

History 225
Re: Lincoln Conspiracy

The Context:

* Begin w/ the Dahlgren raid and the Confederate leadership's belief that Dahlgren's orders to burn Richmond and assassinate Davis and any other Confederate leaders they could lay their hands derived from the higher circles within the Union--right up to the White House.

* The work of the Confederate clandestine services in Canada. It is certain that Booth was associated with this "Department of Dirty Tricks." Booth was a Confederate spy and was used to run messages and medicine into Confederate lines.

The Rebels Secret Service were active in attempts to destabilize the 1864 election. Fire bombing of New York; efforts to free Confederate POWs; raid on St. Alban's, Vermont; financing and encouraging secret Northern organizations like the Kinights of the Golden Circle and other pro-Confederate "patriot" groups in the old Northwest to take up arms and declared a Confederation of the NW and break off from the Union in time for the 1864 election.

In 1864 there was an effort by a member of the Secret Service to spread a yellow fever epidemic in WDC with the use of infected blankets. It failed because yellow fever couldnot be transmitted in this fashion.

Booth was not involved in any of this. But there is evidence that he was part of a Confederate plot to kidnap Lincoln; spirit him from Washington to Richmond and hold him hostege for the exchange of Southern POWS or for other forms of political blackmail. Booth headed up an action team to grab Lincoln and both times it failed to materialize.

These were plans adopted after the Dahlgren Raid.

The Thomas Harney mission to blow up the White House w/ Lincoln and what ever cabient or war leaders were inside. Harney was an explosive expert from the Torpedo Bureau. He was to be infiltrated into WDC by Mosby and his raiders in April 1865. A part of Mosby's force was spotted by Union calvalry and Harney along with some others were taken prisoner. (Wm. Tidwell, April '65)

After this that Booth decided to go ahead with his plans to assassinate Lincoln and Johnson, Grant, Seward, etc.

Context: Desperation and vengence-seeking of the Confederacy; Dahlgren Raid legacy; Sherman's march through the South; Lincoln's Hampton Roads position--unconditional surrender; Lincoln would support the franchise for blacks; Dixie was crashing down faster than any one expected.

History 217
Page two

Re: Lincoln Assassination

There has been a growing counter-argument over the years that has taken on impressive weight in terms of new evidence and a recognition that Lincoln's assassination was an integral part of this period of turmoil and violence in American history ****

Begin with the recognition that John Wilkes Booth was a Confederate spy. He ran quinine and other medicines into the South during the war. As a Northern (Maryland) actor he had plausible reasons for extensive travel plans.

Some of his travels took him to Canada, more particularly to Montreal, which was a very active center for the CSA's secret service network (CSA's Secret Service was rather sophisticated). There is good evidence to believe that Booth was associated in some ways with this network.

*** Lincoln's assassination was not an isolated episode. It was rather an expression of emotions and psychological tensions produced by the war and by a series of catastrophes that overwhelmed the South in the Spring of 1865.

There is good evidence that Jefferson Davis and some elements of his secret service were planning to reverse the South's desperate fortunes by a desperate act. It may have been a plan or plans to abduct Lincoln and bring him to Virginia and then ransom him off against the Confederate POWs. Or it may have been or become even more desperate--that would be his assassination. That there was planning along lines like this involving the CSA secret service in Montreal is more than just circumstantial.

Could Davis and men in his Cabinet have resorted to such acts of perfidy or condemnable lengths?

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Remind ourselves that Lincoln in January 1864 approved a raid by Union cavalry on Richmond. One of the officers in raid, a Colonel Ulric Dahlgren, whose father was an admiral in the Union Navy, led part of the raiding force but was ambushed and killed by Confederates. On his person were found papers that stated his intention was to burn the capitol and kill J. Davis and his cabinet. These papers, under Lee's orders, were published. The Union claimed that Dahlgren's "orders" were forgeries. . . .

But Lincoln did not shrink from the abduction of J. Davis. In May 1863 Lincoln learned that Richmond was virtually undefended. he wrote to General Hooker that "our men . . . could have safely gone in and burnt everything & brought us Jeff Davis."

History 225

Re: Notes w/ Lincoln Assassination

Source: William Tidwell, et. al., Come Retribution

Thesis(based on largely circumstantial evidence but no less convincing in certain aspects) that the government in Richmond worked first to (1)abduct Lincoln and hold him hostege for return of Confederate POWs or to hold against the overrunning of Richmond; (2) when that failed they decided to blow up the White House and kill the Union leaders to disrupt control and command of federal forces(a decapitation plan); (3) but events moved so fast at the end that Booth still thought he could save the Confederacy even after Appomatox(since there were still 100,000 CSA soldiers under arms), by killing Lincoln.

Escape route of Booth after the assassination at Ford's Theatre was along a route used by the Confederate Signal Corps(clandestine service)between Richmond and Washington during the war. Those who helped Booth all along the way were not random individuals, they were all members of the Confederate underground system in Maryland and Virginia. They were part of Lee's rather sophisticated intelligence network in this theatre of war.

The Tidwell book provides an interesting insight into the CSA intelligence services or clandestine operations. The service was busy during the war in trying to finance anti-Lincoln and Union sentiment in the North. They attempted to free Rebel POWs; tried biological warfare against Union troops; planned to burn New York city to the ground (Bacholder, Niagra Falls); and conducted a raid on St. Albans, Vermont.

The thesis proposed by Tidwell--The 'executive action" program against Lincoln began its planning stages in 1864. Then accelerated after the Dahlgren Raid. It may have changed from abduction to the more desperate plan to decapitate the Union leadership by blowing up the White House. (Plans to sneak explosives expert Harney into WDC with the help of Mosby's raiders. When this plan failed and Harney was captured, Booth may have decided to go ahead with the assassination of Lincoln and other Union leaders--Grant, Seward, Johnson.