

# PLAYBOY'S HISTORY OF ASSASSINATION IN AMERICA

PART I

article  
By JAMES MCKINLEY

*for more than a century, political murder has been a way of life. Booth and his fellow conspirators were the first assassins—their legacy the abiding question: were they alone?*

*The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic and a killer.*

—D. H. LAWRENCE

WHEN THE FIRST settlers came to America, they brought with them two fateful articles—a God-drunk dream of themselves as blessed and a gun. They believed they needed the dream to endure and the gun to impose their dream on a new world.

They were right, for with Scripture and shot and shrewd dealing, they spread the dream until, 169 years later, their rectitude was proved with the signing of the Declaration of Independence. That day, the citizenry ran home and armed itself to ratify, forever, the American dream, first with celebratory gunshots, then with the Revolution.

For the next 200 years, wars



were fought, Presidents assassinated, strikes broken, minorities persecuted and riots suppressed, and succeeding generations awoke to their horrors. Still, the dream persisted, inspiring and shaping each wave of Americans, until, in Dallas' Dealey Plaza, our turn came. The gun that killed John Kennedy shocked us awake, drove into our brains the fact that assassination was now, terribly, more than historical. Wide-eyed as horror-movie addicts, we then watched the murders of Malcolm X and George Lincoln Rockwell, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy and an attempt on George Wallace—watched American assassins kill with perfect democracy, left and right alike, while we stuttered. Can this be us? Who are we, to kill this way?

Those who believe America is a more homicidal nation than others—who compare us with Imperial Rome and point to atrocities in Vietnam—can take special comfort in the legend that long before Jamestown, white men's blood had baptized the land. The story goes that in about 1000, on one of the several viking expeditions to Vinland, the explorer Thorvard was persuaded by his wife, Freydis—the bastard daughter of Eric the Red—to slaughter their companions. It seems that Freydis wanted their friends' larger boat and their booty. If true, Freydis' murders—she herself hacked down five women—are the first recorded instance of economic violence in American history.

Indeed, one of the remarkable facts of America's past is that not until the 19th Century, well after our Revolution, that of the French and the one we call the Industrial, did political murder—assassination—become a native curse. It wasn't until 1804, when Aaron Burr killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel, that there was a sharply etched case of one-on-one killing over political differences, and it was 1835 before anybody tried to kill an American President. Nevertheless, it clearly was in the Colonial and revolutionary periods that we

This famous picture of Lincoln was taken at the height of the Civil War. Four days later, he delivered the Gettysburg Address.

## CONSPIRATORS:

One failed actor,  
a landlady  
and assorted spies  
and deserters.



John Wilkes Booth



Mary Surratt



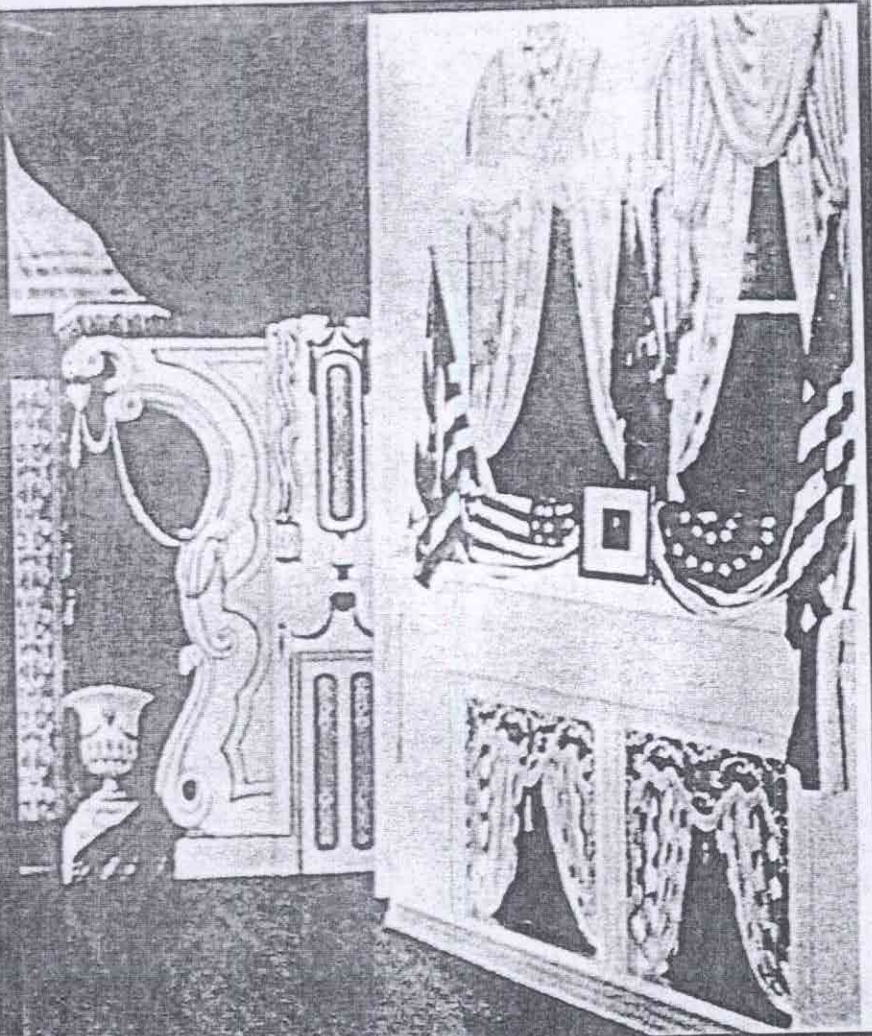
George Atzerodt



David Herold



Lewis Paine



On Good Friday, April 14, 1865, a weary Lincoln attended the evening performance at Ford's Theater. With his wife, Mary, and a young Army major and his fiancée, he sat in his booth (above), enjoying Laura Keane's performance in *Our American Cousin*. Behind the door, Booth, watching through a hole (left) he had bored earlier, waited for his



moment. As Harry Hawk spoke the line "You sockdolagizing old mantrap," Booth entered the box and fired his derringer point-blank at the back of Lincoln's head.



This skull of a Civil War soldier who died at Bull Run (above) was used in an official report to depict Lincoln's wounds. The autopsy found that while the bullet (above right) struck Lincoln in the back of the head, its force shattered his skull opposite the point of impact.

first became aware of our capacity for murder and its varying causes. It surfaced early.

Not long after the Plymouth colonists landed, Miles Standish, the upright Pilgrim who was not nearly so reluctant in war as in love, felt his position threatened by a new boatload of settlers who didn't worship God the right way. With his fellows, Standish decided to solve two problems at once. They would liquidate some Indians who were menacing them, then warn the new arrivals that a similar fate awaited them. Safe in the conviction that they acted justly, they lured a Massachusetts Indian chief to their camp, hacked him and two of his braves to bits, then publicly hanged his 18-year-old brother before proceeding to attack the Indian camp and continue the massacre. Thereafter, Standish warned the new colonists away, proclaiming that the economy, not to mention the theology, couldn't support them all. The rival colonists decamped for Maine. Standish returned in triumph to Plymouth, put the Indian chief's head on a pike and settled down to some fur trading.

In these acts of the Pilgrims—and in their later battles over trades with the other "chosen," the Puritans, or in the "hangman, do your duty" persecutions of the Quakers—we cannot know if the motives were mostly economic, racial,

civil, theological or ultimately personal. The violent usually have a smorgasbord of rationalizations at hand. But we can, in those killings, detect the lineaments of a key question: Did Freydis' murders for booty and Standish's killings for God, territory and trade begin a tradition of *assassination* in America or merely one of violence?

To find an answer, we need some definition of assassination, and one peculiar to our national experience. Assassination? We can say it is the killing of a prominent person, rationally planned to advance or sustain a cause that most often is political—or, as is too frequently the case in our time, to secure notoriety, however temporary, for the assassin—that killing usually being carried out by an individual or a small group of conspirators. Accepting that, we have to excuse Freydis and Standish as our prototypical assassins. Killing solely for monetary gain is not assassination, nor is leading a bunch of crazed zealots against unsuspecting natives. Even so, the viking lady and the Pilgrim father foreshadow the age of assassination in America, and we can legitimately ask, What are the constituents of American assassination?

We can begin with what's least important, the myth of Americans as hand-to-hand killers, struggling like epic





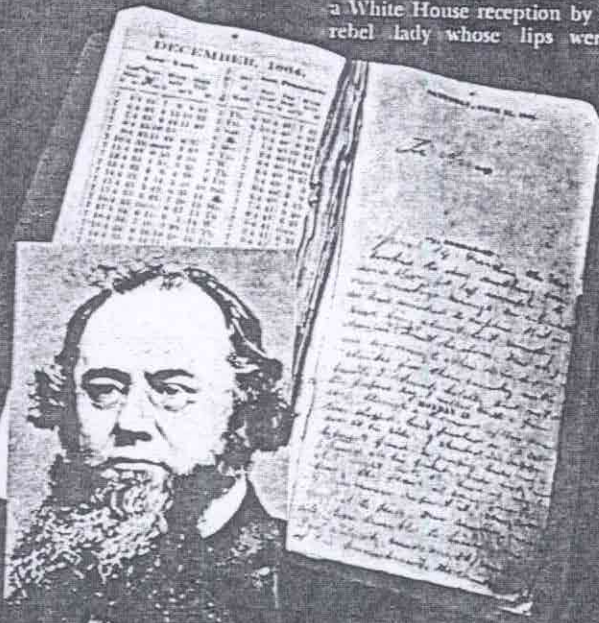
Lincoln passed the night in agony, lying in this too-short bed in a boardinghouse across the street from Ford's.

heroes against their opponents. It's true that those earliest Americans grappled directly with their adversaries, just as the assailants of Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, Anton Cermak, Huey Long, Malcolm X and Robert Kennedy were belly close to their victims. But,

like the Greeks and Romans and the Borgias, who preferred slow poisons administered by servants, we have had our long-range assassinations—most recently, John Kennedy and Martin Luther King. And lest we think those are 20th Century technocratic aberrations,

akin to fire bombing from five miles up, we should remember the apocryphal story that Lincoln, before he fell to the native gun tradition, was the victim of a poison-kiss plot. Lincoln, who reportedly once said assassination was not an American crime, was kissed at a White House reception by a rebel lady whose lips were

Secretary of State Seward (below left) survived knife wounds inflicted by Lewis Paine. Secretary of War Stanton (below right) ran the country during Lincoln's agony. After Booth's death, Stanton took custody of his diary. When it was introduced as evidence, critical pages were missing.



infected with smallpox germs. Whether or not this story is true, it tells us much about the American imagination and about the passions that swirled around Lincoln before he attended the last performance at Ford's Theater of John Wilkes Booth.

Assassination as a frontier-ethnic facedown is not, then, peculiarly American. Nor is tyrannicide our invention, the Greeks instituting it as early as the Fifth Century B.C. and the Romans carrying it to perfection. Europeans, beginning in the Middle Ages, assassinated Thomas à Becket, two Henrys of France, James I of Scotland, a number of the Medicis, and so on down to figures as diverse as Marat, Alexander II, Count Bernadotte, Trotsky and Admiral Darlan. In our time, assassination, as much as ever, crosses national and cultural barriers at random. The names Trujillo, Diem, Lumumba, Gandhi, Faisal and Zapata make the point.

Perhaps the unique characteristic of the American assassination is that the assassin misunderstands the nation in whose cause he thinks he kills. He is a poor historian, though he believes otherwise. In his linear and insular reasoning, things will, must proceed as fantasized in his own delusions:

Booth believes he eliminates the great threat to the South, but Lincoln's death brings on the tight-lipped Radical Reconstructionists, latter-day Puritans whose policies halve the nation for two generations.

McKinley's death, a sacrifice to the common man and to the end of Imperial America, brings on the Roughest Rider of them all, and Teddy Roosevelt acquires new dominions for us.

Huey Long's murder removes the populist dictator but clears the way for Earl and Russell Long to rule Louisiana.

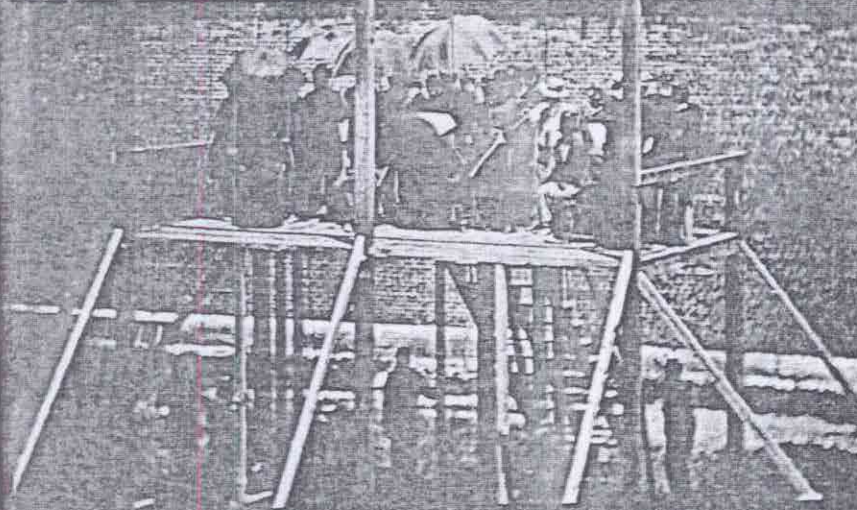
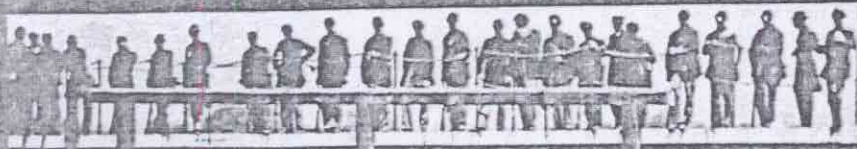
Lee Harvey Oswald or someone destroys Kennedy the appeaser and Lyndon Johnson's bellicosity makes us war haters.

Martin Luther King's death brings not race war but gun-control laws and an avalanche of civil rights legislation.

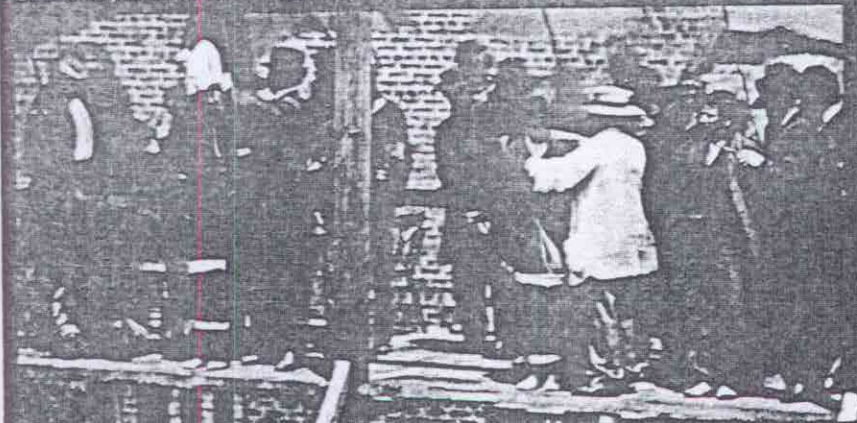
Sirhan Sirhan slays Robert Kennedy and while the Arab watches from his cell, the nation moves closer to Israel.

And the assassins, if alive,

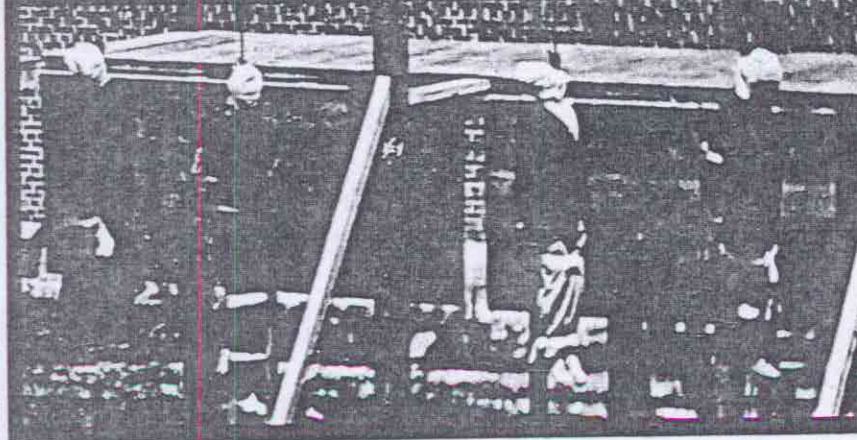
## THE END OF THE CONSPIRACY



On a hot July seventh, Mrs. Surratt, Paine, Herold and Atzerodt were hanged in a Washington prison yard.



A few hours after the executions, the gallows were torn down and sawed into short lengths for souvenirs.



Dr. Samuel Mudd—imprisoned.



Edward Spangler—imprisoned.



Michael O'Laughlin—imprisoned.



Samuel Arnold—imprisoned.



John Surratt—exonerated.

are bemused. Some have made yet another miscalculation. They've ignored the avenging angel, the sergeant who slays Booth, or Long's bodyguards, or Jack Ruby.

Yet the assassinations have had effects. Not always what the killers anticipated, not nearly so effective as those bloody but systematic coups in Europe and the East and Latin America, where power is usurped and governments toppled. Because he is American, our assassin—iso-late—believes with molish irrationality that one great deed will maintain or restore the republic. That is peculiarly American, just as is the toleration, even veneration, we have had for violence.

Abraham Lincoln knew he was an assassination target. Like John Kennedy 100 years later, he sometimes mused over the possibility of his death. On the Good Friday in 1865 when he was shot, Lincoln remarked to William Crook, his bodyguard, "I believe there are men who want to take my life. And I have no doubt they will do it."

Those obsessed with historical repetitions recall J.F.K.'s words that Friday morning of Dallas: "If anybody really wanted to shoot the President of the United States, it would not be a difficult job—all you have to do is get on a high building someday with a telescopic sight. . . ." Both Presidents agreed, too, that they could easily be slain if the killer were prepared to sacrifice his life. Perhaps our first and latest Presidential victims—whose murders are similar in several ways—meditated on their ends in this way because they were, unlike their assassins, good historians. They could keep time in mind, could see themselves as targets ordained by history, by war, by controversy, by great and conflicting interests within the country. It seems they also knew they could not escape their assassinations.

It is certain that Lincoln's death prefigures the assassinations of our time. Reviewing it, we shall see the similarities. There are the uncertain motives of the alleged assassins. Inconsistencies in physical evidence. Missing evidence. Contradictions or impossibilities offered as facts by the Government and its commissions. The odor of a Governmental cover-up. Finally, the crucial specific questions, such as, Was Lincoln betrayed to Booth's fatal gunshot by someone in his Administration? By his Secretary of War and political rival, Edwin Stanton? In his home? In the South? In the Vatican? Or did the mad Booth act alone?

From the beginning of his term, Lincoln was shadowed by untimely death. On his way to Washington in February 1861, to be inaugurated, he was informed by super-spy Allan Pinkerton that an attempt on his life might be made in Baltimore as he changed trains for Washington. Throughout the Civil War, Maryland seethed with Secessionists—the Booths

were Marylanders—and it appears that in 1861, some six or eight conceived the idea of killing Lincoln in the confusion of a diversion staged at the train depot, then fleeing by ship to the South. Whether or not the plot existed is debated, but Lincoln was spirited to Washington by a secret route and arrived in semidisguise, huddled in an old overcoat, crowned by a ruffled soft hat, accompanied by only two trusted bodyguards (one of whom, Lincoln's former law partner Ward Hill Lamon was to lament being absent April 14, four years later). The cartoonists had a marvelous time depicting the new President skulking into his capital. Lincoln's own sentiments seem to have been uttered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, before his ignominious arrival in the city where he would finally be struck down. He said, "If this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle [the Revolution's prize: an equal chance for everyone] . . . I would rather be assassinated on this spot than surrender it."

In Lincoln's mind was our history. We were, after all, risen commoners. That forbade an imperial Presidency. Lincoln disliked guards and panoply, once said he couldn't be the people's President if he shut himself up for safety in an iron box and that an assassin had better be careful, because he might get somebody worse for the next President. Still, Lincoln knew we had a violent tendency. He could look back to 1804 and see Aaron Burr prod his political opponent Alexander Hamilton to a duel. Some said Burr did so to rid the nation of a dangerously aristocratic and ambitious man; others that Burr had avenged himself for 1800, when Hamilton had thrown his support to Jefferson, thus defeating Burr in the House of Representatives for the Presidency. Lincoln knew, though, that this duel was emblematic of his own time: Hamilton's whiggish pragmatism versus the egalitarian absolutism of Burr.

Then Andrew Jackson had been threatened in 1835, when Lincoln was a 25-year-old Illinois legislator. Old Hickory was strolling outside the Capitol when an out-of-work house painter named Richard Lawrence popped from behind a pillar, raised two pistol, and pulled the trigger of one. Jackson heard the cap explode but felt nothing. He rushed Lawrence, his cane raised to thrash him to the ground. Lawrence pulled the other trigger, and that pistol also misfired. Jackson was lucky; but then, he always had been. He'd killed Charles Dickenson in a duel in 1806 through the stratagem of wearing a loose frock coat that slowed his enemy's ball so that it wounded him grievously but not fatally. Andy then coolly shot Dickenson dead. As for Lawrence, Jackson suspected he had been part of a Whig conspiracy to murder him and not the lone, deranged man the failed assassin claimed to be.

Lincoln knew about Burr, about Jackson, about the mobbing and killing of Elijah P. Lovejoy in 1837, when Lovejoy defended his abolitionist newspaper in Alton, Illinois, and by dying at the hands of angry proslavery men gave the cause its first martyr. Before Lovejoy's death, Lincoln had in the Illinois legislature counseled those very citizens that slavery was a grievous wrong. Slavery, he said in 1856, "debauches even our greatest men." He might well have been thinking of Kansas, where the issues had led to killings, rapes, burnings, as proslavers and free-soilers fought it out.

Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas debated for the U.S. Senate seat in 1858. Lincoln won the popular vote but Douglas the election in the legislature, so Lincoln stayed in Springfield while John Brown, the terrorist abolitionist, left Kansas bloody-handed to capture the Government's arsenal at Harpers Ferry in October 1859. "God's Angry Man" hoped to pass out rifles to the oppressed blacks and spark a slave revolt. But Colonel Robert E. Lee and the Marines were summoned. They recaptured the Federal property and put down the rebellion and on December 2, 1859, Lee gave the order and Brown swung at rope's end in the mild Virginia autumn. Among the onlookers, dressed fit to kill as a temporary member of the fashionable Richmond Grays, was a handsome actor, only 21, second youngest of a famous family of thespians, now himself a budding idol of the Southern stage. John Wilkes Booth got sick after Brown was hanged and he later told his sister that "Brown was a brave old man." Certainly, Brown seemed braver than Booth, who had joined the Army in order to see the hanging, then ended his enlistment the next day. He told all those, then and later, who asked why a man with his pro-South views didn't join the Army that he had promised his mother he wouldn't go to war.

Back in Illinois, Lincoln was preparing a speech that, within three months of its delivery at New York's Cooper Union in February 1860, would make him the Republican Presidential nominee, then President. Lincoln told the skeptical city slickers that Brown did not represent responsible antislavery Republicans—the radical abolitionists on the platform snickered—and that the South need fear no interference "with your slaves." It was a speech to placate everyone except the most fervent abolitionists. Yet such sentiments did not soothe Booth's histrionic secessionism and the actor slandered Lincoln in Southern salons with a ferocity that increased after Lincoln's election as our 16th President. Booth's rebel talk earned him the applause his acting did not, at least in the North, where his elder brother Edwin was king of the stage. John Wilkes's envy of Edwin's earnings and his romantic espousal of the South's cause combined in

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late 1860 and early 1861 when he went North determined to equal Edwin's fame and earnings in the cultural capitals. He was, after all, now a star—a commentator said, "A star is an advertisement in tights, who grows rich and corrupts the public taste"—and now he could bad-mouth the "damn Yankees" in their own territory. But he found little sympathy until he joined the Baltimore chapter of a secret society, the Knights of the Golden Circle, which intensified his hatred of the gangling Lincoln's preserve-the-Union talk. His acting also was frequently panned, though he had the name, the physique and the looks: 5'8" but broad-chested and muscular. Black hair and flashing, imprisoning eyes. A good horseman, fine marksman, superb fencer, splendid gymnast.

But barely trained in theater; instead, making it on his looks and his physical abilities (he rewrote Shakespeare's scenes to include daring leaps and sword fights). He hadn't had Edwin's long, on-the-road apprenticeship with their father, Junius Brutus Booth, who had been the most famous Shakespearean actor in America. Nonetheless, John Wilkes had been successful with women in Richmond, Montgomery, Savannah, New Orleans, and now he went North to flaunt his abilities and anti-Union bravado. In Albany on February 18, 1861, he was appropriately playing in *The Apostate* when Lincoln's train came through on the way to the First Inauguration. Booth first saw Lincoln then. He gleefully read the newspapers that ridiculed the President-elect's remarks as "inspired flatulence, slops and dregs," and that night played his role with a fury noted in the reviews. All the spring of 1861, Booth—or Wilkes, as he was called—loudly proclaimed in the dressing rooms, bedrooms, barrooms his admiration for Brutus and Charlotte Corday (Marat's assassin). He was prostrated when Fort Sumter fell on April 14, 1861. Four years later to the day, Abraham Lincoln was shot by Booth.

In the years from 1861 to 1865, we had come to know killing too well. The nation—North and South—was calloused to war's brutalities, to civil disorders (the Draft Riots in New York in 1863 killed and wounded almost 1000), to brutalities in prison camps, to the savagery of guerrilla raids, to the terrible slaughter on the battlefield. Calloused, also, to military rule directed since 1862 by Lincoln's pious, intolerant and fanatically abolitionist Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton—who allegedly schemed to keep the war going, to lose just enough so that the North would be turned to hatred for the South and for slavery. As Stanton saw it, the great aim of the war was to abolish slavery. General McClellan later reported that the Secretary of War believed "to end the war before the nation was ready for that would

be a failure. The war must be prolonged and conducted so as to achieve that." If true, Stanton's desire was directly contrary to the Sense of Congress resolution of 1861, which stated that the war was not to interfere "with the rights of established institutions of those [Southern] states."

It was also contrary to Lincoln's desires in the war's early phases. In 1862, he wrote to Horace Greeley, an adamant abolitionist: "If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that."

But Stanton, throughout the war, would maneuver against Lincoln and thwart his plans. He was a powerful and often devious man who wanted to be President. He was in perhaps the best position possible to act against Lincoln in an ultimate way: either by organizing and directing a conspiracy to assassinate him or by allowing an independent conspiracy to succeed. The evidence against him, as we shall see, is at least compelling.

After the first years of defeats, the North's material and manpower had prevailed. At Appomattox on April 9, 1865, Lee had surrendered to Grant, who had stipulated generous terms, as his President wished. In Washington, the joy was boundless. Lincoln said, "I've never been so happy in my life." Torches lit the night, gunshots punctuated the cheers, bands paraded and played *Dixie* as though the ballad were a trophy of war.

On April 11, Lincoln addressed a crowd on the White House lawn. He carefully, wearily laid out a plan for the reunion of the states. His tone was conciliatory. Later, he elaborated to the Cabinet that in dealing with the defeated South, there would be "no bloody work." Twelve-year-old Tad Lincoln heard the people chant of the rebel leaders, "Hang 'em," and said to his father, "Oh, no, we must hang on to them," to which the President agreed fervently.

Still, John Wilkes Booth, listening, was outraged. He muttered to an accomplice that that was the last speech Lincoln would make. He hated this "ape," this "Emperor," who wanted to install doulocracy. Lincoln had actually been to Booth's precious Richmond, had entered the conquered capital on April fourth. Before that, he had been elected again and Booth had been there on March fourth to watch him make that sickening inaugural speech about "malice toward none and charity for all." No, Lincoln would not really "bind up the nation's wounds," that was clear. With Lee beaten, Lincoln must be killed. Cut off the head and the body dies. The executioner as hero. As Booth put it in his diary for April 13, "Until today, nothing was ever thought of sacrificing to our country's wrongs. For six months we

had worked to capture, but our cause being almost lost, something decisive and great must be done." This messianic memorandum seems utterly familiar to us, who have seen Sirhan's confidences or read the journal of Arthur Bremer, Wallace's assailant. Booth was our first savior assassin.

This decision to kill Lincoln was not Booth's first plot against the President. Before, he had wanted to kidnap Lincoln and exchange him for the thousands of Confederate prisoners Lee so desperately needed back in his armies. For that, he had assembled and subsidized a vaudeville troupe of conspirators. There was himself. He had some money, charm and contacts (his fiancée was a Senator's daughter, though his girlfriends were unconnected). And there were the others he'd enlisted to snatch the President:

- *Lewis Paine, alias Powell and Wood.* Aged 20. A Baptist minister's son and former Confederate soldier who had deserted after Gettysburg and later signed an allegiance to the Union. Handsome, enormously strong, dumb, a Negro hater (he'd been arrested for beating a black girl in Baltimore). Devoted to Booth after seeing him play in Richmond and meeting him in 1861. An absolutely reliable killer, trained for it in the war and out of place in a nonviolent world.

- *John Surratt.* Aged 20. A former Roman Catholic divinity student and presently a Confederate spy and dispatch carrier who knew the routes from Richmond through Washington to the Confederate underground in Montreal. Magnificent horseman and disarmingly convincing as a young clerk for the Adams Express Company in Washington.

- *George Atzerodt.* Aged 29. An illiterate, ferret-faced Prussian immigrant and coachmaker whose chief value was his knowledge of the roads south out of Washington, through Maryland, to Port Tobacco on the Potomac, and his skill and experience as a blockade runner who could cross the river with the captured President on board a chartered boat.

- *David Herold.* Aged 22. Chief occupations: partridge hunter and drugstore clerk. A loyal, agile, chinless boy with few thinking abilities (estimated mental age of 11) but with a profound knowledge of the most byward roads, swamps and houses along the likely escape route, south from Washington.

- *Samuel Arnold.* Aged 30. A former schoolmate of Booth's at the Catholic Saint Timothy's Hall in Catonsville. Deserted Confederate soldier but brave, and smart enough not to take Booth's word in everything. Worked as a farm hand in Maryland.

- *Michael O'Laughlin.* Aged 24. Another childhood acquaintance and Confederate deserter who was captivated by Booth's brilliance. A Maryland livery-stable and feed-store laborer who drank

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too much and thought too little.

To these, when the conspirators' trial came, would be added two more interesting names: Mary Surratt, 45, a widow, the mother of John, who kept a Washington boardinghouse said to be the nest where the plots were hatched. Mrs. Surratt also had a tavern at Surrattsville, Maryland, on the Southern escape route. And Dr. Samuel Mudd, 32, a physician charged with introducing John Surratt and John Wilkes Booth, and who, after Lincoln's murder, admitted having treated Booth for the broken leg he sustained leaping from the Presidential box to the stage at Ford's Theater.

These are the principal players in the kidnaping-become-murder plot. There are many others, one in particular named Louis Weichmann—a pudgy, 22-year-old former theology student who was a clerk in the War Department, an avowed Southern sympathizer, a boarder at Mrs. Surratt's and a fink.

Booth first planned to seize the President at Ford's during a performance of *Jack Cade* on January 18, 1865. He knew Lincoln went often to the theater. Indeed, in 1863, the President had seen Wilkes at Ford's in *The Marble Heart* and had admired his acting. That was the year Booth took to denouncing Lincoln's Administration from the stage—an act that got him arrested in St. Louis and released only when he signed an oath of allegiance to the Union. On another occasion, the President saw Booth perform a villain's role and noted that each malevolent speech seemed directed at him. He said afterward, "That fellow did look might sharp at me." So Booth's theatricalism would have made him perfectly satisfied to attack Lincoln in his box, singlehandedly truss him up, lower him to Herold, Arnold and O'Laughlin and escape through a door held open by another actor. In New York, Booth offered a stock player named Samuel Chester this role, but Chester refused, despite the assurance that "50 to 100" men were involved in the venture. Inevitably, Chester's recollection would lead to speculations after Lincoln's death about just who, and how many, had conspired to kill the President.

With Lincoln subdued, the kidnapers would head for the Navy Yard Bridge in a carriage driven by Surratt and escorted by other conspirators. Thence to Port Tobacco, Atzerodt's boat, Richmond and the presumed plaudits of a grateful Jefferson Davis. The plan failed when the weather turned bad and Lincoln stayed home.

While no evidence exists that Lincoln was aware of this late-show plot, he certainly knew someone was after him. On March 19, 1864, *The New York Times* reported rumors of a plan, vetoed by Davis, to send 150 Confederate raiders to kidnap Lincoln. In August of that

year, a sniper plugged the President's top

hat as he rode the three miles from the White House to his summer retreat at the Soldiers' Home. Unabashed, Lincoln rode in and told the retreat's sentry, "Someone seems to have tried killing me." Who is unknown. It could have been a free-lance killer or one of Mosby's raiders (those irregulars were then operating in the Washington environs, to the consternation of officials) or merely a disgruntled citizen. Likewise, no one knows whether the attempt was premeditated or spontaneous.

Next came a report in November from Union spies that Confederates in Montreal were plotting Lincoln's death (Booth was then in New York, fresh from a Canadian visit, playing Marc Antony in *Julius Caesar* with his brothers Edwin and Junius Brutus, Jr.—during the star-studded performance, Canadian-based rebels made daring arson raids on several New York hotels and Union ships and docks, a coincidence that did not go unremarked). On December 1, 1864, an unsigned ad appeared in the *Selma, Alabama, Dispatch* soliciting funds to arrange the murders of Lincoln, Vice-President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of State William Seward. Why Selma was chosen is unknown, unless the advertisers believed the town of 800 was especially ripe territory for such a scheme—an opinion Martin Luther King shared a century later. By April 1865, Lincoln had numerous serious death threats filed in his desk under ASSASSINATION.

Naturally, these reports brought efforts to protect the President, despite his dislike for bodyguards. Soon after taking office in 1862, Stanton had had his National Executive Police take over patrolling Washington from the small, badly manned Metropolitan Police. They were commanded by Lafayette C. Baker, later a prominent figure in the assassination saga. Baker formerly served the San Francisco vigilantes and he inclined to rough and immediate justice. He was described as sandy-haired, red-bearded, with "long, insatiate jaws." But his police did not guard the President. That was left to special detachments of cavalry (Lincoln complained that their jangling prevented conversation in his carriage) and to bodyguards either detailed by the Metropolitan Police or chosen by Lincoln's old friend Lamon, marshal of the District of Columbia. Altogether, it was catch-as-catch-can.

Stanton often nagged Lincoln to be guarded more. But the President was obdurate, and so Stanton, Baker and Lamon did their best—or so it was thought. The result was a wartime President curiously open to threats, even from vainglorious actors.

Booth next planned to kidnap Lincoln on March 20, 1865. On the fourth, with most of the conspirators, he attended

Lincoln's Second Inauguration. A photo shows Booth's hoboish underlings—so like the Dealey Plaza "tramps" of a century later—stationed at the foot of the speaker's platform, while the top-hatted sinister dandy Wilkes peers down from a gallery at the President. Some historians speculate that Booth intended a flourish there and then, the whisking away of the President at his own Inauguration. But Booth's men were not up to that stroke, even if he bragged later that he could have shot Lincoln where he stood. He didn't, either because the crowd would have torn him to fragments or because the conspirators' inaugural attendance was a scouting mission to see just how well protected the President was those days.

Apparently, not well enough that the group abandoned its plans. In mid-March, Booth and Paine supposedly laid in wait for Lincoln near the White House. They were frightened away when Lincoln strode into view surrounded by men. But with the South now tottering at Petersburg, it seemed to Booth they must strike, grab the President and use him as a towering pawn in the peace talks.

On March 13, Booth reassembled his band, which had scattered to prevent detection following the Inauguration. They drifted into Washington, all making appearances again, as before the *Jack Cade* plan and the Inauguration, at Mrs. Surratt's boardinghouse. All were duly noted by the observant Weichmann, who reported them to the War Department. The department did nothing about these callers. Perhaps they were thought too clownish for serious attention. But the inactivity provoked serious questions a few weeks later.

A number of the conspirators attended Ford's Theater on March 13 to reconnoiter (the Fords were Maryland friends of the Booths) and Wilkes urged again on them the ineffable *rightness* of grabbing Lincoln in a playhouse. At a dinner soiree that evening, after plenty of food and drink, Arnold and Booth argued over the plan. Arnold, supported by O'Laughlin, said even the newspapers were predicting the South would make some move against the President. They'd stay in for one more attempt, and that in some sensible place, not a damned playhouse. Booth muttered that a man should be shot for backing out and Arnold retorted that two could play that game.

March 18 brought Booth's last full performance, again in *The Apostate*. From a stock player named John Mathews, Wilkes gathered that Lincoln would on the 20th go to the Soldiers' Home retreat for a matinee of *Still Waters Run Deep*. That was the time. Again the conspirators gathered. Herold, Surratt and Atzerodt stashed carbines, rope and tools at the Surrattsville tavern, arranged for a boat, then returned to Washington. By the lonely road they



waited. Surratt would seize the President's carriage. O'Laughlin, Arnold, Atzerodt would deal with the escort. Paine and Booth would handle Lincoln. The carriage clattered into view, alone. The conspirators surged forward . . . but it was not Lincoln in the carriage; rather, another person, whom Surratt later said was Salmon P. Chase, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Red with rage, the group returned to Mrs. Surratt's. Booth whipped his boots in anger. The group dispersed. Arnold and O'Laughlin said they were through and left for Maryland. Surratt went to Richmond to resume dispatch carrying up to Montreal. Booth decamped for New York and a week of ladies and booze. Presumably, he suspected the Government knew something was afoot. And some officials did, if they were listening to Weichmann.

Still, Booth would make one last try. On the 29th, the President would be at the theater. Booth wired O'Laughlin, but Michael was finished. Arnold wrote Booth the same. Cursing, Booth repaired on April third to Newport, Rhode Island, with an unknown lady. That day, Richmond fell to Grant. On Saturday, April eighth, Booth checked into the National Hotel in Washington. On the tenth, the shouts in the streets told him Lee had surrendered. He began to drink heavily, to call at Mrs. Surratt's, searching for the remnants of his gang. Only Atzerodt, Herold and Paine were about. With Paine, or perhaps Herold, Booth heard that gentle speech on the 11th. Booth railed about votes for niggers and drank on the next day in John Deery's saloon. Like assassins of a later era—Oswald, Ray, Sirhan—he seemed bent on mad public displays of his opinions, his intents, his skills. Whether Booth was mad or chose outrageous behavior as a protective device is moot, though a question we might ask of a contemporary expert such as "Squeaky" Fromme.

Lincoln not only spoke of his premonitions of death—he saw himself dead. Within a month of April 14 he'd had, and remarked on, a dream in which he saw a corpse lying in state in the East Room. The dreaming President asked a guard who was dead in the White House. He answered, "The President, he was killed by an assassin." Surely this was in the President's mind on the 14th, when he conducted his 11 A.M. Cabinet meeting. He listened once more to Stanton's urgings that parts of the defeated South be put under military rule and denied statehood. It's incontestable that in the afternoon Lincoln went to the War Department and requested that Major Thomas Eckert accompany him as bodyguard to the theater that night. Eckert, Lincoln said, could break iron pokers over his arm.

Stanton denied the request, saying he had pressing work for Eckert that evening. Lincoln then asked Eckert himself, who

said he followed Stanton's orders. In fact, Eckert only went home that evening, while Stanton called on Seward and then went home himself. However many questions their excuses raised later, the President acquiesced that afternoon. He would have one Metropolitan Police Force bodyguard. In addition, Major Henry Rathbone and his fiancée, Clara Harris, would accompany him and Mrs. Lincoln. The Grants had begged off, pleading their desire to go to their children in Burlington, New Jersey. Lincoln suspected the real reason was Julia Grant's dislike for Mrs. Lincoln. Mary was insanely jealous of women around him. Lincoln would as lief stay home. His wife deserved the recreation. They'd lost two of their four sons, had watched their beloved Willie die in 1862 in the prison of the White House. But she'd put on her brave face, get gussied up . . . she spent plenty for clothes, that was sure. At Ford's was a benefit for her favorite actress, Laura Keene, who was appearing in an amusing comedy, *Our American Cousin*. A pity his older boy, Robert, was too battle-fatigued to go. The Stantons had also excused themselves before, which hardly surprised Lincoln. Stanton had little sense of humor. Lincoln would go, accept it, too. He knew he was tired, worn thin, older than his 56 years. His belly bothered him, he slept badly, he stooped and shuffled—hardly the indefatigable frontiersman. Victory was his, but at what cost? To what end? So much to do.

Booth was busy, too. Though he'd booked a box at Grover's Theater the day before, in case the Lincolns and the Grants went there, Ford's would be easier. He knew the Ford family well, received his mail at their office. A stagehand named Edward Spangler had agreed to help. He said the locks on the doors to the Presidential box were broken, which would make it easier. Walking toward Ford's that chilly morning of the 14th, Booth heard people singing *When This Cruel War Is Over* as they waited for the ragtag of General Joseph Egleton Johnston's army, then at bay in North Carolina, to surrender. So he was delighted when he overheard Harry Ford tell the stage carpenter that the Presidential party was coming to his theater. The partition between boxes seven and eight was coming down. Booth was sorry now he had no use for O'Laughlin, who'd shown up drunk at the hotel that morning. Still, things were no longer as dull as he'd said in a letter to his mother the day before.

With characteristic agility, Booth leaped through the day. At Ford's, he inspected the Presidential box. An easy jump of 12 feet from it to the stage, then out the back door to the alley, where Spangler would be holding a horse. Then along the escape route, east across the Anacostia River into southern Maryland, down to Surrattsville, across the Potomac into Virginia and on to Richmond. Then

he watched a rehearsal, though he knew the play as well as Laura Keene. During the third act, there was a line—"You sockdologizing old mantrap"—that always brought a big laugh. Only one actor (Harry Hawk that night) was onstage then. So there it was.

Then to a livery stable to arrange a fast mare for the evening. Next, back to his hotel to dress all in black and pocket his wallet, an unused diary, a compass, his watch, a gimlet, a small brass derringer and a long knife that, unsheathed, bore the inscription, LIBERTY AND INDEPENDENCE. AMERICA—THE LAND OF THE BRAVE AND THE FREE. SHEFFIELD, ENGLAND.

Booth soon afterward dropped in for a moment at Mrs. Surratt's boarding-house and, before long, the widow woman set out for Surrattsville. Weichmann agreed to drive her.

The Herndon House, one block from Ford's, was Booth's next call. To the reliable Paine, he gave the job of killing Seward in his bed as he lay recovering from injuries received in a carriage accident. Paine was eager, but he didn't know Seward's home, couldn't learn the lay of Washington. No trouble. Herold would guide Paine. They should strike near 10:15 P.M., so that the Union hydra heads would all roll at once.

On to the Kirkwood House, where Atzerodt should be. But the Prussian was out boozing, so Booth pushed a note under his door. Then, most curiously, he left a card for Vice-President Johnson, who stayed at Kirkwood House, reading, "Don't wish to disturb you. Are you at home? J. Wilkes Booth." That gesture has reverberated ever since.

Booth went on to Deery's saloon after picking up his horse at the stable. He drank brandy and water, thoughtfully watched billiards and then hurried downstairs to Grover's Theater's office. There he wrote a letter to the editor of Washington's *National Intelligencer* explaining why he had killed. He signed the letter, it's said, "J. W. Booth—Paine—Atzerodt—Herold," and so he crossed forever his Rubicon.

He showed his mare's speed to some stagehands from Ford's and then riding on Pennsylvania Avenue saw John Matthews. Booth knew him well, used him for information, had once even tried to enlist him in his kidnap plots. Now he asked Matthews to deliver the *National Intelligencer* letter the next morning. Matthews agreed. While they chatted, a file of Confederate prisoners was marched past. Booth exclaimed, "Good God, Matthews, I have no country left!" and galloped away. He passed a carriage escorted by outriders. It was General Grant and his wife. On his way to the train station, bystanders told Booth. Well . . . only "the ape" was left to him.

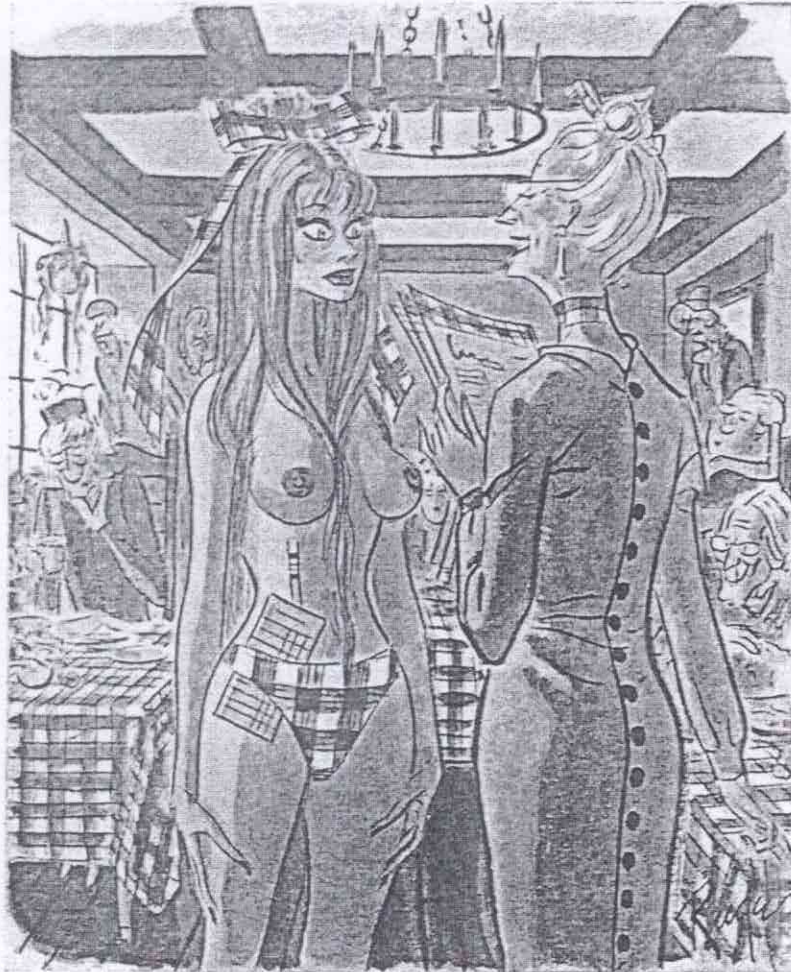
Booth seems then to have found Atzerodt. He ordered the drunken immigrant

to enter Johnson's room around 10:15 and kill the Vice-President. Atzerodt demurred. Too dangerous. Johnson may have been drunk and foolish at the Second Inauguration, but, as Lincoln said, "Andy ain't no drunkard"—and nobody disputed Johnson's courage. Booth insisted, threatening Atzerodt. He caved in and Booth left. Atzerodt continued drinking.

At Taltavul's tavern, next to Ford's, Booth was setting them up for Ford's stagehands. He soon excused himself to go into the empty theater. He went to the pine door leading to boxes seven and eight, those above and directly left of the stage. The broken locks would admit him, but he had to keep others out. He took a board that had supported a music stand. He carved a niche in the plaster wall to jam its end firmly against the door. The fragments he scooped up with one of the five pictures of girlfriends he carried. In the door to box seven he bored a hole with his gimlet. Now back to the hotel. He loaded the single-shot derringer, packed a disguise and two Colt revolvers in his saddlebags. Then to the last meeting with Paine, Herold and Atzerodt. He'd take Lincoln. Paine would enter Seward's house on the pretext of bringing a prescription from Seward's doctor. Atzerodt had his job. When all were finished, they'd rendezvous at the Navy Yard Bridge. Then on to the South, maybe even Mexico. He told them of the *Intelligencer* letter. There'd be no turning back.

By 9:30, Booth was in the alley behind Ford's. He called for Spangler to hold his horse, but the stagehand was occupied with the play. Young Joseph Burroughs came to hold the famous actor's mount. Booth entered the theater, nodding left and right, and walked under the stage through a passage to the street. He ordered a whiskey at Taltavul's. At the bar, but unknown to Booth, were Lincoln's valet, Charles Forbes, and his Police Force bodyguard, John F. Parker, clearly not by the body. Some acquaintances needed Booth, telling him of Edwin's latest successes in New York and elsewhere. Wilkes smiled graciously and replied, "When I leave the stage for good, I'll be the most famous man in America."

Outside the tavern, Booth chatted with other admirers, refusing a drink from Captain William Williams of the Washington Cavalry Police. After accepting a chew of tobacco from the ticket taker, he ascended to the dress circle and watched for his moment. It approached and he moved toward the first door. He was astonished to see no one barring his way. The President was unguarded! As the theater rang to comic lines, Booth entered the vestibule of the Presidential box. He barred the door with his board, then tiptoed to the door to box seven. Through the gimlet hole he saw the President, holding his wife's hand. To



*"It's a natural mistake, my dear—this is 744 East Prescott Avenue; your new job must be at number 744 West."*

the right, on a sofa in box eight, Major Rathbone sat making cow eyes at his fiancée. Onstage, Hawk began his boffo lines in act three, scene two of Tom Taylor's ever-popular comedy. Booth opened the door. As Hawk spoke and the President smiled, Booth aimed the derringer just behind the left ear. It was about 10:15.

"You sockdologizing old—" and the laughs came, muffling the explosion, the thumped-melon sound of a half-inch lead ball entering Lincoln's skull. The 1675 spectators flinched as the President's head moved slightly to the right and forward and slumped soundlessly. Booth said, softly, "*Sic semper tyrannis.*" Major Rathbone jerked upright, jumped at him, was repulsed by a knife slash to his left arm. Mary Lincoln's face bore the puzzled look of a bludgeoned cow, then crumbled to hysteria. Booth's hand found the railing. He vaulted. Noises now. Screams. There was a tear as his spur

caught the Treasury Guard's flag decorating the box. A thud as he hit the stage, the snap of his left shinbone. Hawk stood paralyzed. Booth! Shouts from the audience. . . . "What? . . . Stop that man! . . . What? . . . The President? . . . Part of the play? . . ." Some later said they heard Booth cry "Revenge! I've done it!" Others that he shrieked "Death to tyrants." Others that he merely limped away, brandishing the knife. Certainly, once backstage, he pushed away an actor, then a stagehand, hobbled to the rear door, out to his horse. A blow to young Burroughs' head with his knife hilt, a kick. Then the pounding hooves off toward the Navy Yard Bridge leading South. Everywhere, sounds ripping the night:

• At Seward's house, maniacal screams and groans fill the street as the huge Paine runs amuck, slashing down Seward's son, a soldier, a nurse, at last falling on the helpless Secretary himself. cutting

again and again down across his face, his neck, until his knife grates against the iron brace supporting Seward's injured neck. Then Paine screaming, "I am mad, I am mad!" knifing a State Department courier, running from the house to find his guide, Herold, gone, spurring for the Navy Yard Bridge to Booth and safety. Paine runs, the rendezvous, everything forgotten, and leaves a badly wounded Seward, who will recover.

• Around Ford's, a fugue—the sobs of Mary, sad, knowing sighs from doctors, belligerent inquiries by the police and Stanton's men, the clank of cavalry sabers and bayonets restraining crowds, soon the grunts of men carrying Lincoln across the street to Petersen's boardinghouse, to be stretched across a too-short walnut spindle bed in a little room off the hall. The deathwatchers listen to the President's hopeless breaths tear the room and soon the nation. Stanton whispers orders, directs the investigation, rules America from Petersen's gaslit cubbyholes.

• In the streets, men shout, fire guns, mob those who say they're glad the son of a bitch is dead, as the news is spread by jungle drums of rumor ("Confederates, Mosby's raiders, Jubal Early's . . . the last bloody raid . . . Lincoln, Seward, Johnson, Grant, all dead, for God's sake, look out!"—and, listening, we hear in our time Lyndon Johnson's conspiracy fears after Kennedy, hear "They'll get me, too" in his pulse). The uproar reaches Atzerodt, riding blind drunk, heading for the Kirkwood House and his death date with Johnson. The shouts scare him. He abandons his horse. He'll sell his revolver for drink money and try to make for upper Maryland.

• Those listening most closely hear in all this the sounds of more distant thunder, storms gathering over the death of Lincoln's policy of magnanimity to the South. Like echoes of Booth's escape, Lincoln's death brings on night hooves of the K.K.K. and the counterforce of carpetbaggers. In the dying breaths of the 16th President, we catch those of the nation's innocence.

Lincoln died at 7:22 A.M. on April 15. Stanton, who had taken control of the Government by virtue of his wartime powers, was supposed to have said, "Now he belongs to the ages," though some eyewitnesses said he merely asked a minister to lead them in prayer. All agreed Stanton did a curious thing when the President breathed his last—took his top hat and ceremoniously settled it upon his own head, as though crowning himself. At ten A.M. Holy Saturday, 1865, Salmon Chase gave the oath of office to Andrew Johnson as 17th President of the republic. Incredibly, in the uproar, the character assassination of the new President began, as men like Senator Stewart of Nevada said Johnson had been drunk and mud-caked that morning, never mind that he

was seen sober and somber at Lincoln's deathbed during the night and comported himself well at his oath taking. All in all, things were unhinged.

During the frenzied night, the nation had learned the news in stories bold-bordered in black. But a few Americans were not surprised. Astonishingly, a town in Minnesota throbbed with news of Lincoln's death and a small newspaper in New York had published a bulletin that Lincoln had been killed—before Booth acted; and in the confusion, these facts were lost, though not forever forgotten. As for the major media, despite a telegraph blackout, the Associated Press broke the news about midnight, followed later by every major correspondent. Uncertainty and caution after the first flash prevented mention of Booth as the killer, despite the testimony of dozens of witnesses, theater folk and others, who identified him under the wrathful interrogation of the police and Stanton—who had established his command post in Petersen's rooming house.

Throughout America, weeping women, angry men, rabid mobs poured out to lament and protest the act. Before 24 hours had passed, mobs had even set upon former Presidents Franklin Pierce (for being a Democrat, hence "Southern") and Millard Fillmore (for not draping his home in black). Crowds everywhere attacked known rebel sympathizers as the rumor spread of a giant Confederate conspiracy. Sympathy and compassion for the defeated "erring sisters" vanished. Demonstrators and even Andrew Johnson shouted for hanging Jeff Davis and all other Confederate leaders (to a sour apple tree, as the song went). People who dared whisper against the martyred President were summarily beaten. Only in the South were there signs of jubilation, as with a Texas paper that wrote that the killing was "ordained by God." More sensibly, the *Richmond Whig* said, "The heaviest blow which has ever fallen upon the people of the South has descended." Overall, in its reflexive combination of grief and violence, the nation never saw its like again until the murder of Martin Luther King, another leader who combined political power (and consequences) with a high and authentic moral tone.

Almost from the derringer's report, Stanton and his deputies—especially Lafayette C. Baker—worked furiously to catch and dispose of the assassins. Stanton barked orders through his perfumed beard. The telegraph service was to be cut, except the secret War Department line, until they could give the "correct" story to the press, to the ambassadors, to the world. Booth was not to be identified until they were sure. Search his rooms, bring in his friends, prepare posters, offer rewards no witness could refuse. All trains out of Washington were to be searched, all roads were to be sealed (though seemingly not fast enough, since Booth's escape was suspiciously easy). All

known secess agents to be corralled. Alert 8000 troops, plus Navy vessels, to interdict travel. Above all, get Booth and his associates, such as that maniac responsible for the attack on Seward. As for rights, they were suspended—habeas corpus, press freedom, whatever. This was war.

Stanton's reign of terror worked—in all the ways that such things do. It worked more than partly because Stanton's War Department had known for several weeks that Booth, the Surratts, Arnold, O'Laughlin, Atzerodt, Herold and, at the end, Paine intended to harm Lincoln. Weichmann had told them. Yet, until April 15, Stanton and Baker did not move against the plotters. When they did, it was quickly. By Monday following Black Easter, Stanton's men and the Metropolitan Police had arrested Arnold, O'Laughlin, Spangler, Mrs. Surratt and Paine and had detained many known Confederate agents, sympathizers, bystanders and assorted "witnesses." To anyone ignorant of Weichmann's information—which he was especially eager to amplify after an interview with the police the morning following the assassination—the catch would seem the result of impressive policework.

Though Maryland had never seceded from the Union (and Lee's campaigns had intended to rectify that), it was strongly prorebel. Particularly to the southeast of the Yankee capital. Somewhere there were Booth and Herold—reunited on the road to Surrattsville—at large, still, despite rewards that eventually reached \$50,000 for Booth and \$25,000 for Herold. But arrests were to come. On the 18th, the Cavalry caught wind of Dr. Mudd. The doctor told his cousin he'd set Booth's leg early Saturday and sheltered two men briefly. The cousin informed the police. Mudd was soon brought in. Weichmann said Mudd had been in Washington to see Booth twice and had met him frequently near Surrattsville. They had merely discussed land deals, Mudd said. He was shackled hand and foot and, like the others, in due time taken aboard a monitor in the Potomac. By Stanton's order, a hideous canvas hood was placed over the head of each conspirator—except Mrs. Surratt. The hood prevented speech and hearing and was a barbarous exercise in sensory deprivation.

The Cavalry sweeping the Southern route—all lusting after the rewards—also brought in a drunken John Lloyd, who rented Mrs. Surratt's tavern at Surrattsville. Given Weichmann's choice of being hung as a conspirator or feted as a stoolie, Lloyd stammered that he'd seen Booth and Herold on the murder night. They'd stopped to get some carbines secreted there and some whiskey. Booth seemed injured. Lloyd also said that on Mrs. Surratt's visit on the 14th, she'd told him to get "the shootin' irons" ready, that somebody would be by for them. Thus, he incriminated Mrs. Surratt,

elating Baker and particularly Stanton—who now busied himself preparing indictments of all the captured conspirators, along with Jefferson Davis and sundry other Confederates he thought deserved punishment. Immaculately scribed in Stanton's precise hand, these indictments (only recently discovered by the Library of Congress) were perhaps beyond the Secretary's province. The duty customarily lay with the Attorney General. But Stanton ignored this legality, among others, in his zeal to legitimize radical Reconstruction and to keep the matter wholly in his grasp.

All this time, Booth and Herold were hiding in a thicket near the Zekiah Swamps, about 30 miles south of Surrattsville. They were concealed by a sympathizer named Captain Samuel Cox and cared for by Thomas Jones, the chief rebel signal officer on that stretch of the underground route. Booth was cold and hunted and his leg pained him. He lay, waiting for a chance to cross the Potomac and get to Richmond. He passed hours writing in his diary, telling how he'd killed Lincoln and yet "I am here in despair . . . doing what Brutus was honored for—what made [William] Tell a hero; and yet I, for striking down an even greater tyrant than they ever knew, am looked upon as a common cutthroat." Worse, he found no mention in the *National Intelligencer*, which Jones brought him, of his letter (Matthews, afraid, said he had burned it). Instead, there were denunciations, even by the leaders in the South. He recorded that the Government must be suppressing his letter, his side of it. He told Cox they would never take John Wilkes Booth alive and wrote in his diary, "I have too great a soul to die like a criminal."

But he was fleeing like a criminal. On April 20, Booth and Herold tried to cross the Potomac but were scared back by shots from a patrolling gunboat. The next night, in the fog, they made it, rowing blindly. They fetched up at Nanjemoy Creek but were rebuffed by a Colonel Hughes. They then drifted downstream to find Jones's acquaintances. In fact, everything was downstream from then on.

Ashore, a Dr. Stewart refused to aid them. Booth sent him \$2.50 and a nasty note on a diary page. The night of April 23, the two fugitives slept in a Negro's shack. The next day, they commandeered the man and his team for a journey to the banks of the Rappahannock. There, waiting for a ferry, they fell in with three rebel parolees (or, conceivably, Mosby's raiders detailed by someone to escort them to Richmond). With them, Booth and Herold crossed to Port Royal, sought shelter and were sent to the farm of Richard Garrett, about ten miles north of Bowling Green. Booth was introduced by Captain Willie Jett, his Confederate friend, as Boyd, a wounded ex-soldier seeking lodging. In the ten days

since Lincoln's murder, Booth had traveled about 80 miles.

On the 24th, Lafayette Baker is supposed to have drawn a circle around Bowling Green and announced that despite all the reports of Booth in Canada, Mexico, Texas, they could find the escaped assassin within that ten-mile radius. This divinatory act has never been explained. A Major O'Beirne reported that he had rooted out word of Booth and Herold a day earlier and requested authority to capture them and claim the \$75,000 but was refused. Baker first said he "deduced" their location, then that a "Negro informant" told him about the fugitives (this informant's deposition has never been found).

However it struck the trail, the Cavalry did find Booth and Herold. The horse soldiers went by steamer on April 25 to Port Royal, raised dust galloping past Garrett's and immediately found Jett in Bowling Green. They wanted information about the strangers they'd heard about in Port Royal, and if they didn't get it, Jett would hang at once. They got the information and, before dawn on the 26th, they were at Garrett's.

Commanding were former Lieutenant Colonel Everton Conger and Lieutenant Edward Doherty. Second in command and chief detective was Lieutenant Luther B. Baker, cousin of the oracular Lafayette. With them in this detachment of the 16th New York was a religious-nut sergeant named Boston Corbett.

They stood farmer Garrett on a chopping block and told him they'd string him up if he didn't say where the assassins were, but the old man was speechless, and they were making the noose when one of his sons announced that Booth and Herold were sleeping in the tobacco barn. The troopers surrounded the \$75,000 on the hoof. Conger, Baker, Doherty shouted for the men to come out, they knew who they were. The trapped men shouted they wanted time. Debate ensued until finally Herold gave up, was yanked from the barn door, handcuffed and tied to a tree. He yelled, "Who is that man in there?" Herold's cry caused bewilderment. Was it Booth (though Herold later said it was) or a trick? The other man pleaded for time, then for the troopers to retreat a bit to give him a fighting chance, finally that they should "prepare a stretcher for me, boys." All very theatrical. But it didn't move Conger and Baker. They'd burn the barn, they called. The Garretts shouted at "Boyd" to surrender. They heard him arranging a barricade. The fire was started. It tore the night. The officers could see the man standing upright, silhouetted, his carbine cradled, pistol in his right hand. His crutch was thrown aside. Then a shot and he fell. It was 3:15 A.M., April 26. He was pulled out and laid on a straw mattress on the Garretts' porch. A mortal gunshot wound behind and below

the right ear through the spinal cord, exiting on his left. Baker called the man Booth and the dying man looked surprised, forever adding a measure of confusion to the puzzling case of John Wilkes Booth.

The officers were furious—he was to be taken alive—and they raged. Who shot him? Or did he kill himself? Corbett stepped forward to say he did it because God told him to. And so the assassin had his own assassin, Oswald his Ruby. The head-shot man whispered that they should "Tell Mother I died for my country." He weakened in agony, small cries.

Herold and the others watched Booth die around seven A.M., 11 days to the hour after Lincoln. After collecting his personal effects, they had the body sewn in a horse blanket. It went by wagon and ferry across the Rappahannock and on to find the Cavalry's steamer. Along the way the wagon collapsed, dumping the body into a ditch. The stiffening corpse stayed sometimes unguarded while the officers searched for a new wagon, then for a landing place for the steamer. And Captain Willie Jett escaped during all this, not to be recaptured or to testify until early May. By early morning on the 27th, the body arrived at Washington. There it and Herold were transferred to the monitor Montauk. Herold was ironed and hooded and put into the hold with some of the other conspirators. An autopsy was performed on Booth, for so was the putrefying body identified by a desk clerk, a dentist and a doctor—all familiar with his distinguishing marks. However, close relatives, including his brother Junius, imprisoned as a suspected collaborator, were not summoned to identify the body—an oddity that led later in the century to several mummified "Booths" touring with carnivals.

Then, even more oddly and on Stanton's orders, Lafayette and Luther Baker made a dumb show for the curious crowds of preparing to bury the body at sea. They lowered a shroud, weighted by cannon balls, to a skiff and rowed downriver. Stanton wanted no relic seeking or Booth-the-hero cult nonsense springing up. When the crowds dispersed, Booth's body was secretly buried in an ammo vault of Washington's Old Penitentiary. His last name was painted on the coffin cover. The result of Stanton's secrecy, in one of history's ironies, was a mortal suspicion about Booth's remains, so similar to our time's "autopsy mysteries" about John Kennedy.

Stanton's behavior further mystified things. Colonel Conger had galloped for Washington and his share of the reward as soon as Booth expired. He told Lafayette Baker the news. Baker was ecstatic. He rushed to tell Stanton, "We have got Booth," he announced. Stanton's reaction: "He put his hands over his eyes and lay for nearly a moment without saying a word. Then he got up and put on his coat very coolly." But when Baker next said



"You don't feel it's too cute?"

Booth was dead and gave Stanton his effects, including the diary, the Secretary sprang to work.

At Stanton's insistence, President Johnson ordered a military tribunal for the conspirators. Nine officers selected by Stanton would deliver the verdict. They included General Lew Wallace, who later wrote an imitation of Christ called *Ben-Hur*. The prosecutors were headed by Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt, who reportedly once said, "Not enough Southern women have been hanged in the war." Immediate protests to a military trial were voiced, notably by Horace Greeley. But Stanton maintained the assassination was an act of war. By the time the trial began, he would have Jeff Davis in jail for it. Besides, a court-martial circumvented normal rules of evidence and other legal niceties. President Johnson did ask the Attorney General for a ruling on the legality of the trial. It said everything was OK. Critics said it was judicial murder.

They had reasons. The trial began May 10, 1865. Throughout, the conspirators and Southern leaders were inadequately represented by lawyers, who offered feeble pleas of insanity for Paine, of stupid complicity for the others. The attorneys were reluctant to defend proved monsters. Herold and Paine were hopelessly guilty. Atzerodt had moved after Johnson, leaving incriminating circumstantial evidence. Arnold and O'Laughlin admitted their kidnap roles. Mudd? No proof, other than his acquaintance with Booth and setting the assassin's leg, but that was enough. Spangler had shoved Booth's pursuers back into the theater, had called, "That's not Booth" and, besides, had met with the killer, witnesses said. Mrs. Surratt—well, little except her

proximity to things, plus Lloyd's and Weichmann's testimony about her bearing suspicious packages to Surrattsville.

The defendants came clanking each day from solitary confinement in hoods and irons to the dingy courtroom, where the hoods were removed, but they remained shackled except for Mrs. Surratt and were forbidden to testify freely, even to face the judges and witnesses. They heard, though, their officer-judges frequently interrupt testimony with outrageous opinions of their guilt. They heard witnesses perjure themselves—notably, a congenital liar called Sanford Conover (real name, Dunham), who claimed he'd observed the Confederate cabinet plotting the assassination. Conover also instructed in perjury other Government witnesses, including spies, pimps, deserters and gamblers summoned to prove the defendants guilty. The Government introduced patently phony letters (one retrieved from a bottle in the sea, they said) to implicate Booth's band and the Southern leadership in a vast scheme directed from Canada. Holt hammered at the objective, evidence of the killing, pursuit, capture. All were found guilty on June 30. On July sixth, the individual sentences were delivered.

Jefferson Davis, et al. were to stay in prison.

Mudd, Arnold and O'Laughlin would spend their lives in jail.

Spangler got six years.

Herold, Paine, Atzerodt and Mrs. Surratt were to hang.

So all was in order, except perhaps the last. Women were revered in Victorian America. The press hadn't liked trying Mrs. Surratt at all, there seemed so little evidence. Now vehement protests burst out. But a deal for the woman was in the

works. The tribunal would show that no one gets away with killing a President or thwarting Reconstruction but would forward a petition for mercy to President Johnson.

The President said he never got it. Mrs. Surratt's daughter Anna, pleading for her mother's life, was rebuffed at the White House the morning of July seventh. Unbelievably, the executions were set for that day, one day after sentencing. Andrew Johnson signed the order at 10:30 A.M. And the traps fell at 1:26 P.M. Atzerodt whimpered and cried to the end. Herold stood mute. Paine joked with guards, seized a straw hat and put it on. He proclaimed Mrs. Surratt's innocence, then said his last words, "You know best," to his hangman, who'd assured him he'd try to make it painless. (As it was, Paine slowly strangled, his huge neck refusing to break.)

It was over for them, mostly over for the Government.

It could leisurely pursue John Surratt—he'd not been lured by his mother's plight—to England, to the Vatican (where he had enlisted as a papal Zouave guard), to Egypt, and eventually bring him back in 1867 to be tried by another phoned-up court and, miraculously, released after a jury failed to reach a verdict.

Mudd, Arnold, O'Laughlin and Spangler, in a final twist by Stanton, were diverted from the prison in Albany, New York, to the pestilential silence of America's own Devil's Island, at Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas. O'Laughlin died there of yellow fever in 1867. Mudd fought it as a physician and won. He, Arnold and Spangler were pardoned in 1869 by Johnson. Booth's body rotted until it was exhumed in 1869, identified again (or not) and reburied in the family plot in Baltimore.

Those are the facts as a consensus of Lincoln scholars sees them. But, like Booth's body, the questions will not stay buried.

Here are the most puzzling queries—so reminiscent of the Kennedys, of King—hovering over Lincoln's assassination. They emerge from the myriad accounts of the murder, including the latest: Weichmann's memoir, an alleged hypnotic reincarnation of Booth and the discovery of a code charging that Stanton was Lincoln's Judas and Booth his Brutus.

The first question must be, Were Booth's conspirators acting independently of others who might want the Administration beheaded? Any answer lies in Booth's possible motivation. We've seen his egocentricity. "I must have fame," he said as a boy. And he told Captain Jett, before revealing (if it were needed) that he was Booth. "It was done for notoriety." But can this Oswaldian rationale be all? His voice, hence career, was failing in 1865, but a frustrated lust for fame and

a failing voice might not have been sufficient impulse for assassination. Freudians speculate that Presidential assassins—and Booth, we recall, was our first—may kill to rid the nation of the “bad father” who had promised them much, delivered little and punished severely. It could be that Booth’s father, with his fame, with his long absences, was the progenitor of Wilkes’s hate (the flip side of the love denied). Yet how can anyone prove that?

It is simpler, maybe more accurate, to ascribe his acts to Confederate patriotism.

In January 1865, Booth left a letter with his well-loved sister Asia and her stage-comedian husband, John Sleeper Clarke. It outlined kidnap plots and sweatily proclaimed his love for the “old flag,” now besmirched under Lincoln. He signed it “A Confederate doing his duty upon his own responsibility.” Along with getting Clarke jailed for a while, this letter could be Booth’s honest declaration of his motives. Except . . . except that in Booth’s trunk, the police found a Confederate secret cipher and other documents, including letters, that may well have been in code. Paine, when caught, was carrying a pocket dictionary. He seemed no intellectual, but Noah Webster was often used as a code book. And throughout the investigation of the conspiracy, letters and pamphlets surfaced that kept mentioning oil, cotton, horses. Union intelligence officers knew these as Confederate underground code words, and so they wondered. They mused, too, over Booth’s frequent writings to and about his “mother,” even his dying words could have been code.

Then there were Booth’s several trips to Canada, where resided a mysterious “Jenny,” never explained and so a possible spy contact. There were coincidences such as when the rebel raiders struck New York just after Booth had visited their chief city of Montreal and while he himself was in New York playing in *Julius Caesar*. In his escape from Washington, Booth had the aid of men who were part of the underground conduit. His most able fellow plotter was John Surratt, a professional spy.

Further, where did Booth get the money to support the conspiracy (a question asked of many American assassins; notably, James Earl Ray)? In late 1864 and early 1865, his performances were few. He had had money before, as much as \$20,000 a year, but his expenses were high. He sought to sell some oil shares (oil, again), in June 1864, but that venture was fruitless. What about the infamous Confederate operatives such as Messrs. Howell and Ficklin, who dealt in “oil” and “cotton” and at least one of whom had visited Mrs. Surratt’s? It could have been that Booth was a fully certified spy, working under a perfect cover as a loudmouthed, hard-drinking, flirtatious tragedian, whose

profession gave him free access to theaters and agents both North and South.

But even if Booth were a spy, there is no evidence that he was directed to kill Lincoln. In fact, all the physical evidence, however contradictory in other ways, suggests he decided on it independently. And that suggests he was either a damned poor spy or none at all. We have our choice of motives: vanity or patriotism or congenital madness (his eccentric father, named after the heroic foe of Rome’s Tarquin tyrants, was called Mad Booth—and when Wilkes was accused of Lincoln’s assassination, an actor friend said he wasn’t surprised, “all the goddamn Booths are crazy”), or as a professional hit man or, most improbably, as an avenger. That last comes from the tale that Lincoln’s assassination avenged the hanging of John Yates Beall, a Confederate officer executed for an attack in mufti on a Union prisoner train near Buffalo. The story goes that Booth and Beall were school friends, had reunited in Canada and that when Beall was sentenced, Booth went to Washington to implore Lincoln to spare him. On his knees, he begged Lincoln and won his friend’s pardon, or so he thought. When Beall died anyway, Booth resolved to kill Lincoln. Unfortunately, it seems that a scandal magazine invented this motivation.

Similarly, nothing links the assassination directly with the Confederate Government. Though it is a point of law that *not doing something to prevent the killing can be construed as conspiracy* (as with current suspicions in the Kennedy killings), that seems tenuous, since Davis repeatedly repudiated the act, not to mention serving time for it. The Confederates may have known about the attempts (from Surratt, their courier?), even have wished it well, but they may also have wished it would go away, especially since there was a bona fide Confederate plan—remarkably similar to Booth’s—to kidnap Lincoln in 1864 with which Booth’s stage enterprise could have interfered. So no one can show that Davis and his Cabinet ordered Lincoln dead. Indeed, they lamented as the full fist of Stantonian Reconstruction fell on the South. They knew the basic rule of assassination between countries has, since the Greeks, been that the weaker does not assassinate the stronger (a point to consider when speculating that Castro ordered J.F.K. eliminated). Reconstruction was an example. The South did not benefit from Lincoln’s death.

Who might have benefited, then?

Some believe Lincoln died in a Roman Catholic conspiracy. It’s fact that Booth and Arnold were schooled by Catholics (not unusual in Maryland) and that John Surratt, Mrs. Surratt and Mudd were devout Catholics (as was Weichmann, a schoolmate of Surratt’s in a Catholic seminary). When Surratt slipped off to

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Canada, he found refuge with Canadian priests and he later found employment in the Vatican. Also, Mrs. Surratt's confessor in her death cell was ordered by his archbishop never to reveal what she had told him—an extraordinary measure, considering the traditional confidentiality of the confession. Consider that many priests denounced Lincoln's nonsectarian deism and that the Church tolerated the Confederacy. But nowhere in these coincidences is proof of a Catholic plot except in American minds still steeped in Plymouth Colony bigotry. The Roman Catholics could not gain by Lincoln's death.

Equally likely, and more racy, are the accusations that Mary Todd Lincoln connived in the murder of her husband. Mary was vain, extravagant, jealous, bossy and she had one brother, three half-brothers and three brothers-in-law serving the Confederates, one of whom—David Todd—brutalized Yankee prisoners at Richmond. It's true that by 1865 she owed \$27,000 in clothing bills, which could make her vulnerable to blackmail. It's true that people who hated her called her "two thirds proslavery and the rest secesh" and whispered that she was a spy for the rebels. It's rumored that while in the White House, watching a son die and a husband age, she had two love affairs, including one with a gardener. And, most damning, it's true that it was Mary Todd Lincoln who requested that John F. Parker be exempted from the draft and assigned to the White House detail as the President's bodyguard. Parker, who stood cheek to jowl with Booth at Tal-tavul's saloon the night of April 14, leaving the President unguarded. Strangely, though, he escaped reprimand from Stanton for his negligence; perhaps he redeemed himself with his arrest of a wandering whore the next morning. But even accepting half the rumors about Mary, including an inexplicable fondness for Parker, we cannot maintain with objective evidence that she betrayed Lincoln. On the contrary, there is much to prove she loved him deeply. Until she died, half-mad in Springfield in 1882, she did nothing that supported her accusers' case; in fact, she continually accused Parker of treachery. Nor has any credible evidence since come to light to make her Lincoln's Clytemnestra.

Certainly more plausible is the case against Andrew Johnson. Orchestrated by Stanton and the Radicals, the seditious noise started before the funeral cortege deposited Lincoln's body in Springfield. The abolitionists, at first satisfied with Johnson's anti-South tirades and the Surratt execution, soon saw that this tailor from Tennessee was not going to impose Stanton's military dictatorship, or hang more rebels, but instead would be lenient and implement the ignorant Illinoisan's policies. They claimed that Johnson had benefited most from the assassination. Exhibit A was Booth's calling card.

It still is. Why had Booth left it? It may have been for Johnson's secretary, whom Booth knew and could use for information. Perhaps he hoped for a pass through the Washington pickets (but why, if he were a spy?—it's said he had a forgery in Grant's name). Was Booth renewing an old acquaintanceship made in Nashville, where rumor once had Booth and Johnson keeping sisters as mistresses (if so, why)? Could Booth have wanted to implicate Johnson and thus cripple the new Presidency (but why, if Atzerodt was to kill Johnson)? Was the card a lure to get him out where he could be killed? It could even be that Atzerodt was an unwitting decoy (assigned by whom?) who would simultaneously throw off pursuers and implicate Johnson. We have no answers.

In any event, Stanton's party assailed the new President. It said his drunkenness at the Second Inauguration was to steel himself for the murder or kidnaping he expected that day. It claimed that Booth's card was a signal of intent, that Johnson's brief appearance at Lincoln's deathbed convicted him of heartlessness, that his alleged drunkenness the next morning, his appearance, suggested he had palavered that night with the killers. Harnessed to Johnson's avowed Presidential ambitions, this was powerful, circumstantial stuff. Stories were offered that Johnson was not in his room on the 14th (because, presumably, he had a hand in killing Lincoln). That Stanton had confided after the shooting that he thought Johnson was party to it. That Mrs. Surratt had perished to protect Johnson, who'd ignored her petition for mercy. When Johnson escaped conviction after impeachment, every abolitionist weapon had been used against him. But there was not then, nor is there now, proof that the 17th President plotted to kill the 16th. Rather, Johnson tried to continue Lincoln's policies and even kept Stanton until 1867, when he finally fired his dour Secretary and bitter enemy.

In Lincoln's time, these theories—Booth as rebel spy, a Catholic conspiracy, Mary did it and Johnson did it—enlisted great support. They flourished in the climate of uncertainty and in the mad distress generated by a fratricidal war. Today, we have similar weather, compounded of assassination, Vietnam and Watergate, in which, because so many things have happened, we assume anything could be, however cloudy. Yet history may tell us, as it has told Lincoln scholars, that such contemporary theories are quaint paranoias, nurtured in vapors soon to dissipate. In Lincoln's case, there is just one stubborn, weighty storm front; it hovers around Edwin Stanton and calls him a murderer.

The circumstantial evidence suggesting that Stanton betrayed Lincoln ranges from absurd to credible. The recent hypnotic reincarnation of Booth exemplifies the silly anti-Stanton stuff. Out of the

mouth of a farm boy named Wesley (a sort of bucolic Bridey Murphy) comes Booth to say Stanton was a secret member of the Knights of the Golden Circle—that rococo bunch of secesh gallants who took their name from a circle centered in Havana, which Caribbean port was to anchor a vast slave empire including the American South, Central America and, presumably, the Sargasso Sea. As such, Stanton directed the Circle's plot against Lincoln—even arranging for a stand-in for Booth at Garrett's farm and the subsequent successful escape of the actor to England, where he lived for years before dying, lonely, in Calais, France. Wesley doesn't vouchsafe precisely how all this was accomplished, nor does he seem to realize that such murder-and-escape stories are mythic and go back at least to Cain. Nevertheless, the case against Stanton is reasonable.

First, he was an unlovable man, whose behavior as Buchanan's Attorney General and Lincoln's War Secretary caused Gideon Welles (Secretary of the Navy) to record: "He has cunning and skill, dissembles his feelings . . . is a hypocrite." Welles did not add, though he might have, that Stanton also was peculiar in some ways. He once dug up the body of a favorite servant girl to look on her again. He exhumed his daughter's body and kept it, suitably contained in metal, in his room for a year, the better to mourn. When his wife died, he dressed her for burial in clothes like those she'd been married in. He slept with her nightgown and cap beside him. Coupled with boundless ambition, such necrophilia could produce a dangerous Secretary of War.

Certainly, there is little doubt that Stanton wanted to succeed Lincoln either electorally or as the South's military dictator. He had three major obstacles: the war, Lincoln and Johnson. The war he prolonged, then won. His accusers say he felt threatened, though, by Lincoln's growing popularity, and so he decided to strike by assassination—if not directly, then by allowing it to happen. God knew, he had warned Lincoln often enough. *Cui bono?* the accusers ask. Well, the Government's most powerful officers were Lincoln, Johnson, Seward, Stanton. The first three were targets and Stanton's rivals for power, and although Stanton's defenders strain to establish that desperadoes went to the Secretary's door that night, the evidence is otherwise. Only Stanton and a servant proclaimed that shadowy figures lurked on the steps, seemed to be pulling at the Secretary's broken doorbell—a mechanical failure that saved Stanton, it was said. The men who brought word of Booth's shot to Stanton's house said the doorbell worked just fine. Why would Stanton want to establish that he, too, was a target? Why did the conspirators miss him, while getting to Lincoln and Seward?

Perhaps they thought Stanton was too

well protected. But they could have seen otherwise. If, indeed, O'Laughlin had, as the Government said, scouted Grant on the 13th (and found him well protected), someone could also have found that Stanton was unprotected. He was conscious of security, certainly. He did tell Grant not to go to *Our American Cousin*, and the Grants promptly left town "to see their children," one of whom was in Washington. He told Lincoln that Major Eckert could not accompany the President as bodyguard. The questions come: Could Stanton have been protecting men he wanted to live and was he safe himself because he was a plotter? Did Grant leave town because Stanton knew something was up for Lincoln?

Stanton *did* know it, too. Weichmann's report, received at least a month before the assassination, specified that men gathering at Mrs. Surratt's were plotting against Lincoln. All such threats were reported to the War Department and presumably then to Stanton. Did he regard that one as routine because there had been so many? If so, why had Mrs. Surratt's—according to War Department records—been under surveillance for a month before the killing? Was the failure to act the mistake of a clumsy bureaucracy or part of a plan?

If planned, Stanton's April 14th refusal of Eckert as Lincoln's bodyguard makes sense. Stanton told the President the redoubtable major had urgent business. That night, Stanton ate supper, visited the bedfast Seward and went home. Eckert just went home. They may merely have been avoiding a tedious evening, yet the suspicion grows. Feeding it are the many statements from other officials, such as Provost Marshals David Dana and Ward Lamon, that they believed someone high up knew of the coming assassination attempt. Yet that, too, may well be hindsight—particularly if Booth's diary is to be believed and he didn't decide to kill Lincoln until the 12th or so (more perplexing, the diary entries were made *after* the killing, while Booth was fleeing). And the fact remains—Lincoln was unguarded except by the dandy Major Rathbone. His bodyguard was drinking. His valet, Charles Forbes, may have been in the box—authorities disagree—but whatever, he was scartely suited for dealing with homicidal, gymnastic actors.

Return, then, to the diary. That should establish whether Booth acted alone. The trouble is, it was delivered to Stanton alone, by Lafayette Baker, right after it was taken from Booth's body. Only one journalist in 1865 even mentioned its existence. It was not offered in evidence at the tribunal's show trial! It just vanished from the War Department files and didn't reappear until John Surratt's trial in 1867, at the insistence of his attorneys. It was discovered then that 18 pages were missing, cut out of the section covering the days

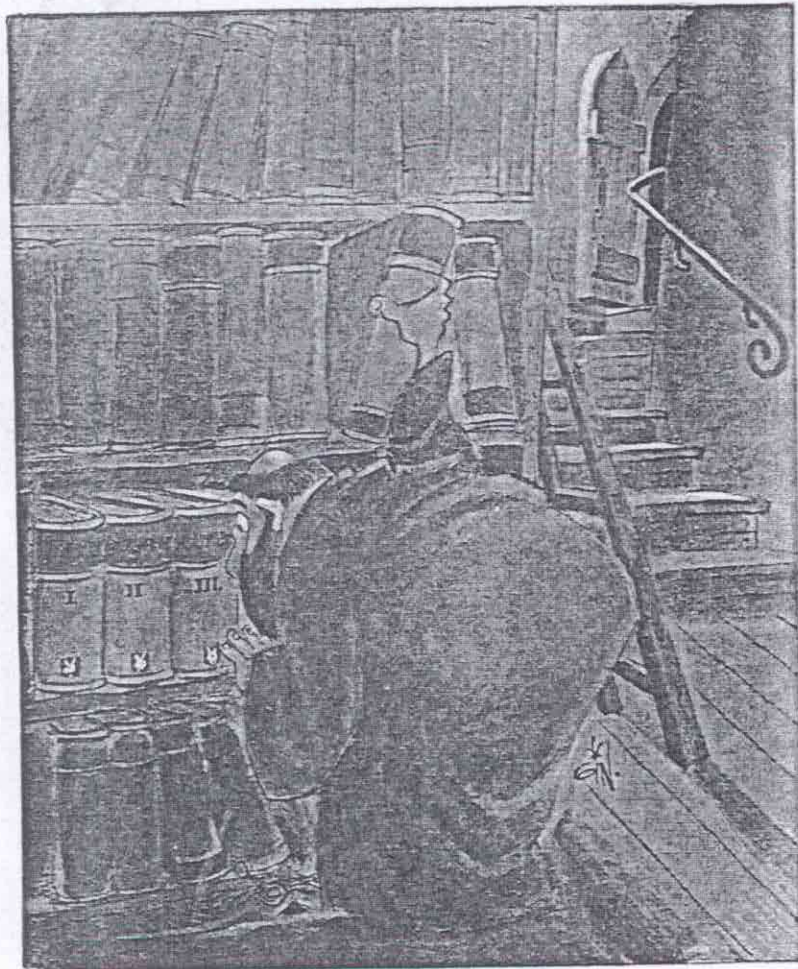
immediately preceding the assassination. Booth's diary was like Nixon's tapes.

Consider, also, the peculiarities of Booth's escape. Why was the most logical escape route left unguarded and open, while the Northern roads were quickly blocked? Did Stanton want Booth to escape? Had he provided the conspirators with the password to get over the Navy Yard Bridge? The Southern route *was* open and the pursuit down it was handicapped by conflicting orders from the War Department (Major O'Beirne's detachment was within a few miles of Booth on the 23rd, when it was recalled). However, it's equally true that Atzerodt went North and made it through the check points.

Anyway, why would Stanton have wanted Booth to escape? So his men could catch him, after being tipped off? How did the Cavalry find Jett so quickly? Was Baker's "deduction" about Garrett's flimflam? Stanton did bless Boston Corbett as a "patriot" and let him go, despite orders that Booth was to be taken alive and that anyone who shot the actor would

be severely punished. But maybe Stanton's deep religiosity welled up for Corbett. Maybe Stanton's cool reaction to Booth's death was not relief but pain. Perhaps, as many think, Booth made good his pledge not to be taken alive. The position of his death wound, the supposedly small caliber of the slug indicated a pistol—not Corbett's carbine—and so Wilkes may have made his own exit while Corbett grabbed for glory.

Did the disrupted telegraphy service on the 14th bear on Stanton's implied complicity? His accusers say it was his intention to create the impression of a large-scale Confederate operation, thus to create panic in which he could usurp power. Perhaps he didn't want rumors to spread before fact did. If so, the rebutters ask, how come some Northern communities broke the news of Lincoln's assassination the afternoon of the 14th *before* it had happened? Unless mental telepathy was at work, someone else was. Did Stanton's people err and let slip what was coming? Did the reports come from the Confederate underground? The Golden





Circle? The local priest? We don't know, and never will, it seems.

Even Booth's body assails Stanton. To this day, legends persist that it was not Booth shot in the barn, not his body Stanton buried. Wesley, the hypnotized farm hand, says Wilkes rests in Calais. Some think Booth's body was lost on the way to Washington. In 1870, a man calling himself John St. Helen claimed to be Booth (he accused Andy Johnson), and in 1903, when a man called David E. George died in Enid, Oklahoma, it was said that St. Helen and George were the same man and both were Booth. The body was embalmed and shown for decades at carnivals. Several Confederate soldiers said Booth had escaped, contacted them and died in Texas, California, Mexico, Virginia . . . and so on. Distant relatives and self-styled "grandchildren" have asserted Booth survived. O'Beirne reportedly said he knew that three men were in the barn and one had gotten away. Hadn't "Booth" looked surprised when his name was called? Hadn't Herold said at first it wasn't Booth with him? Again, these are usual hallucinations after soul-rattling killings. The trouble is, such questions ignore ones closer to Stanton. For example, why didn't Wilkes's brother Junius Brutus, Jr., identify the body, since he was so handy to the monitor, being in the Old Capitol Prison under suspicion? Why was Booth identified by

comparative strangers? Why did Dr. May, who did the autopsy of Booth, first say it looked nothing like him, then identify him by a scar on his neck? Why, then, did the Surgeon General obliterate the scar by removing some of Booth's vertebrae (in still another eerie resemblance, critics of the Warren Report say the Kennedy autopsy reports are irregular, contradictory, even falsified)? What happened to the lady admirer who is said to have bribed her way onto the monitor and snipped a lock of Booth's hair, only to discover the hair was auburn while Booth's was raven black? Why was there controversy over his identity in 1869, when the body was exhumed and shown to the family? Well, legends die hard, and John Wilkes Booth is one of them. Inquiries over his death were complicated by Stanton's desire for secrecy, by the surreptitious burial to prevent hero worship—an act that in itself is part of a cover-up, Stanton's adversaries insist.

With Booth and his testimony secretly interred, the matter of truth was left to people like Weichmann. His memoir—written in the 1890s and drawing heavily on contemporary histories—insists on the guilt of Surratt, Mrs. Surratt, Booth and all the rest. As for Stanton, he calls him "the man of iron and blood" (appropriate in those Bismarckian days), remarks on his kind heart and nobility. Of his

posttrial experience, Weichmann writes: "When the ordeal was over, Edwin M. Stanton, who had sternly called me to account, became my friend and protector, and was only too glad to accord me the justice which I had won by my conduct. . . ." One is tempted to ask, What conduct? except as an informer who knew Booth and his anti-Lincoln crowd and who reported them before Stanton's boss was killed. What other secrets might Weichmann have? And if the Government's case rested on stooges, isn't it odd that Stanton did not summon as witnesses or defendants the several other people who assisted Booth: Matthews, Chester, Jones, Cox, odd people like an Anna Ward, whom Weichmann reported as very suspicious in her dealings with Booth? Why not question Booth's mistresses, correspondents, business associates?

Possibly Stanton was acting legally (though he violated judicial procedures with his investigation and trial), punishing only those he could prove were involved. His police brought in buggylloads of suspected conspirators, but they were released with the Nixonian fiat that further investigation "was not compatible with the public interest." That only led skeptics to more questions.

Was there another conspirator shadowing Grant? Booth couldn't shoot both Grant and Lincoln with a single-shot derringer. In fact, had Grant and his military escort attended the theater, Booth would have had a hard time getting to the President.

Why had Stanton not followed up his department's immediate leads—its foreknowledge of the Surratts, the report of Booth and Herold's flight South? Surrattville was South. But they didn't make arrests there until Monday.

Why was there no sustained pursuit of John Surratt? Stanton knew where he was, could have had him arrested in Liverpool just after his escape from Canada. Yet Stanton revoked the reward for him. Was the Secretary trying to cool the situation or was he afraid? It turned out that Surratt said nothing about Lincoln's assassination when finally tried. Why?

Could other witnesses establish a tie between Stanton and Booth? They could have met at the Second Inaugural ball, since Booth was there with his Senator's daughter and Stanton had been invited.

Why was Edwin's photo, not Wilkes's, shown to witnesses? Whatever the reason, it confused eyewitness identifications of Booth, inducing even more skepticism about eyewitness testimony, if that were possible. Why did witnesses Rathbone and Harris change their testimony between April 15 and May 10 to exclude a statement that someone had called at the Presidential box less than an hour before the killing with a message for the President? If this were so, why wasn't Parker's absence noted then? Or was the message a



"The boys located a short in your high-voltage wire, Mr. Bates."

signal to Parker that someone waited outside?

Why did the depositions of key witnesses disappear, such as Lafayette Baker's? Why did Stanton's prosecutors feel compelled to manufacture evidence to convict the captured conspirators?

All interesting questions, but probably unanswerable. Even if Stanton did conceal the truth, those who survived could have uncovered it later. None did. Unless we can accept as true a recent flare from the banked fires of this mystery.

In 1957, a Mr. Ray Neff discovered what seems to be a code inserted by Lafayette C. Baker in a bound volume of *Colburn's United Service Magazine* for late 1864. In this British military journal, Neff supposedly deciphered a message dated February 5, 1868, saying that Stanton was Lincoln's Judas and that he, Baker, was in danger from Judas' agents. It went on to say Booth committed the deed as Brutus, with Judas' aid. A second message was also deciphered that said that "Ecert [Eckert] had made all the contacts, the deed to be done on the 14th. I did not know the identity of the assassin, but I knew most all else when I approached E. S. about it." The remainder laid the murder on Stanton, the motivation being Lincoln's decision of April 13 to allow the Virginia legislature to be reseated to decide on again joining the Union. The plot, according to this code, involved more than 50 people, including businessmen who wished to profit from the South's dismemberment, Army and Navy officers, a governor and "at least 11 Members of Congress."

This cipher has never been discredited. It was a common Civil War code. Its messages jibe with Booth's initial claim of the size of the plot (even with Wesley's hypnotic remouthing of them). The motive is plausible. Booth's politics were well known. He could have been used by *sub rosa* conspirators capitalizing on his sense of "honor." Baker's signature following the magazine ciphers is certified genuine. Such a plot would explain the cover-up and the subsequent attempts on Baker's life—which culminated in 1868 with death from what resembled arsenic poisoning. But it would not explain how such a far-flung conspiracy failed exposure in the years following.

Indeed, in all the years, we are left with the questions. Some silly, some pertinent, all unsettling. As of today, we must be content with what we know and not trust too much what we suspect. Yes, Lincoln may have been Stanton's pigeon, or some other group's, or it could have been as the Government said—Booth and his unemerry men. All we know with certainty is that in Booth's character, in the questionable aspects of the assassination, we find the lineaments of all our political killings since. To understand that, we



must leave these characters as fate did—mute and historical.

Weichmann stood on his testimony until his death in 1902, though he suffered nervousness and harassment until the end.

John Surratt, after his trial, worked as an auditor in Baltimore. He revealed nothing new about the assassination up to his death in 1916 of natural causes.

Edwin M. Stanton died in 1869, his personal ambitions unfulfilled. His abolitionism won, however. Its morality triumphed, though it spawned strong reactions that have swum upstream to us. The cause of his death was debated. Some vowed he slit his throat, others that he passed naturally.

John Lloyd died an alcoholic, saying he'd testified against the conspirators on pain of death.

Dr. Mudd lived honorably until 1882. The fight to clear his name goes on today.

Edward Spangler, sick with t.b. from the Dry Tortugas, was sheltered by Mudd until his death in 1875.

Sam Arnold died in 1906. Mudd, Arnold said before dying, told him he had no connection with Booth's conspiracy.

William Seward lived until 1872 as a grand old statesman.

Jefferson Davis was released from prison in 1868, went off to Europe, returned to the United States and died in 1889.

The men who turned Anna Surratt away from Andrew Johnson's door both committed suicide soon after the executions.

Major Rathbone married Miss Harris, moved to Germany, became mad and murdered his wife. He died in a lunatic asylum.

Willie Jett became a traveling salesman. He died of syphilis.

Boston Corbett, the religious fanatic

who had castrated himself the better to resist sin, wandered awhile, became a doorman for the Kansas legislature and one day fired two pistols into the crowded chamber. He was put into an asylum, escaped and vanished—some say to peddle patent medicine.

Thomas Eckert became an industrial magnate in the telegraph business and later a judge in Texas. He died in 1910.

Edwin Booth paid Garrett for his burned-down barn and continued as America's greatest actor. He and all his family suffered ignominy because of John Wilkes, whom Edwin called "a rattled fellow." Edwin died in 1893, ending the era of the Booths.

Abraham Lincoln was buried in Springfield after the greatest mourning our nation had seen. His body was the object of another planned kidnaping in 1876—to be held for ransom—but the plot was discovered and the perpetrators imprisoned. The \$75 coffin was buried under steel and concrete in 1901. That year it was opened for the last time. Lincoln seemed to have changed very little in appearance.

What had changed was America. We had murdered our first President. As the *Illinois State Register* said on April 15, "The effect of this terrible blow cannot now be estimated." It was easy enough to yoke the South in recompense for Booth's act. It was less easy to regain our innocence. In the years that followed, we found it was lost forever in the mystery of ourselves. We can say that our first assassination was the hardest. After Lincoln, we knew how.

*This is the first in a series of articles on political assassination in America.*

