoln in Photographs*, 85; Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 121.

²⁴³ *Cleveland Herald* reprinted in the *Argus and Democrat* [Madison, Wisconsin], February 25, 1861.

²⁴⁴ "Departure of Mr. Lincoln," *Fort Atkinson Standard* [Atkinson, Wisconsin], February 14, 1861.

the first day of the train trip when Lincoln's first impression was a disappointment. On February 11, only a few hours into the journey the train stopped at the small town of Tolono, Illinois. When the train pulled into the little town that had swelled in anticipation of the President's arrival, a young man climbed on to the train and looked into a window in a desperate attempt to see the new President. When he saw Lincoln he turned to his friends and exclaimed, "I have seen him! I have seen him! But good crackee, I thought he was better looking than that!"²⁴⁵

Lincoln's facial hair coupled with the exaggerated caricatures printed of him, created an impression of him in the minds of most Americans that was a sharp contrast from how he actually appeared. Because of the exaggerated descriptions and images, his actual appearance, although far from elegant, was an improvement from these reports. An observer stated, "Mr. Lincoln is a better looking man than his portraits represent him." Another man claimed that Lincoln "looked a 100 percent better than I was led to suppose from any picture I had seen."²⁴⁶ Newspapers from both the Old Northwest and Northeast found the former rail-splitter's first impression more favorable than he was portrayed in pictures or drawings. A Wisconsin paper noted, "Mr. Lincoln looks so much better than his pictures represent him."²⁴⁷ When Old Abe reached Philadelphia, *The Christian Recorder* commented, "His personal appearance is much more prepossessing than his portraits indicated it to be."²⁴⁸ These remarks reveal more about how poorly media had depicted the former rail-splitter than how refined he actually appeared.

Two future presidents, James Garfield and Rutherford B. Hayes, witnessed Lincoln on his rail trip to the White House. Both men were familiar with the rugged simple life of the

²⁴⁵ *Weekly Gazette and Free Press* [Janesville, Wisconsin], February 22, 1861.

²⁴⁶ Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 2: 25.

²⁴⁷ "Journey of the President Elect," *Weekly Gazette and Free Press* [Janesville, Wisconsin], March 1, 1861.

²⁴⁸ "The Reception of the President Elect in Philadelphia on Thursday." *The Christian Recorder* [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania], February 23, 1861.

frontier region and the refined political life of Washington D.C.. On February 16, James Garfield saw Lincoln for the first time in Columbus, Ohio. Garfield recorded his disapproving thoughts of the President in his diary. “He [Lincoln] has been raising a respectable pair of dark-brown whiskers, which decidedly improve his looks, but no appendage can ever render him remarkable for beauty.” Garfield then concluded that Lincoln “greatly shows his want of culture, and the marks of Western life.”²⁴⁹

Rutherford B. Hayes considered Lincoln’s rugged appearance a strength because it represented his social mobility. On the train journey the entire procession to the White House demonstrated this casual demeanor. The future president made note of the democratic qualities of Lincoln in Cincinnati on February 11. He recorded, “[T]here was a lack of comfort in the arrangements, but the simplicity, the homely character of all was in keeping with the nobility of this typical American. A six-in-hand with a gorgeous trappings, accompanied by outriders and a courtly train, could have added nothing to him; would have detracted from him, would have been wholly out of place.”²⁵⁰ Lincoln did not travel in abundant luxury, and, if he had, it would have stuck many austere farmers as incompatible with the President's character. Everything about him was simple and unpretentious. This is evident in how Lincoln shared the same train car with everyone that accompanied him on the trip, even newspaper reporters. His common appearance and simple traveling arrangements were a contrast from prior, more dignified, Presidents.

The *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle* found Lincoln's appearance very favorable when he stopped in Pittsburgh on February 15. Writing for a western and generally rural demographic, the paper did not have the scrupulous discernment that refined eastern newspapers had. The

²⁴⁹ James Garfield Diary February 16, 1861, from Jonas M. Bundy, *Life of Gen. James A. Garfield* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1880), 51.

²⁵⁰ William Henry Smith, *Charles Richard Williams, The Life of Rutherford B. Hayes, 19th President of the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 111, 118.

Pittsburgh audience found Lincoln's general appearance favorable. The *Chronicle* even stated that he was an "intelligent looking gentleman."²⁵¹ In an article entitled, "Mr. Lincoln Handsome," the paper not only defended him, but claimed his appearance was appealing. The paper also reported that as Old Abe's train pulled away a young girl remarked, "It was shameful Mr. Lincoln had been made so ugly in his pictures; he was a real handsome man."²⁵²

A newspaper reporter who traveled with Lincoln on his train journey also weighed in on the implications of Lincoln's appearance. "Mr. Lincoln" the reporter remarked, "is remarkably urbane and unpretending in his manners and bearing. There is no aristocracy about him... but he is one of nature's noblemen. This is exemplified in the manner of his leaving."²⁵³ By classifying Lincoln as "one of nature's noblemen" the reporter rightly insinuated that the President lacked a polished first impression and trained social grace. The deficiency was partly due to the worn-out, pale-looking Lincoln during his whirlwind train trip to Washington. Because of the long hours he worked during the journey preparing for each stop, a Wisconsin reporter found that "Mr. Lincoln looks several shades paler than when he spoke in Janesville [Wisconsin]."²⁵⁴

Following the stop at Cleveland Lincoln traveled east to New York. The distance between the regions also represented a deep social divide. In the western regions of America Old Abe was not judged harshly on his clothing, body motions, and grace. On February 18, Old Abe left the rugged uncouth Northwest and entered the polished urban Northeast. While the presidential train was passing through the heart of New York Lincoln received an improvement to his wardrobe. A few weeks before Lincoln's personal secretary, John Nicolay, sent Lincoln's body measurements to a Chicago tailor for a proper suit. Not having a precisely tailored suit,

²⁵¹ "The Proceedings To-Day," *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, February 15, 1861.

²⁵² "Mr. Lincoln Handsome," *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, February 16, 1861.

²⁵³ *Weekly Gazette and Free Press* [Janesville, Wisconsin], February 22, 1861.

²⁵⁴ *Gazette and Free Press* [Janesville, Wisconsin], February 15, 1861.

Lincoln wore an outdated and heavily worn one.²⁵⁵ Noticing this Mary Todd intervened to improve Lincoln's attire before he entered into the pretentious judgments of the East. Having been trained in elegant boarding schools and being well accustomed to elegant society, Mary Todd was no doubt disturbed by her husband's careworn dress. *The New York Times* described this intervention, "During the entire trip Mr. Lincoln has worn a shocking bad hat, and a very thin old over-coat. Shortly after leaving Utica, New York, Mrs. Lincoln gave an order to William, the colored servant, and presently he passed through the car with a handsome broadcloth over-coat upon his arm and a new hat-box in his hand. Since then Mr. Lincoln has looked fifty percent better." "It is very doubtful," the *Time's* continued, "that the wearer of them knows or cares anything about it."²⁵⁶ The article perceptively recognized Lincoln's apathy to appear elegantly, but revealed his willingness to heed the advice of others.

Later in the day of February 18, after a delay, the train arrived in Albany, the state capital of New York. When he took the stage to address the audience, "[T]he President elect," *The New York Herald* wrote, "was hardly recognized by the crowd, and anxiety to see him and to be certain that they saw the right man overcame any disposition to cheer. After a few moments, the crowd realized that the man in front of them was the president and began to applaud." Despite Lincoln's new suit spectators simply did not recognize him. *The New York Herald* continued, "Mr. Lincoln, tired, sun burnt, adorned with huge whiskers, looks so unlike the pale, smooth shaven, red cheeked individual, who represented upon the popular prints and dubbed the splitter."²⁵⁷ The *Daily Zanesville Courier* also commented that Lincoln looked "worn" in

²⁵⁵ A letter from John Nicolay To Elmer E. Ellsworth, Springfield, January 30, 1861, from Burlingame, ed., *With Lincoln in the White House*, 26.

²⁵⁶ "The Incoming Administration; Progress of the President Elect towards Washington. The Trip From Buffalo to Albany. Mr. Lincoln's Speech at Rochester," *The New York Times*, February 19, 1861.

²⁵⁷ "The Presidential Progress," *New York Herald*, February 19, 1861.

Albany.²⁵⁸ This rugged look combined with his “peculiar image” as a result of being “loose and careless in dress” undoubtedly caused the spectators to think that Lincoln was someone other than the president.²⁵⁹ Although he appeared in better attire than he did before western crowds, the reaction he received in the Northeast was drastically different. Despite his new clothes he still could not mask his rugged appearance. Unlike the reception in Pittsburgh or Cleveland, eastern New York audiences were more accustomed to politicians with a polished appearance and a graceful air about them. The *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle* found Lincoln at first sight favorable, even “intelligent looking,” whereas the Albany audience found him less so, even unrecognizable.

On February 19, a day after Lincoln received new clothes, he arrived in New York City. Similar to his previous visit to the city less than a year prior, his general appearance was a stark contrast to the elegant politicians he met. Once the train arrived the president-elect was ushered to New York City Hall, here he was introduced to the mayor of New York, Fernando Wood. When the men stood next to each other, a number of observers noted the contrast between their dress, etiquette, and graceful air. A member of Lincoln’s traveling party recalled the stark difference between the men. He described Lincoln as “rugged” and “unpolished in manner and ungraceful in speech.” In contrast he observed that the Mayor had “easy graceful manners.”²⁶⁰ *The New York Herald* also commented on the difference between the men. “The appearance of the two men was most striking,” it reported. “The chief magistrate of the city dressed in his usual taste, in a suit of black, overcoat buttoned tightly across his breast, looked at his distinguished visitor, and never removed his eyes from him during the delivery of the address.” Lincoln also

²⁵⁸ *Daily Zanesville Courier* [Zanesville, Ohio], February 19 1861; “The Presidential Progress. The Arrival and Reception at the State Capital,” *The New York Herald*, February 19, 1861.

²⁵⁹ Albert Jeremiah Beveridge. *Abraham Lincoln: 1809-1858*. Vol: 4 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), I: 503.

²⁶⁰ Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 2: 28.

dressed in a black suit “but did not return the steady gaze that was fixed upon him.”²⁶¹ Lincoln was unable to avoid appearing peculiar among elite New York society even while wearing the new clothes he received in Albany. Henry Villard, a New York journalist who accompanied the President on his train journey, witnessed the reactions to Old Abe’s unkempt appearance. According to Villard, the President's facial hair did not look “naturalized” and his clothes were “illy arranged.” After observing Lincoln's blundering presentation of himself in New York Villard declared, “It was plain to see that the Lincolns are common sense, homelike folks unused to the glitter and flutter of society.”²⁶²

When Lincoln was leaving city hall, amid a large audience, he made his way to a balcony and said to the crowd, “Friends, I do not appear for the purpose of making a speech. I came merely to see you and allow you to see me; and I have to say to you what I have said frequently to audiences on the journey, that in the sight I have the best of the bargain.”²⁶³ After the quick speech, the crowd, which was comprised of urban gentlemen along with coarsely dressed laborers, rushed to meet Lincoln. “Ex-Mayor Harper [of New York City]” noted a reporter for the *Weekly Gazette and Free Press* of Janesville, Wisconsin, “came through the ordeal, and shaking Mr. Lincoln by the hand, admitted that their pictorial had done him injustice. Immediately after the ex-mayor came one of the seediest, unwashed citizens of New York, and thus they continued to pour in.”²⁶⁴ The President shook thousands of hands that evening while he was bombarded by a mob of New Yorkers from every social class.²⁶⁵ The scene revealed Lincoln’s true character. The former rail-splitter communicating personably to the audience with

²⁶¹ *The Weekly Hawk-Eye* [Burlington, Iowa], February 23, 1861; *Weekly Gazette and Free Press* [Janesville, Wisconsin], February 22, 1861.

²⁶² Henry Villard, *Lincoln on the Eve of '61*, *New York Herald*, February 20, 1862.

²⁶³ *Weekly Gazette and Free Press* [Janesville, Wisconsin], March 1, 1861.

²⁶⁴ *Weekly Gazette and Free Press*, February 22, 1861.

²⁶⁵ Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 2: 29.

ease and genuineness, regardless if the spectators were considered slovenly or cultivated. His homespun demeanor was unconventional for a president, especially in a city familiar with elite society like New York.

On February 23, Lincoln's train reached Washington. Although Lincoln had arrived at his destination, he was not able to remove himself from the frenzy. Once in Washington, the fear of an assassination attempt prohibited the President-elect from being paraded around for the public to see, but social protocol required the new President to attend levees, elegant Washington social gatherings. *The New York Herald* described the importance of these procedures. "There are other duties," the paper stated on February 18, "connected with the presidential office, than those which may be attended to, in the old-fashioned and queerly furnished private retreat of the Executive. There are social necessities which must be met, and on the fulfillment of which depends in no small degree the harmony of our relations with the rest of mankind."²⁶⁶

Most of the personal criticism Lincoln received came from being unqualified for the traditional role expected of a President. Shortly after arriving in the capital he quickly displayed his inadequacy at performing proper etiquette. An elegant levee was the traditional scene for the president to be introduced to the refined politicians and elite society of Washington. The levee was prepared for Lincoln just like it had been for prior presidents. During James Buchanan's presidency, *The New York Times* declared a "fancy costume was obligatory" for a Washington levee.²⁶⁷ An article for the *Times* described the magnitude of the Washington levees Lincoln attended in 1861. "Fort Sumpter was forgotten," the article claimed, "Major Anderson was a myth, WIGFALL was dropped, assassins were not dreamed of--dress, dress, dress, seemed

²⁶⁶ "The Presidential Progress. The Arrival and Reception at the State Capital," *The New York Herald*, February 18, 1861.

²⁶⁷ "FASHIONABLE INTELLIGENCE," *New York Times*, April 12, 1858.

literally to occupy the minds and entire existence of three people out of every five [in the city of Washington D.C].”²⁶⁸

Before the levee the State Department and William Seward felt the need to take precautionary measures to protect the President’s public image. Seward knew of the potential harm that could be caused by the former rail-splitter appearing in western garb and acting with disregard for formality. Concerned staff members in the State Department sent Lincoln a detailed memorandum of clothing to wear to the first levee. Included was a black suit and formal white gloves. Dutifully Lincoln obliged the orders and wore the costume. The crowd that night was the largest one to attend a White House elegant reception. The entrance to the mansion was “impossible” to enter through because of the enormous line of people stretching far into the street. Swarms of people from every social class came, a departure from former presidential levees.²⁶⁹ Lincoln shook so many hands that by the end of the night the white gloves the State Department gave him turned a muddled off-white color.²⁷⁰

It was the President-elect’s first impression on the elegant politicians of the city. The event and expectations of Lincoln were captured in the *New York Herald*. “Mr. Lincoln,” the paper observed, “passed through the long parlor hall, thronged with the elite and fashion of the national metropolis.” Amid the most fashionable people in Washington in formal attire, he nevertheless presented himself without social grace. “Abraham Lincoln,” stated the *Springfield Republican* “looks very awkward in white kid gloves and feels uncomfortable in new boots.”²⁷¹ Being uncomfortable in formal clothing was a pattern throughout his life. As a manual laborer he

²⁶⁸ “The Republican Court,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1861.

²⁶⁹ “Mr. Lincoln’s First Reception at Washington,” *The New York Herald*. February 24, 1861; “Editor’s Easy Chair,” *Harper’s Magazine* 24 (1861), 558; Jerrold M. Packard, *The Lincolns in the White House: Four Years that Shattered a Family* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005), 28.

²⁷⁰ Walter B. Stevens, *A Reporter’s Lincoln* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press), 52.

²⁷¹ *Springfield [Massachusetts] Republican*, February 26, 1861.

had not experienced wearing much of anything new or proper and as president he had not grown accustomed to the refined costume he was expected to wear. His ungainly appearance was accentuated in contrast to Mary Todd's elegant dress and social grace. *The New York Times* observed that compared to Mr. Lincoln, "Mrs. Lincoln, is modeled in another fashion."²⁷² The contrast of the two was also apparent in their understanding of etiquette. During the evening Lincoln committed a social error. As he was in the White House mingling with his guests the former rail-splitter wore his hat. It would have struck the elite guests to see the President make such an unusual etiquette error. Whether he forgot to take off his hat or whether he was unaware of the social protocol is unknown. While Old Abe made some blunders he was pardoned of criticism by Northern Republican newspapers. The *New York Herald* published a few of the guests' impressions of the President that night. It noted that "the ladies, who thought he was awkward at first sight, changed their opinion."²⁷³ Although the *Herald* wanted to present Lincoln favorably to its readers, it still admitted that he made an "awkward" first impression. "Awkward" was a word often used to describe Lincoln and one that was not associated with prior presidents, all of whom maintained the presidency with a certain degree of elegance and social ease.²⁷⁴

After observing the levee a reporter for New York's *Commercial Advertiser* announced: "I don't believe first class people in Washington go to Lincoln's levees. Why, I've seen more intelligence in a small drawing room in New York than I could see in the reception and ante-rooms together that evening at the White House." The report continued by criticizing him for being "so good-natured and free-and-easy in his manners" and suggested he should "look and act the Chief Magistrate a little more." It ended by claiming that Lincoln "has not yet appreciated,

²⁷² "The Presidential Progress," *New York Times*, February 25, 1861.

²⁷³ *The New York Herald*, February 24, 1861; "Mr. Lincoln's First Reception at Washington," *The New York Herald*, February 24, 1861.

²⁷⁴ "Mr. Lincoln's First Reception at Washington," *The New York Herald*, February 24, 1861.

socially, the position he has been called to occupy.”²⁷⁵ By the summer of 1861, Lincoln had gained a reputation for having a nonchalant attitude toward refined sensibilities at his levees.²⁷⁶ *The New York Herald* asserted that before Lincoln “[e]very class and phase of society in Washington was so deeply affected by the charming soirees, receptions and fancy balls of these irresistible Southern ladies.” But once the former rail-splitter entered the White House there was a “sudden transition in that city from all these social splendors and fascinations to the rough simplicities of ‘Honest Old Abe.’”²⁷⁷

Throughout his political career Lincoln never was able to emulate the precision required for gentlemen at levees. His inability to wear clothing well and his lack of graceful performance was an unintentional display of unrefined social mobility, a sharp contrast from the exhibition of refined style and grace rooted in the political tradition of England. These events were a prime stage for both women and men of elite status, either by marriage or birth, to display their elegance during an evening of formal dining and dancing. Only a few years prior to Lincoln’s presidency, elegant social events were popular among the elite and closely followed by the general public. When formal events took place in Washington, newspapers would document in detail the specifics of the evening. Reports about what the president and Washington officials wore were published in newspapers. The two presidents preceding Lincoln –Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan– were praised for the social decorum they displayed at their levees.

On March 4, Inauguration Day, Lincoln improved his appearance. After the frenzy of his publicized train journey and of living in Washington for few weeks, Lincoln was more prepared for national attention of the occasion. In preparation he was provided with a suit made specifically for him to wear during the inauguration. Illinois businessmen presented it to their

²⁷⁵ Robert S. Harper, *Lincoln and the Press* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1951), 93.

²⁷⁶ “Mr. Lincoln’s First Reception at Washington,” *The New York Herald*, February 24, 1861.

²⁷⁷ “Startling Discoveries at Washington,” *The New York Herald*, August 26, 1861.

local hero as a gift before he left Springfield almost a month earlier. Appearing elegantly, Lincoln wore his new tailored suit for a much anticipated inaugural speech.²⁷⁸ *The Charleston Mercury*, a vehement opponent of Lincoln, even found Lincoln's first impression more favorable than it anticipated. "It was my first glimpse of the mighty Rail Splitter" the reporter wrote. "Looking down upon him through a lorgnette, he did not seem as homely and vulgar as the prints and the press represent him." The reporter then reverted to debasing Old Abe, "But all sides agree that he is a low flung, weak minded man. Even the Republicans laugh at him."²⁷⁹

In December 1860, about three months before Lincoln left for Washington, *Harper's Weekly* published an article entitled "Our American Dignity." The author, Alfred H. Guernsey argued the social system that regulated class structure in America deviated from the "Old World" regulations of England. America diverged from the traditional English gentility regulation of lineage. Instead of being identified by family heritage, Guernsey claimed, America adopted national lineage. He asserted, a hard working American "proves himself to be of the lineage of Washington, and Franklin, and Adams, and their compeers." By breaking the traditional genteel regulations of "family blood that regulates the descent of honors," it enabled more social fluidity. But Guernsey still maintained that "all dignity must have a material basis," a principle that was rooted in the "Old World" form of gentility.

Not only did Lincoln break the "Old World" tradition, but he also did not abide by what traditionally classified a refined gentleman in America. Even though there were no longer restrictions placed on the lower classes or people with common lineage from rising to the rank of a social elite, an emphasis was placed on displaying social rank with exterior elegance. Lincoln's sloppy dress and poor social grace were indicators of his lack of social "worth," even for

²⁷⁸ "The Departure of Mr. Lincoln," *The New York Herald*, February 16, 1861; Bartow Adolphus Ulrich, *Abraham Lincoln and Constitutional Government* (Chicago: Chicago Legal News, 1916), 66.

²⁷⁹ "Our Washington Correspondence," *The Charleston [South Carolina] Mercury*, March 7, 1861.

America's more egalitarian refined standard. Guernsey contended that political figures like Lincoln undermined the form of "American Dignity." The democratic political system enabled uncouth politicians to be elected, and therefore the author believed these men were inept. He admitted, "We must confess that the best dignity of our nation is not generally in its officials." The clear evidence of this statement was the election of Lincoln.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ Alfred H. Guernsey, "Our American Dignity," *Harper's Weekly* 49, (December, 1860), 102, 111.

Chapter 5

“A FIRST-RATE SECOND-RATE MAN”: REACTIONS TO LINCOLN IN THE WHITE HOUSE

Lincoln himself breaks down the wall separating the dignity of the office from the dignity of the people.²⁸¹ - Barry Schwartz

After being in Washington a few weeks Lincoln became exposed to the more scrupulous English standards of social behavior. His coarse manner and fashion fascinated English visitors. The idea of the plain, former rail-splitter as president dismayed those accustomed to the traditional ethos of English gentility. For centuries English political officials maintained a tradition of genteel courtly customs. By this standard Lincoln was an anomaly, especially to William Howard Russell, an English journalist from the *London Times*, who was sent to tour America to record the deepening division between the North and the South. During his visit a large portion of his time was spent at the White House, and as a prestigious visitor Russell attended many of the levees (more literally defined as a courtly receptions) that Lincoln did. It was not the sharp national divide culminating in the Civil War that caught Russell's attention the most, rather he devoted large portions of his diary to scrupulously evaluating the President-elect's western habits from a genteel, English perspective.

Russell's diary recorded his first encounter with Lincoln during one of the first formal levees at the White House. Russell recalled that Lincoln had a “shambling” and “loose” walking

²⁸¹ Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 170.

manner and, by Russell's standard, wore an appalling suit when he entered the ballroom. His black suit did not fit his lanky frame correctly, a habitual problem for Lincoln. It was wrinkled and outdated, and his necktie was raggedly tied. Russell was so aghast by his appearance that he compared Lincoln's dress to an "undertaker's uniform at a funeral." Old Abe, showing no concern for his appearance, also left his hair uncombed, another common habit of his. Russell concluded his assessment by writing that in Europe Lincoln would not be considered a "gentleman."²⁸²

Russell's reports caught the attention of many people in both England and America. Once they were published in the *London Times*, they were occasionally republished in American newspapers. Many elite Americans shared Russell's criticism that Lincoln lacked traditional genteel qualities. Etiquette manuals, like the writings of Lord Chesterfield, were classic educational literature for young males seeking acceptance from the upper echelon of society. These manuals served as the basic rubric for what constituted gentility or refinement, and it was by their standards that Russell critiqued Lincoln. He wrote in his diary that many Americans made "disparaging allusions" in regards to Lincoln's initial impression. During a reception in Lincoln's honor in March of 1861, Russell observed as the President walked through a hallway lined with refined guests, "Not one of the men I saw even touched his hat." It was repulsive to Russell and to the White House guests that the President would not put more effort into appearing more distinguished than the general public.²⁸³

His dress and unkempt external appearance also stunned other English visitors who met the President. Not dignifying the esteemed position with a display of proper etiquette or care for his attire was vulgar to English visitors. One Englishman who met Lincoln in Springfield was

²⁸² William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South*, 2 Vols. (London: Bradbury and Evens. 1863), I: 37.

²⁸³ Russell, *My Diary North and South*, II: 349.

recorded as being “shocked” that such a man with simple western characteristics was even nominated for the presidency.²⁸⁴ Another English traveler vividly remembered his first impressions of meeting Lincoln. He wrote that Lincoln greeted him and other guests from England with “hair ruffled,” eyes that were “very sleepy,” and “[f]eet enveloped in carpet slippers.” The English gentleman was surprised by his ill-bred appearance, explaining in his recollection that he and his company were “votaries of court etiquette.”²⁸⁵

The former rail-splitter was a popular subject in England. England's *Macmillan's Magazine* published an article entitled, "Washington During the War," but despite the name of the article the primarily topic was Lincoln's external appearance. The article scrutinized his “creased, soiled, and puckered up” black suit and even his “ill-fitting boots,” a common description of Lincoln's appearance in England. After debasing Old Abe's appearance the article transitioned away from his external features and asserted, “You would never say he [Lincoln] was a gentleman; you would still less say he was not one.” The article proceeded to explain this seeming contradictory statement; “[T]here are men to whom the epithet of 'gentleman-like' or 'ungentleman-like' appears utterly incongruous; and of such Mr. Lincoln is one.” The understanding that he possessed gentlemanly characteristics came from the a close examination of Lincoln, one that surpassed the outer-man. “There is about him an utter absence of pretension, and an evident desire to be courteous to everybody, which is the essence, if not the outward form, of good breeding,” the article asserted. The last part of the article departed from the usual harsh repugnance William Howard Russell and other Englishmen had for the President. While Lincoln did not change after his first year in office, he began to be evaluated by more than his

²⁸⁴ Francis B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1866), 121.

²⁸⁵ George Borrett, “An Englishman in Washington in 1864,” reprinted in *The Magazine of History* 149 (1929): 12-13.

lack of exterior refinement. With time, many refined elites in both England and America were able to look past Lincoln's exterior and recognize favorable parts of the former rail-splitter's interior character, parts that they would even consider gentlemanly.²⁸⁶

The scrutiny over Lincoln's western style and demeanor was apparent to those surrounding him at the White House. His Secretary of State, William Henry Seward, a man known for his refined appearance and proper manners, was well aware that Lincoln's presentation reflected poorly on the President. Gentlemanliness in all circumstances was a principle Seward lived by, motivating him to be keenly attuned to the social customs expected of elites.²⁸⁷ Although Seward had harbored feelings of animosity after he was eliminated from the 1860 presidential race by Lincoln, he still joined the President's administration. He took it upon himself to assist the President in the personal matter of refinement.²⁸⁸ After Lincoln's presidency, he recalled that Lincoln "had no pomp, display, or dignity, so-called. He appeared simple in his carriage and bearing." Seward considered the sloppy condition of his clothes and his indifference to etiquette a consequence of his upbringing as a "rude, uncultivated boy, without polish."²⁸⁹ Lincoln undoubtedly received sage advice on refinement from Seward, but it did little to improve his assimilation into refined society. His apathy towards social decorum was clear since both his wife and Secretary of State gave him informed advice, but he still never passed as a traditional gentleman, nor would he ever.

²⁸⁶ Special Correspondent, "Washington During the War." *Macmillan's Magazine* 6 (Cambridge: London, 1862): 23-26.

²⁸⁷ Frederic Bancroft, *The Life of William H. Seward*, 2 Vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1900), I: 199.

²⁸⁸ John Hay's diary entry December 13, 1861, reprinted in John Hay, *Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay*, ed. by Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger (Carbondale : Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 165; Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson*, 2 Vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), I: 123.

²⁸⁹ Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln*, 323, 326.

Seward's correction of Lincoln's etiquette was less than subtle at times. Although most of Seward's instruction was discreet, on December 30, 1861, he sent a letter to the President blatantly informing him of how he was required to appear. A sense of Seward's annoyance with Lincoln is apparent in the way he reminded him to appear in formal attire. The letter informs him to dress in "full costume," adding that this attire is "customary" for the annual New Year's Day levee. But Seward's message did not contain a suit like the memorandum the State Department sent the President for his Inaugural Levee in March, 1861. Despite serving as President for a year Lincoln still had to be reminded to present himself elegantly. It was always a clumsy endeavor for Lincoln to try to pass as a part of elite society, since he often failed to meet simple protocol of proper etiquette.²⁹⁰

During Old Abe's first summer in office, Prince Napoleon Bonaparte, the son of Jerome Bonaparte, made a visit to the White House in August, 1861, rousing the public enamor with European courtly life.²⁹¹ Prince Napoleon personified what social elites in America aspired to. Newspapers would frequently describe his visit in America, and more specifically his elaborate costume and courtly manners, to their readership. Even though Lincoln had been thoroughly prepared how to portray the refined sensibilities of a gentleman before Prince Napoleon, he failed to pass as such. Napoleon wrote in his diary that Lincoln had "the appearance of a bootmaker." Appalled, he noted, "What a difference between this sad representative of the great republic and her founding fathers!"²⁹² The *New York Times* translated and republished an article from the Paris periodical, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, about the visit seven months later. The French author remarked, "Mr. Lincoln's nomination was hailed with enthusiasm by the working

²⁹⁰ Glyndon Van Deusen, *William Henry Seward* (New York: Oxford University, 1967), 337.

²⁹¹ Esther Singleton, *The Story of The White House*, 2 Vols. (New York: The McClure Company, 1907), I: 79; Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 2 Vols. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), I: 471.

²⁹² Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln*, I: 257.

classes, who saw in his rustic origin, in his probity as well as in his moderation, a guarantee for labor and the laboring classes.” The author clearly did not believe Lincoln was equivalent to the courtly European politicians. His unprivileged upbringing was amusing and a source of condescending remarks from the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. The French author patronizingly asserted, “If I give you all Mr. Lincoln's claims to public respect, you will allow me a smile at his whimsical appearance, and at that pair of kid gloves which seem astonished at finding themselves in the hands of a rail-splitter.”²⁹³

Although English elites held a higher standard for what constituted proper etiquette and costume, many refined Americans also expressed disapproval of Lincoln’s uncouth qualities. The inherited English standard of refinement was prominent in metropolitan cities in the Northeast. Schooling in classic genteel standards enabled gentlemen to have a criteria by which to evaluate themselves and judge others. By breaking this standard, Lincoln received much disapproval. In 1862 the acclaimed writer Nathaniel Hawthorne and four others interviewed the president in the White House. When he met the president, Hawthorne immediately noticed his poorly kept appearance. “He had shabby slippers on his feet. His hair was black, still unmixed with gray, stiff, somewhat bushy, and had apparently been acquainted with neither brush nor comb that morning, after the disarrangement of the pillow,” wrote Hawthorne in an article intended for but never published in *The Atlantic Monthly* because of an editors concerns with how the criticism of the president would be received. Hawthorne further noted, “and as to a night-cap, Uncle Abe probably knows nothing of such effeminacies.”²⁹⁴ The President’s uncouth appearance led Hawthorne to conclude that Lincoln had “no bookish cultivation” and “no refinement.” Hawthorne believed that his description of Lincoln, which the editor removed

²⁹³ “Prince Napoleon at Washington,” *The New York Times*, March 16, 1862.

²⁹⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tales, Sketches, and Other Papers* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1878), 310.

from the article, was, according to Hawthorne, “the only part of the article really worth publishing.”²⁹⁵

Like Hawthorne, a New Englander, Ralph Waldo Emerson also wrote disparagingly about his initial impression of Lincoln. Educated at Harvard, Emerson was thoroughly versed in the customs of social elites. Both Hawthorne and Emerson shared many of the English sensibilities regarding social mores. In June of 1863, Emerson described Lincoln as a clown, claiming that his taste was unrefined and his manners were poor. Although Emerson felt the hierarchical social system of the South was frivolous, he still valued many of the genteel customs practiced in the South and in the urban Northeast. Maintaining the Jeffersonian democratic ideal of the “natural aristocracy,” Emerson advocated for men to elevate to the social elite status they merited. However, elevating to this status was not permitted without forsaking a sloppy appearance and unrefined habits. As a result Old Abe’s lack of elegance as president prompted Emerson to respond by debasing Lincoln. Emerson’s criticism was not founded in political ideology, rather he employed a traditional genteel standard to demean Lincoln for his lack of exterior performance.²⁹⁶

Journalist Henry Villard also thought poorly of Lincoln at the beginning of his presidency. Villard served as a reporter for newspapers in the Northeast when Lincoln was ascending in his political career. In 1858, Villard covered the Lincoln-Douglas debates for multiple newspapers in the Northeast. “It seemed to me,” he recalled during the debates, “incomprehensible and outrageous that the uncouth, common Illinois politician... should carry

²⁹⁵ Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Chiefly About War Matters. By a Peaceable Man.” *Atlantic Monthly* 10, no. 57 (July 1862): 44-46.

²⁹⁶ Edwin Harrison Cady, *The Gentleman in America: A Literary Study in American Culture* (Syracuse University Press: Syracuse, New York, 1949), 167-170; Ralph Emerson, *Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Emerson’s Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln* (Rockford, Illinois: Wilson Brothers, 1909), 5-10; Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson: With Annotations* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 375.

the day over the eminent and tried statesman [Douglas].”²⁹⁷ Villard reacted with disgust towards Lincoln's un-brushed hair, poor attire, and clumsy body movement. Like many elegant Eastern gentleman, he felt that Lincoln was unfit for political office. Accustomed to the elegant social standards of cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, Villard viewed Lincoln as unfit for the exclusively presidential office.²⁹⁸

Two years later in 1860, George Templeton Strong, a refined Wall Street lawyer from New York, saw Lincoln for the first time. Strong reacted to Lincoln by writing, “He is a barbarian, Scythian, yahoo, a gorilla, in respect of outward polish.”²⁹⁹ Eventually Strong's opinion of Lincoln changed. Halfway through Lincoln's presidency Strong noted in his diary that Lincoln was “a first-rate second-rate man.”³⁰⁰ Although Lincoln had honesty and courage, according to Strong, his slovenly style lowered him to second-rate. The New York preacher Henry Ward Beecher shared the same opinion of Lincoln. He formed his first impressions in 1860, when Lincoln visited New York for his speech at Cooper Union. Holding Lincoln to a refined standard, Beecher thought little of the rugged Illinoisan. Because Lincoln did not properly display himself as a sophisticated and graceful gentleman, Strong and other Northeastern elites considered the President to be “second-rate.” Even Major General George McClellan, who worked closely with Lincoln as the General-In-Chief of the Union army, in late 1861, regarded Lincoln poorly. A son of a prominent physician and raised by a mother noted for her “considerable grace and refinement,” McClellan was well versed in the mores of elite

²⁹⁷ Henry Villard, *Memoirs of Henry Villard, Journalist and Financier, 1835-1900*, 2 Vols. (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), I: 137-138.

²⁹⁸ Larry D. Mensch, *Abraham Lincoln, President-Elect: The Four Critical Months from Election to Inauguration* (Jefferson, North Carolina: MacFarland, 2005), 82.

²⁹⁹ Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie and the War Years* (Fort Washington, Pennsylvania: Harvest Books 2002), 401; P.M. Zall, “Abe Lincoln Laughing.” From, *The Historian's Lincoln*, edited by Gabor S. Boritt (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 8.

³⁰⁰ George Templeton Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong: Young Man in New York, 1835–1849*, ed. by Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, 2 Vols. (New York, 1952), I: 253; Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House*, 230.

society.³⁰¹ With a prominent upbringing McClellan keenly felt that the former rail-splitter was an inept pick for the presidency. He recorded in his diary that Lincoln “was destitute of refinement - certainly in no sense a gentleman- he was easily wrought upon by the coarse associates whose style of conversation agreed so well with his own.”³⁰²

Salmon Chase, a senator from Ohio and Lincoln's Secretary of the Treasury, was well acquainted with the social mores of both the northwest regions of the country and the northeastern states. But even Chase was initially unaccustomed to Old Abe's informal etiquette. On January 4, 1861, Chase arrived in Springfield in response to an invitation from the newly elected Lincoln. Knowledgeable of proper etiquette for politicians, Chase composed a formal message informing Lincoln of his arrival and his hope to visit him. In polite protocol he waited for a formal response at his inn. Unconcerned with formality, once Lincoln heard of Chase's arrival he eagerly made his way to see him. The disregard to inform Chase of his arrival displayed Lincoln's impulsiveness. Not only was Chase surprised by his indifference to proper protocol when he showed up at his room without warning, he was also struck by his ill-fitting and wrinkled clothes. Even for a western politician from Ohio, who adhered to social regulations that were more laid back than the genteel standards of New York or Washington, Chase was caught off guard by Lincoln's disregard for customs and his careless appearance.³⁰³

Lincoln remained unchanged through his second term as President, amid the constant instruction to refine his outer appearance. In February of 1864, prominent portrait painter Francis Carpenter moved into the White House to paint the President in his natural setting. Born in Syracuse, New York, Carpenter committed his life to painting, a life that brought him into the

³⁰¹ Thomas J. Rowland, "George Brinton McClellan." *Leaders of the American Civil War: A Biographical and Historiographical Dictionary* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), 259.

³⁰² Thomas Keneally, *Lincoln* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 113.

³⁰³ John Niven, *Salmon P. Chase: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 223.

sphere of respectable society. It was in this realm that he became accustomed to the meticulous aspects of refinement. And just as William Howard Russell in 1861, had been disgusted at the sight of Lincoln's "shambling" gait, three years later Carpenter was also repulsed by Lincoln's ungainly and sloppy manner of walking. A proper walking deportment was a telling sign of social rank.³⁰⁴ Their opinion was further shared about Lincoln's poorly kept hair. Carpenter recorded that Lincoln had no concern for his "rough, unmanageable hair." In the six months Carpenter lived at the White House, he often witnessed Lincoln's western habits. He described the President as generally "uncultivated," "simple," and "without polish." Lincoln's casual nature took various forms. "Mr. Lincoln's 'laugh'" Carpenter noted, "stood by itself. The 'neigh' of a wild horse on his native prairie is not more undisguised and hearty." Far removed from the frontier societies he felt comfortable with, Lincoln had to overcome the judgments made of him. The emphasis on outer refinement was something the former rail-splitter was never concerned with. Instead of devoting extensive effort attempting to pass as refined, Lincoln chose to be genuine and sincere. He remained unchanged from years earlier in Illinois. "His habits" Carpenter noted, "continued as simple as when he was a practicing lawyer in Springfield." Carpenter, like many other social elites, witnessed the leadership of Lincoln and found qualities of more significance than external refinement. By the end of his time at the White House, he described Lincoln as a man that was "deep, exact, and strong."³⁰⁵

Two years after Emerson first wrote derogatorily about Lincoln, his view of the President had changed, no longer focusing on appearance or manners. Emerson asked, "Why talk of President Lincoln's equality of manners to the elegant or titled men?" Emerson noted that such

³⁰⁴ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 123, 158.

³⁰⁵ Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House*, 218, 150, 217, 349.

an “upright” man as Lincoln “...has no need to think of his manners or appearance.”³⁰⁶ On May 4, 1865 Emerson honored the recently passed president by writing an article in the *New York Times* exonerating Old Abe's “native” manners and nature as wholly American, without influence from England or France.³⁰⁷ Lincoln’s ability to win the approval of Northern society during the Civil War, even from social elites, altered how Emerson and others evaluated him. Through the adversity of the war, the strong leadership of Lincoln, and the eventual success of the Union Army caused the assumed superiority of the elite classes to be broken down. Lincoln's legacy encouraged new social standards to be based on ability and intelligence, characteristics associated with the interior character of a man; diverging from the social emphasis on exterior refinement. Accordingly, the views Hawthorne, Emerson, Beecher, Strong, and Villard had of Lincoln changed too. They eventually evaluated Lincoln on his true character qualities instead of statically judging him for his coarse external style. And during this time Lincoln hardly changed his dress or improved his etiquette. While Old Abe remained constant it was these men that changed their assessment of Lincoln. They began to evaluate Lincoln on a deeper level than simply the superficial. As a reporter Villard spent time traveling with Lincoln, enabling him to witness various parts of Lincoln’s character that he found admirable. Observing the great responsibility and strain placed on Lincoln during the Civil War, Villard saw him as an admirable leader and politician. Not only did the social elites change their opinion of Lincoln during his presidency, but the North as a whole grew to esteem Lincoln in spite of his surface flaws.³⁰⁸

Public interest in the President’s dress, awkward body control, and poor manners began

³⁰⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. William H. Gilman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 187.

³⁰⁷ Ralph W. Emerson, “Our Late President,” *New York Times*, May 4, 1865.

³⁰⁸ Villard, *Memoirs of Henry Villard*, 2 Vols. I: 28, 93-96.

to dwindle as the Civil War grew in intensity. The extravagance of elegant dress and performance could no longer be afforded when the nation was in a dire struggle for its survival. Money and energy were increasingly being used for the war effort instead of elegant events or for personal appearance. Since the country was preoccupied with more important concerns less scrutiny was given to Old Abe's uncouth appearance and manners. Additionally, it was also a subject that newspapers and communities had exhausted. Now with Lincoln's unrefined appearance and manners being well known and the media more concerned about the war effort, the new perceptions about him went deeper than his dress or awkward demeanor.

In the White House the President was known to seem odd to his staff. It was not only his curious dress that drew attention, it was also his body posture that they found unusual. Richard Henry Dana, a United States Attorney during Lincoln's presidency, noticed that he was "awkward" as Chief of Staff. Dana found him so crude that he compared the President to "a man who has brought in something to sell."³⁰⁹ The daughter of Lincoln's Presidential secretary, Helen Nicolay, claimed, "He was so unconscious of self that not only his mind but his physical frame responded to the emotion of the moment." During long nights studying military information Lincoln was often observed sitting on the very edge of his chair. He sat so far on the edge that it appeared to his staff that his knees touched the ground. His lanky height magnified his awkward body demeanor. His intense concentration on presidential tasks made him unconcerned with how he appeared.³¹⁰

At the White House Lincoln made it a priority to meet with visitors. Hospitable and personable, the President set aside time to sit and chat with guest, a practice he enjoyed.³¹¹

³⁰⁹Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln*, I: 257.

³¹⁰Nicolay, *Lincoln's Secretary*, 101.

³¹¹Berry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 168.

Visitors were consistently unprepared for his casual and jovial nature, especially since they wore formal attire and practiced their best etiquette. Guests often recalled their surprise when Lincoln greeted them informally, typically, while wearing his favorite house slippers.³¹² But his interest in conversation and personal communication often made an impression that surpassed his poor external appearance. *The Washington Reporter* suggested Old Abe's disinterest in a sophisticated facade benefited the public. It observed that the Illinoisan “directed attention to the interest of the people more than to personal aggrandizement.”³¹³

One of his guests was Colonel Silas Burt. Burt, sent to meet Lincoln at the White House on military business, was aghast when he first saw Lincoln. He later recalled, “That pathetic figure has ever remained indelible in my memory.” The shock was a result of Lincoln greeting him with “bowed” form, “hair disheveled,” “no necktie or collar,” and wearing “heelless slippers.”³¹⁴ Noah Brooks, a journalist who became well acquainted with Lincoln during his Presidency, observed Lincoln’s casual demeanor among guests at the White House. Brooks noted that Lincoln’s manners made an immediate impression on visitors. Old Abe's informality was overt, he became almost unconscious of his surroundings while listening to guests in the privacy of his White House office. In this setting his peculiar mannerisms would surface. Frequently he would extend his elbow so that he could lean his face on his hand. Proper company were taken back by his nonchalance. One guest recalled the President's odd mannerism during his visit, “He [Lincoln] was then oblivious to all else and had such times a habit of

³¹² Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, 163-4; *The London Times*, September 4, 1863.

³¹³ *The Washington Reporter*, August 30, 1863.

³¹⁴ Recollections of Colonel Silas W. Burt about Lincoln quoted from Victoria Radford, ed., *Meeting Mr. Lincoln: Firsthand Recollections of Abraham Lincoln by People, Great and Small, Who Met the President* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998), 24.

placing the thumb of his left hand below his chin with his index finger partly curved and extending to his lips, or sometimes laying across them and along the side of his nose.”³¹⁵

Although his guests were startled by Lincoln’s dress, manners, and overall casual nature they generally were delighted with him after their visit. One guest observed that the President’s familiar manner made “strangers feel unconstrained and at ease in his presence.”³¹⁶ Lincoln once told a friend visiting him at the White House, “Now call me Lincoln, and I’ll promise not to tell of the breach of etiquette—if you won’t—and I shall have a resting-spell from ‘Mr. Lincoln.’”³¹⁷ His personable nature extended to everyone regardless of sex or race. In November of 1862, Mary Livermore and Jane Hoge, leaders of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, met Lincoln in the White House to discuss the growing concern they had for keeping Union military camps sufficiently clean and well supplied. The women arrived at the White House formally prepared. Upon being greeted by Lincoln, the women were surprised by his awkward appearance and his obliviousness to proper manners. The women made note that Lincoln treated them personably and sincerely for an hour.³¹⁸ His interest in personal conversation surpassed his poor external appearance with a number of women who met with him. He treated his female guest as cordially as he did his male guest.³¹⁹

More than a year later, in the summer of 1863, Fredrick Douglass met Lincoln at the White House. His concern over how the President would receive him as an African American vanished once he saw the Lincoln. Cordially greeted, Douglass was almost baffled by the reception he received. Years later he wrote about his interaction with Lincoln. “In all my

³¹⁵ Henry Rankin, *Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1916), 323, 374

³¹⁶ Radford, ed., *Meeting Mr. Lincoln*, 36.

³¹⁷ Radford, ed., *Meeting Mr. Lincoln*, 34, 35.

³¹⁸ Donald Winkler, *The Women in Lincoln’s Life* (New York: Rutledge Hill Press, 2001), 156-157.

³¹⁹ Wendy Hamand Venet, *A strong-Minded Woman: The Life of Mary Livermore* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 82-83; Mrs. Anna Byers-Jennings Account of meeting Lincoln from Radford, edited, *Meeting Mr. Lincoln*, 84-85.

interviews with Mr. Lincoln,” Douglas noted, “I was impressed with his entire freedom from popular prejudice against the colored race.”³²⁰ Lincoln’s affection was also felt by Sojourner Truth, a seminal African American abolitionist and woman’s rights activist. In 1864 after a visit with the president, Sojourner Truth declared, “I am proud to say, that I have never was treated by any one with more kindness and cordiality than was shown me by the great and good man.”³²¹ Without pretentious procedures Lincoln displayed his general fondness for people by treating them casually and sincerely.

Henry W. Knight also found Lincoln unusual. Soon after Knight enlisted in the military he found himself assigned guard duty in Washington. Serving at the War Department Knight frequently saw Lincoln visiting at all hours of the day, especially late at night, to study military strategy. He recalled that the President would often wear a "shockingly bad hat," and carry a ragged umbrella. But what struck Knight was Old Abe’s pleasant nature. When Lincoln walked by him he would always greet him with a “good evening,” and occasionally he would initiate a brief conversation. One evening Lincoln entered into the War Department where Knight was standing guard and stopped. Two axes placed on the wall in case of a fire caught Lincoln’s attention. He asked Knight, "I wonder if I could lift one of those axes up by the end of the handle?" Then Lincoln took the axe from the wall and, according to Knight, “laying the heavy end on the floor, he commenced raising it till he held it out at arm's length, and kept it there several seconds.” After this display of strength Lincoln asked Knight if he would like to attempt the same feat, but Knight was unable to lift the axe by the handle. After the macho challenge Knight endearingly recalled the lighthearted conversation that followed. While caught up in the moment with Knight, Old Abe was unconscious of proper social decorum for a president. By not

³²⁰ Allen Thorndike Rice, *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of his Time* (New York: North American Publishing Company, 1886), 319-323.

³²¹ Radford, ed., *Meeting Mr. Lincoln*, 104.

being limited with certain refined regulations Lincoln was able to uninhibitedly commune with those he crossed paths with.³²²

During the war Lincoln frequently spent time away from Washington visiting military camps. These visits enabled more men outside of Washington to view and meet the President. Soldiers were not inclined to notice the refined characteristics that were conspicuous to the elegantly trained. As a result soldiers typically did not make note of Old Abe's lack of refined sensibilities, though many soldiers found Lincoln's mannerisms and dress awkward they generally had deeper, multifaceted impressions of him. Unlike Lincoln's presidential campaign in 1860 and his train journey to Washington in February of 1861, when the public was in a frenzy over his outer appearance, those in the military noted more of Lincoln's abilities and leadership qualities than his refinement.

On April 30, 1861, early in the war, a Union officer named Robert Shaw met Lincoln. He later wrote in a letter about this encounter. "It is easy" Shaw contended, "to see why he is so popular with all who came in contact with him. His voice is very pleasant and though to be sure we were there a few moments, I didn't hear anything like a Western twang or slang in him. He gives you the impression of being a gentleman."³²³ A month later another Union soldier named Patrick Guiney also described his meeting Lincoln in a letter. He wrote, "I had the honor of conversing with 'Old Abe' himself." Secretary of State Seward was also present, but he only shook hands with Guiney. The more refined and reserved Seward was molded from the traditional standard of conduct for social elites, causing him to remain more aloof around social inferiors. By not being too cordial with soldiers Seward reinforced his superiority. Lincoln was

³²² Henry W. Knight, "Personal recollections of Abraham Lincoln" accessed from William Hayes Ward, *Abraham Lincoln: Tributes from his Associates, Reminiscences of Soldiers* (New York: Thomas Crowell and Company, 1895), 188-190.

³²³ Robert Gould Shaw, *Blue-Eyed Child of Fortune: The Civil War Letters of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw*, edited by Russell Duncan (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 91.

unconscious and unconcerned with what his interaction would imply to refined society or whether his interaction would give soldiers the impression that they were his social equals. Further along in the letter Guiney observed, "President Lincoln is a man of considerable western intellect but he is ten times a homelier man than I expected he was."³²⁴ Although Guiney did comment on Lincoln back-country sensibilities, contrary to Shaw's observation, it was after first noting his thoughts about Lincoln's other qualities. Among soldiers there appeared to be a general esteem for the President because Lincoln took time to converse and mingle with them on his visit to military camps. Connecting on a personal level with people was an attribute Lincoln practiced his whole life, but it was often overshadowed by the startling first impression he made. After encountering Lincoln, one soldier perceptively recorded in his diary, "The president is a representative in all points of the tastes, manners, ideas, and capacities of the American people... 'internally and externally.'"³²⁵

Lincoln's behavior and conversation with his common constituents was not recommended by the etiquette manuals', but he was sincere in the way he interacted with people. By failing to heed the chief principles of refinement and being inattentive to the exterior person the President generally felt uninhibited with guests. Strict rules about how to converse and treat guests were provided in Cecil B. Hartley's *The Gentlemen's Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness*. The manual lists 100 rules that should govern interaction with others. The detail and depth of the instruction was debilitating to personable conversations, especially between men of different social rank. Constant evaluations of the proper etiquette rules occupy the performer's

³²⁴ Patrick R. Guiney, *Commanding Boston's Irish Ninth: The Civil War Letters of Colonel Patrick R. Guiney Ninth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 12-13.

³²⁵ "Personal Recollections of the War." *Harpers New Monthly Magazine* 36 (New York: Harper and Brothers, May 1868), 570.

mind.³²⁶ Other antebellum manuals also gave similar instructions -instructions that were repeated from earlier writings on gentility.³²⁷ By not performing in a refined manner Lincoln connected with his guest sincerely, without the impersonal direction of etiquette manuals.

But by 1862, amid the harsh judgment of Lincoln's lack of refinement some opinions were beginning to change, even in England. During his second year as President the public began to peel the superficial layers away from Old Abe. Looking passed his uncouth dress the public began to notice character qualities of the President. Historian John C. Waugh contends "nobody ever visited him [Lincoln] without coming out with an unforgettable memory of him."³²⁸ The ability to connect and understand other people was a gift Lincoln had. Although he lacked the social refinement of the traditional gentleman, he exuded an interior sense of elegance.

³²⁶ Cecil B. Hartley, *The Gentlemen's Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness* (Boston: G.W. Cottrell, 1860), 186-216.

³²⁷ Count Alfred D'orsay, *Etiquette; or, a Guide to The usages of society with a Glance at Bad Habits* (New York: Wilson, 1843), 32.

³²⁸ John C. Waugh, *Reelecting Lincoln: the battle for the 1864 presidency* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2001), 80.

Chapter 6

THE FORMER RAIL-SPITTER'S LEGACY TO REFINED SOCIETY

Lincoln's Funeral

Unlike the presidential election of 1860, the 1864 election lacked as much enthusiasm. Overshadowed by the Civil War, the election did not spark the public's curiosity. This was largely because the country was already acquainted with the former rail-splitter who sparked the public's interest four years prior. By 1864, Lincoln had gained more regard among social elites, even with his lack of refined sensibilities. With a Union victory looming closer the general public approval of Lincoln was rising.

The country's relationship with Lincoln took a drastic change in April of 1865. As the Union raised the Stars and Stripes in the Confederate capital of Richmond, it appeared the national turmoil was winding down. Five days after the Union officially achieved victory, Lincoln and Mary Todd made plans to attend Ford's Theater. Interestingly, the First Family had difficulty finding guests to accompany them. A number of couples refused the Lincoln's request due largely to their annoyance with Mary Todd. Although the President was noted for his careless manners and uninhibited nature, it was the genteelly trained Mary Todd who annoyed their potential guests. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and his wife, General Grant and his wife, General Isham Nicholas Haynie, Illinois Governor Richard Oglesby, William Howard (a Detroit postmaster), William Wallace (governor of Idaho territory) and his wife all declined the invitation. Finally Clara Harris (daughter of a New York Senator) and her stepbrother Major

Henry R. Rathbone accepted the First Family's invitation.³²⁹ At Ford's Theater the well documented events of Lincoln's death unfolded. Lincoln was shot and died.

Once the news of Lincoln's death circulated mourners began to congregate around the White House. On April 18, the late President's body was prepared for an open viewing in the East Room of the White House. Thousands of people poured into the White House to view the body. The scene was later described in print; "Every class, race and condition of society was represented in the throng of mourners, and the sad tears and farewells of whites and blacks were mingled by the coffin of him to whom humanity was everywhere the same." During the funeral procession at the White House *The New York Times* reported, "The most touching exhibitions of sorrow were made by many whose dress marked them as of the poorer classes of society." The lower classes felt they had a president that truly embodied them, without abandoning his common character, manners, and dress as President. Expressing the deepest sorrow, this group, comprised of farmers and common laborers felt they lost the most. The *Daily Milwaukee News* noted, "A very common remark" at the White House that day was "[h]e was the poor man's friend."³³⁰

After his death the former rail-splitter was not remembered for his awkward manners and slovenly dress, but was often commended for his "simple" or "common" demeanor. It was not the absence of refinement that was admired, but the informal, welcoming characteristics of his unassuming habits and appearance. In the memorializing of his life the late President was collectively considered a gentleman, even by elite society. Poetry commemorating his life was published. Poet Richard Henry Stoddard wrote "An Horatian Ode." The poem described the late

³²⁹ David Donald. *Lincoln* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 594.

³³⁰ William T. Coggeshall, *Lincoln Memorial. The Journeys of Abraham Lincoln* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State Journal, 1865), 111; *Daily Milwaukee News*, April 19, 1865; "The Assassination," *New York Times*, April 19, 1865.

President as having “rustic manners, —speech uncouth,” and that he was, “[n]o gentleman like Washington.” It then transitioned to reveal that the former rail-splitter’s uncouth qualities were formative for him to gain greater virtues. The poet asserted that unlike, “The proudest in the purple born” and the “grandly borne” Lincoln epitomized all that was “The just, the wise, the brave.”³³¹ Similarly, Illinois Senator Richard J. Oglesby declared in honor of the late President, “Lincoln had many advantages to fit him for his great work.” Explaining that he was able to succeed because his “habits were unexceptionably good;” habits Lincoln cultivated while living “among the common people.”³³²

The depiction of Lincoln after his death in 1865 was a sharp contrast from his first presidential campaign in 1860. His humble origins were a source of scrutiny from refined audiences, but after his death it became a basis for his adoration. In 1860, the *Staunton Spectator*, a Democratic newspaper, wrote, “Mr. Lincoln has no elements of popularity and certainly no special qualifications for the office,” either in “his associations or correct in his moral habits.”³³³ The progression from being sneered at by pretentious social elites to gaining their esteem was a gradual development during the four years the Illinoisan was in the White House. Almost two weeks after his assassination *The New York Times* published an article entitled “President Lincoln's Life and Its Lessons.” The editorial valued how the late President had lived, and advocated for future generations to learn from it. It esteemed Lincoln as a gentleman, not only in virtue, but also in his simple demeanor.³³⁴ *The New York Herald* similarly valorized Lincoln for his plain characteristics. A day after his assassination it commemorated him as a “plain,

³³¹ Richard Henry Stoddard, “An Horatian Ode.” Quoted in, *Poetical Tributes to the Memory of Abraham Lincoln* (Philadelphia: J.B Lippincott Company. 1865), 29-35.

³³² John Carrol Power, *Abraham Lincoln: His Life, Public Services, Death and Great Funeral Cortège* (Chicago: H. W. Rokker, 1889), 212.

³³³ *Staunton Spectator* [Virginia], May 22, 1860.

³³⁴ “President Lincoln's Life and Its Lessons,” *New York Times*, May 1, 1865.

unpretending man” that “exhibited a breadth of sagacity.” The article then confessed that his casual plainness in appearance and dress was “perplexing to politicians.”³³⁵ A eulogy essay by Charles Henry Hart honestly stated that he was “not especially attentive to dress.” “The formal politeness of fashionable life he had not.” But, Hart then clarified that “the gentleness of the unspoiled child of nature he had.”³³⁶ Less than a year after Lincoln’s death George Bancroft gave a memorial address on Lincoln's life to both houses of Congress. He declared, “Lincoln was one of the most unassuming of men. His conduct and manners showed more than ever his belief that all men are born equal. He was no respecter of persons, and neither rank nor reputation. In judging of character he failed in discrimination.”³³⁷ Before gentlemen of great influence and social rank, Bancroft implored Lincoln's egalitarian sensibilities. Unlike other gentlemen, these qualities came naturally to Lincoln and after his death they were widely revered.

The North mourned the deceased president. Churches were filled across the Union for services commemorating Lincoln. Both urban and rural areas across the North communities shared in memorializing the assassinated President. In New York copies of Lincoln’s second inaugural address and music sheets, which accompanied his funeral in Washington, sold rapidly. Pictures of Lincoln grew in demand, just like they had during the summer of 1860. Many cities set aside a day to stop business out of respect. The governor of Massachusetts even declared the first day in June to be a day of fasting for the state to mourn the death. Even plans to erect statues

³³⁵ “Our Dead President and Our Living President,” *New York Herald*, April 16, 1865.

³³⁶ Charles Henry Hart essay on Lincoln accessed from Andrew Boyd, *A Memorial Lincoln Bibliography* (Albany, New York: Dirketory, 1870), 21.

³³⁷ George Bancroft, *Memorial Address on the Life and Character of Abraham Lincoln: Delivered in the House of Representatives on the 12th of February, 1866* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), 45.

of the martyred President were being made within weeks after his death.³³⁸ Everywhere in the North there were displays of admiration for the former rail-splitter.³³⁹

In order to bury the late President in his hometown of Springfield, and to let the nation's people pay their last respects, arrangements were made for Lincoln's body to travel by train through major Northern cities. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton organized the logistics of the funeral procession and utilized the military for the construction of the train and to gain access to the railroads.³⁴⁰ More than four years prior Lincoln traveled through many of the same cities going to Washington as the President-elect. Pittsburgh and Cincinnati were the major cities excluded from the funeral trip that Lincoln stopped at in 1860. It was arranged for the train to travel 1,627 miles, weaving in and out of large Northern cities.³⁴¹ Newspapers frequently documented the train's procession, just as they had done when he was first elected president. In 1860, observers looked on with curiosity and fascination, receiving Old Abe differently in the Northwestern states than the polished Northeastern ones. But in 1865, unlike his first reception, he was heralded unanimously as a hagiographic figure; beloved by all in the Northeast and Northwest. This time his lack of refinement was not seen as a flaw by the social elites.³⁴²

On April 21, the funeral train departed Washington. On the first day of the journey from Washington to Harrisburg, the *Syracuse Daily Courier and Union* reported about the diversity of people who gathered along the route. "At Phenix, a factory village 20 miles from Baltimore," the paper noted, "some of the more notable and affecting scenes were of exceedingly plain and poorly dressed men and women at different places on the route with handkerchiefs at their eyes

³³⁸ "The National Lincoln Monument Completion of the Bronze Statue," *New York Times*, July 13, 1872.

³³⁹ "The Burial: President Lincoln Again at His Western Home," *New York Times*, May 5, 1865; *Iowa State Weekly Register*, April 26, 1865; *The Davenport Daily Gazette*, April 19, 1865; "Classified Ad 20," *New York Times*, April 19, 1865; Power, *Abraham Lincoln*, 131; *New York Times*, April 22, 1865; *Dubuque Democratic Herald*, April 22, 1865; *Burlington Weekly Hawk Eye*, April 22, 1865.

³⁴⁰ Scott D. Trostel, *The Lincoln Funeral Train* (Fletcher, Ohio: Cam-Tech Publishing, 2002), 16-18.

³⁴¹ Trostel, *The Lincoln Funeral Train*, 206.

³⁴² *Ibid*, 38.

with the appearance of weeping.”³⁴³ About twenty–five miles further across the border at a small town in Pennsylvania *The New York Herald* noticed a peculiar scene: “The commonly dressed laborers stood beside the well dressed citizen, and black and white formed an interesting group. The gloom produced by the death for the time leveled all distinctions.”³⁴⁴ It was the deep adoration people had for Lincoln that united them from various social ranks and races to assemble next to one another. It was as though social distinction disappeared for those lining the route. Just as Lincoln had lived his life in a way that was noted for equal treatment, most of the crowds that congregated did not ostracize anyone. On April 22, a eulogy speaker in Lowell, Massachusetts said, “The charmed cord by which he attached all to him who enjoyed his acquaintance even in the slightest degree, was the absence of all pretension in manners, conversation or personal appearance.” He further stated that Lincoln “accorded to every one who approached him, whatever his business or station in life, such hearing and attention as circumstances permitted. For himself he asked nothing of the nature of personal consideration.”³⁴⁵

From Harrisburg the train departed to Philadelphia and then to New York City. At every stop throngs of people gathered, mourning and paying homage to the assassinated president.³⁴⁶ During the evening of the 22nd, the train pulled into Philadelphia, where Lincoln's casket was taken to Independence Hall. From the late night of the 22nd into the early morning of the 23rd, mourners poured into the historic building to see their slain President. The crowd was so large at one point that the line to enter the Hall extended three miles. The excitement lasted until the train

³⁴³ *Syracuse Daily Courier and Union*, April 22, 1865.

³⁴⁴ “The Funeral Train: Along The Route,” *New York Herald*, April 22, 1865.

³⁴⁵ George S. Boutwell, *Eulogy on the Death of Abraham Lincoln: Delivered Before the City Council and Citizens of Lowell At Huntington Hall, April 19th, 1865* (Lowell: Stone And Huse. 1865), 12.

³⁴⁶ *Syracuse Daily Courier And Union*, April 25, 1865.

left for New York City on the 24th.³⁴⁷ At New York, the normally bustling city sat quiet. Work was suspended for the day as an act of respect. Everywhere the former President's casket traveled crowds of respectful mourners eagerly observed it. *The New York Times* recorded that "it was generally remarked that a more well-behaved, quiet or more orderly assemblage was never seen in the State of New York." Once the casket arrived in the city, it was taken to City Hall where the public could pay its last respects to the former rail-splitter. It was estimated that 150,000 mourners passed by Lincoln's body in New York.³⁴⁸ Controversially people of "color" were not allowed to view Lincoln's open casket. But they mourned in the crowded streets despite the discrimination.³⁴⁹

The general fame of the late president was evident in newspapers. In late April, while the casket was traveling across the Appalachians and through the Midwest, reports surfaced of people being chastised for reacting with pleasure at Lincoln's death. In Swampscott, Massachusetts, George Stone was tarred and feathered for cheering after hearing of Lincoln's death. And *Janesville Daily Gazette* reported, "Major Otis Wright, of Lowell Superintendent of the Middlesex Horse railroad, narrowly escaped hanging for expressing joy at Mr. Lincoln's death." Wright was given fifteen minutes to leave the town and never return.³⁵⁰ In Galesburg, Iowa, a man boarded a train headed for Burlington. It was reported that the traveler commented to a man sitting near him, "Booth was deserving of every honest man's gratitude for killing Lincoln." For this blasphemy the man was seized, dragged from his seat, and, according to *The Burlington Weekly Hawk Eye*, received a "tremendous beating." The newspaper also mentioned

³⁴⁷ Trostel, *The Lincoln Funeral Train*, 71-73.

³⁴⁸ Trostel, *The Lincoln Funeral Train*, 86.

³⁴⁹ "Honors to the Martyr President: Arrival in the Metropolis," *New York Times*, April 25, 1865; *Syracuse Daily Courier And Union*, April 26, 1865; Power, *Abraham Lincoln*, 142.

³⁵⁰ *Janesville Daily Gazette*, April 26, 1865.

that an Iowa woman was publicly scorned for waving her hat after hearing of Lincoln's death, despite her insistence that the report was false.³⁵¹

The authority to confront anyone who blasphemed Lincoln empowered the lower classes of society. Confronting anyone who slandered Lincoln's name, regardless of social rank, was justified, even a superintendent of a railroad company was banished from his city for his negative comments of the former president. The great regard for Old Abe was generally felt in the North. Respectable procedures of refinement were an afterthought to the crowds that thronged the train carrying Lincoln's casket at each stop along the 1,654 mile journey.³⁵² An egalitarian manner, as reflected in Lincoln's own life, swept the North upon his death; people of every social rank, both common and elite, found attributes of Lincoln admirable.

As the train traveled west, tens of thousands came to see Lincoln at every major stop.³⁵³ In Indiana and Illinois dedicated crowds congregated at rail stations. Thousands of people sung hymns and held torches through the night as the casket rested in the train near them. When the train passed, people of all ages and social standing waved flags, handkerchiefs, while others sang. When the train arrived in Springfield, thousands came to Lincoln's hometown to mourn; some came all the way from the east coast to see him laid to rest. The *New York Times* estimated that millions arrived, either viewing his casket or grieving him as his train passed. Although it is difficult to know how many people were at each city at which the funeral train stopped, every destination along the trip was brimming with mourners. And of those that attended the

³⁵¹ *Burlington Weekly Hawk Eye*, April 29, 1865.

³⁵² Michael Burlingame, *Lincoln: A Life*, 2 Vols. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), II: 822.

³⁵³ "Obsequies," *New York Times*, April 29, 1865.

processions it was observed, “All classes, without distinction of politics or creeds, spontaneously united in the posthumous honors.”³⁵⁴

On April 26, the *New York Times* published an article entitled, “Is President Lincoln a Martyr?”³⁵⁵ The public response quickly affirmed that society believed that the assassinated president was one. Memorial speeches championed him as “[t]he savior of his country, the martyr for American liberty.”³⁵⁶ Addresses across the North described him in hagiographic language. It appeared that he not only fought for the country to remain intact, he made the ultimate sacrifice for it. Churches also memorialized the martyred President. At a service in a Detroit, Michigan church, the pastor, Augustan G. Hibbard stated, “I sincerely believe that America never saw his superior as statesman and ruler.”³⁵⁷ Eulogies were organized across the North in churches and other venues.³⁵⁸ On the first anniversary of Lincoln's passing, James Garfield spoke in Congress, furthering the impression that the late president was a martyr.³⁵⁹ Stirred by the death, public plans developed for monuments of Lincoln.³⁶⁰

Lincoln's significance during his Presidency is most apparent by how he was mourned. People regardless of social rank, color, or sex mourned him in the North. But it was the laboring class that felt the loss the most. Unlike prior presidents Lincoln truly personified the common

³⁵⁴ “The Presidents Obsequies: Mr. Lincoln Again at Home,” *New York Times*, May 4, 1865; “The Burial: President Lincoln Again at His Western Home,” *New York Times*, May 5, 1865, 1; “The Presidents Obsequies,” From the *Boston Journal* reprinted in, *New York Times*, May 1, 1865.

³⁵⁵ “Is President Lincoln a Martyr?” *New York Times*, April 26, 1865; “The Assassination of the President,” *New York Times*, May 8, 1865; “The Death of President Lincoln,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1865.

³⁵⁶ Charles Ellis, *The Memorial Address on Abraham Lincoln, Delivered at the Hall of the Mechanic's Institute, June 1, 1865* (New York: McMillan, 1865), 31.

³⁵⁷ Augustine George Hibbard, *In Memory of Abraham Lincoln: A Discourse Delivered in the First Congregation Unitarian Church in Detroit Michigian* (Detroit: Gulley's Stream, 1865), 6.

³⁵⁸ James Willis Patterson, *Memorial Address on the Life and Character of Abraham Lincoln: Delivered at Concord, New Hampshire, June 1, 1865* (Concord, New Hampshire: Cogswell and Sturtevant, 1865), 15.

³⁵⁹ James Garfield, *The Works of James Abram Garfield*, 2 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1882), I: 202; William Andres Snively, *Memorial Sermon and Address on the Death of President Lincoln: St. Andrew's Church, Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: Haven, 1865), 6-9; Erastus Otis Haven, *Memorial Proceedings in Honor of the Lamented President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln: Held in Ann Arbor, Michigan* (Ann Arbor: Peninsular Courier Office, 1865), 3-8.

³⁶⁰ “Article 4,” *New York Times*, June 12, 1866.

man. It was for this reason that Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, noted that “there were no truer mourners, when all were sad, than the poor colored people who crowded the streets.”³⁶¹ His life was celebrated so passionately because he came from, and displayed in himself, the low and humble, instead of the high and elite.³⁶² As a result, the late President steadily developed into a legendary figure, an American icon.

Lincoln and the White House after His Death

The social scene of Washington was deeply affected by Lincoln’s Presidency and remained altered after his death. Lincoln’s casual civility devoid of English genteel culture left an intrinsically American precedence that affected future presidency. The clearest evidence of his impact was on the receptions at the White House during and after his Presidency. As President, he had a social obligation to periodically hold levees. These social events were the pinnacle of elite society. But once in office, he veered away from the elaborate courtly White House receptions and turned them into casual gatherings for every social class. Abandoning traditional standards, he changed the exclusive social scene for one that was more receptive to non-elites.

Before the 1860s, presidential levees held to a strict standard of refined elegance, mimicking the gentility of English courtly life. The levees in Washington served as the standard for what constituted polished manners and fashionable appearance for elites around the country. In 1853, President Millard Fillmore held the customary New Year’s Day reception at the White House for exclusive guests. The function was a display of elegant manners and decorum; it

³⁶¹ Gideon Welles diary entry on April 19, 1865, from Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson* 2 Vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), II: 293.

³⁶² Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, 156.

embodied the essence of refinement.³⁶³ Lincoln's presidency marked a transition away from previous presidential social customs. The throngs of people who poured into the White House on the night of Lincoln's first reception changed levees into an event that welcomed diverse classes of people.

The first levee of a president's term was an exclusive occasion in Washington and a much anticipated tradition. In 1857, four years prior to Lincoln's first term, President James Buchanan hosted his inaugural levee. A *New York Times* reporter observed, "Every one you met was superbly attired" at the reception. It was a formal occasion celebrated by the socially refined. "Every observance," the *Times* continued, "which taste and good feeling could desire was obeyed with the instincts and impulses of good breeding." The article continued by claiming the event "was a display of democratic elegance and gracefulness of which any country, or nation or court in the world might feel proud." For the occasion Buchanan appeared in elegant dress and he performed as a complete gentleman in his manners.

Although the initial levee introducing the president to the city was open to the general public, only the social elites between the presidencies of William Henry Harrison and Lincoln regularly attended the event.³⁶⁴ It was humiliating for anyone to attend that was not familiar with the expected social decorum. During the last levee in honor of President Buchanan in early 1860, a man became the victim of the exclusivity of refined sensibility. At the event a guest arrived in rugged clothing and treated the other refined guests in a very informal and welcoming manner, breaking the prescribed code of conduct. It became apparent to the rest of the gentlemen in attendance that the brash guest was from a northwestern region of the county. Guilty of

³⁶³ "Washington City on New Year's Day: Presidential Levee," *Arthur's Home Magazine* 1 (Philadelphia: T.S. Arthur, 1853), 386.

³⁶⁴ Esther Singleton, *The Story of The White House*, 2 Vols. (New York: The McClure Company, 1907), I: 287.

breaking the rules of refined etiquette, the uncouth westerner was notified that he must leave the reception. The reason for his dismissal was that he was not attired in “court-dress or military uniform.”³⁶⁵ The exclusive former presidential levees were starkly different from the receptions in Lincoln's White House.

Towards the end of Lincoln's life White House receptions were widely attended in Washington. On January 1, 1865, the White House was full during one of the most popular social events in the county. The New Year's Day reception was the largest levee during Lincoln's Presidency. With the Civil War coming to an end and his second inaugural promisingly near, there was good reason for the people in Washington to celebrate. Just like Old Abe's first reception at the White House on March 6, 1861, the scene at the mansion was a mix of established gentlemen, middling, and lower classes. Standing at the entrance of the White House, Lincoln cordially greeted all of his guests by shaking their hand. He shook so many hands that the next day he his right shoulder was swollen. One observer recalled that the day after the reception “he could scarcely use his arm for a few days.”³⁶⁶ The Illinoisan greeted his guest wearing the same style of formal outfit the State Department had sent him in 1862, exactly three years prior for the same New Year's levee. He wore white gloves and a formal black suit –which was considered by all standards formal attire. But despite his elegant dress Lincoln failed to seem natural or graceful. He wore the outfit awkwardly and his hair was uncombed. A woman with discerning taste recalled him at the 1865 New Year's levee as having “no elegance about him,” and “no elegance in him.”³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ Singleton, *The Story of The White House*, I: 58.

³⁶⁶ *The Adams Sentinel*, January 5, 1864.

³⁶⁷ William Charles Harris, *Lincoln's Last Months* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2004), 57-59; Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles*, 2 Vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), II: 407; Agnes Elisabeth Winona, *Ten Years of My Life* (New York: Worthington, 1877), 45.

The casual nature of this event was characteristic of the former rail-splitter. It was observed at the 1865 New Year's levee that the few of foreign guests present referred to the President as "your Excellency," and the American guests would simply call him "Mr. President" or "Mr. Lincoln." The absence of a formal dress requirement was welcomed by the public as an invitation to swarm the White House. Soldiers came in their battle-worn uniforms to meet Old Abe. Just like the crowds, security at the levee was also casual; streets outside the presidential mansion and the long line of guests entering were not monitored by guards. Gideon Welles thought that "a little more system at the white house would improve matters." Such a democratic array naturally led to a certain amount of excitement and disorder among the visitors.³⁶⁸

During the reception, a significant scene of democratic equality transpired. Four African Americans were among the huge line of visitors that greeted the president and celebrated the New Year. The news of the first African Americans to celebrate a levee at the White House was telegraphed around the country. *The Washington Chronicle* declared, "Years ago had a colored man presented himself at the White House, at the President's levee, seeking an introduction... he would have been, in all probability, roughly handled for his imprudence."³⁶⁹ Others found this news disconcerting. The *Dubuque Democrat Herald* of Ohio used racial epithets to express its anger over the situation. Upset with the President, the newspaper claimed that the typical "darkie" appears "more like gentlemen than he ever does."³⁷⁰ Despite the pressure placed on the Illinoisan throughout his presidency to present and perform like his political associates, he displayed little or no change. His first levee, just like his last, revealed that his nonchalant presentation of himself remained unaffected by the social pressures of the presidency.

³⁶⁸ "News From Washington," *New York Times*, January 3, 1864; Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles*, 2 Vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), II: 219.

³⁶⁹ *Janesville Daily Gazette*, January 5, 1864.

³⁷⁰ *Dubuque Democratic Herald*, January 5, 1864.

Following Lincoln's death, it was noted that traditionally elegant Washington events veered away from being pretentious or exclusive, the type that had traditionally taken place before the former rail-splitter entered the White House.³⁷¹ New Year's events at the White House were gradually called less ostentatious titles like, "event" or "reception" under the presidencies of Johnson, Grant, and Hayes. And after Lincoln's presidency, dress requirements were abolished at levees. In 1867, two years after Lincoln's death, the *New York Times* featured an article observing the decline of pretentious elite standards. It contended that the people who believed the etiquette manuals description of Washington etiquette were being "misled" because the "grandeur of fashionable life" was a "myth." It continued, "When people obey the common-sense dictates of civilization and ordinary politeness, they fulfill all the requirements of 'Washington etiquette.'" Men wearing "rough cloth" and stomping around coarsely in cowhide-boots were accepted "even when mixed up in a crowd of spruce men, delicate ladies, or distinguished officers and civilians." According to the article, all that was required were for guest to "preserve good order." It claimed, "All classes of people attend these levees."³⁷²

Lincoln's second Vice-President, Andrew Johnson, carried on Old Abe's tradition of making the White House a welcoming place for all classes of society. Though Johnson displayed himself with a polished appearance, he also imitated how Lincoln treated the lower classes hospitably. Before his political career Johnson became familiar with refined sensibilities by working as a tailor. As President he was thoroughly attuned to the latest clothing fashions for gentlemen and his dress displayed that, but he did not exclude himself from interacting with the white laborers.³⁷³ Instead, he followed in Lincoln's example and opened the White House to

³⁷¹ *The Indiana Progress*, April 5, 1877; *The New York Times*, January 31, 1867.

³⁷² "Fashionable Life at the Capital," *New York Times*, January 31, 1867.

³⁷³ Hans L. Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1989), 24-27, 34.

white males regardless of social rank.³⁷⁴ The *New York Times* asserted that there was little difference between how Lincoln and Johnson made themselves available to all who visited them at the White House.³⁷⁵ On February 27, 1866, Johnson held his first presidential reception. He stood at the entrance of the presidential mansion, where an enormous line had formed, shaking hands with everyone. His first few receptions at the White House were similar, they were swarmed with people from every social rank, although African Americans were excluded. During Johnson's second White House reception on March 26, Esther Singleton's *The Story of the White House* professed, "Aristocracy and democracy were alike represented."³⁷⁶

As president, Ulysses S. Grant continued to open the White House to every social rank. By winning the November, 1868 election Grant proved pivotal in determining whether the egalitarian precedents Lincoln set would last. Although Grant was noted for his informal style as a general, it was not clear when he took the presidency if he would uphold a refined social standard for manners and appearances or follow Lincoln's simple demeanor. The first anticipated social event for President Grant was his Inaugural Ball on March 6, 1869. Although the crowd fit tightly into the reception hall, it was noted that those in attendance displayed an elegance both in their manners and appearance. The audience as a whole was described by a *New York Times* reporter as being "intelligent looking" and behaving in a way that reflected "good breeding."³⁷⁷ Even though the event was exclusively attended by social elites, future events in Grant's honor would be more mixed.

A few days after the ball, Grant and his wife moved into the White House. On the day reserved for the traditional first reception welcoming the President, Grant canceled the event

³⁷⁴ Seale, *The President's House: A History*, 421

³⁷⁵ Cymon, "From Washington," *New York Times*, January 22, 1866.

³⁷⁶ Singleton, *The Story of the White House*, II: 106-109; *The Western Mirror* [Cambridge City, Indiana], March 1, 1866.

³⁷⁷ "WASHINGTON," *New York Times*, March 7, 1869.

only a few hours before it was to start, claiming that both he and his wife were fatigued. This came as a surprise to many in Washington, especially the large crowd along the street waiting to enter the White House.³⁷⁸ It was not until early April that Grant opened up the White House for the first reception. On April 6, a swarm of people filled the White House. Despite the Inaugural Ball being almost exclusively attended by social elites, the scene at the White House was remarkably similar to Lincoln's levees. There were "few gentlemen" present and "little formality" was performed. The *New York Times* also observed that there was "an absence of stiffness," implying that the horde of people were very casual and uninhibited with the motion of their body. Not only was the crowd common in their speech, dress, and manners, but Grant and his Presidential cabinet also interacted casually with the guests.³⁷⁹

Grant's presidential levees at the White House followed the precedent left by Old Abe. *The New York Herald* noted, "There are no prescribed rules of etiquette or dress imposed upon visitors at the President's levees, except decency." Like Lincoln, Grant wore gloves and a suit but he was not considered elegant in appearance by refined standards. There was nothing about Grant's appearance that displayed superiority to the guests from lower classes. As president he did not change his casual disposition. Visitors who saw him at the White House found him simple in his demeanor and appearance.³⁸⁰

In 1873, an Ohio newspaper recalled how elaborate the New Year's Day levee at the White House had been in the first half of the nineteenth-century. It recounted how men and women would arrive in their best attire and pay scrupulous attention to their manners.

Comparing these earlier New Year's levees to those of the Grant administration the paper

³⁷⁸ *Herald And Torch Light*, March 10, 1869.

³⁷⁹ "Washington," *New York Times*, April 7, 1869; *The Coshocton Democrat*, March 16, 1864; *Weekly Gazette And Free Press*, January 8, 1864; *Janesville Daily Gazette*, January 5, 1864.

³⁸⁰ "The President's Levees," *New York Herald*, February 21, 1870; "General Grant," *Algona Upper Des Moines*, March 13, 1872; "Gen. Grant," *New York Times*, January 2, 1869.

proclaimed, “But now we may go in visiting with costume, elaborate or plain, for etiquette makes no requirements beyond the reach of the most moderate of circumstances and humble tastes.” The event was no longer exclusively for social elites. Anyone who wished to approach the president could, including “high and low, the rich man and the beggar.” Lifting the restrictions that prohibited equal access was seen as a victory for the common man. By the 1870s the possibility for self-made-men to follow in the footsteps of Lincoln was encouraged.³⁸¹

The White House developing into a model of democracy among whites created mixed reactions in the mid-1860s and 1870s. In much of the rural North the absence of pretentious barriers segregating social classes was seen as progress. On January 9, 1875, the *Janesville Gazette* of Wisconsin claimed that by the White House events abandoning dress and etiquette requirements “we have improved on former fashions.” A shift away from using etiquette manuals towards a more inclusive form of social decorum had taken place by the mid to late 1860s. During antebellum America the implications of appearance –style and presentation of dress, grooming, elegant body control, and etiquette- were deemed indicators of character qualities and morality.³⁸² Social rank had been worn on the sleeve, but as society changed in the 1860s worth was increasingly based on qualities not associated with personal appearance. The *Logansport Weekly Journal* of Indiana published an article entitled, “Good Manners,” on May 17, 1873. It declared that respecting men, regardless of social ranks, was “as essential as the basis of good manners”³⁸³ After Lincoln’s death there emerged an interest in abolishing the rigid standards of refinement. Many found value in qualities that could be obtainable by everyone, not excluded for only just the wealthy or well-bred.

³⁸¹ *Janesville Gazette*, January 9, 1875.

³⁸² Alfred D'orsay. *Etiquette: Or, A Guide to the Usages of Society, With a Glance at Bad Habits* (New York: Wilson Company, 1843), 23; Robert De Valcourt, *The Illustrated Manners Book: A Manual of Good Behavior and Polite Accomplishments* (New York: Leland Clay Company, 1855), 31, 453.

³⁸³ “Good Manners,” *Logansport Weekly Journal*, May 17, 1873.

The change caused some socially elites to object to permitting the plebeian ranks to have potential for success without attempting to pass as refined gentleman. Some reacted against the absence of etiquette regulations because it caused White House events to be polluted by vulgarity. An article entitled, “An American President’s Reception in the Days of Decorum” was published in the *Defiance Democrat* of Ohio. It recalled wistfully White House levees from the early part of the nineteenth-century. The article alleged that these events were an enlightened atmosphere for only the “fashionable and refined.” Since Lincoln’s presidency, the article claimed that the White House had been assaulted by boisterous throngs who behaved coarsely. The author found consolation in the fact that displays of elegance and proper manners were still present as social events at the White House. Infrequent displaces of civility were what was protecting Washington from chaos of the plebeian masses. Scenes of rudeness prompted the author to advocate for more “gentlemen of the old school.” The absence of training in the art of gentlemanly behavior had led to more rambunctious gatherings, at what was a previously a calm and elegant event. Politeness and deference were only a memory. It was noted that even “[t]he President and his chosen friends” appear the equal of most. The casual behavior of Lincoln, Johnson, and Grant in the White House had subverted social distinction. Since they appeared informal and treated their company accordingly, the visible display of deference, which had been an obligation for the lower classes, was not in effect among their White House guests.³⁸⁴

After Lincoln’s presidency, social elites were beginning to accept fewer exclusive forms of refinement and retreat from demeaning the lower classes of society for uncouth qualities, a class Old Abe had come from and one that he had treated warmly. The country began to welcome a more democratic approach to the general public, it was clear that the casual western

³⁸⁴ “An American President’s Reception in the Days of Decorum,” *Defiance Democrat* [Ohio], January 18, 1873; “Manners in the Olden Times,” *Defiance Democrat*, November 1, 1873.

style maintained during Lincoln's Presidency would not dissipate from the public mind, like William Henry Harrison's "Log Cabin" persona had more than twenty years prior. The Republican presidents that came after Lincoln continued to make the White House less restricted. As a result, after Lincoln's presidency the city of Washington would not return to the exclusive presidential levees. The courtly English ethos that had lingered in conventions of the presidential office was altered by a former rail-splitter. A more democratic and genuine presidential office was created by Lincoln. It was a legacy that was not limited to the White House, but had a permeating influence on American society in general.

CONCLUSION

During his presidency and after his death Lincoln became admired across the North, despite his lack of refined sensibilities. Over the course of his presidency, Old Abe's contentment with his western habits and friendly nature slowly became accepted among both urban gentlemen and common laborers across the North.³⁸⁵ Although he did not consistently strive to pass as refined, respectable elites found more qualities in Lincoln than just what his external appearance suggested. When interacting with others he displayed a genuine interest in people that was unfettered by the dictates of etiquette manuals. Focused on the moment at hand with little concern for his surroundings, Old Abe would frequently behave without concern for manners.³⁸⁶ According to the *Washington Reporter*, during his first presidential campaign, Lincoln's easy-going approach towards life enabled him to be carefree enough to "sit down upon the door step in his shirt and sleeves and chat with his neighbors."³⁸⁷ This image would make a gentleman in 1860 shudder with disapproval. Towards the end of his life however, Lincoln's genuine character and successful leadership led the social elites to rank him as a "natural-made gentleman."³⁸⁸

Lincoln's influence changed social protocol for future presidents. This was apparent in the presidential campaigns of Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876 and James Garfield in 1880. Old Abe affected how refined sensibilities were perceived in presidential candidates. The Republican media eagerly attempted to align Hayes and Garfield with Lincoln in any way they could. The impression of both men typifying the laboring class, as Lincoln had done, was vital for them to win public approval. Interestingly, both Hayes and Garfield displayed laboring class sensibilities, as Lincoln had done. They shed polished qualities associated with the elite classes and wore

³⁸⁵ Herndon, *Herndon's Lincoln*, 313.

³⁸⁶ Radford, *Meeting Abraham Lincoln*, 36.

³⁸⁷ *Washington Reporter*, August 30, 1860.

³⁸⁸ Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln*, 419.

stylish beards, a look that also displayed their similarity to Lincoln –the first President to wear a beard in the White House.³⁸⁹

Within a week after Hayes was nominated for the 1876 Republican presidential ticket, party newspapers claimed that he was the next Abraham Lincoln. New York's *Albany Express* declared, "And who is Rutherford B. Hayes? Not unlike the noble Abraham Lincoln in many respects, for his life is as simple and as pure and as unassailable as was that of our martyred President."³⁹⁰ The *New York Times* was more blatant in its use of Lincoln to support Hayes. It claimed, "History does repeat itself after all. In 1876, as in 1860, the Republican Party has its LINCOLN to lead it on to victory."³⁹¹ Shelby M. Culloms, an Illinois politician campaigning for Hayes, called to a Midwest crowd, "Go with me to 1860, when honest old Abe Lincoln carried our banner to victory. 'Old Abe' the grandest man and noblest statesman since Washington."³⁹² Other Republicans speakers used the same tactic.³⁹³ The comparison indicated that the North longed for a rough laborer to ascend the social ranks and take the presidency as a validation the superiority of their society which had won the Civil War. Overtly refined sophistication was a telling sign of what the North saw as the antithesis to Lincoln.³⁹⁴ Comparison of Hays to Lincoln revealed much about how the North adored their martyred hero, and about their search to find another leader who embodied him.³⁹⁵

³⁸⁹ The popularity of beards was partly due to their fashion in Europe around 1860 and because most military men having facial hair during the Civil War.

³⁹⁰ *The Albany Express* [Albany, New York] republished in *Indiana Progress* [Indiana, Pennsylvania], June 22, 1876.

³⁹¹ "The Cincinnati Nominees," *New York Times*, June 17, 1876; Charles Richard William and William Henry, *The Life of Rutherford B. Hayes: Nineteenth President of the United States*, 2 Vols. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), I: 386.

³⁹² *The Decatur* [Illinois] *Republican*, August 31, 1876.

³⁹³ *Kennebec* [Maine] *Journal*, August 10, 1876; "Address of General Kilpatrick," *New York Times*, June 13, 1876.

³⁹⁴ "The President's Message," *Weekly Nevada State Journal* [Washoe County, Nevada], December 12, 1876.

³⁹⁵ Ari Hoogenboom, *The Presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988).

During the election of 1880, the interest in a president from the laboring class was evident at the beginning of the campaign. By the second-half of the nineteenth-century, Lincoln had personified the self-made man. His western mannerism and careless dress reinforced his image as a man of the people, untainted by genteel pretentiousness. Republican media tried to associate Garfield in the same western image. Within days after Garfield won the Republican ticket, *The Cleveland Leader* used the unrefined qualities of Old Abe to Garfield's advantage. The paper declared, "Lincoln in early life was a flatboatman and rail-splitter. Garfield was a canal-boat driver and carpenter. Lincoln afterward studied law, so did Garfield. Lincoln's first name was Abraham, Garfield's middle name is Abraham. Lincoln was nominated at Chicago, so was Garfield. Lincoln was elected, and so will Garfield be." The article was then reprinted in newspapers from Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.³⁹⁶ The comparison to Lincoln motivated *The Janesville Gazette* of Wisconsin to print, "Nothing like this has been seen since the nomination of Lincoln in 1860."³⁹⁷ The comparison of Garfield to Lincoln circulated widely throughout the North.³⁹⁸

The *London Times* noticed how Lincoln had paved the way for Garfield to be a successful presidential candidate. On June 23, 1880 the paper announced, "A good many defects in the American constitution are balanced by the opening it affords for the unaided influence of sagacity and endurance. Such men as Abraham Lincoln undoubtedly was, and as James Garfield appears to be, make up for a good many constitutional flaws and a good many theoretic improprieties." The article then maintained these men were "not wanting in culture," because "they have more valuable qualities than culture can give." After the article was published in the

³⁹⁶ *Cleveland Leader* reprinted in: *Logansport [Indiana] Daily Journal*, June 13, 1880; *The Messenger* [Indiana, Pennsylvania], June 30, 1880; *The Athens [Ohio] Messenger*, July 8, 1880.

³⁹⁷ *Janesville [Wisconsin] Gazette*, June 16, 1880.

³⁹⁸ *Oshkosh [Wisconsin] Daily Northwestern*, June 10, 1880.

London Times, it was reprinted in two Republican newspapers, the *New York Times* on July 5, 1880, and the *Marshall Statesman* of Michigan on July 8, 1880. Because of Lincoln's legacy, his apparent personal faults or lack of social polish were now valued in presidential candidates, indicating that he was from the people. The label, or the appearance, of being aristocratic was disadvantageous to presidential hopefuls. This was partly because Lincoln's presidency motivated the public to resist elite gentleman as presidential candidates in the belief that they were disconnected from the general population. Great wealth was also a reason for the public to be suspicious of a politician being corrupt.³⁹⁹ The evidence that Garfield rose up from a humble upbringing was his record as a tow boatman, and his lack of elaborate personal etiquette. *The Athens Messenger* appealed to voters who valued the concept of social mobility in their article entitled, "Self-Made-Man." Published on June 17, 1880 the article claimed, "Every man the Republican Party has nominated for president within the last twenty years had a lowly beginning in the world... Lincoln was an uncouth farmer boy and rail-splitter... Garfield bossed a canal boat mule." The article concluded, "The popular heart responds to Garfield's nomination with a spontaneous enthusiasm which it has not shown for a Presidential candidate since Lincoln."⁴⁰⁰

Even days after the election of 1880, claims that candidates were elite gentleman became a source of attack. In response to Democratic reports of Garfield being one of these refined men, the *Morning Gazette* of Fort Wayne, Indiana on November 7, 1880, declared, "Our people need not be alarmed or troubled about these 'grape vine reports.'" In another section of the *Gazette*, the paper's editor wrote: "Talk of the aristocratic party. The Republicans can show a better record on log cabin presidents than any other party. Lincoln, the rail-splitter, was born in a log cabin..."

³⁹⁹ *Morning Gazette* [Fort Wayne Indiana], on November 7, 1880 revealed the opinion that there was a link between aristocratic politicians and corruption when it printed, "The Democrats usually seek a man with a mint of money for their candidate for president. By his barrel they expect to corrupt the people."

⁴⁰⁰ *The Athens* [Ohio] *Messenger*, June 17, 1880.

so was the tow-line boater [Garfield]. This beats snobbery out of all time. If the republicans are composed of the aristocracy, why do they not nominate a great aristocrat?”⁴⁰¹

Garfield won support due to his laboring class roots and his unpretentious facade. *The Methodist*, a New York magazine with Republican sympathies stated, “One [Garfield] comes to the front who, like Lincoln, is a stalwart ‘son of the forest,’ whom the leaders had left quite out of their calculations.”⁴⁰² Similarly, *The Atlantic Monthly* published an article entitled, “The Republicans and Their Candidate.” The article stated that Garfield was “a candidate who has elements of popularity such as no presidential nominee has had since Lincoln.”⁴⁰³ Like the Republican newspapers, magazines similarly utilized the legacy of Lincoln to validate the candidacy of Garfield.⁴⁰⁴

It was critical for both Hayes and Garfield to align themselves with the martyred president during their campaigns. After his death, memory of Lincoln carried such a powerful following that even his appearance and manners were not considered repugnant, as they once had been. Instead the western sensibilities and casual nature were valued in presidential candidates, like Hayes and Grant, but not to the slovenly extent of Lincoln. While the idea of a president of laboring class origin who displayed those marks in his demeanor appealed to the common people, the awkward manners and unkempt appearance of Lincoln were not completely justified. Instead, his legacy helped fuse the dichotomy between the Eastern refined elites and the western laboring sorts, but it did not make the former adopt his nonchalant habits. Ultimately, the former rail-splitter impressed upon the North, among other things, that the character qualities of the

⁴⁰¹ *Morning Gazette* [Fort Wayne, Indiana], November 7, 1880.

⁴⁰² *The Methodist* [New York], June 19th 1880 accessed in Burke Aaron Hinsdale, *The Republican Text-Book for the Campaign of 1880: A full history of General James A. Garfield’s Public Life, With Other Political Information* (New York: D. Appleton: 1880), 167.

⁴⁰³ “The Republicans and Their Candidate,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 46 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company. 1880): 259.

⁴⁰⁴ Kenneth Ackerman, *Dark Horse: The Surprise Election and Political Murder of President James A. Garfield* (New York: Carroll Publishers, 2003), 418.

laboring sort should be recognized and valued, as those of the “natural-made-gentleman.”

Lincoln’s influence on Grant, Hayes, and Garfield proved that presidential manners and appearance were part of his legacy in the nineteenth-century. Barry Schwartz in *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* keenly asserts, “Lincoln’s life denied the necessity of impermeable classes, proved that the republic could thrive without aristocracy.”⁴⁰⁵ Lincoln’s casual nature was uniquely American, deviating from the deep-rooted ties to English gentility. Breaking the stereotype of a gentleman, Lincoln influenced how future men of character, who lacked the pretentiousness display in their appearance or behavior, would be judged.

⁴⁰⁵ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, 156.

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