





not recall”) – the answer that he uttered numerous times, during the cross-examination of his testimony, and which became, in effect, his nickname after Lord Brougham destroyed his credibility by eliciting this response so often (see also the prints by [Charles Williams](#) and [William Hone](#) memorializing this phrase). John Singleton Copley, who prosecuted the case, admits that he is “steep’d in Vice,” and expects to be “punish’d justly.” Enclosed in the frame of a bar that bears some resemblance to a guillotine (and also to a pillory), the conspirators do not seem to notice their images in the mirror suspended above them, which presents them to viewer upside-down. John Bull, equipped with conventional insignia of justice and fairness, emphatically condemns them all. His conventional hat here performs double duty as the black cap of a judge pronouncing a sentence of capital punishment. ([fig.3](#))

The political motives for the print may be associated, in part, with the movement to expand the franchise: a good part of Queen Caroline’s support came from politicians and radicals who associated the government (and the small majority in the House of Lords that approved the Pains and Penalties Bill) with the forces of reaction, aligned against the middle and working classes. When the government withdrew the bill, realizing that it would not pass in the House of Commons, the result was a setback for the reform movement. Insofar as the print celebrates John Bull’s power, as an ordinary Englishman, to make his voice heard, the influence that he seems to enjoy here would not start to gain political recognition until the passage of the First Reform Act in 1832.



Figure 3

Just as the expansion of franchise occurred gradually, the nineteenth century also saw the development of various other figurations of the “average man,” in his legal and political aspects, that may be aligned with the image presented here. In numerous legal domains (criminal law, torts, and contracts, for instance) the “reasonable man” came to function as an essential personification used for assessing liability; prints like this one helped to establish the conditions that would foster the emergence of this device. Walter Bagehot’s image, in *The English Constitution*,<sup>1</sup> of “public opinion” as embodied by “the bald-headed man at the back of the omnibus” provided yet another variation on this theme: for Bagehot, this character represented “[t]he middle classes—the ordinary majority of educated men,” who “in the present day [wield] the despotic power in England.” The figure would soon be transformed into the “man on the Clapham omnibus,” used by numerous judges as a more distinctive evocation of the “reasonable man.” The judicial figure illustrated here may be thus be placed in a longer genealogy, and recognized as one of the many factors that conspired to associate public opinion, common sense, moral rectitude, and political power with the ordinary Englishman.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1867).