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# Historical Social Research Historische Sozialforschung

*Simon Morgan:*

Heroes in the Age of Celebrity:  
Lafayette, Kossuth, and John Bright in 19th-Century America.

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# Historical Social Research

## Historische Sozialforschung

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# Heroes in the Age of Celebrity: Lafayette, Kossuth, and John Bright in 19th-Century America

Simon Morgan\*

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**Abstract:** »Helden im Zeitalter der Berühmtheit: Lafayette, Kossuth und John Bright im Amerika des 19. Jahrhunderts«. This article explores the relationship between the 'hero' and the celebrity culture of the 19th-century United States. Even by the 1820s, the activities of print media and entrepreneurial manufacturers meant that individuals widely recognised and worshipped as 'heroes' almost inevitably became part of the nascent celebrity culture of the age, while some actively courted this connection to pursue their own political or financial agendas. However, using the receptions of three foreign heroes, the Marquis de Lafayette, Lajos Kossuth, and John Bright, the article contends that we can still make valid distinctions between the two states through the analysis of cultural practice and discourse. In turn, by conceptualising 'hero' and 'celebrity' as two axes on the graph of fame, it is possible to use such analysis to assess more accurately a given individual's public reputation.

**Keywords:** United States, celebrity, hero, modernity, Lafayette, Kossuth, John Bright.

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

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For Daniel Boorstin, Charles Lindbergh's tickertape parade through Manhattan on 13 June 1927, celebrating the intrepid airman's historic first solo flight across the Atlantic, symbolised a key moment of transition. This was the moment the precious metal of heroism alloyed itself with the tawdry tinsel of celebrity, when even a man who had achieved such an amazing and important feat of technical skill, endurance, and sheer bravery had to submit to becoming at least in part a media construct: one of the so-called 'human pseudo-events' Boorstin so despised and which he feared would eventually replace genuine heroes like Lindbergh himself (Boorstin 1962). Boorstin was not the last commentator to attempt to draw a firm dividing line between the two categories of

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Robert van Krieken and Max Jones for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

the hero and celebrity. Some have devised taxonomies designed to distinguish between more valuable members of the celebrity pantheon and those who were simply famous for being famous, as with Chris Rojek's (2001) distinction between 'achieved' and 'attributed' celebrity. As celebrity studies has become increasingly historicised, scholars have realised that such debates over the true meaning of fame are nothing new (Morgan 2011). Scholars of the Romantic age have contended that contemporaries distinguished between true 'fame,' handed down to posterity, and the fleeting fame of 'mere celebrity' (Lilti 2017, 87-92). Antoine Lilti has recently reinforced the same distinction, arguing that to avoid a reductive and anachronistic conflation of 'fame' and 'celebrity,' we should distinguish between what he terms 'glory,' the posthumous fame of a 'great' or virtuous individual, and 'celebrity,' the contemporaneous attention paid by an audience to a living person which transcended the initial cause of their fame (Lilti 2017, 6; see also the interview in this issue: Lilti and Le Goff 2019, 19-38).

Such distinctions are easier to maintain in theory than in practice: the apparatus of celebrity ensured that the deeds of 'heroes' would be reported, magnified, and celebrated well within their own lifetimes. This article begins from the standpoint that any distinction between the *living* hero and the celebrity, if it was ever entirely clear cut, has been blurred for far longer than Boorstin considered, and any attempt to draw a hard and fast distinction is fundamentally flawed, partly because heroes as well as celebrities are culturally constructed (Jones 2007). Moreover, the imbrication of heroic fame with celebrity culture is a feature of modernising societies making the transition to mass literacy and industrial mass production. It has been argued that celebrity was the product of modernity; that it required a fully-functional suite of visual media communications operating in a mature consumer economy to even exist, and that there could be no such thing as celebrity in the absence of moving pictures (Schickel 2000, 23). It has even been claimed that 'true' celebrity is a product of online social media and that all earlier phenomena which go by that name were actually something else entirely (Cashmore 2011). However, the recent uptick of interest in historical celebrity has demonstrated that, far from being an end product of 'modernity,' the emergence of celebrity was actually a key driver of the modernising process itself (Morgan 2010).

The expansion of the public sphere and the number and range of public individuals went hand-in-hand with the expansion of print media, which both provided a platform for making those individuals better known by more people, but also as it expanded created a demand for more individuals to write about or illustrate. Heroic individuals were perfect subjects, particularly 'national' heroes perceived to have rendered some signal service to the nation-state, as they accrued the most attention capital and appealed to the widest markets. Expansion of print media in turn drove and was driven by improvements in printing

technology, mirrored elsewhere in the development of new techniques in the manufacture of textiles, pottery, and glassware. Even before the advent of photography in the 1840s, it was possible for finely engraved images of individuals to be mass produced on good quality paper. Such images could in turn then be reproduced on media as diverse as cotton, silk, ceramic, and glass (Briggs 1988).

Studies of figures such as Italian patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi demonstrates that ‘genuine’ heroes have been part of a culture of celebrity for far longer than Boorstin dreamt of (Riall 2007). However, bearing in mind Lilti’s warning against reductivism, the article rejects the temptation of collapsing the two categories into each other. Heroes in the modern era are not simply a subset of the category ‘celebrity’: rather, the two occupy separate axes on the graph of public attention.<sup>2</sup> It is the aim of this article to explore methodologies for assessing how far along the respective ‘celebrity/hero’ axes individuals sit, and whether it was still possible for bona fide ‘heroes’ to avoid completely the trappings of celebrity in the context of a modernising society moving toward mass literacy and mass production. To make a workable distinction between heroes and celebrities, these states will be analysed at the level of praxis. As both the hero and the celebrity are cultural constructs, it is the nature of the historically situated cultural practices and behaviours, and the discourses of which they are a part, which determine the nature of those constructs. In the 19th century, certain cultural practices, such as the erecting of statues or the naming of buildings, streets, children, or settlements after individuals with no direct personal connection to that place or person, were more closely associated with hero-worship than with ‘mere’ celebrity. As Tom Mole (2007) has pithily observed in his work on Lord Byron, celebrity is constructed through the multi-valent interactions of an individual, an industry (in Byron’s case, the publishing industry) and an audience. The same could easily be said of heroes, but it is the specific nature of those interactions and the motivations behind them which identifies the subject as heroic, rather than simply famous.

To this end, the article examines the case of three men who achieved heroic status in the 19th-century United States: the Marquis Lafayette, hero of the American Revolution; Hungarian nationalist Lajos (or Louis) Kossuth; and British radical John Bright. Each of these men were foreigners who found their way into American affections by becoming imbricated in America’s national myth. Lafayette, a foreigner who risked his life for the nascent Republic, became a symbol of the purity of the American ideal; Kossuth, as leader of the Hungarian revolution of 1848, was an exemplar of how that ideal had been exported back to Europe; Bright was a rare British champion of the northern

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<sup>2</sup> I am grateful for Robert van Krieken’s comments on my initial draft which have helped to clarify my thinking on this point.

states during their death-struggle with the southern Confederacy, becoming identified as the 'true' voice of British public opinion in contrast to the hostility or indifference emanating from the aristocracy and their tools. As outsiders to American culture, these men arguably provide more easily observable and measurable instances of hero-worship than is the case with most home-grown figures. Lafayette and Kossuth both enjoyed triumphal tours of the country in 1824-5 and 1851-2 respectively, all well-documented in the contemporary press and subsequent memoirs and biographies, which allow us to observe their receptions in detail across a relatively bounded timespan. Bright, on the other hand, never visited the country that he risked so much of his domestic political capital to defend, despite invitations from at least three Presidents. For this reason, he provides a useful control, allowing us to judge most clearly whether it was possible for an American hero of his era to avoid the trappings of celebrity and still remain a hero.

Geoff Cubbitt has defined a hero as

any man or woman whose existence [...] is endowed by others, not just with a high degree of fame and honour, but with a special allocation of imputed meaning and symbolic significance – that not only raises them above others in public esteem but makes them the object of some kind of collective emotional investment.' (Cubbitt 2000, 3)

Scholars of celebrity may argue that such a definition fits equally well for 'mere' celebrities in many fields, including musicians and film-stars. However, John Price's (2015) work on 'everyday heroism,' by definition referring to acts carried out by those who were not already famous and who did not necessarily have high social status, gives us a useful alternative working definition of a hero as someone who has carried out an action which is widely recognised as 'heroic' by a given community. To be considered as heroic, the action had to incur an element of personal risk, as with the acts of life-saving that Price concentrates on. As Price's individuals were not publicly recognised before their heroic actions, any subsequent fame can be attributed entirely to those actions and the attention paid to them by the community. They therefore start off at zero on the celebrity axis. However, being identified as a hero inevitably conferred a quantity of 'attention capital,' to use Robert van Krieken's (2012) useful concept, in turn providing incentives for those rewarded for heroic acts to convert that capital into money or influence. Once a hero acquired a wider value through publicity, the opportunity existed to translate heroic status into celebrity. This opportunity went beyond the heroic individuals themselves, who may actually have been marginal to the process, to the journalists and newspaper editors who reported their actions, the artists and poets who wished to enhance their own public profiles or magnify their own ideals of morality by celebrating the heroic actions of others, and the manufacturers of memorabilia. It also extended to those wishing to make political capital from association with

a heroic individual. Though Price barely mentions her, the process of elevation from obscurity to heroic fame, and then entry into popular culture via the cultural and material productions of third parties, may be seen most clearly in the case of Grace Darling, who went from obscure lighthouse keeper's daughter to 'Northumbrian heroine' and then to international celebrity almost overnight following her involvement in the rescue of the survivors of a shipwreck in 1837 (Cunningham 2007).

Unless a hero was already well-known for something else, what matters in terms of converting heroism into celebrity is therefore primarily what happens after the heroic act takes place. How far does the heroic subject and/or other actors in the marketplace or the public sphere, attempt to either monetise the value of the hero's 'attention capital,' or use it to promote their reputations for other ends? To what extent is the adulation and respect elicited by the heroic individual augmented or replaced by the more casual interest, objectification, or even outright prurience that are features of the culture of celebrity? It is a key contention that John Bright's refusal to make himself available in person to his American admirers, and his lack of interest in actively promoting his American reputation in the years after the Civil War, effectively prevented his development into a fully-realised celebrity subject, while allowing him to retain his aura as American hero through his very absence. However, even in Bright's case, advances in communications, the spread of cheap journalism, and quicker transatlantic transportation ensured that even he could not avoid celebrification entirely. In the case of Lafayette, as Leo Braudy has observed, ambition for personal fame and recognition was not necessarily incompatible with maintaining his reputation as the disinterested champion of the Republic (Braudy 1997, 460). Arguably, it was Kossuth who found the experience of fame most disorientating, failing to appreciate the complexities of translating popular adulation into political influence in an ostensibly democratic society.

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## 2. Guests of the Nation: The Significance of Lafayette and Kossuth

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When considering the construction of national heroes, as well as the trinity of actors identified by Mole, one must also consider the role of the state. All three of our subjects did useful ideological work for the American state at key moments of its evolution. Lafayette, as a young French aristocrat, offered his services to the American Revolution against British rule, his activities acquiring a new significance after France joined the war in 1778 as a key link not simply between two armies, but also two cultures (Kramer 1981). His reputation was cemented by his military contribution to the Virginia campaign, which sealed the outcome of the war. Wounded at the battle of the Brandywine, a



blood sacrifice that was constantly referred to during his later tour, Lafayette returned to France determined to play a role in the reformation of its own government. He was conspicuous in the early phases of the Revolution and remained an icon for many Americans, being viewed as a positive ambassador for America's image and interests overseas (Loveland 1971). An opponent of the restored French Bourbon monarchy, he engineered an official invitation to the United States for the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1825, partly for the purpose of raising his political stock at home (Crout 2015, 85-6).

Lafayette's tour has been seen as bringing the nation together in celebration of a shared history and values at a time when pressures on national unity were beginning to make themselves felt as the nation expanded inexorably across the continent, absorbing new populations with Spanish or French heritage, and with the vexed question of the expansion of slavery lurking in the background (Loveland 1971). Such divisions were as of yet at an early stage, demonstrated by the fact that Lafayette was able to advocate a gradualist approach to slave emancipation and support for the Colonization Society, which aimed to facilitate the emigration of black Americans to colonies in Africa: positions which 25 years later would have been excoriated by American abolitionists and southern sectionalists alike (Pollock 2015). During Lafayette's tour, slavery failed to emerge as a major issue, and his presence failed to disturb the peace of America's founding hypocrisy (Loveland 1971). Which is not to say that in Lafayette's presence all disharmony evaporated like dew before the rising sun. In New Orleans, controversies over whether the town's Creole or Anglo-American communities would take precedence in Lafayette's grand entrance continued beyond the last minute, as rival militias disputed the honour of ordering the firing of the salute (Frink 2015). However, the arguments were over who got the most honour from welcoming Lafayette, rather than whether he should be welcomed at all.

Lajos, or Louis, Kossuth, was one of the principal leaders of the Hungarian revolution of 1848. He had achieved his pre-eminent position through scintillating oratory and his reputation as a defender of freedom of speech, having edited a political journal which reported the affairs of the Hungarian Diet. For this he spent time in prison, where he allegedly taught himself English from Shakespeare (Hilson 1856, 6; Massingberd 1851, 5). His mastery of the language was central to his reception in both Britain and America. During the revolution against Austrian rule, Kossuth was appointed Governor, but after Russian intervention reversed the Hungarian army's early successes, Kossuth and his entourage fled to Turkey. There, he and his men languished in luxurious confinement while the Sublime Porte decided their fate. Despite Habsburg demands to hand them over for summary justice, Kossuth was eventually released under pressure from the British government. The American government

of President Fillmore then decided to extend him the same honour it had offered to Lafayette, despatching the country's most modern warship, the *Mississippi*, to transport him to America. There, Kossuth and his men were offered asylum on the basis that they lived out quiet, non-revolutionary lives.

Unlike Lafayette, however, Kossuth proved a troublesome guest, whose presence exacerbated already festering divisions.<sup>3</sup> Initial enthusiasm in both government and popular circles waned after barn-storming receptions at Spezia and Marseilles, which severely tested the patience of the ship's captain and threatened to embroil his mission in a major diplomatic incident. Eventually, Kossuth abandoned the *Mississippi* at Gibraltar and made his way to Great Britain. During his six-week stay, Kossuth generated much popular excitement, but his autocratic desire to remain the sole symbol of Hungarian nationhood left fellow emigrés in disarray. He then embarked for the US, arriving on Staten Island on 5 December 1851.<sup>4</sup>

Kossuth initially made up some of the ground lost through the *Mississippi* affair, being granted an introduction to both houses of Congress, but his tour of the country became mired in controversy. His aims were to raise money to foment future revolution in Hungary, and persuade the United States to abandon its traditional neutrality to guarantee that revolution against Russian meddling. The State Department was wary of offending Austria, while Kossuth's interventionism lost sections of the press, particularly when he hinted to the New York Bar Association that military action might be required to control Russia (Komlos 1973, 87-8). The America Kossuth visited was also much more divided than that encountered by Lafayette. After 20 years of militant abolitionism, Kossuth's Enlightenment language of universal rights was distinctly *passé* south of the Mason-Dixon line, where he was met with relative indifference, even in New Orleans from whence he had received a formal invitation (Komlos 1973, 122). By contrast, 'Kossuth fever' marked his appearances in New England, with crowds in Boston of around 50,000 (Komlos 1973, 128). Eventually, disappointed in both his aims, Kossuth slipped out of the country, returning to London and a life of exile.

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### 3. Distant Champion: John Bright as American Hero

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Like many British radicals, John Bright was an ardent admirer of the United States as a 'beacon of liberty': the land of universal (if the universe were only

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<sup>3</sup> Unlike Lafayette's tour, Kossuth's has garnered relatively little scholarly attention in the US itself. The fullest account in English continues to be Komlos 1973; see also Spencer 1977 and Roberts 2015.

<sup>4</sup> For Kossuth in England: Janossy 1937; Claeys 1989: 244-55; Kabdebo 1979; Lada 2013.

white) manhood suffrage and religious equality. Unlike fellow free-trader Richard Cobden, who toured the US in 1834 and 1859, Bright never set foot in the country, preferring to admire its institutions from afar. His name first became known there during the campaigns of the Anti-Corn Law League, followed by many in the US. Having initially flirted with northern abolitionists, during the later stages of its campaign the League attracted the interest of Southern sectionalists such as Duff Green and John C. Calhoun, anxious to boost the economy of the Southern states by facilitating their trade with Lancashire (Morgan 2009). However, in the long run Bright and Cobden were more comfortable with the liberals and manufacturers of the free northern states. Both men struck up a friendship with Charles Sumner, abolitionist Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, whom they met in 1856 while he was convalescing from a severe beating from a pro-slavery senator, which had almost cost him his life (Donald 1960). When the Civil War erupted in 1861, it was natural therefore that Bright came down on the side of the North.

Bright's influence was two-fold. First, like Cobden, he used private correspondence with key opinion formers such as Sumner as a 'sub-diplomatic' channel to Lincoln's administration at key moments of tension. This was particularly important during the *Trent* affair of December 1861, when two Confederate envoys were forcibly removed from a British steamer (Bright 1911; Bright and Sumner 1912; Cobden and Sumner 1897).<sup>5</sup> Second, this time unlike Cobden, Bright was vocal in his support of the Union from the outset, both in Parliament and in well-publicised extra-parliamentary speeches.<sup>6</sup> Although a functioning transatlantic telegraph cable was still some years away, the reduction of the Atlantic crossing to around ten days enabled the speeches of leading British statesmen on American subjects to be widely disseminated and avidly perused in the US. Bright became one of the key platform speakers at public meetings aimed at promoting pro-Union sentiments, particularly among the working classes of Lancashire then suffering the effects of the 'Cotton Famine.' Far more than Bright's private influence with Sumner and others, it was this more public medium of communication which not only won Bright the hearts of many in the North, but also made him a useful figure for Northern statesmen, including Lincoln.

Bright's American reputation rested on three orations in particular. The first was delivered in Rochdale in August 1861, during the early stages of the conflict.<sup>7</sup> The second was of greater importance, being delivered in the heat of the *Trent* crisis of December 1861.<sup>8</sup> This speech received intense coverage, being

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<sup>5</sup> Many of Cobden's letters to Sumner are also reproduced in Hobson 1919.

<sup>6</sup> For Cobden's initial reticence, see Meardon 2006.

<sup>7</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 3 Aug. 1861.

<sup>8</sup> Reprinted in Bright 1868, Vol 1: 167-95.

reproduced verbatim in many newspapers and republished in pamphlet form. This was due in part to the efforts of US officials such as Thomas H. Dudley, American consul at the British port of Liverpool, who sent copies of the speech to leading American papers.<sup>9</sup> The speech resonated as a counterweight to the intense vituperation of the United States over the *Trent* issue in many of the leading newspapers, particularly *The Times*, drawing forth numerous letters of gratitude from American citizens.<sup>10</sup> Patrick Joyce has argued that the power of Bright's oratory, particularly its religious aspects, did not transmit well to the printed page, and so it was necessary to hear him to experience the full force of his charisma (Joyce 1994, 98). This has led one of the foremost scholars of 19th-century oratory to conclude that "no politicians during this period made their reputations based upon newspaper readership alone" (Meisel 2001, 272). However, the American reception of Bright's speeches challenges this view. Joyce was forgetting, perhaps, that speeches in 19th-century newspapers were designed to be read aloud. Up and down the loyal states of the Union, ordinary American citizens sat around their firesides or in public places, listening to friends, relations, or passing strangers reading out Bright's words. One such, Anson Gleason, graphically described in a letter to Bright how his charisma could thus be effectively meditated across thousands of miles of ocean:

Have you room in noble philanthropic heart, for a yankee stranger, who with his family has been recently very highly entertained & electrified by your late speech at the dinner in Rochdale – Sir, could you have seen the swelling of our hearts & heard our acclamations at the closing of each sentence – you would not, at least, censure me for attempting to give you a kind of memento of our gratitude – I said to our son (who read your address to his parents & sisters) I *earnestly* wish that a *mighty host* of our patriotic countrymen would at once enrol their names to a hearty vote of Thanks to that noble hearted Englishman!<sup>11</sup>

Gleason had been a missionary, and it seems that, far from failing to translate to the printed page, the cadences of Bright's oratory particularly lent themselves to the call-and-response style familiar to American evangelicals.

The third speech was a repost to W. E. Gladstone's oration at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, with its notorious claim that the South had "made a nation."<sup>12</sup> As Gladstone was Chancellor of the Exchequer, the second most powerful post in the British government, this was widely interpreted in the US as the prelude to official recognition of the Confederacy by the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston. While few American papers published Bright's response verbatim, its

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas H. Dudley to Bright, 6 Dec. 1861, British Library (BL) Add. MS 43391, fos. 58-9. Hereafter Bright Papers.

<sup>10</sup> Bright Papers, Add. MS 43391, fos. 60-97.

<sup>11</sup> Bright Papers, Add. MS 43391, fos. 96-7.

<sup>12</sup> Newcastle Courant, 10 Oct. 1862.

dramatic peroration, denouncing those who would recognise “a State which offers itself to us, based upon a principle [...] more odious and more blasphemous than was ever heretofore dreamed of in Christian or Pagan, in civilized or in savage times,” was widely reproduced.<sup>13</sup> This speech in particular brought responses from American citizens of British birth or ancestry, pleased to find a champion from the ‘old country’ amidst what was perceived as the general hostility of the British political class.<sup>14</sup>

Lincoln, perceiving the advantages of a well-respected British champion, promoted Bright as an alternative to the views of Gladstone, Lord John Russell, and *The Times* of London. In this respect, Bright was less important for his influence with the British government (at this point slim), than as the representative of a putative pro-northern public opinion supposedly drowned out by the Metropolitan press. The accuracy of Bright’s picture of a pro-southern aristocracy stifling the ‘silent majority’ of the pro-northern working class has been questioned (Campbell 2003). However, this was less important than Bright’s successful projection of such a notion across the Atlantic. Bright was seen as an emissary directly from the sympathetic British people to their American cousins, by-passing the hostile government and its organs of the press. For Lincoln, Bright was a counterweight to the hawks in his own cabinet, and a means of calming Anglophobe passions in the population at large. He actively promoted Bright’s reputation, often drawing the attention of visitors to the portrait of the eminent English Quaker which hung in his otherwise spartan reception room.<sup>15</sup> He even pardoned the son of one of Bright’s constituents, involved in a treasonable plan to fit out a Confederate cruiser, emphasising that his action was intended “as a public mark of the esteem held by the United States of America for the high character and steady friendship of the said John Bright” (Bullard 1939, 219-20).

Even while the war was still in progress, there were hopes that Bright would soon visit the US to enjoy his hero’s welcome. In August 1865, a rumour circulated that the US government had despatched the frigate *Colorado* to bring Bright across the Atlantic, echoing the compliment extended to Kossuth in 1851.<sup>16</sup> One correspondent promised him the greatest reception any foreigner

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<sup>13</sup> Delivered on 18 Dec. 1862: Rogers, *Speeches*, 197-225, peroration at 224-5.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., Julian E. Thompson to Bright, 5 April 1863, Bright Papers Add. MS 43391, fos. 144-5.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Janney to Bright, 24 April 1865; Schuyler Colfax to Bright, 20 May 1866, BL Add. MS 43991, fos. 249-50, 291-2.

<sup>16</sup> A gesture lampooned by the *Saturday Review* as “Mr Bright’s Pilgrimage,” (repr. *Lancaster Gazette*, 26 Aug. 1865), and lauded in *Reynolds’s Newspaper* as ‘An American Compliment to British Democracy,’ 27 Aug. 1865. The rumour seems to have originated in the American press early in the month: e.g., *Howard Union* (Glasgow, Mon.), 3 Aug. 1865; *Raftsmen’s Journal*, (Clearfield, Pa.) 9 Aug. 1865; *White Cloud Kansas Chief* (White Cloud, Kan.), 17 Aug.

had received since Lafayette.<sup>17</sup> Bright never tested the claim: his admirers would have to be content to eulogize him from a distance.

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#### 4. Rituals of Recognition: The Public Construction of the Hero

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The public celebration of Kossuth, Lafayette, and Bright as national heroes in America took broadly similar forms: notably an outpouring of poetry and prose in praise of their virtues and the commissioning and dedication of portraits, busts, and statues. Communities, institutions, and individuals across the loyal States were anxious to honour the efforts of Bright and other supporters of the Union. As early as March 1862, the New York Chamber of Commerce had passed a vote of thanks to Bright for his “noble advocacy of our cause, which you have had the firmness and courage to maintain, in face of public prejudice and ministerial opposition.”<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, tributes in poetry and prose flowed in the loyalist press.<sup>19</sup> The Denver branch of the Union League Club sent a resolution of gratitude for Bright and Cobden’s “hearty, intelligent, and manly sympathy for the Government of the United States, in its struggle with an Aristocratic Slave Oligarchy”; the New York branch commissioned a portrait.<sup>20</sup> Bright was the first to have his biography printed as part of W. W. Boon’s “Gallery of America’s Friends in England” in the *Federal Magazine*, while an edition of his American speeches was published by Frank Moore of New York.<sup>21</sup> The Friends’ Boarding School at Providence, Rhode Island, honoured him with a bust.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the most idiosyncratic act was the dedication of a pair of Giant Sequoias in the Yosemite Valley’s Calaveras Grove to Cobden and Bright, where they joined an arboreal pantheon of international heroes

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1865. It was denied in a statement dated Washington, 4 Sept.: see e.g., *Cleveland Leader*, 5 Sept. 1865.

<sup>17</sup> George Peabody to Bright, 18 Oct. 1865, BL Add. MS 43991, fos. 272-3; the comparison with Lafayette was reiterated for example in “Will John Bright Visit Us,” *The Cecil Whig* (Elkington, Md.), 29 July 1882.

<sup>18</sup> P. Perit to Bright, 8 March 1862, BL Add. MS. 43991, fos. 108-11.

<sup>19</sup> See Charles K. Tuekerman, New York, to Bright, 13 Jan. 1863, including a cutting from the *New York Evening Post* containing a sonnet “To John Bright of England.” BL Add. MS 43991, fo. 130.

<sup>20</sup> Simeon Whiteley, and Omor O. Ken, and Union League Club, NY, to Bright, 8 May 1865, BL Add. MS 43991 fos. 185-6, 251-2.

<sup>21</sup> W. W. Boon to JB, 20 Aug. 1865, BL Add. MS. 43391, fos. 262-3; *Federal Magazine*, Sept. 1865; F. Moore to Bright, BL Add. MS. 43391, fos. 258-9.

<sup>22</sup> For Bright’s thoughts on this, see “America, Peace and War. March 10, 1884,” Bright 1895: 295-7.

including Daniel O’Connell and Florence Nightingale.<sup>23</sup> Most significantly, a bust of Bright was gifted to Lincoln himself. Fittingly, it stood for many years alongside a bust of Lafayette in the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House, until it was removed presumably during Truman’s restoration of the mansion in the 1950s.<sup>24</sup> It was rediscovered in a men’s room by none other than Jackie Kennedy, who, with more of an eye to period detail than extending Bright’s ongoing mission as the British people’s unofficial ambassador to the United States, placed it in the Lincoln Rooms as an historical curio.<sup>25</sup>

However, Bright’s roll-call remains modest alongside the substantial tributes to Kossuth and Lafayette. The physical tours these men undertook, which allowed them to meet their American admirers face-to-face, facilitated a more intense level of hero-worship. Elaborate rituals of reception and celebration were organised along the routes of their respective tours. Lafayette’s in particular, as befitted an officer of the American Revolution, were distinctly martial in character. Everywhere he went, he was escorted by detachments of mounted regular soldiers or militia whose units he was invariably called upon to review.<sup>26</sup> When he stopped at places with especial significance for the revolution, such as Concord and Lexington, there were meetings with veterans and the presentation of relics (Levasseur 1829, 69-70). In Boston, he was presented with a sword which he himself had presented to its previous owner; the pathos was heightened when it transpired that the latter had died only two days previously (Levasseur 1829, 37-8). At Hartford, Connecticut, General Wadsworth entered carrying the bloodied epaulettes and scarf Lafayette had been wearing when wounded at the battle of the Brandywine (Levasseur 1829, 81-2). Most striking, however, were the elaborate parades and processions in which Lafayette took part at major population centres. One of the most impressive was at Philadelphia, where the general passed through no fewer than 13 triumphal arches (Miller 1989, 122-31). The celebration that greeted Lafayette in New Orleans has been described by Mary Ryan as “a high-water mark of civic and ceremonial creativity” (Ryan 1998, 61).

While the emphasis during Lafayette’s tour was on his martial prowess as a victorious soldier of American Liberty, Kossuth, while often portrayed in military uniform, had a rather more complex legacy, having been the civilian head of the Revolution. Kossuth’s image therefore focused on his role in the struggle for Hungarian freedom and the good of the Hungarian nation, rather than his

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<sup>23</sup> See Cobden to William Hargreaves, 1 Oct. 1864, in Cobden 2015, 547-8.

<sup>24</sup> From an inventory of 1946: Phillips-Schrock 2013, 174.

<sup>25</sup> KN-18241. White House Artifacts: Marble Bust of John Bright. <<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKWHP-KN-18241.aspx>> (accessed 23 Oct. 2017); “The First Lady Brings History and Beauty to the White House,” *Life*, 1 Sept. 1961, 63.

<sup>26</sup> See the account of the tour by Lafayette’s secretary: Auguste Levasseur (1829).

military achievements. This, along with the developments described earlier, explains his greater appeal in the New England states, which, compared to the slave states of the South, had more ethnically mixed white European populations and, by the 1850s, a greater receptiveness to the language of liberty and equality.

One of the most obvious and enduring expressions of hero-worship was the naming of settlements, political units, and geographical features after the two men. At least 20 settlements, ranging from cities to districts, were named after Lafayette, while three small settlements were named after Kossuth in Ohio, Indiana, and Mississippi, as well as a county in Iowa. This form of recognition was perhaps only possible in a relatively newly established and expanding nation like the US, where new settlements were being formed with far greater frequency than in the 'Old World.' Another, more personal, mark of esteem was the naming of children after prominent individuals. Bright even jokingly referred to this practice as one reason why he had declined invitations to go to the US:

one of them did say there were several penalties I should have to pay, and that he thought one of them was that nearly all the children would be called after me. (Laughter.) Well, if this and a great many other dreadful things which he told me would happen are true, I am, I think, very prudent in staying in this country.<sup>27</sup>

An online search of US census records reveals that there was indeed a significant increase in the number of records of 'Kossuth' and its variants as either a first or middle name around the time of his visit in 1852. While the 1860 census reveals a total of 4 individuals so named born within two years of 1842, it shows 80 born within two years of Kossuth's visit in 1852. Once again, however, this is modest in comparison to Lafayette's haul. The same census reveals 715 individuals with 'Lafayette' as a first or middle name born within two years of his visit in 1825, compared to 44 if we centre on 1815. Given the inevitable attrition in the intervening 35 years, not to mention the smaller population in 1825 compared to 1852, Lafayette's greater relative impact on American naming practices is clear. Most striking was the extent to which Lafayette's popularity in this respect was maintained, indeed even increased, in the years after his visit. According to the 1860 census, even within the two years on either side of 1852, when the Hungarian was at the height of his fame, newly minted Lafayettes outnumbered Kossuths by more than 26:1.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "The American Minister and Mr Bright on Relations with America," *Manchester Times*, 23 April 1864. The letter in question was from R. Walker, 15 July 1863, BL Add. MS. 43991, fos. 164-5.

<sup>28</sup> <<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1860usfedcenancestry/>> accessed 6 Oct. 2017.



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## 5. Mobilising Attention Capital: The Celebrification of the Hero

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Heroes are objects worshipped by multiple subjects, for whom that worship may become an integral part of their own subjective identities; consequently, their reputations are often mobilised for the purposes, benign or nefarious, of states or other communities. Arguably, an important step to becoming a ‘celebrity hero’ is taken when individuals assert their own public subjectivity by exploiting the attention capital gained from their heroic status to advance their own interests, pecuniary or otherwise, or to further an agenda which may or may not overlap with that of the community which originally elevated them to the status of hero. When Kossuth and Lafayette visited the United States, they both had ulterior motives relating to their political ambitions in Europe. Lafayette clearly wished to boost his reputation in France, where he was keen to position himself as a fulcrum of liberal opposition to the restored Bourbon regime. He ensured that his tour of the United States was well covered in the European press, including speeches where he was critical of the French government (Crout 2015, 94-5). A few years after his return, he embarked on what effectively became a political tour of France which replicated much of the ritual and symbolism of its American predecessor, including grand entries, triumphal arches, and military escorts (Crout 2015, 95-101). Kossuth, on the other hand, made no secret of his intention to use the tour to raise money for continued efforts at national liberation and to get assurances of American intervention in defence of another successful revolt against Austrian rule.

However, Kossuth’s experiences in particular reveal the difficulties that all celebrities face in controlling the discourse of their fame in the face of daily scrutiny and criticism from the press and the public. Again, unlike Lafayette, it needs to be appreciated that Kossuth divided American opinion rather than unifying it. Even before he set foot in the United States, interested parties connected to the Austrian and Russian states had been doing their best to undermine his public reputation, accusing him of cowardice before the revolution’s inevitable collapse, fleeing to Turkey, and leaving others to pay the price for his adventurism. From Kossuth’s perspective this was to be expected, and there was no shortage of partisans in emigré groups or the press willing to put the opposite case. Paradoxically, what exercised him more was the nature of the adulation he received, which he perceived as at best a distraction, and at worst a negation of his wider aims. He complained about the waste of money on grand rituals and public dinners which could have been better spent promoting the Hungarian national cause, at one point claiming that of \$160,000 collected by February 1852, no less than \$130,000 had been squandered in this way (Komlos 1973, 118). While this was undoubtedly a gross exaggeration, it is a

telling sign of Kossuth's ambivalence towards his public position in the United States, particularly the trappings of celebrity which almost inevitably accompanied his heroic status once the man himself set foot on American soil. The year after his return from America, Kossuth was run to ground in London by the author Harriet Beecher Stowe, then enjoying her own triumphal tour of Britain and keen to leverage her literary celebrity to galvanise the moribund British anti-slavery movement (Morgan 2017). Noting the apparent poverty in which he was living, contrasting with the accusations of some of his American opponents, Stowe's brother Charles Beecher went on to record: "He alluded to Hatty's great reception in a way that showed both his feelings and his insight. How much of all this enthusiasm is *curiosity*, superficiality; how much is genuine benevolence?" (Van Why and French 1986, 119) In part, though, it was Kossuth's aversion to American celebrity culture, rather than the culture itself, which undermined his agenda. Unlike Lafayette, who took every opportunity to make himself available to ordinary well-wishers and the curious alike, Kossuth surrounded himself with liveried guards whose job was to keep people away from the great man, attempting to maintain an aristocratic distance which played badly in the Great Republic. Thus, one newspaper argued, the respectable kept away from his meetings while those who showed up were motivated principally by idle curiosity.<sup>29</sup>

In the introduction, it was argued that the emerging culture of celebrity was intimately entwined with the development of consumer markets and the growth of manufacturing industry. Lafayette's visit to America in the 1820s allows us a rare opportunity to see this reciprocal relationship in action in real time, as nascent industries were stimulated by the demand for images of the great man and other mementoes of his visit (Klamkin 1975, 3). Within days of his arrival in New York, glass moulds inscribed with his image had been manufactured; soon, a wide range of memorabilia was available from paper doyleys and ribbons to whisky flasks (Klamkin 1975). Where domestic manufacturers were unable to meet the demand, foreign competitors were only too ready to step in, as was the case with Lafayette ceramics. The potters of Staffordshire in England were well used to producing large quantities of good quality ceramics for the American market: following the Anglo-American war of 1812, they had even produced a range of mugs bearing portraits of popular American naval commanders (May and May 1972, 136-40). They were therefore quick off the mark in 1825-6, producing jugs and plates with messages of welcome, and even a range of platters showing Lafayette's French residence, La Grange (Klamkin 1975, 53-6). Martinet and Roe, New York umbrella manufacturers, recognising a unique marketing opportunity, advertised the fact that they were

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<sup>29</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, cited in Komloss 1973, 119-20.

to present Lafayette with a specially made umbrella, while Leavenworth, Hayden and Scovill of Waterbury, Connecticut, presented him with a set of gold buttons, which they then made available in brass as mass-produced souvenirs (Klamkin 1975, 48-50). Kossuth's visit, despite its rather more controversial nature, saw the production of a similarly diverse range of items (Horvath 1995). In a retrospective account of the visit published in 1897, the New York *Sun* newspaper recollected the 'Kossuth Mania' of December 1851, including the sudden popularity of goulash and Kossuth's impact on that year's New Year gifts:

There were Kossuth cravats [...] Kossuth pipes, Kossuth umbrellas, Kossuth belts and buckles, Kossuth purses, Kossuth jackets, and Kossuth braid and tassels for wearing apparel. Then the Alpine hat, with a certain peculiar shape of crown and brim, soon became, and for years continued to be, known as the Kossuth hat.<sup>30</sup>

By not visiting the US, Bright managed to avoid most of these manifestations of 'celebrification.' His decision not to travel rested in part on the precedents of those who had gone before him. Having suffered a breakdown in the 1850s, he was worried that the constant attention and celebration would overtax his system. There were also political reasons why Bright thought it prudent to remain at home. He had never, for obvious reasons, been popular in the South, but as memories of the Civil War receded even some of his northern admirers found his free trade views difficult. By the late 1870s, as America became more protectionist and Britain's economy began to falter, there was pressure on Bright from both sides of the Atlantic to use his prestige to intervene personally.<sup>31</sup> Bright refused to mount a free trade mission to the United States, but did use public letters to air his views of America's protectionist folly (Bright 1895).<sup>32</sup> This drew some criticism in the US, with the more paranoid protectionists even claiming that Bright was using a 'pile' of British gold to bribe Americans to become free traders.<sup>33</sup> A personal visit would inevitably have dragged him into these convoluted issues of domestic politics, and by this point Bright was in declining health.

Nonetheless, Bright could not escape entirely. For one thing, Americans in London made a point of seeking him out. He was much amused that one, the wife of General Barlow, "hoped I would 'think her polite, as she had not asked for my autograph!'" (Bright 1930, 269) He could also be contacted by admirers via the postal service, although even here Bright's American postbag was by no

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<sup>30</sup> Sun (NY), 30 May 1897.

<sup>31</sup> For example, "Reciprocity," New York Herald, 14 Aug. 1879.

<sup>32</sup> In particular, "Protection in the United States, January 21, 1879," 222-3; "On the results of free trade in England. November 17, 1884," 311-14.

<sup>33</sup> "That Hypothetical Pile," Austin Weekly Statesman, 1 Nov. 1883.

means as full as that of Lafayette after his return from the United States (Kramer 1981). In 1875-6, 1879, 1882, and 1883, there were rumours that Bright would, after all, honour the country by his presence, forcing him to issue denials.<sup>34</sup> When his children visited the country, American newspapers tracked their movements; when he fell ill, late in 1888, the public were kept up to date with his progress by telegraphic bulletins which were then copied and recopied across the States.<sup>35</sup> His death was front page news across the country.<sup>36</sup>

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## 6. Conclusion

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By comparing three very different case studies, this article has demonstrated that celebrity culture played an important role in mediating the relationship between individuals perceived as heroic and the wider public a full century before Lindbergh's tickertape parade. At the same time, it has shown that hero worship was not just a subset of celebrity culture in 19th-century America but involved a distinct set of public and private practices. The cross-over came when attempts were made by the heroic individual or third parties to leverage their heroic attention capital for other purposes, when retailers and manufacturers took advantage of their fame for commercial purposes, and when consumers began to demand commodities and information. Together, this created the conjunction between the celebrity subject, the market and the audience, which Mole puts at the heart of the celebrity phenomenon.

However, it has also been argued that in a society which remained to some degree a face-to-face one, the physical presence of an admired individual was still an important pre-requisite for the translation of the heartfelt respect and steady admiration due to the 'hero,' to the saturnalia of consumption, and effervescent enthusiasm more characteristic of public interest in the celebrity. While transatlantic communications allowed Bright to stir the hearts of patriotic American loyalists at a distance and to achieve a lasting place of affection in many of those hearts, his refusal to travel to the United States meant that, in significant ways, he never realised his potential to become a major American celebrity. There were to be no grand entries, gun salutes, or parades to be cov-

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<sup>34</sup> E.g., Sun, NY, 7 Feb. 1883.

<sup>35</sup> E.g., Austin Weekly Statesman, 22 Nov. 1883, noticing a lecture by Mrs Bright-Clark on women's suffrage. For reports of his illness, Evening Star (Washington, D.C.), 22 Nov. 1888; Butte Semi-Weekly Miner (Butte, Mon.), 8 Dec. 1888; Arizona Weekly Journal-Miner, 19 Dec. 1888.

<sup>36</sup> E.g., Evening Star, 27 March 1889; Indianapolis Journal, 27 March; Wheeling Daily Intelligencer (Wheeling W. Va.), 28 March; The Sun (NY), 28 March; Evening Bulletin (Maysville, Ky.), 28 March; St Paul Daily Globe, 28 March; Omaha Daily Bee, 28 March; Sacramento Daily Record-Union (Calif.), 28 March.

ered by the press or that would bring him before either the admiring or the merely curious multitudes; no bonanza of engraved prints which in turn could have stimulated new fashions for middle-class Quaker attire. Over time, this ensured that Bright's cult dwindled to a relatively small number who remembered his contribution during the Civil War, or who admired and studied his oratory. Bright therefore scores high on the 'hero' axis, and low for 'celebrity.' By contrast, the sheer publicity generated by the visits of Lafayette and Kossuth brought them as individuals before much wider audiences comprising all classes, sexes, and, at least in Lafayette's case, ethnicities. Of course, Lafayette and Kossuth had natural advantages for making them celebrities, in particular their romantic 'foreignness' compared to Bright's stolid Englishness. Lafayette's debonair manners and gallic charm won him almost universal admiration, while the exotic appearance of the bearded Kossuth, reproduced in countless print portraits, was a feature of his appeal on both sides of the Atlantic (Roberts 2015; Lada 2013). Above all, perhaps, it was their own desire to play the celebrity game and to court publicity and popularity for their own ends which allowed the trappings of celebrity, whether welcomed, tolerated, or resented, to attach themselves to these men, for however brief a time. Crucially though, Lafayette's greater comfort with early American fame culture placed him high in the pantheon of American heroes, while he continued to bask in his fame as a living celebrity. Kossuth's discomfort with the demotic side of his celebrity, and the controversial nature of his tour, ensured not only that his status as hero remained highly contested, but also that his celebrity moment was relatively short-lived.

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