

## Chapter Thirty-Six

“This War Is Eating My Life Out; I Have a Strong  
Impression That I Shall Not Live to See the End”:

(April 9-15, 1865)

Lincoln had no doubt that the Union would ultimately triumph, but he said months before the war's conclusion, “I may not live to see it. I feel a presentiment that I shall not outlast the rebellion. When it is over, my work will be done.”<sup>1</sup> To Harriet Beecher Stowe he made a similar prediction: “Whichever way it [the war] ends, I have the impression that I sha'n't last long after it's over.”<sup>2</sup> He told his friend Owen Lovejoy that he might die even before peace came: “This war is eating my life out; I have a strong impression that I shall not live to see the end.”<sup>3</sup>

### RETURN TO WASHINGTON

On April 9, as Lee was surrendering to Grant at Appomattox, the River Queen chugged up Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River. Thomas Stackpole, a White House steward, reported that on the trip back to Washington, the First Lady struck her husband in the face, damned him, and cursed him.<sup>4</sup> At a dinner party on the boat, Elizabeth Keckly observed a young captain, “by way of pleasantry,” say: “Mrs. Lincoln,

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<sup>1</sup> Boston Evening Journal, n.d., copied in the Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 18 April 1865.

<sup>2</sup> Littell's Living Age, 6 February 1864.

<sup>3</sup> Francis B. Carpenter, The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln: Six Months at the White House (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Undated manuscript in the hand of William Herndon, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

you should have seen the President the other day, on his triumphal entry into Richmond. He was the cynosure of all eyes. The ladies kissed their hands to him, and greeted him with the waving of handkerchiefs. He is quite a hero when surrounded by pretty young ladies." The officer "suddenly paused with a look of embarrassment. Mrs. Lincoln turned to him with flashing eyes, with the remark that his familiarity was offensive to her. Quite a scene followed."<sup>5</sup> (Mary Harlan similarly recalled that a young officer aboard the River Queen described an episode of the president's visit to Richmond: all doors were closed to him save one, which "was opened furtively and a fair hand extended a bunch of flowers, which he took." Mrs. Lincoln "made manifest her dislike of the story, much to the narrator's chagrin.")<sup>6</sup>

To his shipboard companions Lincoln read for several hours, mostly from Shakespeare's Macbeth. After reciting the thane's guilty soliloquy following the murder of King Duncan, the president remarked "how true a description of the murderer that one was; when, the dark deed achieved, its tortured perpetrator came to envy the sleep of his victim." He read that scene several times. While passing Mount Vernon, the Marquis de Chambrun predicted to Lincoln that Americans would one day revere his home in Springfield as much as they did Washington's home. "Springfield! How happy, four years hence, will I be to return there in peace and tranquility!" the president exclaimed.<sup>7</sup> (A few days earlier, when John Todd Stuart had asked him if he intended to return to the Illinois capital after his presidency, Lincoln replied: "Mary does not expect ever to go

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<sup>5</sup> Keckley, Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1868), 166-67.

<sup>6</sup> Evidently a summary of a letter by Mary Harlan Lincoln, in William Adams Slade, "Abraham Lincoln's Shakespeare," typescript, J. G. Randall Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>7</sup> Chambrun, "Personal Recollections of Mr. Lincoln," Scribner's Magazine, January 1893, 35.

back there, and don't want to go – but I do – I expect to go back and make my home in Springfield for the rest of my life.”<sup>8</sup>

During the voyage to Washington, Lincoln did not discuss his Reconstruction policy with Charles Sumner, its chief opponent. Instead he told the senator: “they say I have been under Seward's influence; I have counselled with you twice as much as I ever did with him.”<sup>9</sup> As the ship approached the landing dock at Washington, Mary Lincoln said: “That city is full of our enemies.” Lincoln impatiently rejoined, “Enemies! We must never speak of that.”<sup>10</sup>

Lee had surrendered while the presidential party was making its way to the capital. On April 10, Lincoln was understandably cheerful. “The very day after his return from Richmond,” Stanton recalled, “I passed with him some of the happiest moments of my life; our hearts beat with exultation at the victories.”<sup>11</sup>

But Lincoln did not long indulge in celebrating, for he had to deal with the thorny issues of Reconstruction. That very day, when Virginia Governor Francis H. Pierpont congratulated him on the fall of Richmond, he replied: “I want it distinctly understood that I claim no part nor lot in the honor of the military movements in front of Richmond[.] All the honor belongs to the military. After I went to the front, I made two or three suggestions to Gen. Grant about military movements, and he knocked the sand from under me so quickly that I concluded I knew nothing about it and offered no more

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<sup>8</sup> Stuart interviewed by Nicolay, Springfield, 24 June 1875, in Michael Burlingame, ed., An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay's Interviews and Essays (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 14.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Sumner to Francis W. Bird, Washington, 16 April 1871, Beverly Wilson Palmer, ed., The Selected Letters of Charles Sumner (2 vols.; Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 2:549.

<sup>10</sup> Chambrun, “Personal Recollections of Mr. Lincoln,” 35.

<sup>11</sup> B. F. Morris, comp., Memorial Record of the Nation's Tribute to Abraham Lincoln (Washington: W. H. & O. H. Morrison, 1865), 13.

advice.” Lincoln wanted information more than praise from Pierpont. What should be done in Virginia now that Lee surrendered? Elements of the disloyal state legislature had reassembled in Richmond but had overstepped their limited mandate. Should Pierpont, as governor of loyal Virginia (based in Alexandria) proceed to the state capital? How would people there receive him? “Will they rush forward and try to seize all the offices?” Lincoln asked. “Will they sulk and do nothing? . . . Is there any Union sentiment among the Southern people strong enough to develop itself? If so, what measures should be adopted to foster this sentiment?” Lincoln urged Pierpont to be “industrious, and ascertain what Union sentiment there is in Virginia, and keep me advised.”<sup>12</sup>

Virginia was a special case, since it had a Unionist government under Pierpont already in place. What about the other states lately in rebellion? Of them, Louisiana was furthest along the road to restoration. Lincoln wanted to continue fostering the Michael Hahn government there and to win congressional recognition for it. But to do so, he must overcome the resistance of Radicals in Congress, many of whom shared Andrew Johnson’s view that “treason must be made odious,” that “traitors must be punished and impoverished,” and that “their social power must be destroyed.” Prominent Confederates should be arrested, tried, convicted, and hanged, the Vice President said: “We have put down these traitors in arms. Let us put them down in law, in public judgment, and in the morals of the world.”<sup>13</sup> When an abolitionist suggested disfranchisement rather than

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<sup>12</sup> Recollections of Pierpont, undated typescript, Pierpont Papers, University of West Virginia.

<sup>13</sup> Speeches of 9 June 1864, 3, 21 April 1865, The Papers of Andrew Johnson, ed. LeRoy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins (16 vols.; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1967-2000), 6:726, 7:612, 546.

execution would be the best punishment for Rebel leaders, Johnson replied: “a very good way to disfranchise them is to break their necks!”<sup>14</sup>

Less punitive Radicals, concerned more about protecting former slaves than punishing their erstwhile masters, championed black suffrage. Voicing the opinion of many Radicals, Salmon P. Chase told Lincoln that “it will be, hereafter, counted equally a crime & a folly if the colored loyalists of the rebel states shall be left to the control of restored rebels.”<sup>15</sup> On April 11, Lincoln moved dramatically closer to such Radicals in a carefully prepared address delivered from the White House to a jubilant crowd.

The day before, the president had been twice serenaded by thousands of cheering Washingtonians, who clamored for a speech. To their disappointment, he replied that he would not comply then but would give one the next day. As a gesture to placate them, he instructed the Marine band to play “Dixie.” In justifying this magnanimous gesture, he jocularly explained: “I have always thought ‘Dixie’ one of the best tunes I have ever heard. Our adversaries over the way attempted to appropriate it, but I insisted yesterday that we fairly captured it. [Applause.] I presented the question to the Attorney General, and he gave it as his legal opinion that it is our lawful prize. [Laughter and applause.] I now request the band to favor me with its performance.”<sup>16</sup> The way for this unusual gesture had been paved by young Tad, who preceded his father at the window, waving a captured Confederate flag (the one that Elmer Ellsworth had fatally torn down in May

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<sup>14</sup> Washington correspondence, 25 April, St. Cloud, Minnesota, Democrat, 4 May 1865, in Arthur J. Larsen, ed., Crusader and Feminist: Letters of Jane Grey Swisshelm, 1858-1865 (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1934), 292.

<sup>15</sup> Chase to Lincoln, Baltimore, 11 April 1865, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>16</sup> Roy P. Basler et al., eds., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 8:393. Lincoln had instructed the Marine band to play Dixie on earlier occasions. Washington correspondence, 6 October, Philadelphia Inquirer, 7 October 1861.

1861) until a servant yanked him away, much to the amusement of the assembled multitude.<sup>17</sup>

The night of April 11, as promised, Lincoln gave a formal speech to a crowd, which responded to his appearance with unusual intensity. Standing near him, Noah Brooks found “something terrible about the enthusiasm with which the beloved Chief Magistrate was received – cheers upon cheers, wave after wave of applause rolled up, the President modestly standing quiet until it was over.”<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Keckly wrote that she “never saw such a mass of heads before. It was like a black, gently swelling sea. The swaying motion of the crowd, in the dim uncertain light, was like the rising and falling of billows – like the ebb and flow of the tide upon the stranded shore of the ocean. Close to the house the faces were plainly discernible, but they faded into mere ghostly outlines on the outskirts of the assembly; and what added to the weird, spectral beauty of the scene, was the confused hum of voices that rose above the sea of forms, sounding like the subdued, sullen roar of an ocean storm, or the wind southing through the dark lonely forest. It was a grand and imposing scene.”<sup>19</sup>

When Brooks expressed surprise that the president held a manuscript from which to read, Lincoln explained: “It is true that I don’t usually read a speech, but I am going to say something to-night that may be important, I am going to talk about reconstruction, and sometimes I am betrayed into saying things that other people don’t like. In a little off-hand talk I made the other day I used the phrase ‘Turned tail and ran.’” Senator

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<sup>17</sup> Washington correspondence, 12 April, Sacramento Daily Union, 8 May 1865, in Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed: Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 182.

<sup>18</sup> Noah Brooks, Statesmen (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1893), 214.

<sup>19</sup> Keckley, Behind the Scenes, 176.

Sumner “was very much offended by that, and I hope he won’t be offended again.”<sup>20</sup> As Lincoln read from his text, Brooks held a candle so that he could see it. After finishing each page, the president let it fall to the floor, where Tad energetically scooped it up.<sup>21</sup> Upon finishing his remarks, Lincoln quipped to Brooks: “That was a pretty fair speech, I think, but you threw some light on it.”<sup>22</sup>

As Lincoln spoke from a White House window, his wife and Clara Harris (daughter of New York Senator Ira Harris) stood at nearby window chatting so loudly that they nearly drowned out the president. Initially, the crowd tolerated this unbecoming behavior, but in time some people emphatically told the noisemakers to quiet down. Disconcerted by their shushing, Lincoln feared that something he said had given offense. But he soon realized that no disrespect was meant and, with “an expression of pain and mortification which came over his face as if such strokes were not new,” he continued reading his speech.<sup>23</sup>

Instead of delivering the expected triumphal paean to the conquering Union army and navy, Lincoln dwelt at length on the problems of Reconstruction, explaining how he and General Banks had worked to make Louisiana a model for the other Confederate states.<sup>24</sup> Frankly acknowledging that Radical criticism of their handiwork had validity, he dismissed as “a merely pernicious abstraction” the question of whether the seceded states were in or out of the Union. Some Radicals insisted that by withdrawing from the Union,

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<sup>20</sup> Brooks, Statesmen, 214.

<sup>21</sup> Noah Brooks, Washington, D. C., in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Herbert Mitgang (1895; Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 227; Keckley, Behind the Scenes, 177.

<sup>22</sup> Brooks, “Personal Reminiscences of Lincoln,” Scribner’s Monthly, March 1878, 567.

<sup>23</sup> Boston Daily Advertiser, 7 October 1867; Clara Harris in Timothy S. Good, ed., We Saw Lincoln Shot: One Hundred Eyewitness Accounts (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 70.

<sup>24</sup> Washington correspondence, 12 April, Sacramento Daily Union, 8 May 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 183.

they had reverted to the status of territories and could therefore be governed by Congress. Lincoln resisted that line of argument, asserting that he and the Radicals “agree that the seceded States, so called, are out of their proper practical relation with the Union; and that the sole object of the government, civil and military, in regard to those States is to again get them into that proper practical relation. I believe it is not only possible, but in fact, easier, to do this, without deciding, or even considering, whether these states have even been out of the Union, than with it. Finding themselves safely at home, it would be utterly immaterial whether they had ever been abroad. Let us all join in doing the acts necessary to restoring the proper practical relations between these states and the Union; and each forever after, innocently indulge his own opinion whether, in doing the acts, he brought the States from without, into the Union, or only gave them proper assistance, they never having been out of it.”

To strengthen this appeal for Republican unity, Lincoln offered the Radicals an important substantive concession. Hitherto he had expressed support for black suffrage only in private. Now, fatefully, he made it public: “It is also unsatisfactory to some that the elective franchise is not given to the colored man. I would myself prefer that it were now conferred on the very intelligent, and on those who serve our cause as soldiers.” To be sure, he acknowledged, the Louisiana legislature had not availed itself of the opportunity to enfranchise blacks that had been afforded it by the new state constitution, but “the question is not whether the Louisiana government, as it stands, is quite all that is desirable. The question is ‘Will it be wiser to take it as it is, and help to improve it; or to reject, and disperse it?’ ‘Can Louisiana be brought into proper practical relation with the Union sooner by sustaining, or by discarding her new State Government?’” Putting it



another way, he asked: “Concede that the new government of Louisiana is only to what it should be as the egg is to the fowl, shall we sooner have the fowl by hatching the egg than by smashing it?”<sup>25</sup>

Months later, Frederick Douglass acknowledged that although Lincoln’s call for black suffrage “seemed to mean but little,” it actually “meant a great deal. It was just like Abraham Lincoln. He never shocked prejudices unnecessarily. Having learned statesmanship while splitting rails, he always used the thin edge of the wedge first – and the fact that he used it at all meant that he would if need be, use the thick as well as the thin.”<sup>26</sup> Owen Lovejoy had used this same image to describe Lincoln’s approach to emancipation. In dealing with slavery, the president had inserted the thin edge of the wedge in March 1862 (with the recommendation to help compensate Border States which adopted gradual emancipation), drove it in deeper in 1863 (with the Emancipation Proclamation), and fully drove home the thick part in 1865 (with the Thirteenth Amendment.) Even before March 1862, Lincoln had worked behind the scenes to persuade Delaware to emancipate its slaves. So it was with black suffrage. In 1864, Lincoln had privately urged Governor Michael Hahn to enfranchise at least some blacks in Louisiana. In 1865, he publicly endorsed the same policy. To be sure, Louisiana was a special case, for a number of educated blacks lived in New Orleans. Possibly, Lincoln did not mean to extend suffrage to uneducated blacks in other states, but that seems unlikely, for if he wanted to enfranchise only the educated, he would not have suggested that black soldiers, regardless of educational background, be granted voting rights.

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<sup>25</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:399-405.

<sup>26</sup> Manuscript of a speech, [ca. December 1865], Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

One member of Lincoln's audience did not underestimate the importance of Lincoln's call for limited black suffrage. Upon hearing the president's words, a handsome, popular, impulsive, twenty-six-year-old actor named John Wilkes Booth turned to a companion and declared: "That means nigger citizenship. Now by God I'll put him through!"<sup>27</sup> He added: "That is the last speech he will ever make."<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, Lincoln was moving toward the Radical position. Now that the war was over, there was no need to inveigle Confederates into surrendering with offers of exceptionally lenient peace terms. His proclaimed support for limited black suffrage was but one sign of his willingness to meet Radical critics halfway. In March, he had without reservation signed the Freedman's Bureau Bill. It established a federal agency, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, to protect the interests of the former slaves as well as white refugees. (The agency was forbidden to practice discrimination based on race; whatever benefits blacks enjoyed were to be afforded to whites equally, and vice versa.) No longer would liberated blacks work under the supervision of provost marshals and treasury agents; the legislation even held out the promise, somewhat vaguely, of land redistribution. Lincoln's concern all along, according to chaplain John Eaton (who was in charge of freedmen in the Mississippi Valley), "was to illustrate the capacity of these people for the privileges, duties and rights of freedom."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Lewis J. Weichman in Michael W. Kauffman, American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies (New York: Random House, 2004), 210.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis Powell, one of Booth's co-conspirators, told this to Thomas T. Eckert. Eckert's testimony, 30 May 1867, "Impeachment of the President," House Report no. 7, 40<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session (1867): 674.

<sup>29</sup> LaWanda Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom: A Study in Presidential Leadership (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1981), 29.

Moreover, Lincoln suggested that he was willing to compromise on Reconstruction policy. On April 10, he told Virginia Governor Pierpont “that he had no plan for reorganization, but must be guided by events.”<sup>30</sup> Stanton testified that at war’s end, Lincoln had not “matured any plan.”<sup>31</sup> While he hoped that Congress would seat the Louisiana senators and congressmen, in his April 11 speech he acknowledged that conditions varied from state to state and that “no exclusive, and inflexible plan can safely be prescribed as to details and colaterals. Such exclusive, and inflexible plan, would surely become a new entanglement. Important principles may, and must, be inflexible.” As for Louisiana government, he said that though he had promised to sustain it, “bad promises are better broken than kept” and he would “treat this as a bad promise, and break it, whenever I shall be convinced that keeping it is adverse to the public interest.” He closed his speech with a tantalizing hint: “it may be my duty to make some new announcement to the people of the South. I am considering, and shall not fail to act, when satisfied that action will be proper.”<sup>32</sup>

It is not clear what Lincoln’s closing remarks meant, but three days later at a cabinet meeting he “said he thought [he] had made a mistake at Richmond in sanctioning the assembling of the Virginia Legislature and had perhaps been too fast in his desires for early reconstruction.”<sup>33</sup> He made a similar observation to House Speaker Schuyler

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<sup>30</sup> Charles H. Ambler, Francis H. Pierpont: Union War Governor of Virginia and Father of West Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 254-258.

<sup>31</sup> “Impeachment of the President: Testimony,” 40<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, House Report no. 7, 401, 403-404.

<sup>32</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:399-405.

<sup>33</sup> John Niven, ed., The Salmon P. Chase Papers (5 vols.; Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993-1998), 1:530 (diary entry for 15 April 1865). A similar account appears in Howard K. Beale and Alan W. Brownsword, eds., Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson (3 vols.; New York: W. W. Norton, 1960), 2:279-280 (entry for 13 April 1865).

Colfax, conceding that he was “not sure that it was wise” to have recalled the Virginia legislature and that it “was a doubtful experiment at best.”<sup>34</sup> Commenting on Lincoln’s views as expressed on April 14, the pro-Radical James Speed told Salmon P. Chase that the president “never seemed so near our views.”<sup>35</sup>

#### RECONSTRUCTION POLICIES: THE LAST CABINET MEETING

Despite his ill-advised decision to let the Virginia legislature reconvene, Lincoln shared the Radicals’ desire to keep the old leadership class of the South from returning to power. He had worked to block reactionaries’ attempts to gain positions of authority in Louisiana, and presumably he would do so in other states. As Frederick Douglass plausibly speculated in December 1865, if Lincoln had lived, “no rebels would hold the reins of Government in any one of the late rebellious states.”<sup>36</sup>

Lincoln was not disposed to withdraw his support of amnesty for most Confederates. According to Gideon Welles, he “dreaded and deprecated violent and revengeful feelings, or any malevolent demonstrations toward those of our countrymen who were involved, voluntarily or involuntarily in the rebellion.”<sup>37</sup> When criticized for excessive leniency, he asked: “How many more lives of our citizen soldiers are the

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<sup>34</sup> Colfax to Isaac N. Arnold, 1 May 1867, in Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher, eds., Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 114.

<sup>35</sup> Niven, ed., Chase Papers, 1:530 (diary entry for 15 April 1865).

<sup>36</sup> Douglass speech, [ca. December 1865], manuscript, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>37</sup> Welles, “Lincoln and Johnson: Their Plan of Reconstruction and the Resumption of National Authority,” Galaxy 13 (April 1872), in Albert Mordell, ed., Civil War and Reconstruction: Selected Essays by Gideon Welles (New York: Twayne, 1959), 184.

people willing to give up to insure the death penalty to Davis and his immediate coadjutors?”<sup>38</sup>

But what should be done with the Confederate president and his advisors? Lincoln told Grant and Sherman that he hoped that the Rebel leaders would escape the country without his knowledge. Similarly, in response to Postmaster General William Dennison’s query about letting Confederate eminenti escape, the president said: “I should not be sorry to have them out of the country; but I should be for following them up pretty close, to make sure of their going.”<sup>39</sup> In discussing the possibility of capturing Jefferson Davis, Mary Lincoln allegedly exclaimed: “Don’t allow him to escape, the law! He must be hanged.” The president replied: “Let us judge not that we be not judged.”<sup>40</sup> When Charles A. Dana asked if he should order the arrest of Jacob Thompson, who had served as a Confederate agent in Canada as well as James Buchanan’s secretary of the interior, Lincoln replied: “no, I rather think not. When you have got an elephant by the hind leg, and he’s trying to run away, it’s best to let him run.”<sup>41</sup> Varying the zoological metaphor, he said his position resembled that of a young boy in Springfield who bought a pet raccoon which turned out to be so vicious that it scratched and tore the lad’s clothing to shreds. Someone who noticed the sad youth, asked what was wrong. “Hush, don’t speak

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<sup>38</sup> Washington correspondence, 1 April, Sacramento Daily Union, 8 May 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 178.

<sup>39</sup> Frederick W. Seward, Reminiscences of a War-Time Statesman and Diplomat, 1830-1915 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1916), 254-255.

<sup>40</sup> Lloyd Lewis, Myths after Lincoln (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), 39. Lewis evidently got this quote from Chambrun, “Personal Recollections of Mr. Lincoln,” 33. Chambrun identified the source only as someone aboard the River Queen who “enjoyed the privilege of speaking freely before him.”

<sup>41</sup> C. A. Dana to J. S. Pike, Washington, 10 May 1865, Pike Papers, University of Maine; Charles A. Dana Recollections of the Civil War: With the Leaders at Washington and in the Field in the Sixties (New York: D. Appleton, 1898), 274.

so loud,” he replied, “can’t you see that he is gnawing his rope off now? That way, I can go home and tell the folks I could not prevent his escape.”<sup>42</sup>

But what if Confederate leaders did not emigrate? Lincoln told Schuyler Colfax “that he did not want their blood, but that we could not have peace or order in the South while they remained there with their great influence to poison public opinion.” To encourage them to flee, he suggested that military authorities “inform them that if they stay, they will be punished for their crimes, but if they leave, no attempt will be made to hinder them. Then we can be magnanimous to all the rest and have peace and quiet in the whole land.”<sup>43</sup> Lincoln did not indicate what he would recommend if Confederate leaders still refused to take the hint.

Though the president was moving in their direction, some Radicals remained hostile to his Reconstruction policy, especially his willingness to grant amnesty to Confederates. Noah Brooks reported that “the extremists are thirsting for a general hanging, and if the President fails to gratify their desires in this direction, they will be glad, for it will afford them more pretexts for the formation of party which shall be pledged to ‘a more vigorous policy.’”<sup>44</sup>

The subject of amnesty came up at a cabinet meeting on April 14. According to Welles, Lincoln expressed the hope that “there would be no persecution, no bloody work, after the war was over. None need expect he would take any part in hanging or killing those men, even the worst of them. Frighten them out of the country, open the gates, let

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<sup>42</sup> Charles Adolphe de Pineton, Marquis de Chambrun, Impressions of Lincoln and the Civil War: A Foreigner’s Account (New York: Random House, 1952), 85n.

<sup>43</sup> Colfax to Isaac N. Arnold, 1 May 1867, in Fehrenbacher and Fehrenbacher, eds., Recollected Words of Lincoln, 114

<sup>44</sup> Washington correspondence, 12 April, Sacramento Daily Union, 8 May 1865, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 185.

down the bars, scare them off,” he said, gesturing as if he were shooining sheep. “Enough lives have been sacrificed. We must extinguish our resentments if we expect harmony and union.”<sup>45</sup> Stanton reported that Lincoln “spoke very kindly of General Lee and others of the Confederacy” and showed “in marked degree the kindness and humanity of his disposition, and the tender and forgiving sprit that so eminently distinguished him.”<sup>46</sup> (Lincoln habitually referred to the Confederate president and his best general as “Jeffy D” and “Bobby Lee.”)<sup>47</sup>

At the April 14 cabinet meeting, with Grant in attendance, Lincoln stressed that Reconstruction “was the great question now before us, and we must soon begin to act.”<sup>48</sup> At the president’s request, Stanton had drafted an executive order establishing temporary military rule in Virginia and North Carolina, restoring the authority of federal laws, which were to be enforced by provost marshals. It did not deal with the sensitive issue of black suffrage, for as Stanton explained to Charles Sumner on April 16, he “thought it would be impolite to press that question then, for there were differences among our friends on that point, and it would be better to go forward on the great essentials wherein we agreed.”<sup>49</sup> When Stanton read this projet to his colleagues, Welles objected to the provision lumping Virginia and North Carolina together in a single military district. The navy secretary pointed out that the Pierpont administration in Virginia had been

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<sup>45</sup> Welles, “Lincoln and Johnson,” 191.

<sup>46</sup> Stanton to John A. Dix, Washington, 15 April 1865, and Stanton to Charles Francis Adams, Washington, 15 April 1865, QR, I, 46, 3:780, 785.

<sup>47</sup> David Homer Bates, “Lincoln and Charles A. Dana,” in William Hayes Ward, Abraham Lincoln: Tributes from His Associates (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1895), 229.

<sup>48</sup> Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:281 (entry for 14 April 1865).

<sup>49</sup> Welles to Andrew Johnson, Hartford, 27 July 1869, Johnson Papers, Library of Congress; Welles, “Lincoln and Johnson,” 195; Stanton’s testimony before a congressional committee, in Frank Abial Flower, Edwin McMasters Stanton: The Autocrat of Rebellion, Emancipation, and Reconstruction (New York: W. W. Wilson, 1905), 301-2.

recognized by the administration as the legitimate government of the Old Dominion during the struggle over West Virginia statehood. Lincoln “said the point was well taken” and “that the same thing had occurred to him and the plan required maturing and perfecting.” Therefore he instructed Stanton “to take the document, separate it, adapt one plan to Virginia and her loyal government – another to North Carolina which was destitute of legal State authority and submit copies of each to each member of the Cabinet.”<sup>50</sup> He added that the federal government “can’t undertake to run State governments in all these Southern States. Their people must do that, – though I reckon at first some of them may do it badly.”<sup>51</sup> He asked Stanton to supply copies of his modified proposal to his cabinet colleagues and suggested that the document be discussed at their next meeting, scheduled for April 18.<sup>52</sup> Lincoln expressed relief that Congress had adjourned until December. For several months no more filibusters led by obstructionists like Charles Sumner, in league with Conservatives from the Border States, could thwart the will of the administration (and indeed of a congressional majority).

Turning to military matters, Lincoln predicted the imminent arrival of significant news from Sherman, for the previous night he had what he called “the usual dream which he had preceding nearly every great and important event of the war. Generally the news had been favorable which preceded this dream, and the dream itself was always the same.” He explained that “he seemed to be in some singular, indescribable vessel, and that he was moving with great rapidity towards an indefinite shore; that he had this dream preceding Sumter, Bull Run, Antietam, Gettysburg, Stones River, Vicksburg,

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<sup>50</sup> Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:281-82 (entry for 14 April 1865); Welles, “Lincoln and Johnson,” 192.

<sup>51</sup> Seward, Reminiscences of a War-Time Statesman, 256.

<sup>52</sup> Welles, “Lincoln and Johnson,” 193.



Wilmington, etc." Grant interrupted, observing "with some emphasis and asperity" that "Stones River was certainly no victory, and he knew of no great results which followed from it." Lincoln replied that "however that might be, his dream preceded that fight." He continued: "I had this strange dream again last night, and we shall, judging from the past, have great news very soon. I think it must be from Sherman," for "my thoughts have been in that direction, and I know of no other very important event which is likely just now to occur."<sup>53</sup>

The cabinet found Lincoln in exceptionally good spirits.<sup>54</sup> Stanton, who thought the president seemed "very cheerful and hopeful," remarked: "That's the most satisfactory Cabinet meeting I have attended in many a long day." He asked a colleague: "Didn't our chief look grand today?"<sup>55</sup> He later remarked that "Lincoln was grander, graver, [and] more thoroughly up to the occasion than he had ever seen him."<sup>56</sup> Frederick Seward, substituting for his bedridden father, recalled that the president wore "an expression of visible relief and content."<sup>57</sup> Treasury Secretary Hugh McCulloch "never saw Mr. Lincoln so cheerful and happy as he was" on April 14. "The burden which had been weighing upon him for four long years, and which he had borne with heroic fortitude, had been lifted; the war had been practically ended; the Union was safe. The weary look which his face had so long worn, and which could be observed by those who knew him well, even when he was telling humorous stories, had disappeared. It was

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<sup>53</sup> Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:280-83 (entry for 14 April 1865); Welles, "Lincoln and Johnson," 188-189.

<sup>54</sup> John Palmer Usher to his wife, Washington, 15 April 1865, copy, Usher Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>55</sup> Stanton to Charles Francis Adams, Washington, 15 April 1865, OR, I, 46, 3:785; Charles Dickens to John Forster, n.p., n.d., New York Times, 21 November 1880; W. Emerson Reck, A. Lincoln, His Last 24 Hours (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1987), 40.

<sup>56</sup> Stanton's reminiscences in a memorandum by Moorfield Storey, 2 February 1868, in Storey, "Dickens, Stanton, Sumner, and Storey," Atlantic Monthly 145 (1930):463.

<sup>57</sup> Seward, Reminiscences of a War-Time Statesman, 254.

bright and cheerful.”<sup>58</sup> To James Harlan, secretary-of-the-interior-designate, Lincoln seemed “transfigured,” for his customary expression of “indescribable sadness” had abruptly become “an equally indescribable expression of serene joy, as if conscious that the great purpose of his life had been achieved.”<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Mary Lincoln reported that her husband was “supremely cheerful” and that during their afternoon carriage ride his “manner was even playful.” She remarked to him, laughingly, “you almost startle me by your great cheerfulness.” He responded: “And well I may feel so, Mary; for I consider this day the war has come to a close. We must both be more cheerful in the future. Between the war and the loss of our darling Willie we have been very miserable.”<sup>60</sup>

#### DECISION TO ATTEND FORD’S THEATRE

The previous evening, Lincoln had been too sick with a headache to take a carriage ride with his wife, who wished to see the brilliant illuminations celebrating Lee’s surrender. Grant, at Lincoln’s request, had agreed to accompany her. As she and the general entered their carriage, the crowd that had gathered outside the White House shouted “Grant!” nine times. Taking offense, Mrs. Lincoln instructed the driver to let her out, but she changed her mind when the crowd also cheered for the president. This happened again and again as the carriage proceeded around town. The First Lady evidently thought it inappropriate that Grant should be cheered before her husband was. The next day, Grant declined the president’s invitation to join him and Mrs. Lincoln to attend a performance of Our American Cousin, for he feared incurring her displeasure

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<sup>58</sup> Hugh McCulloch, Men and Measures of Half of a Century: Sketches and Comments (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1888), 222.

<sup>59</sup> Ida M. Tarbell, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (2 vols.; New York: Lincoln Memorial Association, 1900), 2:232.

<sup>60</sup> Carpenter, Six Months at the White House, 293.

again.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Mrs. Grant informed her husband that she did not wish to be around the First Lady after the unpleasantness at City Point three weeks earlier. (Later she told Hamilton Fish “that she objected strenuously to accompanying Mrs. Lincoln.”) Grant said “we will go visit our children . . . and this will be a good excuse.”<sup>62</sup> When the First Lady’s messenger announced that the presidential carriage would call for her and her husband at 8 p.m., Julia Grant curtly informed him that they would be out of town that night.<sup>63</sup> And they so were rolling along aboard a train to New Jersey while the Lincolns’ carriage rumbled toward Ford’s Theatre.

Others also declined the president’s invitation, including Colfax, Stanton, and Stanton’s assistant, Thomas T. Eckert. When Mrs. Stanton learned that Mrs. Grant had turned down the offer, she said to the general’s wife that she too would refuse: “I will not sit without you in the box with Mrs. Lincoln!”<sup>64</sup> The secretary of war had sought to discourage Lincoln from theatergoing, for he worried about his safety.<sup>65</sup> After learning that the Grants would not attend the performance at Ford’s Theatre, Lincoln felt inclined to follow suit, but the First Lady insisted that they go. The press had announced that he and the general would be in attendance, and the audience would be terribly disappointed if neither man showed up.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> In the fall of 1869, Grant gave this account to his cabinet. Hamilton Fish diary, entry for 12 November 1869, Fish Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>62</sup> Reminiscences of Susan Man McCulloch, privately owned, in Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln’s Secretary of War (New York: Knopf, 1962), 395.

<sup>63</sup> John Y. Simon, ed., The Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant (New York: Putnam, 1975), 155.

<sup>64</sup> Adam Badeau, Grant in Peace, from Appomattox to Mount McGregor: A Personal Memoir (Hartford: S. S. Scranton, 1887), 362.

<sup>65</sup> Stanton’s reminiscences in a memorandum by Moorfield Storey, 2 February 1868, in Storey, “Dickens, Stanton, Sumner, and Storey,” 464.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*; Noah Brooks, Washington in Lincoln’s Time (New York: Century, 1895), 257-58; Hamilton Fish diary, entry for 12 November 1869, Fish Papers, Library of Congress.

That fateful night, the president had no adequate security detail. This was not unusual, for at Lincoln's request, bodyguards did not accompany him when he attended the theater.<sup>67</sup> John F. Parker, one of four Metropolitan Police patrolmen who had been detailed to the interior department and assigned to protect the White House and its furnishings (not its occupants), was part of the entourage that night. Accompanying him was Charles Forbes, a White House messenger.<sup>68</sup> (The Executive Mansion needed guarding, for vandals purloined from it valuable ornaments and cut souvenir swatches from rugs and curtains.) Neither Forbes nor Parker was a true bodyguard, nor were they asked to protect the president. The man who had been performing that duty zealously, Ward Hill Lamon, was in Richmond on a presidential mission. When Booth made his fatal way to the Lincolns' box, Parker was either watching the play (which Lincoln may have urged him to do) or drinking at the tavern in the theatre. (He had a dismal record as a Metropolitan Police patrolman before 1865 and three years later was dismissed for neglecting his duty. He was not, however, disciplined for his conduct on April 14, 1865. A board of the Metropolitan Police conducted an investigation but took no action against him.)<sup>69</sup>

#### LINCOLN'S INSOUCIANCE REGARDING SECURITY

Lincoln was notoriously indifferent about his safety, even though many death threats had been sent to him. "Soon after I was nominated at Chicago, I began to receive

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<sup>67</sup> George C. Ashmun, "Recollections of a Peculiar Service," in R. Hunter, ed., Sketches of War History: Papers Read before the Ohio Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, 1886-1888 (3 vols.; Cincinnati: Robert Clarke, 1888), 2:289. On the various arrangements to safeguard the president, see George S. Bryan, The Great American Myth (New York: Carrick & Evans, 1940), 51-74.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas F. Pendel, Thirty-Six Years in the White House (Washington: Neale Publishing Company, 1902), 11.

<sup>69</sup> Reck, A. Lincoln: His Last 24 Hours, 86-87, 162-67.

letters threatening my life,” he remarked to Francis B. Carpenter in 1864. “The first one or two made me a little uncomfortable, but I came at length to look for a regular installment of this kind of correspondence in every week’s mail, and up to Inauguration Day I was in constant receipt of such letters. It is no uncommon thing to receive them now; but they have ceased to give me apprehension.” When Carpenter expressed surprise at such a casual disregard of serious danger, Lincoln replied: “Oh, there is nothing like getting used to things!”<sup>70</sup> He placed threatening missives in a file marked “assassination letters.”

To Colonel Charles G. Halpine, who asked why he did not have his White House visitors screened as military commanders did, he replied: "Ah, yes! such things do very well for you military people, with your arbitrary rule, and in your camps. But the office of president is essentially a civil one, and the affair is very different. For myself, I feel, though the tax on my time is heavy, no hours of my day are better employed than those which thus bring me again within the direct contact and atmosphere of the average of our whole people. Men moving only in an official circle are apt to become merely official, not to say arbitrary, in their ideas, and are apter and apter with each passing day to forget that they only hold power in a representative capacity. Now this is all wrong. I go into these promiscuous receptions of all who claim to have business with me twice each week, and every applicant for audience has to take his turn as if waiting to be shaved in a barber’s shop. Many of the matters brought to my notice are utterly frivolous, but others are of more or less importance, and all serve to renew in me a clearer and more vivid image of that great popular assemblage, out of which I sprang, and to which at the end of

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<sup>70</sup> Carpenter, Six Months at the White House, 63.

two years I must return. . . . I call these receptions my public opinion baths; for I have but little time to read the papers and gather public opinion that way, and though they may not be pleasant in all their particulars, the effect as a whole is renovating and invigorating to my perceptions of responsibility and duty. It would never do for a President to have guards with drawn sabers at his door, as if he fancied he were, or were trying to be, or assuming to be an emperor.” To surround himself with guards, “would only be to put the idea” of assassination into the minds of adversaries and thus “lead to the very result it was intended to prevent.”

Lincoln asked Halpine rhetorically: “do you think the Richmond people would like to have Hannibal Hamlin here any better than myself? In that one alternative, I have an insurance on my life worth half the prairie land of Illinois. And besides, if there were such a plot, and they wanted to get at me, no vigilance could keep them out. We are so mixed up in our affairs, that – no matter what the system established – a conspiracy to assassinate, if such there were, could easily obtain a pass to see me for any one or more of its instruments.” As for the possibility that lunatics might kill him, Lincoln said: “I must take my chances, – the most crazy people at present, I fear, being some of my own too zealous adherents. That there may be such dangers as you and many others have suggested to me, is quite possible; but I guess it wouldn’t improve things any to publish that we were afraid of them in advance.”<sup>71</sup>

In 1863, Lincoln told Noah Brooks: “I long ago made up my mind that if anybody wants to kill me, he will do it. If I wore a shirt of mail and kept myself surrounded by a bodyguard, it would be all the same. There are a thousand ways of getting at a man if it is

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<sup>71</sup> Carpenter, Six Months at the White House, 66-67.

desirable that he should be killed. Besides, in this case, it seems to me, the man who would come after me [as president] would be just as objectionable to my enemies – if I have any.”<sup>72</sup> (Because he was so good-natured himself, he found it hard to believe that anyone would do him harm.) He thought it impossible to obtain foolproof protection. To well-wishers concerned about assassins he commented, “I should have to lock myself up in a box” and he simply could not “be shut up in an iron cage and guarded.”<sup>73</sup>

One night toward the end of the war, Lincoln had visited the war department to catch up on news from the front. As he prepared to walk back to the White House along a tree-lined path, Stanton warned: “You ought not to go that way; it is dangerous for you even in the daytime, but worse at night.” Lincoln replied: “I don’t believe there’s any danger there, day or night.” Stanton countered: “you shall not be killed returning the dark way from my department while I am in it; you must let me take you round by the avenue in my carriage.” Reluctantly the president complied. Similarly, when General James H. Van Alen also warned him that ill-disposed folk might attack him as he walked alone from the White House to the war department along a tree-lined path, he trustfully replied: “Oh, they wouldn’t hurt me.”<sup>74</sup>

Lincoln’s insouciance about assassination was widely shared. With the exception of a crazed Briton who pulled the trigger on two guns in a miraculously unsuccessful attempt to kill Andrew Jackson, no leading American public official had been the target of a murderer. In 1862, Seward wrote that “[a]ssassination is not an American

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<sup>72</sup> Brooks, “Personal Reminiscences of Lincoln,” Scribner’s Monthly, March 1878, 674.

<sup>73</sup> Nicolay interview, Chicago Herald, 4 December 1887; Leonard Swett, “Conspiracies of the Rebellion,” North American Review (February 1887):187.

<sup>74</sup> Colfax, Life and Principles of Abraham Lincoln: Address Delivered at the Court House Square, at South Bend, April 24, 1865 (Philadelphia: J. B. Rodgers, 1865), 10; J. H. Van Alen to the editors of the New York Evening Post, New York, 22 April, New York Evening Post, 11 May 1865.

practice or habit, and one so vicious and so desperate cannot be engrafted into our political system. This conviction of mine has steadily gained strength since the Civil War began. Every day's experience confirms it. The President, during the heated season, occupies a country house near the Soldiers' Home, two or three miles from the city. He goes to and . . . from that place on horseback, night and morning, unguarded. I go there unattended at all hours, by daylight and moonlight, by starlight and without any light."<sup>75</sup>

Starting in 1862, Lincoln did have military escorts when he rode to and from the Soldiers' Home in the warmer months. At first he protested, saying half in jest that he and his wife could barely hear themselves talk "for the clatter of their sabres and spurs," and that some of cavalymen appeared to be "new hands and very awkward," so that he was "more afraid of being shot by the accidental discharge of one of their carbines or revolvers than of any attempt upon his life, or for his capture by the roving squads of Jeb Stuart's cavalry."<sup>76</sup> A Pennsylvania infantry company was assigned to guard the cottage where he and his family stayed, and a New York cavalry unit usually accompanied him on his daily commute. The following year an Ohio squad replaced the New Yorkers. One August night in 1864, while Lincoln was riding alone from the White House back to the Soldiers' Home, a would-be assassin shot his hat off. Thereafter security precautions became more stringent.<sup>77</sup> Lamon, who claimed that he had good reason to be frightened about the president's safety, started to sleep at the White House, where John Hay observed him one November night as he slept before the door to the president's bedroom

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<sup>75</sup> Seward to John Bigelow, Washington, 15 July 1862, in Bigelow, Retrospections of an Active Life (5 vols.; New York: Baker & Taylor, 1909-1913), 2:547-548.

<sup>76</sup> Charles G. Halpine, Baked Meats of the Funeral: A Collection of Essays, Poems, Speeches, Histories, and Banquets (New York: Carleton, 1866), 110, in Fehrenbacher and Fehrenbacher, eds., Recollected Words of Lincoln, 194-195.

<sup>77</sup> Ashmun, "Recollections of a Peculiar Service," 283-85.



in an “attitude of touching and dumb fidelity, with a small arsenal of pistols and Bowie knives around him.”<sup>78</sup> (Lamon departed the next morning before Hay or Lincoln awoke.)

#### THE FINAL DAY

Around 3 o’clock, the Lincolns visited the Navy Yard and toured the monitor Montauk. The ship’s doctor reported that the First Couple “seemed very happy – and so expressed themselves.”<sup>79</sup> Late in the afternoon, Richard J. Oglesby, governor of Illinois, called at the White House with his state’s adjutant general, Isham Nicholas Haynie of Springfield. Delighted to see old friends, the president chatted for a while, then read them four chapters of the latest book by humorist Petroleum V. Nasby (pen name for David Ross Locke). Ignoring repeated summonses to dinner, Lincoln continued to read, laughing and commenting as he went along.<sup>80</sup>

After supper, Lincoln met with Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax. Earlier in the day, when the Indiana congressman mentioned to him that he would soon visit California, the president told him he wished that he too could go. “I have very large ideas of the mineral wealth of our nation,” he said. “I believe it practically inexhaustible. It abounds all over the Western country – from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific, and its development has scarcely commenced. During the war, when we were adding a couple of millions of dollars every day to our national debt, I did not care about encouraging the increase in the volume of our precious metals. We had the country to save first. But, now

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<sup>78</sup> Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger, eds., Inside Lincoln’s White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 246 (entry for 8 November 1864).

<sup>79</sup> Good, ed., We Saw Lincoln Shot, 71.

<sup>80</sup> Mark A. Plummer, Lincoln’s Rail-Splitter: Governor Richard J. Oglesby (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 106-7; Mark A. Plummer, ed., “The Last Hours of Lincoln: The [Isham Nicholas] Haynie Diary,” Journal of Illinois History 4 (2001):32 (entry for 14 April 1865).

that the Rebellion is overthrown, and we know pretty nearly the amount of our national debt, the more gold and silver we mine, makes the payment of that debt so much the easier. Now I am going to encourage that in every possible way. We shall have hundreds of thousands of disbanded soldiers, and many have feared that their return home in such great numbers might paralyze industry by furnishing suddenly a greater supply of labor than there will be a demand for. I am going to try and attract them to the hidden wealth of our mountain ranges where there is room enough for all. Immigration, which even the war has not stopped, will land upon our shores hundreds of thousands more per year, from over-crowded Europe. I intend to point them to the gold and silver that waits for them in the West. Tell the miners, from me, that I shall promote their interests to the utmost of my ability, because their prosperity is the prosperity of the nation; and we shall prove, in a very few years, that we are, indeed, the treasury of the world."<sup>81</sup> That evening Lincoln admonished the speaker: "Don't forget, Colfax, to tell those miners that that's my speech to the miners, which I send by you."<sup>82</sup>

When Colfax told Lincoln that many people had feared for his safety in the Virginia capital, he smilingly replied: "Why, if any one else had been President, and had gone to Richmond, I would have been alarmed too; but I was not scared about myself a bit."<sup>83</sup>

Around 8:30, as Lincoln prepared to leave the White House, he asked his elder son if he would like to come along. Robert declined, citing fatigue. So his parents

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<sup>81</sup> Colfax, speech in Virginia City, Nevada, 26 June 1865, published in the Washington Daily Morning Chronicle, 7 August 1865, in Fehrenbacher and Fehrenbacher, eds., Recollected Words of Lincoln, 113-114.

<sup>82</sup> Reck, Lincoln: His Last 24 Hours, 57.

<sup>83</sup> Colfax, Life and Principles of Lincoln, 10.

climbed into their carriage and proceeded to pick up Major Henry R. Rathbone and his stepsister (who was also his fiancée) Clara Harris. When the Grants announced that they could not join the presidential party, Mrs. Lincoln had invited the young couple to do so. The First Lady called Miss Harris a “dear friend.”<sup>84</sup> Together the two women often took carriage rides and, according to Miss Harris, she regularly attended plays with the Lincolns.<sup>85</sup> The party reached Ford’s Theatre about half an hour after the curtain had risen on Tom Taylor’s light comedy, Our American Cousin. As they entered, the orchestra struck up “Hail to the Chief,” and the audience rose to greet them with vociferous applause, which Lincoln acknowledged with a smile and bow. As he moved toward the box, he looked to one observer “mournful and sad.”<sup>86</sup>

#### JOHN WILKES BOOTH: MAD RACIST

John Wilkes Booth had spent the day plotting to assassinate Lincoln, Vice-President Johnson, and Secretary of State Seward. The previous autumn, Booth had begun hatching a scheme to kidnap the president, spirit him off to Richmond, and exchange him for Confederate prisoners-of-war. That enterprise fizzled in mid-March when the conspirators planned to intercept Lincoln on his way to a hospital. With the failure of the capture plot, some of the conspirators quit Booth’s team.

Weeks later, when Lincoln toured Richmond, Booth was outraged. According to his sister, the president’s “triumphant entry into the fallen city (which was not

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<sup>84</sup> Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 697.

<sup>85</sup> Clara Harris in Good, ed., We Saw Lincoln Shot, 69.

<sup>86</sup> Charles A. Leale to Benjamin F. Butler, 20 July 1867, in Good, ed., We Saw Lincoln Shot, 60.

magnanimous), breathed fresh air upon the fire which consumed him.”<sup>87</sup> Richmond was the city where Booth had first triumphed as an actor.

In the spring of 1865, Booth had been sleeping badly and experiencing difficulties with his fiancée.<sup>88</sup> Depressed, Booth began drinking more heavily than usual, consuming as much as a quart of brandy in less than two hours.<sup>89</sup> When a friend offered him a drink, he said: “Yes, anything to drive away the blues.”<sup>90</sup> Booth’s good friend Harry Langdon believed that “Whiskey had a great deal to do with the murder.”<sup>91</sup> John Deery concurred, speculating that “Booth was as much crazed by the liquor he drank as by any motive when he shot Lincoln.”<sup>92</sup> He was known as “a hard drinker of the strongest brandy.”<sup>93</sup>

Booth was even more disconsolate when he heard that the Army of Northern Virginia had surrendered on April 9, for he had come to feel guilty about his failure to strike a blow for the Confederacy. He had promised his mother not to join the Confederate army.<sup>94</sup> In late 1864, he wrote her saying he had started “to deem myself a

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<sup>87</sup> Asia Booth Clarke, John Wilkes Booth: A Sister’s Memoir, ed. Terry Alford (1938; Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 99.

<sup>88</sup> Terry Alford, “Why Booth Shot Lincoln,” in Charles M. Hubbard, ed., Abraham Lincoln and His Contemporaries (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1999), 133.

<sup>89</sup> John Deery, co-proprietor of a billiard parlor frequented by Booth, in the New York Sunday Telegraph, 23 May 1909.

<sup>90</sup> Testimony of Henry Phillips, stage manager at Ford’s Theatre, in Plummer, ed., “Haynie Diary,” 36 (testimony included in the entry for 14 April 1865).

<sup>91</sup> Langdon interviewed by George Alfred Townsend, 1883, in Alford, “Why Booth Shot Lincoln,” 133.

<sup>92</sup> John Deery in the New York Sunday Telegraph, 23 May 1909.

<sup>93</sup> Alfred W. Smiley in an interview with Louis J. Mackey, 1894, in Ernest C. Mitchell, John Wilkes Booth in the Pennsylvania Oil Region (Meadville, Pennsylvania: Crawford County Historical Society, 1987), 72.

<sup>94</sup> Edwin Booth to Nahum Capen, Windsor Hotel, [London], 28 July 1881, in Clarke, Sister’s Memoir, ed. Alford, 116. Booth’s claim seems valid. Alford, “Why Booth Shot Lincoln,” 129-30.

coward and to despise my own existence.”<sup>95</sup> His loving sister Asia asked him pointedly after he declared his undying devotion to the South: “Why not go fight for her, then? Every Marylander worthy of the name is fighting her battles.”<sup>96</sup> When he expressed to Harry C. Ford, treasurer of Ford’s Theatre, disappointment that Lee had surrendered his sword after having promised never to do so, Ford pointedly asked what Booth had done compared to Lee. Defensively the actor replied that he was as brave as Lee. “Well,” Ford sneered, “you have not got three stars yet to show it.”<sup>97</sup> With the war virtually over, what could he do to redeem himself in his own eyes? Killing Lincoln might salve his troubled conscience. (It is not clear exactly when Booth decided to shoot rather than abduct Lincoln. It is possible that the alternative of murder ran as an undercurrent through the kidnapping scheme.)<sup>98</sup>

On April 14 (Good Friday), when Booth heard that Grant and the president would attend Ford’s Theatre that night, he impulsively decided to kill them. Earlier he had mentioned the possibility of murdering the president, but not to his colleagues in the capture plot. Summoning the remnants of the kidnapping team (David Herold, George Atzerodt, and Lewis Powell), Booth assigned them various tasks. Powell was to kill Seward, Atzerodt was to kill Andrew Johnson, and Herold was to assist Booth escape after he shot Lincoln. The murder of Johnson and Seward would heighten the effect of the presidential assassination, throwing the government into chaos.

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<sup>95</sup> Booth to Mary Ann Holmes Booth, [Philadelphia, November 1864], in John Rhodehamel, ed., Right or Wrong, God Judge Me: The Writings of John Wilkes Booth (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 130.

<sup>96</sup> Clarke, Sister’s Memoir, ed. Alford, 82.

<sup>97</sup> Harry Ford in Kauffman, American Brutus, 217-18.

<sup>98</sup> Edward Steers, Jr., Blood on the Moon: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 88.

Booth's motives are not entirely clear, but he was an avid white supremacist whose racist rage formed an important part of his psyche. Indignation at the proposal that blacks would become citizen-voters prompted him to act. (As noted above, Booth responded to Lincoln's call for black suffrage by vowing: "That means nigger citizenship. Now by God I'll put him through!") Thus Lincoln was a martyr to black civil rights, as much as Martin Luther King and other activists who fell victim to racist violence a century later.

In September 1864, Booth nearly shot a black man who entered a barbershop where he had been waiting for a haircut. When the black expressed joy at a recent Union army victory, Booth asked peremptorily: "Is that the way you talk among gentlemen, and with your hat on too?"

"When I go into a parlor among ladies, I take my hat off, but when I go into a bar-room or a barber shop or any other public place, I keep my hat on," came the reply.

Incensed, Booth reached for his gun and would have used it if another patron had not intervened.<sup>99</sup>

In December 1860, Booth spelled out his views on slavery, race and abolitionism in a speech that he drafted but did not deliver. Intended for an audience in Philadelphia, where he was then playing, it defended slavery as "a happiness" for the slaves "and a social & political blessing" for whites. "I have been through the whole South and have marked the happiness of master & man. I have seen the Black man w[h]ip[p]ed but only when he deserved much more than he received. And had an abolitionist used the lash, he would have got double."

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<sup>99</sup> James Lawson, the barber, interviewed in 1894 by Louis J. Mackey, in Miller, Booth in the Pennsylvania Oil Region, 70.

Booth condemned abolitionists in the most bloodthirsty terms: “Such men I call tra[i]tors and treason should be stamped to death and not al[l]owed to stalk abroad in any land. So deep is my hatred for such men that I could wish I had them in my grasp And I the power to crush. I’d grind them into dust! . . . Now that we have found the serpent that mad[d]ens us, we should crush it in it birth. . . . I tell you Sirs when treason weighs heavy in the scale, it is time for us to throw off all gentler feelings of our natures and summon resolution, pride, justice, Ay, and revenge.”<sup>100</sup>

Although he did not mention Lincoln in this screed, Booth came to believe that the president deserved to be stamped to death, ground into powder, and crushed not only because he was an abolitionist like John Brown but also because he was a tyrant like Julius Caesar. “When Caesar had conquered the enemies of Rome and the power that was his menaced the liberties of the people, Brutus arose and slew him,” he wrote as he planned to assassinate Lincoln.<sup>101</sup> In the summer of 1864, he told his sister that the president’s domineering advisors made him “the tool of the North, to crush out, or try to crush out slavery, by robbery, rapine, slaughter and bought armies. . . . He is Bonaparte in one great move, that is, by overturning this blind Republic and making himself a king. This man's re-election . . . I tell you – will be a reign! . . . You'll see, you'll see, that reelection means succession. His kin and friends are in every place of office already.” Lincoln was “a false president,” a “Sectional Candidate” who had been elected by fraud and who was “yearning for a kingly succession as hotly as ever did [the Spartan

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<sup>100</sup> Rhodehamel, ed., Right or Wrong, God Judge Me, 55-64.

<sup>101</sup> Booth to the editors of the Washington National Intelligencer, Washington, 14 April 1865, Rhodehamel, ed., Right or Wrong, God Judge Me, 149.

monarch] Ariston.”<sup>102</sup> Similarly, in late 1864 he told his brother Edwin “that Lincoln would be made King of America.” (Edwin speculated that this conviction “drove him beyond the limits of reason.”)<sup>103</sup> When George P. Kane, the former police commissioner of Baltimore, was arrested on a well-founded suspicion of treason, Booth exclaimed: “the man who could drag him from the bosom of his family for no crime whatever, but a mere suspicion that he may commit one sometime, deserves a dog’s death!”<sup>104</sup> The men responsible for Kane’s arrest and long incarceration, Booth thought, were Lincoln and Seward. Booth also blamed the president and secretary of state for the execution of his friend John Yates Beall in early 1865.<sup>105</sup>

Northern Democrats and some Radical Republicans had long been condemning Lincoln as a tyrant. During the 1864 election campaign, a few Northern newspapers, as we have seen, called for the president’s assassination. Even before then, a New York editor had lectured the president: “Behave yourself in [the] future, boss, or we shall be obliged to make an island of your head and stick it on the end of a pole.”<sup>106</sup> In May 1863, a speaker at Cooper Union paraphrased Patrick Henry’s famous “treason” speech: “Let us also remind Lincoln that Caesar had his Brutus and Charles the First his Cromwell. Let us also remind the George the Third of the present day that he, too, may have his Cromwell

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<sup>102</sup> Clarke, Sister’s Memoir, ed. Alford, 88.

<sup>103</sup> Edwin Booth to Nahum Capen, Windsor Hotel, [London], 28 July 1881, Clarke, Sister’s Memoir, ed. Alford, 116.

<sup>104</sup> Kauffman, American Brutus, 124.

<sup>105</sup> Alford, “Why Booth Shot Lincoln,” 130-31.

<sup>106</sup> New York Copperhead, 11 July 1863, in Bryan, Great American Myth, 391.



or his Brutus.”<sup>107</sup> A leading Iowa Democrat confided to his diary that Lincoln was a tyrant whose power could be checked only “by revolution or private assassination.”<sup>108</sup>

Southern newspapers also called for Lincoln’s death. The editors of the Richmond Dispatch said: “assassination in the abstract is a horrid crime . . . but to slay a tyrant is no more assassination than war is murder. Who speaks of Brutus as an assassin? What Yankee ever condemned the Roundhead crew who brought Charles I to the block, although it would be a cruel libel to compare him politically or personally to the tyrants who are now lording it over the South?”<sup>109</sup> The Baltimore South ran a poem suggesting that Lincoln be hanged:<sup>110</sup>

Two posts standant;

One beam crossant;

One rope pendent;

Abram on the end on ’t;

Glorious! splendent.

In late 1864, the Selma, Alabama, Dispatch carried an ad by a lawyer offering to act the role of assassin: “If the citizens of the Southern Confederacy will furnish me with the cash, or good securities, for the sum of one million dollars, I will cause the lives of Abraham Lincoln, William H. Seward and Andrew Johnson to be taken by the 1<sup>st</sup> of March next. This will give us peace, and satisfy the world that cruel tyrants can not live in a ‘land of liberty.’ If this is not accomplished, nothing will be claimed beyond the sum

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<sup>107</sup> New York Herald, 19 May 1863, in Kauffman, American Brutus, 200.

<sup>108</sup> Charles Mason, former chief justice of the Iowa Supreme Court, diary entry, 23 September 1864, in Hubert H. Wubben, Civil War Iowa and the Copperhead Movement (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980), 84.

<sup>109</sup> Kauffman, American Brutus, 121.

<sup>110</sup> Baltimore South, 7 June 1861, in Bryan, Great American Myth, 391.

of fifty thousand dollars, in advance, which is supposed to be necessary to reach and slaughter the three villains.”<sup>111</sup>

After the assassination, many Northerners blamed such violent rhetoric for creating the atmosphere which helped predispose Booth to murder Lincoln. Said a California newspaper, “The deed of horror and infamy . . . is nothing more than the expression in action, of what secession politicians and journalists have been for years expressing in words. Wilkes Booth has simply carried out what the Copperhead journalists who have denounced the President as a ‘tyrant,’ a ‘despot,’ a ‘usurper,’ hinted at, and virtually recommended. His weapon was the pistol, theirs the pen; and though he surpassed them in ferocity, they equaled him in guilt. . . . Wilkes Booth has but acted out what Copperhead orators and the Copperhead press have been preaching for years.”<sup>112</sup>

Booth was bigoted against immigrants, especially from Ireland, as well as against blacks. During the 1850s he, like many other Marylanders, supported the Know-Nothing party, and in 1864 he denounced Lincoln supporters as “false-hearted, unloyal foreigners,” “bastard subjects, of other countries,” and “apostates” who “would glory in the downfall of the Republic.” Booth had a snobbish streak which not only made him reluctant to dine with the laborers on his father’s farm but also to condemn Lincoln’s “appearance, his pedigree, his coarse low jokes and anecdotes, his vulgar similes, and his policy” as “a disgrace to the seat he holds.”<sup>113</sup>

While Booth’s act resembled the racist crime of James Earl Ray, who murdered Martin Luther King in 1968, it was also the work of a deeply neurotic man with

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<sup>111</sup> Francis Fisher Browne, The Every-Day Life of Abraham Lincoln (New York: N. D. Thompson, 1886), 804.

<sup>112</sup> Kauffman, American Brutus, 80.

<sup>113</sup> Clarke, Sister’s Memoir, ed. Alford, 88-89.

conflicted feelings about his parents. He seems to have identified the Confederacy with his beloved mother and the North, embodied by Lincoln, with his father. He spoke extravagantly of his love of country: “Indeed I love her so that I oft mentally exclaim, with Richelieu. O my native land let me but ward this dagger from thy heart! and die upon thy bossom [sic]. ~~Indeed I love her so~~ Such is my love that I could be content to crawl on to old age. With all the curses, that could be heaped upon me, to see her safe from this coming tempest!” He asserted that “I am . . . a mer[e] child a boy, [compared] to some I see around me. A child indeed and this union is my Mother. A Mother that I love with an unutterable affection. You are all her children, and is there no son but I to speak in its Mother’s cause[?] O would that I could place my worship for her in another heart, in the heart of some great orator, who might move you all to love her, to help her now when she is dieing [sic]. You all do love her. You all would die for her.” He hoped she could be saved peacefully, but if not, “it must be done with blood. Ay with blood & justice.” The South “has been wronged. Ay wronged. She has been laughed at, prayed [sic] upon and wronged. . . . She must be reconciled. How can she. Why as I said before with naught but justice. The Abolition party must throw away their principals [sic]. They must be hushed forever. Or else it must be done by the punishment of her aggressors. By justice that demands the blood of her oppressors. By the blood of those, who in wounding her have slain us all, with naught save blood and justice. Ay blood, in this case, should season justice.”<sup>114</sup>

In 1860, when Booth spoke of his exaggerated love of country, he meant the entire United States, but once war broke out, he regarded the South as his country. “My

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<sup>114</sup> Rhodehamel, ed., Right or Wrong, God Judge Me, 61.

love is for the South alone,” he stated toward the end of the conflict.<sup>115</sup> To his sister he declared: “So help me holy God! my soul, life, and possessions are for the South.”<sup>116</sup>

During the war, he had acted as a sometime Confederate courier, spy, and smuggler. To kill Lincoln would be to help the Confederacy as it was dying. Then he could perish on her bosom.

In November 1864, Booth emphasized his belief in white supremacy and hatred for Republicans: “This country was formed for the white not for the black man,” he wrote in a letter probably meant for his brother-in-law. “And looking upon African slavery from the same stand-point held by those noble framers of our Constitution. I for one, have ever considered it, one of the greatest blessings (both for themselves and us,) that God ever bestowed upon a favored nation.” As evidence to support that conclusion, he cited the “wealth and power” of the whites and the blacks’ “elevation in happiness and enlightenment above their race, elsewhere.” He had lived amid slavery most of his life and had “seen less harsh treatment from Master to Man than I have beheld in the North from father to son.” All Republicans were traitors, he maintained, and “the entire party, deserved the fate of poor old [John] Brown.”<sup>117</sup>

In another letter written around the same time, Booth apologized to his mother for leaving her “to do what work I can for a poor oppressed downtrodden people.”

Extravagantly he declared his undying devotion: “Heaven knows how dearly I love you. . . . Darling Mother I can not write you, you will understand the deep regret, the forsaking your dear side, will make me suffer, for you have been the best, the noblest, an example

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<sup>115</sup> Letter of November 1864, Rhodehamel, ed., Right or Wrong, God Judge Me, 126.

<sup>116</sup> Clarke, Sister’s Memoir, ed. Alford, 82.

<sup>117</sup> Rhodehamel, ed., Right or Wrong, God Judge Me, 124-27.

for all mothers.” Much as he would like to please her by staying out of harm’s way, “the cause of liberty & justice” called. “I have not a single selfish motive to spur me on to this,” he protested, “nothing save the sacred duty, I feel I owe the cause I love, the cause of the South.” He felt compelled “to go and share the sufferings of my brave countrymen, holding an unequal strife (for every right human & divine) against the most ruthless enemy, the world has ever known.”<sup>118</sup>

This letter tends to corroborate the statement of an actress friend of Booth that the “love and sympathy between him and his mother were very close, very strong. No matter how far apart they were, she seemed to know, in some mysterious way, when anything was wrong with him. If he were ill, or unfit to play, he would often receive a letter of sympathy, counsel, and warning, written when she could not possibly have received any news of him. He has told me of this, himself.”<sup>119</sup> Two weeks before the assassination, Booth’s mother wrote him saying: “I never yet doubted your love & devotion to me – in fact I always gave you praise for being the fondest of all my boys.”<sup>120</sup> According to his brother Edwin, John was “his mother’s darling.”<sup>121</sup> When away from her, he wrote her every Sunday.

By killing Lincoln, Booth also hoped, not unreasonably, that he would achieve lasting renown for having done something truly memorable. A schoolmate recalled that as an adolescent Booth “always said ‘he would make his name remembered by

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<sup>118</sup> Rhodehamel, ed., Right or Wrong. God Judge Me, 130-31.

<sup>119</sup> Ann Hartley Gilbert, The Stage Reminiscences of Mrs. Gilbert, ed. Charlotte M. Martin (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1901), 57-58.

<sup>120</sup> Mary Ann Holmes Booth to J. W. Booth, New York, 28 March 1865, in Kauffman, American Brutus, 199.

<sup>121</sup> Edwin Booth to Nahum Capen, Windsor Hotel, [London], 28 July 1881, in Clarke, Sister’s Memoir, ed. Alford, 116.

succeeding generations.”<sup>122</sup> “I must have fame! fame!” he reportedly exclaimed.<sup>123</sup> In 1864, he declared: “What a glorious opportunity there is for a man to immortalize himself by killing Lincoln.”<sup>124</sup> A week before the assassination, he remarked to a friend: “What an excellent chance I had to kill the President, if I had wished, on inauguration day!”<sup>125</sup> When asked what good that would have done, he replied: “I could live in history.”<sup>126</sup> To another friend who allegedly posed the same question, Booth cited a passage from Colley Cibber’s adaptation of Richard III:

The daring youth that fired the Ephesian dome  
Outlives in fame the pious fool that reared it.<sup>127</sup>

A few weeks before the assassination, Booth told an acquaintance that he longed to “do something which the world would remember for all time.”<sup>128</sup> The evening he shot Lincoln, Booth told someone who predicted that he would never achieve the fame his father had attained: “When I leave the stage for good, I will be the most famous man in America.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Asia Booth Clarke, The Unlocked Book: A Memoir of John Wilkes Booth by His Sister (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1938), 152.

<sup>123</sup> Stanley Kimmel, The Mad Booths of Maryland (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1940), 150.

<sup>124</sup> Kimmel, Mad Booths, 175.

<sup>125</sup> Samuel Knapp Chester testimony, 12 May 1865, Benn Pitman, comp., The Assassination of President Lincoln and the Trial of the Conspirators David E. Herold, Mary E. Surratt, Lewis Payne, George A. Atzerodt, Edward Spangler, Samuel A. Mudd, Samuel Arnold, Michael O’Laughlin (Cincinnati: Moore, Wiltach & Baldwin, 1865), 45.

<sup>126</sup> Kaufmann, American Brutus, 205.

<sup>127</sup> Richard III act 3, scene 1; Kauffman, American Brutus, 245, citing the New York World, 25 April 1865. The press account has Booth slightly misquoting this couplet, substituting “daring” for “aspiring” and “reared” instead of “raised.”

<sup>128</sup> New York Clipper, 29 April 1865, in Alford, “Why Booth Shot Lincoln,” 132.

<sup>129</sup> William Withers, Jr., heard Booth say this in the tavern next to Ford’s Theatre. Kimmel, Mad Booths, 262.

Booth's sister thought his "wild ambition" had been inborn and "fed to fever-heat by the unhealthy tales of Bulwer."<sup>130</sup>

In the revealing diary he kept while fleeing his pursuers, Booth wrote: "I am abandoned, with the curse of Cain upon me, when if the world knew my heart, that one blow would have made me great." When the Army of Northern Virginia surrendered, he determined that "something decisive & great must be done." Mystified by the execration he was receiving in the press, he wallowed in self-pity: "For doing what Brutus was honored for, what made Tell a hero" he was now unfairly "looked upon as a common cutthroat." He boasted that he "had too great a soul to die like a criminal." Clearly he thought by doing something "decisive & great" he would be honored just as Brutus was for killing Caesar and William Tell was for killing Hermann Gessler.<sup>131</sup>

As the fugitive Booth was chatting with the family of Richard H. Garrett, a Virginia farmer in whose tobacco barn he would die the next day, the subject of Lincoln's assassin came up. When Garrett's daughter speculated that the villain probably had been well paid, Booth opined that "he wasn't paid a cent, but did it for notoriety's sake."<sup>132</sup>

Booth's famous brother Edwin considered John mentally unbalanced from boyhood. "He was a rattle-pated fellow, filled with Quixotic notions," Edwin wrote. "We regarded him as a . . . wild-brained boy, and used to laugh at his patriotic froth whenever secession was discussed. That he was insane on that one point no one who knew him can doubt."<sup>133</sup> A friend in Washington reported that shortly before the assassination Booth

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<sup>130</sup> Clarke, Sister's Memoir, ed. Alford, 46.

<sup>131</sup> Booth's diary reproduced in Kauffman, American Brutus, 399-400.

<sup>132</sup> Kimmel, Mad Booths, 249.

<sup>133</sup> Edwin Booth to Nahum Capen, Windsor Hotel, [London], 28 July 1881, in Clarke, Sister's Memoir, ed. Alford, 116.

“seemed a bit crazed.”<sup>134</sup> In a burst of maniacal temper, he nearly strangled to death his brother-in-law, John Sleeper Clarke, for mildly criticizing Jefferson Davis.<sup>135</sup>

Booth’s mental instability and fondness for liquor may have been in part genetic. His alcoholic father, the celebrated English-born tragedian Junius Brutus Booth, suffered from spells of madness. In the winter of 1829, he broke character on stage and shouted as the management hustled him away: “Take me to the Lunatic Hospital!”<sup>136</sup> One day he was about to hang himself when his wife, the former Mary Ann Holmes, stopped him. “My God – my God! what could have come over me!” he exclaimed.<sup>137</sup> On other occasions he tried to commit suicide by overdosing on laudanum and by leaping into the waters off Charleston harbor. He had homicidal as well as suicidal impulses. In 1824, he asked a fellow actor: “I must cut somebody’s throat today, and whom shall I take? Shall it be Wallack, or yourself, or who?” Just then John Henry Wallack appeared, and Booth draw a long dagger and attempted to stab him. (His son John Wilkes would use a similar weapon against Major Rathbone.) One night in 1838, for no good reason, he assaulted a friend and dealt him a serious blow with an andiron. In 1835, after failing to appear for a performance, he apologized, citing “a mind disordered” and “a partial derangement.” At that same time his doctor reported that Booth “has for years past kept his wife in misery, and his friends in fear by his outrageous threats & acts [and] has bothered his acquaintances by vexatious importunity, till they bolt their doors against him.”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> John Deery in the New York Sunday Telegraph, 23 May 1909.

<sup>135</sup> Charles Wyndham in the New York Herald, 27 June 1909, in Bryan, Great American Myth, 141-42.

<sup>136</sup> Stephen M. Archer, Junius Brutus Booth: Theatrical Prometheus (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 113-14.

<sup>137</sup> Kauffman, American Brutus, 84; Archer, Junius Brutus Booth, 140.

<sup>138</sup> Archer, Junius Brutus Booth, 151, 137, 136.



When drunk, Junius Booth directed tirades against Mary Ann and may have beaten her.<sup>139</sup> He certainly humiliated her and her children when it was revealed that he had married and then abandoned a woman in England, Marie Christine Adelaide Delannoy. When John Wilkes was twelve years old, Aladaide sued for divorce. Her allegations about Junius and Mary Ann’s “adulterous intercourse” and “the fruits of said adulterous intercourse” were extremely embarrassing, as were her screaming confrontations with her husband on the streets of Baltimore.<sup>140</sup> Legally, John Wilkes and his sibling were bastards. After the divorce from Adalaide was finalized, Junius wed Mary Ann on John Wilkes’s thirteenth birthday. The embarrassment persisted, for the press ran lurid stories again at the time of Adelaide’s death in 1858. John Wilkes probably harbored strong feelings against his father for abusing his mother and humiliating him. Those negative feelings could not be expressed openly, for Junius died in 1852. John Wilkes evidently displaced his rage against his father onto Republicans and their leader, Abraham Lincoln.

Booth hated Lincoln passionately, holding the president responsible for all that had gone wrong. “Our country owed all our troubles to him,” he wrote in his diary.<sup>141</sup> A few months before the assassination, he told his friend Alfred W. Smiley that “he had a personal hatred of Lincoln.” Smiley inferred from Booth’s “utterances that he had a very strong hatred of Abe Lincoln.” One of those utterances was particularly emphatic: “I would rather have my right arm cut off at the shoulder than see Lincoln made president

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<sup>139</sup> Kauffman, American Brutus, 94, citing statements by neighbors in the papers of Stanley Kimmel.

<sup>140</sup> Archer, Junius Brutus Booth, 323, 196.

<sup>141</sup> Kimmel, Mad Booths, 235.

again.”<sup>142</sup> A barber recalled that while Booth was being shaved, he would deliver “a tirade against Lincoln.” He “would sit in the chair and call Lincoln all the vile names he could think of, ‘a rail splitting this, that, and the other thing.’ His enmity towards Lincoln was intense.”<sup>143</sup> On another occasion, Booth took offense during an argument about Lincoln and reached for his gun but was persuaded not to shoot the president’s defender.<sup>144</sup>

By killing Lincoln, Booth unconsciously avenged his mother, whose troubles (he thought) were the fault of Junius Brutus Booth. Immediately after shooting the president, Booth reportedly said not only “sic semper tyrannis” but also “the South is avenged” (or “Revenge for the South.”)<sup>145</sup>

Booth’s sister reported that “he wanted to be loved of the Southern people above all things.”<sup>146</sup> As he lay dying, Booth said: “Tell my mother – tell my mother that I did it for my country – that I die for my country.”<sup>147</sup> If in fact he unconsciously equated his mother with the South, the assassination of Lincoln would in effect be a way of proving his love for her.

Booth’s willingness to die for his country also had roots in a martyr complex. He despised John Brown’s abolitionist views but extravagantly admired his courage. Booth

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<sup>142</sup> Smiley in an interview with Louis J. Mackey, 1894, in Mitchell, Booth in the Pennsylvania Oil Region, 72-73.

<sup>143</sup> James Lawson in an interview with Louis J. Mackey, 1894, in Mitchell, Booth in the Pennsylvania Oil Region, 70. Cf. interview with Jerry Allen, *ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>144</sup> A Mr. McAmrich, operator of a ferry on which this episode took place; D. R. Campbell, a carpenter who witnessed the scene; and Oliver B. Steele, an oil worker, in interviews with Louis J. Mackey, 1894, in Mitchell, Booth in the Pennsylvania Oil Region, 66-67.

<sup>145</sup> Basset [first name unknown], Sheldon P. McIntyre, and Julia Shepherd in Good, ed., We Saw Lincoln Shot, 33, 72, 56; Alford, “Why Booth Shot Lincoln,” 136.

<sup>146</sup> Clarke, Unlocked Book, 107-8.

<sup>147</sup> Luther B. Baker heard Booth say this. Kauffman, American Brutus, 320.

called Brown, whose hanging he witnessed, “a man inspired, the grandest character of the century.”<sup>148</sup> His favorite literary figures were martyrs for liberty in the works of Shakespeare, Schiller, Byron, and Plutarch.<sup>149</sup>

## THE ASSASSINATION AND AFTERMATH

Once in their box, the Lincolns and their guests sat back to enjoy the show. Around 10:30, as Booth made his way toward them, he encountered Charles Forbes outside the box and gained admission after showing him a card.<sup>150</sup> (Lamon probably would not have done allowed him to pass. Mrs. Lincoln held Forbes responsible for her husband’s death.) Once in the anteroom, Booth barred the door behind him with an improvised jam. Through a tiny peephole he had bored earlier he could see the president. Waiting till there was but a single actor on stage, he opened the inner door, stepped quickly toward the president’s rocking chair, and shot him in the back of the head at point-blank range with a derringer. Rathbone struggled with the assassin, who slashed the major’s arm badly with a long dagger, then leaped to the stage. (He liked to make sensational jumps onto the stage, especially when entering the witches’ cave in Macbeth.)<sup>151</sup> Upon landing, he shouted out “sic semper tyrannis” (thus always to tyrants), the Virginia state motto (and also statements about vengeance for the South). Striding across the stage, he escaped out the back door, mounted a horse, and galloped toward southern Maryland, following the route he had earlier established as part of his kidnapping scheme.

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<sup>148</sup> Clarke, Unlocked Book, 124.

<sup>149</sup> Kauffman, American Brutus, 200.

<sup>150</sup> Kauffman, American Brutus, 393; Good, ed., We Saw Lincoln Shot, 80-81.

<sup>151</sup> J. T. Ford in Bryan, Great American Myth, 95.

The instant that Lincoln was shot he lost consciousness, never to regain it in the remaining nine hours of his life. Amid the pandemonium in Ford's Theatre, three doctors (Charles Leale, Albert King, and Charles Taft) made their way to the presidential box. They removed Lincoln from his rocker, placed him on the floor, and inspected his body for wounds. Meanwhile, guards cleared the theater. Discovering the fatal hole in the back of the president's head, the physicians feared that he could not survive being transported back to the White House. So they had him carried across the street to the boardinghouse of William Petersen, where he was laid diagonally across a short bed.

Mary Lincoln later told a friend that "she saw the flash and heard the report of the pistol, thinking it was in some way connected with the Play. She leaned forward to see what it was, and then looked to Mr Lincoln to see where he was looking. He was sitting with his head dro[p]ped down and eyes shut. She was not alarmed at this, [for] he sometimes held his head in that way when in deep thought, but she put her hand on his forehead and he not stirring she put it on the back of his head and feeling it wet she immediately withdrew it covered with blood. She then screamed and that is the last she remembered that took place in the Theatre. She says, as she put her hand on his head she recollects that something suddenly brushed past her and rubbing off her Shawl. It was Booth as he jumped from the Box."<sup>152</sup>

Once she recovered from her faint, Mary Lincoln crossed the street to the Petersen house, escorted by Clara Harris and the bleeding Major Rathbone. Upon entering, she frantically exclaimed: "Where is my husband! Where is my husband!" as she wrung her

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<sup>152</sup> Horatio Nelson Taft diary, 30 April 1865, Library of Congress. She gave a similar account to Elizabeth Blair Lee. Elizabeth Blair Lee to Samuel Phillips Lee, Washington, 22 April 1865, Virginia Jeans Laas, ed., Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 499.

hands in extreme anguish. When she reached his bedside, she repeatedly kissed his head, which was slowly oozing blood and brain tissue. “How can it be so?” she asked. “Do speak to me!”<sup>153</sup> When he failed to respond, she suggested that Tad be sent for, saying “she knew he would speak to him because he loved him so well.”<sup>154</sup> With his tutor, the boy had been attending a performance of “Alladin” at nearby Grover’s Theater. But she had second thoughts about summoning him to the Petersen house. “O, my poor ‘Taddy,’” she asked plaintively, “what will become of him? O do not send for him, his violent grief would disturb the House.”<sup>155</sup>

Tad in fact had heard the awful news when the management of Grover’s Theater announced it to the audience. He became hysterical and was taken to the White House, where he burst out to the guard Thomas Pendel, “O Tom Pen! Tom Pen! they have killed papa dead. They’ve killed papa dead!” Pendleton informed Tad’s brother Robert, who had been socializing with John Hay. They immediately rushed to Tenth Street, accompanied by Senator Sumner, who had happened to come to the Executive Mansion under the mistaken impression that the president had been taken there.<sup>156</sup> At the Petersen house, Robert spoke briefly to his mother, then entered his father’s room and took a position at the head of the bed, crying audibly. Soon he composed himself, but on two occasions he broke down, sobbing loudly and leaning his head on Sumner’s shoulder.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> George Francis to his niece Josephine, Washington, 5 May 1865, Lincoln Collection, Chicago History Museum.

<sup>154</sup> John Palmer Usher to his wife, Washington, 15 April 1865, copy, Usher Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>155</sup> Brooks, Washington in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Mitgang, 251.

<sup>156</sup> Pendel, Thirty-Six Years, 42-44; Sumner’s reminiscences in a memorandum by Moorfield Storey, 2 Feb 1868, in Storey, “Dickens, Stanton, Sumner, and Storey,” 463.

<sup>157</sup> Benjamin Brown French, Witness to the Young Republic: A Yankee’s Journal, 1828-1870, ed. Donald B. Cole and John J. McDonough (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1989), 470 (entry for 15

He had the presence of mind to ask that his mother's good friend Elizabeth Dixon, wife of Connecticut Senator James Dixon, be notified. She came quickly to help comfort the distraught First Lady. "I held her & supported her as well as I could & twice we persuaded her to go into another room," Mrs. Dixon reported.<sup>158</sup> The senator's wife was accompanied by her sister, Mary Kinney, and Mrs. Kinney's daughter, Constance. Another Connecticut matron, Mary Jane Welles, wife of Gideon Welles, also rushed to help console the First Lady. Andrew Johnson called but quickly left when Stanton, who knew Mrs. Lincoln disliked the vice president, advised him that his presence was unnecessary.<sup>159</sup>

As the room in the Petersen house filled with cabinet members, doctors, generals, and others, Mary Lincoln occupied the front parlor, attended by some friends, including Clara Harris and the family minister, the Rev. Dr. Phineas T. Gurley, pastor of the Fourteenth Street Presbyterian Church. Miss Harris, whose dress was soaked with the blood of her fiancé, reported that "Mrs. Lincoln all through that dreadful night would look at me with horror & scream, oh! my husband's blood, my dear husband's blood!"<sup>160</sup> In hysterics, she repeatedly asked: "Why didn't he shoot me?"<sup>161</sup>

Mary frequently visited to the bedroom. On one occasion she was so taken aback by her husband's distorted features that she fainted. Coming to, she pleaded with her

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April 1865); Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:288 (entry for 15 April 1865, written on 18 April 1865); Charles Sabin Taft, "Abraham Lincoln's Last Hours," Century Magazine, February 1893, 635.

<sup>158</sup> Reck, A. Lincoln: His Last 24 Hours, 139.

<sup>159</sup> Stanton's reminiscences in a memorandum by Moorfield Storey, 2 February 1868, in Storey, "Dickens, Stanton, Sumner, and Storey," 465.

<sup>160</sup> Clara Harris to "My dear Mary," 25 April 1865, Ira Harris Papers, New-York Historical Society, in Kauffman, American Brutus, 37-38.

<sup>161</sup> Maunsell B. Field, Memories of Many Men and of Some Women: Being Personal Recollections of Emperors, Kings, Queens, Princes, Presidents, Statesmen, Authors, and Artists, at Home and Abroad, During the Last Thirty Years (New York: Harper, 1874), 322.

dying spouse: “Love, live but for one moment to speak to me once to speak to our children!”<sup>162</sup>

Lincoln’s fitful breathing reminded Stanton of “an aeloian harp, now rising, now falling and almost dying away, and then reviving.”<sup>163</sup> Around 7 a.m., as Mary Lincoln sat by the bedside, Lincoln’s breathing grew so stertorous that she jumped up shrieking and fell to the floor. Hearing her, Stanton, who had in effect taken charge of the government, entered from an adjoining room and loudly snapped: “Take that woman out and do not let her in again.”<sup>164</sup> As Mrs. Dixon helped her return to the front parlor, the First Lady moaned: “Oh, my God, and have I given my husband to die?” An observer told a friend that he “never heard so much agony in so few words.”<sup>165</sup>

At 7:22 a.m., the president finally stopped breathing. “Now he belongs to the ages,” Stanton said tearfully.<sup>166</sup>

When Gurley broke the news to Mary Lincoln, she cried out: “O – why did you not let me know? Why did you not tell me?”

“Your friends thought it was not best,” Gurley replied. “You must be resigned to the will of God. You must be calm and trust in God and in your friends.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Taft, “Lincoln’s Last Hours,” 635.

<sup>163</sup> Stanton’s reminiscences in a memorandum by Moorfield Storey, 2 February 1868, in Storey, “Dickens, Stanton, Sumner, and Storey,” 463.

<sup>164</sup> Charles A. Leale, “Lincoln’s Last Hours,” Harper’s Weekly, 13 February 1909.

<sup>165</sup> James Tanner to Henry F. Walch, Washington, 17 April 1865, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>166</sup> There are variations on this wording, but Stanton said something very like this according to people present, including John Hay, James Tanner, and Charles Taft. See Bryan, Great American Myth, 189. The Marquis de Chambrun reported that Assistant Secretary of the Interior William T. Otto heard Stanton say: “He is a man for the ages.” Chambrun, Impressions of Lincoln, 97n.

<sup>167</sup> Horatio Nelson Taft diary, 30 April 1865, Library of Congress.

At Stanton's suggestion, Gurley delivered a prayer and then escorted Mary Lincoln to the White House. As she left the Peterson home, she glanced at Ford's Theatre and cried: "Oh, that dreadful house!"<sup>168</sup> Upon reaching the Executive Mansion, they were accosted by Tad, who repeatedly asked: "Where is my Pa? Where is my Pa?" Apparently he expected that his father, though shot, would come home with Mary. "Taddy, your Pa is dead," Dr. Gurley replied. Unprepared for those shocking words, the grief-stricken lad screamed: "O what shall I do? What shall I do? My Brother is dead. My Father is dead. O what shall I do? What will become of me? O what shall I do? O mother you will not die will you. O don't you die Ma. You won[']t die will you Mother? If you die I shall be all alone. O don[']t die Ma."<sup>169</sup>

The next day, when Gideon Welles and James Speed called at the White House, Tad asked tearfully: "Oh, Mr. Welles, who killed my father?" The navy secretary and the attorney general could offer no answer, nor could they staunch their own tears.<sup>170</sup> Tad's grief was so intensified by his mother's weeping that he begged her: "Don't cry so, Mama! or you will make me cry too! You will break my heart. . . . I cannot sleep if you cry." The lad tried to comfort her, saying: "Papa was good and he is gone to heaven. He is happy there. He is with God and brother Willie."<sup>171</sup> On April 16, he asked a White House caller: "Do you think my father has gone to heaven?"

"I have not a doubt of it," came the reply.

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<sup>168</sup> Field, Memories of Many Men and of Some Women, 326.

<sup>169</sup> Horatio Nelson Taft diary, 30 April 1865, Library of Congress.

<sup>170</sup> Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:290 (entry for 15 April 1865, written 18 April 1865).

<sup>171</sup> Keckley, Behind the Scenes, 192, 196.



"Then," said Tad, "I am glad he has gone there, for he never was happy after he came here. This was not a good place for him."<sup>172</sup>

## THE FUNERAL

On Saturday, April 15, a chilly rain fell on the capital as horrified and dumbfounded Washingtonians milled about before the White House. Among them were many blacks who, according to Welles, were "weeping and wailing their loss. This crowd did not appear to diminish through the whole of that cold, wet day; they seemed not to know what was to be their fate since their great benefactor was dead." The navy secretary confided to his diary that "their hopeless grief affects me more than almost anything else, though strong and brave men wept when I met them."<sup>173</sup> The abolitionist Jane Grey Swisshelm informed readers of the St. Cloud, Minnesota, Democrat that "the presence of the thousands of Freed-people who regarded Abraham Lincoln as their Moses" was striking. "With tears and lamentations they lean their faces against the iron fence around the Presidential Mansion, and groan with a feeling akin to despair lest now, that their friend is gone, they shall be returned to their old masters." She heard a black woman exclaim: "My good President! My good President! I would rather have died myself! I would rather have given the babe from my bosom! Oh, Jesus! Oh, Jesus!" Mrs. Swisshelm concluded that the "mourning for President Lincoln is no mockery of woe, but the impassioned outburst of heartfelt grief; and it is touching to see, on every little negro hut in the suburbs, some respectful testimonial of sorrow. Many deprived themselves of a

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<sup>172</sup> Carpenter, Six Months at the White House, 293.

<sup>173</sup> Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:290 (entry for 15 April 1865, written 18 April 1865).

meal to get a yard or two of black [material] to hang above their poor door or window. Was ever mortal so wept by the poor?"<sup>174</sup>

Mary Lincoln was so grief-stricken that she did not attend the obsequies for her husband. On April 18, Lincoln's embalmed body lay in state in the East Room of the White House, where over 20,000 persons filed past the open casket to pay their last respects. Thousands of others would have done so but were deterred by the long lines and went home rather than wait hours to gain admission. Many of the teary-eyed mourners looked upon the coffin as if it contained a beloved friend or family member. Some spoke farewells to the inanimate remains. Conspicuous among them were less prosperous citizens, both white and black, who remarked: "He was the poor man's friend."<sup>175</sup>

On April 19, the anniversary of the first bloodshed of both the Civil and Revolutionary Wars, Lincoln's funeral took place in that same vast room. The Rev. Dr. Gurley delivered the sermon in which he quoted a statement that Lincoln made to him and other clergy who had called on him in the "darkest days" of the war: "Gentlemen, my hope of success in this great and terrible struggle rests on that immutable foundation, the justice and goodness of God. And when events are very threatening, and prospects very dark, I still hope that in some way which man can not see all will be well in the end, because our cause is just, and God is on our side."<sup>176</sup>

The body was then conveyed to the Capitol, where it lay in state until the following evening. The Twenty-second U.S. Colored Infantry regiment led an immense,

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<sup>174</sup> Washington correspondence, 17 April, St. Cloud Democrat, 27 April 1865, Larsen, ed., Crusader and Feminist, 287-88

<sup>175</sup> William T. Cogheshall, Lincoln Memorial: The Journeys of Abraham Lincoln from Springfield to Washington, 1861, as President Elect, and from Washington to Springfield, 1865, as President Martyred (Columbus: Ohio State Journal, 1865), 110-11.

<sup>176</sup> Cogheshall, Lincoln Memorial, 127.

solemn procession past the grieving multitudes that lined crepe-bedecked Pennsylvania Avenue. Bringing up the rear were four thousand blacks, including leaders of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and various fraternal orders.<sup>177</sup> Gideon Welles noted that there “were no truer mourners, when all were sad, than the poor colored people who crowded the streets, joined the procession, and exhibited their woe, bewailing the loss of him whom they regarded as a benefactor and father. Women as well as men, with their little children, thronged the streets, sorrow, trouble, and distress depicted on their countenances and their bearing.”<sup>178</sup> Another witness of the procession reported that the blacks sorrowfully declared that they “had lost their best friend.”<sup>179</sup>

Blacks outside the nation’s capital shared the Washingtonians’ sorrow. In Charleston, South Carolina, the black population seemed stricken upon hearing of Lincoln’s death. “I never saw such sad faces,” a journalist wrote, “or heard such heavy hearts beatings, as here in Charleston the day the dreadful news came! The colored people – the native loyalists – were like children bereaved of an only and loved parent.” One woman, “so absorbed in her grief that she noticed no one,” cried loud and long. The reporter concluded that “her heart told her that he whom Heaven had sent in answer to her prayers was lying in a bloody grave, and she and her race were left – fatherless.”<sup>180</sup>

The gloom pervading the capital was broken only by some Radical Republicans and abolitionists who opposed Lincoln’s Reconstruction policy because of its leniency toward the defeated Confederates. At a caucus, several Radicals seemed glad that

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<sup>177</sup> Benjamin Quarles, Lincoln and the Negro (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 241-42; Victor Searcher, Farewell to Lincoln (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), 80-81.

<sup>178</sup> Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:293 (entry for 19 April 1865, written probably on 25 April 1865).

<sup>179</sup> B. F. Winslow to his grandfather, Washington, 18 April 1865, S. Griswold Flagg Collection, box 2, Sterling Library, Yale University.

<sup>180</sup> Carpenter, Six Months at the White House, 83-84.

Andrew Johnson, who called for harsh punishment of Rebels, would be in charge. "I like the radicalism of the members of this caucus," Indiana Congressman George W. Julian wrote. "Their hostility towards Lincoln's policy of conciliation and contempt for his weakness were undisguised; and the universal feeling among radical men here is that his death is a god-send."<sup>181</sup> Michigan Senator Zachariah Chandler believed that the Almighty "continued Mr. Lincoln in office as long as he was useful, and then substituted a better man to finish the work."<sup>182</sup> Ben Wade told that "better man" (Andrew Johnson): "we have faith in you. By the gods, there will be no trouble now in running the government."<sup>183</sup> He added: "Mr. Lincoln had too much of human kindness in him to deal with these infamous traitors, and I am glad that it has fallen into your hands to deal out justice to them."<sup>184</sup> Henry Winter Davis said "the assassination was a great crime, but the change is no calamity. I suppose God has punished us enough for his weak rule – & ended it."<sup>185</sup> Jane Grey Swisshelm echoed Davis: "I do not look upon this death as a National calamity," for she had feared "the destruction of our Government through the leniency and magnanimity of President Lincoln." She believed that God "removed from this important place one who was totally incapable of understanding, or believing in, the

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<sup>181</sup> George W. Julian, "George W. Julian's Journal -- The Assassination of Lincoln," Indiana Magazine of History 11 (1915):334-335. Julian wrote in his memoirs: "I spent most of the afternoon in a political caucus, held for the purpose of considering the necessity for a new cabinet and a line of policy less conciliatory than that of Mr. Lincoln; and while everybody was shocked at his murder, the feeling was nearly universal that the accession of Johnson to the presidency would prove a godsend to the country." Julian, Political Recollections, 1840 to 1872 (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg, 1884), 255.

<sup>182</sup> Chandler to his wife, Washington, 23 April 1865, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress, in William C. Harris, Lincoln's Last Months (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 228.

<sup>183</sup> Julian, "Journal," 335.

<sup>184</sup> Undated manuscript in the Henry L. Dawes Papers, "The Reconstruction Period, 1865-1869," in Harris, Lincoln's Last Months, 227.

<sup>185</sup> Davis to Samuel F. Du Pont, n.p., 22 April 1865, transcript, S. F. Du Pont Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

wickedness, the cruelty, and barbarism of the Southern people.”<sup>186</sup> William Lloyd Garrison, Jr., told a friend that “Mr. Lincoln’s too great kindness of heart led him to a mistaken leniency, but Andy Johnson has fought the beasts of Ephesus on their own soil and has learned by bitter experience their implacable nature. ‘Thorough’ will be the word now. . . . The nation sails into new waters now and it may be providential that a new hand grasps the rudder.”<sup>187</sup>

Several Christian clergy also welcomed the ascension of Johnson to power.<sup>188</sup> Within hours of learning that Lincoln died, Henry Ward Beecher declared: “Johnson’s little finger was stronger than Lincoln’s loins.”<sup>189</sup> A Presbyterian minister in Freeport, Illinois, asserted that Lincoln “had fulfilled the purpose for which God had raised him up, and he passed off the stage because some different instrument was needed for the full accomplishment of the Divine purpose in the affairs of our nation.”<sup>190</sup> Other clergy told their flocks that God allowed the assassination because “a sharper cutting instrument” was wanted, a “man of sterner mood than the late President,” to punish the Rebels. Hence the continuation of Lincoln in office “would not have been so favorable to God’s plan as his removal.”<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Washington correspondence, 17, 25 April, St. Cloud Democrat, 27 April, 4 May 1865, Larsen, ed., Crusader and Feminist, 288, 290.

<sup>187</sup> William Lloyd Garrison, Jr., to Martha Wright, 16 April 1865, Garrison Papers, Smith College, in James M. McPherson, The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 314.

<sup>188</sup> David B. Chesebrough, No Sorrow Like Our Sorrow: Northern Protestant Ministers and the Assassination of Lincoln (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994), 69-71; Victor B. Howard, Religion and the Radical Republican Movement, 1860-1870 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 94.

<sup>189</sup> Debby Applegate, The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 357.

<sup>190</sup> Chesebrough, No Sorrow Like Our Sorrow, 69.

<sup>191</sup> T. H. Barr, A Discourse, Delivered by the Rev. T. H. Barr, at Canaan Center, April 19, 1865, on the Occasion of the Funeral Obsequies of Our Late President, Abraham Lincoln (Wooster, Ohio: Republican

The events of April 19 impressed one Washington correspondent, who wrote: “In point of sad sublimity and moral grandeur, the spectacle was the most impressive ever witnessed in the national capital. The unanimity and depth of feeling, the decorum, good order, and complete success of all the arrangements, and the solemn dignity which pervaded all classes, will mark the obsequies of Abraham Lincoln as the greatest pageant ever tendered to the honored dead on this continent.”<sup>192</sup>

On April 20, thousands of mourners passed silently through the rotunda of the Capitol to bid farewell to Lincoln.

In Springfield the mourning was especially profound. Residents flocked instinctively to the State House Square to grieve communally with fellow townsmen. The city council, reflecting their wishes, passed a resolution calling for the president’s remains to be buried in their city.<sup>193</sup> Initially, Mary Lincoln had insisted that her husband be buried in Chicago, but eventually her son Robert and David Davis persuaded her to accept Springfield, though she had been “vehemently opposed” to the Illinois capital.<sup>194</sup>

## THE FUNERAL TRAIN

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Steam Power Press, 1865), 10; Francis Le Baron Robbins, A Discourse on the Death of Abraham Lincoln (Philadelphia: H. B. Ashmead, 1865), 13; Gordon Hall, President Lincoln’s Death: Its Voice to the People (Northampton, Massachusetts: Trumbull & Gere, 1865), 10.

<sup>192</sup> Coggeshall, Lincoln Memorial, 133.

<sup>193</sup> John Carroll Power, Abraham Lincoln: His Life, Public Services, Death and Great Funeral Cortege, with a History and Description of the National Lincoln Monument

(Springfield: Edwin A. Wilson, 1875), 105-7.

<sup>194</sup> Willard L. King, Lincoln’s Manager, David Davis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 227; Theodore Calvin Pease and James G. Randall, eds., The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning (2 vols.; Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1925-1933), 2:22 (entry for 17 April 1865). According to Victor Searcher, she turned down New York, Washington’s Congressional Cemetery, and the U.S. Capitol; Searcher implied that she also balked at having a procession follow the funeral at the White House and at having a laying-in-state at the Capitol rotunda. Searcher, Farewell to Lincoln, 57.

Stanton and other leading Republicans, fearing aftershocks from the assassination, planned to have a train convey Lincoln's body back to Springfield, retracing the route taken in 1861. According to Shelby Cullom, the country "was so wrought up no one seemed certain what was to happen; no one knew but that there would be a second and bloodier revolution, in which the Government might fall into the hands of a dictator; and it was thought the funeral trip would serve to arouse the patriotism of the people, which it did."<sup>195</sup> Mrs. Lincoln adamantly opposed those plans, but ultimately yielded.<sup>196</sup>

So on April 21 a heavily draped, nine-car train bearing the president's body, along with the remains of Willie Lincoln, departed Washington for the Prairie State.<sup>197</sup> At the depot, the sight of grief-stricken black troops moved the assembled dignitaries so profoundly that they wept uncontrollably.<sup>198</sup> Thirteen days later the train arrived, having traveled 1654 miles, retracing the route taken from Springfield to Washington in 1861 (with Pittsburgh and Cincinnati omitted and Chicago added).

At several cities the coffin was displayed for public viewing. A Philadelphia newspaper reported that a "grand, emphatic and unmistakable tribute of affectionate devotion to the memory of our martyred chief was that paid by Philadelphia on the arrival of his remains . . . . No mere love of excitement, no idle curiosity to witness a splendid pageant, but a feeling far deeper, more earnest, and founded in infinitely nobler sentiments, must have inspired that throng, which, like the multitudinous waves of the swelling sea, surged along our streets from every quarter of the city, gathering in a dense,

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<sup>195</sup> Shelby M. Cullom, Fifty Years of Public Service: Personal Recollections of Shelby M. Cullom, Senior United States Senator from Illinois (Chicago: McClurg, 1911), 107.

<sup>196</sup> Searcher, Farewell to Lincoln, 63.

<sup>197</sup> For detailed accounts of the train journey, see Coggeshall, Lincoln Memorial, and Searcher, Farewell to Lincoln.

<sup>198</sup> Power, Abraham Lincoln, 128.

impenetrable mass along the route prescribed for the procession. . . . The myriads of expectant faces gathering around the depot . . . and lining the route of the procession for hours before the arrival of the funeral train; the various civic associations marching in orderly column, with banners draped in mourning, to take their assigned places; the bands leading such associations, and making the city vocal with strains sweet but melancholy; the folds of sable drapery drooping from the buildings, and the half-masted flags, with their mourning borders; all were striving to express the same emotion. . . . Never before in the history of our city was such a dense mass of humanity huddled together. Hundreds of persons were seriously injured from being pressed in the mob, and many fainting females were extricated by the police and military and conveyed to places of security. Many women lost their bonnets, while others had nearly every particle of clothing torn from their persons. Notwithstanding the immense pressure and the trying ordeal through which persons had to pass in order to view the remains, but little disorder prevailed, every one apparently being deeply impressed with the great solemnity of the occasion. After a person was once in line, it took from four to five hours before an entrance into the Hall [Independence Hall] could be effected. Spectators were not allowed to stop by the side of the coffin, but were kept moving on, the great demand on the outside not permitting more than a mere glance at the remains, which were under military guard.”<sup>199</sup>

Similar demonstrations of widespread, profound grief took place at Baltimore, Harrisburg, New York, Albany, Buffalo, Cleveland, Columbus, Indianapolis, Chicago, and Springfield.

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<sup>199</sup> Philadelphia Inquirer, n.d., in Coggeshall, Lincoln Memorial, 149-50, 155-56.



As the train proceeded westward, people gathered wherever roads crossed the tracks and also at crape-festooned depots. Observers demonstrated their respect in various ways: doffing hats and bonnets, weeping, slowly waving flags and handkerchiefs, singing hymns as they knelt by the grading. At night, large bonfires were lit, around which children huddled. Some parents shook their youngsters awake so they could see and remember forever the sight of Lincoln's funeral train. (In later years, those children recalled not only the passing railroad cars but also the flowing tears of the grownups, which they found deeply unsettling.) Farmers decorated their houses with flags and evergreens and paused respectfully in their fields to pay mute homage to the martyred president. Banners and arches bore touching inscriptions:<sup>200</sup>

“All joy is darkened; the mirth of the land is gone.”

“We have prayed for you; now we can only weep.”

“He has Fulfilled his Mission.”

“Mournfully and tenderly bear him to his grave.”

“Millions bless thy name.”

“Revere his Memory.”

“Weep, sweet country weep, let every section mourn; the North has lost its champion, the South its truest friend.”

“He still lives in the hearts of his countrymen.”

“How we loved him.”

“Washington the Father and Lincoln the Saviour.”

“A glorious career of service and devotion is crowned with a martyr's death.”

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<sup>200</sup> The following inscriptions are from Morris, Memorial Record of the Nation's Tribute, 146, 155, 159, 183, 184, 187, 195, 196; Power, Abraham Lincoln, 155, 159, 196; and Coggeshall, Lincoln Memorial, 288, 294, 241, 242, 270, 294, 297.

“There’s a great spirit gone!”

“The heart of the nation throbs heavily at the portals of the tomb.”

“Servant of God, well done,/ Thy race is o’er, thy victory won.”

“Too good for Earth, to Heaven, thou art fled,

And left the Nation in tears.”

“We loved him, yes, no tongue can tell

How much we loved him, and how well.”

“The Poor Man’s Champion – The People Mourn Him.”

“We Honor Him Dead who Honored us while Living.”

“Behold how they loved him.”

“We loved him much, but now we love him more.”

“His death has made him immortal.”

“We have prayed for you; now we can only weep.”

“Our guiding star has fallen; our nation mourns.”

“Know ye not that a great man has fallen this day in Israel.”

Quotations from Shakespeare adorned some banners:

“Good night! and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.”

“His life was gentle, and the elements

So mixed in him, that nature might stand up

And say to all the world –

This was a man.”

Some inscriptions were taken from Lincoln’s own public utterances:

“With malice toward none, with charity for all.”

“Sooner than surrender these principles, I would rather be assassinated on the spot.”

“Upon this act, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.”

“Let us resolve that the martyred dead shall not have died in vain.”

Among the million-plus mourners who availed themselves of the opportunity to view the remains were many women, some of whom actually tried to kiss the president’s lifeless face.<sup>201</sup> When forbidden to do so, they protested loudly and refused to move on.<sup>202</sup> To a Baltimore observer, that face seemed to preserve “the expression it bore in life, half-smiling, the whole face indicating the energy and humor which had characterized the living man.”<sup>203</sup> By the time the train reached New York, however, Lincoln’s face had become discolored. No matter how skillfully the undertakers administered powder, rouge, and amber, it grew frightfully pitted, hollow-cheeked, and black. As time passed, the body came to resemble a mummy. The New York Evening Post reported that the eyes had sunk, the cheeks had turned dark, and the tightly compressed lips resembled “a straight sharp line.” In sum, it was “not the genial, kindly face of Abraham Lincoln; it is but a ghastly shadow.”<sup>204</sup>

Blacks also flocked to bid farewell to the president. In Indianapolis, a procession marched carrying a large facsimile of the Emancipation Proclamation and banners reading “Colored Men, always Loyal,” “Lincoln, Martyr of Liberty,” “He lives in our

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<sup>201</sup> Power, Abraham Lincoln, 220, gives the 1,000,000 figure.

<sup>202</sup> Coggeshall, Lincoln Memorial, 167; Searcher, Farewell to Lincoln, 135.

<sup>203</sup> Searcher, Farewell to Lincoln, 99, citing the Baltimore Sun, 22 April 1865.

<sup>204</sup> New York Evening Post, 26 April 1865, in Thomas Goodrich, The Darkest Dawn: Lincoln, Booth, and the Great American Tragedy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 214.

Memories,” and “Slavery is Dead.”<sup>205</sup> At Baltimore, blacks “were convulsed with a grief they could not control, and sobs, cries, and tears told how deeply they mourned their deliverer.”<sup>206</sup> A different motto appeared on the banner of black members of the Cleveland chapter of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows: “We mourn for Abraham Lincoln, the True Friend of Liberty.”<sup>207</sup> In New York, 5000 blacks who had planned to join the procession were shocked when the city council forbade them to participate.<sup>208</sup> The Evening Post denounced the council’s order: “Our late President was venerated by the whole colored population with a peculiar degree of feeling . . . and [they] looked upon him as the liberator of their race. We have accepted the services of colored citizens in the war and it is disgraceful ingratitude to shut them out of our civic demonstration.”<sup>209</sup> The eminent black clergyman and abolitionist J. Sella Martin protested that Lincoln’s final public speech, in which he endorsed black suffrage, left “no doubt that had he been consulted he would have urged, as a dying request, that the representatives of the race which had come to the nation’s rescue in the hour of peril, and which he had lifted by the most solemn official acts to the dignity of citizens and defenders of the Union, should be allowed the honor of following his remains to the grave.”<sup>210</sup> The city council’s action so outraged Stanton that he fired off a telegram from Washington to the New York authorities: “It is the desire of the Secretary of War that no discrimination respecting color should be exercised in admitting persons to the funeral procession tomorrow. In this

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<sup>205</sup> Coggeshall, Lincoln Memorial, 265.

<sup>206</sup> Isaac N. Arnold, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg, 1885), 437.

<sup>207</sup> Coggeshall, Lincoln Memorial, 222.

<sup>208</sup> Power, Abraham Lincoln, 143-44.

<sup>209</sup> New York Evening Post, 26 April 1865, in Searcher, Farewell to Lincoln, 139.

<sup>210</sup> J. Sella Martin to the editors of the New York Evening Post, New York, 24 April, New York Evening Post, 24 April 1865.

city a black regiment formed part of the escort.<sup>211</sup> Discouraged by the officials' action, most blacks abandoned their plans to march. Yet over 200 did join the procession, holding aloft banners inscribed: "Abraham Lincoln, our Emancipator" and "To Millions of Bondsmen he Liberty Gave."<sup>212</sup> To protect them, police chief John Kennedy provided an escort, which proved unnecessary, for spectators cheered and waved handkerchiefs as the blacks passed by. One black woman between her sobs exclaimed, "He died for me! He was crucified for me! God bless him!"<sup>213</sup>

The tremendous outpouring of dignified grief led to the virtual standstill of New York's commerce and financial transactions for nearly two weeks. The editors of the New York Times regarded this cessation of ordinary business as "a prompt, spontaneous and deliberate sacrifice by the industrious, the frugal, the pecuniarily responsible body of the people" which "raises the character of the whole nation far above the imputation of sordidness, of persistent and unchangeable devotion to Mammon, so falsely urged against it by outside commentators." Moreover, they concluded, "in the presence of the ready self-sacrifice which our present bereavement has illustrated, the theory that republics are ungrateful may at least bear revision."<sup>214</sup>

In New York, copies of the Second Inaugural sold briskly and appeared in many store windows, framed by black crape or flowers. Copies of Lincoln's farewell address to Springfield also found numerous buyers.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> C. A. Dana to John A. Dix, Washington, 24 April 1865, in David T. Valentine, Obsequies of Abraham Lincoln in the City of New York (New York: E. Jones, 1866), 147.

<sup>212</sup> Coggeshall, Lincoln Memorial, 179-180; New York Evening Post, 26 April 1865, in Goodrich, Darkest Dawn, 214.

<sup>213</sup> New York Tribune, 25 April 1865.

<sup>214</sup> Coggeshall, Lincoln Memorial, 199.

<sup>215</sup> Searcher, Farewell to Lincoln, 138.

One of the dignitaries aboard the train recalled that as it moved westward, mourners seemed “more wrought up,” for in the Midwest “there were not only expressions of deep sorrow, but of vengeance as well, especially toward the South.”<sup>216</sup> In fact, anger at the South pervaded the East as well as the West. In countless funeral sermons and editorials, Northerners denounced the states lately in rebellion and demanded that Confederate leaders be executed.<sup>217</sup>

Officials on the train, astounded by the intense outpouring of grief by millions of people, feared that authorities in Springfield might not have made adequate preparations. (An estimated 5,000,000 people saw the funeral car and casket in the various cities where it was displayed.) So at Albany, a member of the Illinois delegation was dispatched to Springfield to help with arrangements.<sup>218</sup> At Chicago, a man observing the thousands of mourners pass through the Court House remarked: “I have seen three deceased Kings of England lying in state, but have never witnessed a demonstration so vast in its proportions, so unanimous and spontaneous, as that which has been evoked by the arrival in the city of the remains of the fallen President.”<sup>219</sup> The Chicago Tribune noted that as the coffin was conveyed through the city, “there were no downcast countenances, but none that were not sad and pitiful. There were no loud voices in the unnumbered throngs. Men expressed themselves in subdued tones, and often nothing would be heard but the

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<sup>216</sup> Cullom, Fifty Years of Public Service, 107.

<sup>217</sup> Chesebrough, No Sorrow Like Our Sorrow, 55-65, 96-101; Thomas Reed Turner, Beware the People Weeping: Public Opinion and the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), passim.

<sup>218</sup> Power, Abraham Lincoln, 157.

<sup>219</sup> Power, Abraham Lincoln, 198.

indescribable murmur of ten thousand voices, modulated to a whisper, and the careful tread of countless feet on the damp pavement of the streets.”<sup>220</sup>

For twenty-four hours, Springfield mourners streamed by the casket before it was closed and placed in a receiving vault at Oak Ridge cemetery, two miles from the center of town, on May 4. In the procession to the cemetery, immediately following the hearse was a black man, the Rev. Mr. Henry Brown, who led Lincoln’s horse, Old Bob. Brown had worked for the Lincolns as a handyman. Other Springfield blacks, including Lincoln’s friend and barber, William Florville, brought up the rear of the procession. Lincoln had more black friends and acquaintances, among them Spencer Donnegan, Jameson Jenkins, William Johnson, and Maria Vance.<sup>221</sup> They, too, may well have been in the rear guard.

At Oak Ridge, the most eminent Methodist in the country, Bishop Matthew Simpson of Evanston, delivered a eulogy, during which he mistakenly identified a passage from Lincoln’s 1839 speech about banking as a condemnation of slavery. Commenting on the funeral train journey, he declared: “Among the events of history there have been great processions of mourners. There was one for the patriarch Jacob, which came up from Egypt, and the Egyptians wondered at the evidences of reverence and filial affection which came from the hearts of the Israelites. There was mourning when Moses fell upon the heights of Pisgah and was hid from human view. There have been mournings in the kingdoms of the earth when kings and princes have fallen, but never was there, in the history of man, such mourning as that which has accompanied this

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<sup>220</sup> Chicago Tribune, 3 May 1865.

<sup>221</sup> See Richard E. Hart, “Springfield’s African Americans as Part of the Lincoln Community,” Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association 20 (winter 1999):35-54.

funeral procession, and has gathered around the mortal remains of him who was our loved one.” Like many others, the bishop recognized in Lincoln a distinct individuality: “he made all men feel a sense of himself – a recognition of individuality – a self-relying power. They saw in him a man whom [sic] they believed would do what is right, regardless of all consequences. It was this moral feeling which gave him the greatest hold on the people, and made his utterances almost oracular.”<sup>222</sup>

#### CONTROVERSY OVER A LOCATION FOR THE TOMB AND MONUMENT

The selection of the gravesite proved controversial. Springfield’s civic leaders had purchased a six-acre lot, known as the Mather Block, near the State House, but Mary Lincoln objected, insisting “that it was her desire to be laid by the side of her husband when she died, and that such would be out of the question in a public place of the kind.”<sup>223</sup> (Nine years later she gave a different reason, arguing that Lincoln wanted to be buried in a quiet place.)<sup>224</sup> On April 28, Secretary of War Stanton informed the Springfield committee, headed by Governor Richard J. Oglesby, that Mrs. Lincoln’s “final and positive determination is that the remains must be placed in Oakridge Cemetery – and nowhere else.” Two more peremptory messages of similar import quickly followed.<sup>225</sup> On May 1, Robert Todd Lincoln told Oglesby in no uncertain terms that he and his mother “demand that our wishes be consulted.”<sup>226</sup> Her decision did not sit

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<sup>222</sup> Chesebrough, No Sorrow Like Our Sorrow, 127, 132.

<sup>223</sup> Keckley, Behind the Scenes, 199.

<sup>224</sup> Arnold, Lincoln, 439.

<sup>225</sup> Mark A. Plummer, Lincoln’s Rail-Splitter: Governor Richard J. Oglesby (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 109-110.

<sup>226</sup> Robert Todd Lincoln to Oglesby, Washington, 1 May 1865, Robert Todd Lincoln Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield (courtesy of Jason Emerson).



well. “The people are in a rage about it and all the hard stories that ever were told about her are told over again,” wrote Lincoln’s friend H. P. H. Bromwell from Springfield. “She has no friends here.”<sup>227</sup> In June, a visitor echoed that judgment: “I have not heard one person speak well of Mrs. Lincoln since I came here.”<sup>228</sup> The previous month, the Rev. Dr. Phineas Gurley, who had delivered the benediction at Lincoln’s funeral, reported from the Illinois capital that everyone there “loved Mr. Lincoln, but as for Mrs. L., I cannot say as much. Hard things are said of her by all classes of people, and when I got to know how she was regarded by her old neighbors and even by her relatives in S[pringfield], I did not wonder that she had decided to make her future home in Chicago. . . . The ladies of Springfield say that Mr. Lincoln’s death hurt her ambition more than her affections – a hard speech, but many people think so who do not say so.”<sup>229</sup>

(Mary Lincoln decided to settle in Chicago in part because she fallen out with her sisters. “I can never go back to Springfield!” she exclaimed to her closest confidante, Elizabeth Keckly.<sup>230</sup> She resented Frances Todd Wallace’s failure to express thanks for the appointment of her husband as a paymaster. In addition, Frances seemed not to be pleased with the success enjoyed by Mary and Abraham and had resisted Mrs. Lincoln’s appeals to have her daughter stay at the White House to comfort her after Willie’s death. The relative who did serve that function, Elizabeth Todd Edwards, was also estranged from Mary. Evidently the sisters had quarreled over Ninian Edwards’ conservative

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<sup>227</sup> H. P. H. Bromwell to his parents, Springfield, 30 April 1865, in Harry E. Pratt, ed., Concerning Mr. Lincoln: In Which Abraham Lincoln Is Pictured as He Appeared to Letter Writers of His Time (Springfield: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1944), 129.

<sup>228</sup> Sarah Sleeper to her mother, Springfield, June, 1865 (no day of the month indicated), Sleeper Papers, Small Collection 1405, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>229</sup> Gurley to E. Darwin Brooks, Washington, 22 May 1865, Gurley Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>230</sup> Keckley, Behind the Scenes, 200.

politics and his misconduct in the office to which Lincoln had appointed him. Moreover, Mary Lincoln resented some unflattering comments about her in a letter by Elizabeth's daughter Julia.<sup>231</sup> Like many another critic of the First Lady's regal ways, Ann Todd Smith had spoken disparagingly of "Queen Victoria's court" at Washington. When word of this reached her, Mary Lincoln wrote witheringly of Ann's "malice," "wrath," "vindictiveness," and "envious feeling.")<sup>232</sup>

Mary Lincoln next clashed with the Lincoln National Monument Association, formed in May with Governor Richard J. Oglesby at its head. When she learned of their plan to erect a memorial at the Mather Block, she peppered Oglesby with imperious ultimatata. On June 5 she wrote: "unless I receive within the next ten days, an Official assurance that the Monument will be erected over the Tomb in Oak Ridge Cemetery, in accordance with my oft expressed wishes, I shall yield my consent, to the request of the National Monument association in Washington & that of numerous other friends in the Eastern States & have the sacred remains deposited, in the vault, prepared for Washington, under the Dome of the National Capitol." Five days later she reiterated her threat, insisted that her decision was "unalterable," and demanded written assurances that no one other than she, Lincoln, their sons, and their sons' families would be buried in the tomb. Next day she assured Oglesby that her wishes "will meet the approval of the whole civilized world." Haughtily she added: "It is very painful to me, to be treated in this manner, by some of those I considered my friends, such conduct, will not add, very much, to the honor of our state."<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Jean H. Baker, Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography (New York: Norton, 1987), 248.

<sup>232</sup> Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 105.

<sup>233</sup> Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 241-45.

Though it was clearly the widow's prerogative to determine the burial site for her husband's remains, it was not her right to dictate the location of a memorial honoring his memory. But what was the association to do? One observer of the controversy advised Governor Oglesby that "Mrs. L is a vain woman and vanity will decide the matter tho she may think that there are other and higher motives."<sup>234</sup> The board of directors of the National Lincoln Monument Association voted by a one-vote majority to acquiesce.<sup>235</sup>

Indignation at Mary Lincoln might have been even greater if the public had learned that a few weeks after the assassination she sold her husband's shirts to a shady character for \$84.<sup>236</sup> Ward Hill Lamon sent an emissary to retrieve them.<sup>237</sup> When she left the White House in late May, she took with her "fifty or sixty boxes" and a "score of trunks."<sup>238</sup> Some journalists believed that she "stole a great deal of Government silver, spoons[,] forks[,] etc[.], and a large quantity of linen and stuffs."<sup>239</sup> Early in 1866, the New York Daily News commented that nobody "would have said a word against a few souvenirs having been taken away. But to despoil the whole house of the best of everything; to send off by railroad more than seventy large packing-cases filled with the newest carpets, curtains, and works of art which have been provided for the adornment of the house, and not for the use of any one family; this was felt to be not exactly in good taste. It is not longer any

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<sup>234</sup> Plummer, Oglesby, 112.

<sup>235</sup> Power, Abraham Lincoln, 229.

<sup>236</sup> Receipt to John Hammack by Mary Lincoln, May 1865, Ward Hill Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

<sup>237</sup> Jesse W. Weik, The Real Lincoln: A Portrait, ed. Michael Burlingame (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 377.

<sup>238</sup> Keckley, Behind the Scenes, 203.

<sup>239</sup> Bayly Ellen Marks and Mark Norton Schatz, eds., Between North and South: A Maryland Journalist Views the Civil War: The Narrative of William Wilkins Glenn, 1861-1869 (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), 296 (entry for 4 October 1867).

wonder that the [White] house looks empty, dingy, and shabby."<sup>240</sup> At that same time the New York World reported that for “the \$100,00 appropriated in the last four years for alleged repairs and furniture for the White House, there is now actually nothing to show on the premises; the Republican officer can be named who says that he furnished ninety boxes to pack up the removed traps. Another prominent Republican says that it required fifteen carts to remove the luggage from the White House; and in addition to this expenditure and these removals, it is a notorious fact that the thirty thousand dollars lately appropriated to furnish the Executive Mansion will nearly all be absorbed by the creditors for the persons who occupied the house ten months ago.”<sup>241</sup> Republican Senator Benjamin F. Wade of Ohio stated that Mary Lincoln “took a hundred boxes . . . away with her, and the Commissioner of Public Buildings swore there were fifteen other boxes that she wanted to carry off and he had to interfere to prevent her. At any rate she cleaned out the White House. I didn't know but she was going to run a big hotel with all she carried off.”<sup>242</sup>

Mary Lincoln heatedly denied the charge.<sup>243</sup> But the testimony of Supreme Court Justice David Davis, a close friend of Lincoln and the administrator of his estate (as recorded in Orville H. Browning's diary), lends credence to the allegation. On July 3, 1873, when Browning told Davis “that all the charges against her [Mary Lincoln] of having pilfered from the White House were false,” the judge replied “that the proofs were too many and too strong against her to admit of doubt of her guilt; that she was a natural born thief; that

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<sup>240</sup> Washington correspondence, 7 January 1866, New York Daily News, 9 January 1866.

<sup>241</sup> Washington correspondence, 7 January 1866, New York World, 9 January 1866.

<sup>242</sup> Jefferson, Ohio, correspondence, Cincinnati Commercial, 2 November 1867.

<sup>243</sup> Mary Todd Lincoln to Sally Orne, Chicago, 13 January [1866], to Alexander Williamson, Chicago, 17 and 26 January [1866], and to Oliver S. Halsted Jr., Chicago, 17 January (1866), Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 326-30.

stealing was a sort of insanity with her, and that she carried away, from the White House, many things that were of no value to her after she had taken them, and that she had carried them away only in obedience to her irresistible propensity to steal.”<sup>244</sup> As noted earlier, Thaddeus Stevens, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, covered up the scandal and got Congress to pay for the refurnishing of the White House.<sup>245</sup>

When philanthropists attempted to raise a fund for Mary Lincoln’s support shortly after the assassination, she apparently wrote three letters to an agent who was soliciting money on her behalf (probably Alexander Williamson, Tad’s tutor) in which she urged him “to secure subscriptions when the tragedy is fresh and feeling most poignant” and telling him he could “subtract 25 per cent from all moneys collected” as a fee.<sup>246</sup>

#### NATIONAL MOURNING FOR A LOST FATHER

The nation’s enormous outpouring of grief testified to the profound love and respect that Lincoln inspired, an emotional bond like the one between a child and a nurturing, wise parent. Abundant evidence supports the 1866 statement of J. G. Holland that Lincoln, “more than any of his predecessors,” was “regarded as the father of his people.”<sup>247</sup> Some observers spoke of Americans as orphans now that Lincoln was dead. “We lament a nation that has lost its Father, and in its orphanhood knows not where to look for consolation or safety,” said the Alta California of San Francisco. “Him we knew,

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<sup>244</sup> David Davis statement in the Orville Hickman Browning diary, 3 July 1873, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>245</sup> New York Commercial, 16 February 1866; A. K. McClure to Alonzo Rothschild, Philadelphia, 9 May 1907, Lincoln Contemporaries Collection, Lincoln Financial Collection, Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne.

<sup>246</sup> Ellery Sedgwick saw three such letters in the possession of W. K. Bixby of St. Louis, who refused to allow their publication. Ellery Sedgwick, The Happy Profession (Boston: Little, Brown, 1946), 163.

<sup>247</sup> J. G. Holland, Life of Abraham Lincoln (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. Bill, 1866), 8.

in him we trusted; in his hands we knew that all was safe, but now what is to become of us?”<sup>248</sup> In Wisconsin, Edward Searing, professor of Latin and French at Milton College, noted that on the funeral train’s journey “the fatherless people through their tears could scarcely see the beloved face.”<sup>249</sup> In a sermon on April 16 (a day which came to be known as Black Easter), the Unitarian divine James Freeman Clarke remarked John Wilkes Booth’s act “was not only assassination . . . it was parricide; for Abraham Lincoln was as a father to the whole nation. The nation felt orphaned yesterday morning.”<sup>250</sup> Another Massachusetts minister, the Congregationalist Elias Nason, likened the pain caused by Lincoln’s death to the “profound personal grief we feel, as when a dear old father, a beloved mother, or a brother is torn relentlessly from our breast.” To Nason, the widespread grieving “is not mourning for some great national loss only.” It was instead “lamentation for one who has been very near and very dear to us; for one who seemed to be of the immediate circle of our own familiar friends and acquaintances; for one who had so identified himself with our own views and feelings that he seemed to be an elementary part of our own being, – bone of our bone, blood of our blood; for one so entirely with us in sympathy, in genius, in love, in action, in aspiration, that he must ever bear the august appellation of the People’s Own Beloved President. Even the little children looked upon him as their own kind-hearted ruler.”<sup>251</sup> Yet other Bay State

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<sup>248</sup> Herbert Mitgang, ed., Abraham Lincoln: A Press Portrait: His Life and Times from the Original Newspaper Documents of the Union, the Confederacy, and Europe (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 481.

<sup>249</sup> Edward Searing, President Lincoln in History: An Address Delivered in the Congregational Church, Milton, Wisconsin, on Fast Day, June 1st, 1865 (Janesville: Veeder & Devereux, 1865), 18.

<sup>250</sup> Sermons Preached in Boston on the Death of Abraham Lincoln, Together with the Funeral Services in the East Room of the Executive Mansion at Washington (Boston: J. E. Tilton, 1865), 96.

<sup>251</sup> Elias Nason, Eulogy on Abraham Lincoln, Late President of the United States: Delivered before the New England Historic-Genealogical Society, Boston, May 3, 1865 (Boston: W. V. Spencer, 1865), in Chesebrough, No Sorrow Like Our Sorrow, 6.

ministers noted that “[s]trong men have wept, and been convulsed with grief, as if they had lost a father or brother,” and that “[w]e all seemed to have lost a father, a brother, a dear bosom-friend.”<sup>252</sup> A Baptist preacher in Philadelphia lamented that the “nation’s Father has been struck down in all his gentle kingliness.”<sup>253</sup> In Illinois, a college president told his students and faculty that Lincoln “was endeared to every individual of the loyal millions of this people . . . . Each feels as if the dastardly blow . . . had been struck at a member of his own household. We mourn not merely for a public man, but for a dearly-beloved friend and brother.”<sup>254</sup>

On April 16, a preacher in Maine told his parishioners: “Our Father . . . . has fallen and we feel ourselves orphans.” Three days later, he remarked that it would seem strange “to one who did not know the circumstances of the case, to hear how often the word ‘Father,’ has fallen from trembling lips these last few days. ‘I feel,’ says one, and another, and another, ‘as if I had lost my Father,’ or, ‘as I did when my Father died.’ Such is the common feeling and the common word.”<sup>255</sup>

Many other clergy echoed this paternal theme.<sup>256</sup> Back in Illinois, a Presbyterian in Freeport noted that the country loved Lincoln “as it never loved another. He was the best and greatest, the greatest because the best, the most loving, the most lovable, the

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<sup>252</sup> John E. Todd and Warren H. Cudworth in Sermons Preached in Boston on the Death of Lincoln, 82, 200.

<sup>253</sup> George Dana Boardman, Addresses, Delivered in the Meeting-House of the First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, April 14th, 16th, and 19th, 1865 ([Philadelphia]: Sherman, 1865), 52.

<sup>254</sup> Richard Edwards, Life and Character of Abraham Lincoln: An Address, Delivered at the Hall of the Normal University, April 19th, 1865 (Peoria: N. C. Nason, 1865), 3.

<sup>255</sup> Charles Carroll Everett, A Sermon Preached on the Sunday after the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, Late President of the United States, Together with Remarks, Made on the Day of His Funeral (Bangor: Benjamin A. Burr, 1865), 5, 21-22.

<sup>256</sup> Chesebrough, No Sorrow Like Our Sorrow, 6-7; Rollin W. Quimby, “Lincoln’s Character as Described in Sermons at the Time of His Death,” Lincoln Herald 69 (1967): 179.

most brotherly, the most fatherly man of all our rulers. . . . How remarkable the affection of the people for this man!”<sup>257</sup> Other eulogists noted that “we have lost our noblest son, our bravest brother, our kindest father” and “a friend who was a father to the humblest in the land.”<sup>258</sup> Theodore L. Cuyler, who as a member of the Christian Commission had gotten to know Lincoln, was so distraught by the assassination of the man he called a “dear departed father” that he could not write out a sermon. He therefore spoke extemporaneously to his New York congregation, saying that the “plain homespun kind-voiced President was so near to every one of us – so like our own relative that we were wont to call him ‘Uncle Abe’ and ‘Father Abraham.’ There was no disrespect in this; but rather a respect so deep and honest that it could afford to be familiar.” Cuyler concluded that “[o]ur father died at the right time; for his mighty work was done.”<sup>259</sup> Another New York preacher noted that the “father of the country is slain, and a whole nation are the mourners.”<sup>260</sup> “Somehow we all felt that he was a brother and a friend to us all,” declared a Methodist in Buffalo. “Unconsciously to ourselves, we felt a deep personal interest in him, and affection for him. His great soul had drawn us to him; and now we mourn for him as though a Father or a Brother had been taken away from us.”<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Isaac Eddy Carey, Abraham Lincoln: The Value to the Nation of his Exalted Character, Rev. Mr. Carey’s Fast Day Sermon, Preached June 1, 1865, in the First Presbyterian Church of Freeport, Ill. ([Freeport Ill.]: n. p., 1865), in Chesebrough, No Sorrow Like Our Sorrow, 7.

<sup>258</sup> Unidentified clipping in the Ford’s Theatre archive, in Goodrich, Darkest Dawn, 237; sermon by William Ives Buddington, in Our Martyr President. Abraham Lincoln: Voices from the Pulpit of New York and Brooklyn (New York: Tibbals and Whiting, 1865), 111.

<sup>259</sup> Sermon by Cuyler in Our Martyr President, 159, 168, 171.

<sup>260</sup> Sermon by William Adams in Our Martyr President, 332.

<sup>261</sup> John Brodhead Wentworth, A Discourse on the Death of President Lincoln Delivered in St. Mark’s Methodist Episcopal Church, and Repeated (by request) at the Lafayette St. Presbyterian Church, Buffalo, April 23, 1865 (Buffalo: Printing House of Matthews & Warren, 1865), 11.



Boston preachers joined this mourners' chorus. In Shawmut Church, Edwin B. Webb exclaimed that the "nation has lost a father; the human race a sincere, devoted, and able leader!"<sup>262</sup> "We have slept securely, we have dismissed anxiety and fear, because our father was at the helm," observed Edward Norris Kirk. "But he is gone, – dead; murdered."<sup>263</sup> James Reed told his flock on April 19: "We all feel to-day as if a father had been taken away from us,"<sup>264</sup> and Henry C. Badger referred to Lincoln as "the father of his people."<sup>265</sup> Andrew Leete Stone predicted that generations to come "shall speak his name as our fathers spoke to us the name of Washington, and shall grow up revering and guarding the hallowed memory of this second Father of his country; whom History will write, also, the Father of a race."<sup>266</sup>

Many blacks did in fact regard Lincoln as a father. In Troy, New York, a black preacher mourned Lincoln as "the Father of our nation."<sup>267</sup> Another black minister there elaborated: "We, as a people, feel more than all others that we are bereaved. We had learned to love Mr. Lincoln as we have never loved man before. We idolized his very name. We looked up to him as our saviour, our deliverer. His name was familiar with our children, and our prayers ascended to God in his behalf. He had taught us to love him. The interest he manifested in behalf of the oppressed, the weak and those who had none

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<sup>262</sup> Sermons Preached in Boston on the Death of Lincoln, 147.

<sup>263</sup> Sermons Preached in Boston on the Death of Lincoln, 35.

<sup>264</sup> Sermons Preached in Boston on the Death of Lincoln, 302.

<sup>265</sup> Henry C. Badger, The Humble Conqueror: A Discourse Commemorative of the Life and Services of Abraham Lincoln, Preached to the Cambridgeport Parish, April 23, 1865 (Boston: printed for the parish, 1865), 9.

<sup>266</sup> Andrew L. Stone, A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of Abraham Lincoln, Who Was Assassinated in Washington, Friday, April 14th, 1865, Preached in the Park Street Church, Boston, on the Next Lord's Day (Boston: J. K. Wiggin, 1865), 14.

<sup>267</sup> Joseph A. Prime, "Sermon Preached in the Liberty Street Presbyterian Church (Colored)," in A Tribute of Respect by the Citizens of Troy, to the Memory of Abraham Lincoln (Troy, N. Y.: Young & Benson, 1865), 154.

to help them, had won for him a large place in our heart. It was something so new to us to see such sentiments manifested by the chief magistrate of the United State that we could not help but love him.”<sup>268</sup> The congregation of the Zion Baptist Church in Cincinnati heard its minister proclaim that if Lincoln’s assassin had “given us [blacks] the choice to deliver him or ourselves to death, we would have said, take me; take father or mother, sister, brother; but do not take the life of the father of this people.” He noted that “[e]very freedman wept” at “the death of our father, ABRAHAM LINCOLN.”<sup>269</sup>

The most eloquent black eulogy for Lincoln was delivered by Frederick Douglass before a large audience at Manhattan's Cooper Union on June 1, 1865, which was designated a day of national humiliation marking the end of the official mourning period for Lincoln. "No people or class of people in the country," he declared, "have a better reason for lamenting the death of Abraham Lincoln, and for desiring to honor and perpetuate his memory, than have the colored people." The record of the martyred president, when compared "with the long line of his predecessors, many of whom were merely the facile and servile instruments of the slave power," was impressive. Douglass acknowledged that Lincoln was "unsurpassed in his devotion to the welfare of the white race," and that "he sometimes smote" blacks "and wounded them severely;" nevertheless he was also "in a sense hitherto without example, emphatically the black man's President: the first to show any respect for their rights as men . . . . He was the first American President who . . . rose above the prejudice of his times, and country." If during the early

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<sup>268</sup> Jacob Thomas, "Sermon Preached in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church," in Tribute of Respect by the Citizens of Troy, 44-45.

<sup>269</sup> Wallace Shelton, Discourse upon the Death of Abraham Lincoln (Newport, Kentucky: W. S. Bailey, 1865), 4, in Chesebrough, No Sorrow Like Our Sorrow, 4, and Charles Joseph Stewart, "A Rhetorical Study of the Reaction of the Protestant Pulpit in the North to Lincoln's Assassination," (PhD dissertation, University of Illinois, 1963), 112.

stages of the Civil War the president had favored colonizing the freedmen abroad, Douglass asserted, "Lincoln soon outgrew his colonization ideas and schemes and came to look upon the Black man as an American citizen." To illustrate this point, Douglass cited his personal experience: "It was my privilege to know Abraham Lincoln and to know him well. I saw and conversed with him at different times during his administration." Douglass found Lincoln's willingness to receive him remarkable in itself: "He knew that he could do nothing which would call down upon him more fiercely the ribaldry of the vulgar than by showing any respect to a colored man." (In a draft of this speech, Douglass said: "Some men there are who can face death and dangers, but have not the moral courage to contradict a prejudice or face ridicule. In daring to admit, nay in daring to invite a Negro to an audience at the White house, Mr. Lincoln did that which he knew would be offensive to the crowd and excite their ribaldry. It was saying to the country, I am President of the black people as well as the white, and I mean to respect their rights and feelings as men and as citizens.")

When Douglass was admitted to the President's office, he found him easy to talk with: "He set me at perfect liberty to state where I differed from him as freely as where I agreed with him. From the first five minutes I seemed to myself to have been acquainted with [him] during all my life . . . [H]e was one of the very few white Americans who could converse with a negro without anything like condescension, and without in anywise reminding him of the unpopularity of his color."

Douglass recalled one episode in particular that demonstrated Lincoln's "kindly disposition towards colored people." While Douglass was talking with the president, a White House aide on two occasions announced that the governor of

Connecticut sat in an adjacent room, eager for an interview. "Tell the Governor to wait," said the President. "I want to have a long talk with my friend Douglass." Their conversation continued for another hour. Douglass later speculated that "[t]his was probably the first time in the history of the country when the Governor of a State was required to wait for an interview, because the President of the United States was engaged in conversation with a negro."

Douglass did not rely solely on his own experience to explain why Lincoln should be considered "emphatically the black man's President." He told the Cooper Union audience about "[o]ne of the most touching scenes connected with the funeral of our lamented President," which "occurred at the gate of the Presidential Mansion: A colored woman standing at the gate weeping, was asked the cause of her tears. 'Oh! Sir,' she said, 'we have lost our Moses.' 'But,' said the gentleman, 'the Lord will send you another;'  
'That may be,' said the weeping woman, 'but Ah! we had him.'" (Dozens of funeral sermons likened Lincoln to Moses.)<sup>270</sup>

This woman, according to Douglass, represented millions of blacks who "from first to last, and through all, whether through good or through evil report, fully believed in Abraham Lincoln." Despite his initial tardiness in attacking slavery, Douglass said, they "firmly trusted in him" with a faith that constituted "no blind trust unsupported by reason." Blacks had "early caught a glimpse of the man, and from the evidence of their senses, they believed in him. They viewed him not in the light of separate individual acts, but in the light of his mission, in his manifest relation to events and in the philosophy of his statesmanship. Viewing him thus they trusted him as men are seldom trusted. They did not

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<sup>270</sup> Chesebrough, No Sorrow Like Our Sorrow, 35-37.

care what forms of expression the President adopted, whether it were justice, expedience, or military necessity, so that they see slavery abolished and liberty established in the country."

Black people, Douglass maintained, observed with their own eyes astounding progress: "Under Abraham Lincoln's beneficent rule, they saw themselves being gradually lifted to the broad plain of equal manhood; under his rule, and by measures approved by him, they saw gradually fading the handwriting of ages which was against them. Under his rule, they saw millions of their brethren proclaim defend their freedom. Under his rule they saw the Confederate states . . . broken to pieces, overpowered, conquered, shattered to fragments, ground to powder, and swept from the face of existence. They saw the Independence of Hayti and Liberia recognized and the whole colored race steadily rising into the friendly consideration of the American people. In this broad practical common sense, they took no captious exceptions to the unpleasant incidents of their transition from slavery to freedom. All they wanted to know was that those incidents were only transitional not permanent."<sup>271</sup>

Many of Lincoln's contemporaries ranked him second only to Washington, but Rutherford B. Hayes disagreed, writing privately in 1866 that "Lincoln is overshadowing Washington. Washington is formal, statue-like – a figure for exhibition."<sup>272</sup> That is indeed why Lincoln was more warmly remembered than Washington; people admired Washington but they loved as well as admired Lincoln. The Rev. Mr. William James Potter told his Massachusetts parishioners that while the first president "was the father of

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<sup>271</sup> Manuscript of a speech, 1 June 1865, Douglass Papers, Library of Congress

<sup>272</sup> Chesebrough, No Sorrow Like Our Sorrow, 38; Hayes to Sardis Birchard, n.p., 15 April 1866, in Charles Richard Williams, The Life of Rutherford Birchard Hayes, Nineteenth President of the United States (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 1:272n.

our country,” Lincoln “was its savior. And in many respects he came nearer to the heart of the people than did even Washington.”<sup>273</sup> Professor Edward Searing went even further, declaring that Lincoln “was greater than Washington, as a man, and did a much greater work.” Washington’s “main work” was to win freedom for three million colonists, while Lincoln, as “an incident in his work,” freed four million slaves. “Washington’s work was great, Lincoln’s gigantic.” Moreover, Searing claimed, the sixteenth president outshone the first one intellectually: “I believe Lincoln to have been much superior to Washington – superior as a speaker, as a writer and as a clear-headed original thinker.”<sup>274</sup> Another Midwestern academic, President Richard Edwards of Illinois Normal University, reached a similar conclusion: “Lincoln the Liberator, contending for a grand unselfish and beneficent idea, is greater, in his opportunities and his position, than Washington the Patriot, fighting for the freedom of his native land.”<sup>275</sup> A black Presbyterian minister concurred, stating that in “some things Abraham Lincoln is to be regarded as superior to Washington” and that if “the American people have reason to rejoice in the life and labors of a Washington, then the colored people of our country have a much greater reason to rejoice that Abraham Lincoln was permitted to occupy the executive chair.”<sup>276</sup> Theodore Cuyler boldly predicted that within fifty years “the foremost name in American history will be the name that was signed to the Edict of Emancipation.”<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> William J. Potter, The National Tragedy: Four Sermons Delivered Before the First Congregational Society, New Bedford, on the Life and Death of Abraham Lincoln (New Bedford: A. Taber & Brother, 1865), 16.

<sup>274</sup> Searing, Lincoln in History, 18-19.

<sup>275</sup> Edwards, Life and Character of Lincoln, 19.

<sup>276</sup> Prime, “Sermon Preached in the Liberty Street Presbyterian Church,” 154, 156.

<sup>277</sup> Cuyler in Our Martyr President, 165.

Lincoln was so beloved that some preachers interpreted his assassination as God's way of thwarting idolatry. A Philadelphia Baptist asked: "Was not President Lincoln's death necessary to the nation's life? Were we not leaning on an arm of flesh forgetful of the ever loving God?"<sup>278</sup> Thomas M. Hopkins, a Presbyterian divine in Indiana, maintained that "God cannot tolerate idols. . . . This nation was on the point of worshipping Mr. Lincoln. . . . Ask these heavy hearts why this sadness? and they will reply . . . we loved our President and were lo[a]th to spare him. . . . We knew not how much we loved him until he was gone. This fact alone shows us that there was danger of his occupying too great a space in our hearts." Hopkins added that to "the soldiers and their families he was a friend, a loving father."<sup>279</sup>

Indeed, Union troops revered Lincoln profoundly and were enraged at the assassins.<sup>280</sup> A private wrote that he and his colleagues, upon hearing of the assassination, "moved away slowly to our quarters, as if each had lost a near and dear friend at home." He added: "I always thought that he was most loved by all the Army. What a hold Old Honest Abe had on the hearts of the soldiers of the army could only be told by the way they showed their mourning for him."<sup>281</sup> A Wisconsin infantryman thought "No man, not even Grant himself, possesses the entire love of the army as did President Lincoln. We mourn him not only as a President but as a man, for we had

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<sup>278</sup> Chesebrough, No Sorrow Like Our Sorrow, 75.

<sup>279</sup> Thomas M. Hopkins, A Discourse on the Death of Abraham Lincoln, Delivered in the 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church in Bloomington, Indiana, April 19th, 1865 ([Bloomington?]: n.p., 1865), 5-6.

<sup>280</sup> William C. Davis, Lincoln's Men: How President Lincoln Became Father to an Army and a Nation (New York: Free Press, 1999), 238-45.

<sup>281</sup> Davis, Lincoln's Men, 238-39.

learned to love him.”<sup>282</sup> From Fort Stevens in Washington, one trooper reported that “Everyone here looks sad, and the men all feel terribly indignant . . . I would pity [sic] any of them [the assassins] who fall into the hands of the army. I would like to be a private executioner of any one of them. . . . Death to Traitors is now the unanimous cry, particularly in the army.”<sup>283</sup> Black troops were especially saddened.

In late 1862, soldiers had started referring to the president as “Father Abraham,” and they continued to do so for the remainder of his life, most notably during the 1864 election campaign.<sup>284</sup> An Illinois corporal recalled that during “the last two years of the war especially, the men had come to regard Mr. Lincoln with sentiments of veneration and love. To them he really was ‘Father Abraham,’ with all that the term implied.”<sup>285</sup> A lieutenant in the U.S. Colored Troops told his wife, “I am getting to regard Old Abe almost as a Father – to almost venerate him – so earnestly do I believe in his earnestness, fidelity, honesty & Patriotism.” Another lieutenant wrote: “With us of the U.S. Colored Army the death of Lincoln is indeed the loss of a friend. From him we received our commission – and toward him we have even looked as toward a Father.”<sup>286</sup> With heartfelt emotion they sang, “We are coming, Father Abraham, three hundred thousand more.”

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<sup>282</sup> James K. Newton to his parents, near Montgomery, Alabama, 7 May 1865, in Stephen E. Ambrose, ed., A Wisconsin Boy in Dixie: The Selected Letters of James K. Newton (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), 152.

<sup>283</sup> Captain John Henry Wilson, captain of the First Massachusetts Infantry, to his wife, Washington, 16 April 1865, in Frederick C. Drake, “A Letter on the Death of Lincoln,” Lincoln Herald 84 (1982):237.

<sup>284</sup> Davis, Lincoln’s Men, 81, 135, 197, 226.

<sup>285</sup> Leander Stillwell, The Story of a Common Soldier of Army Life in the Civil War, 1861-1865 (2nd ed.; [Erie? Kan.]: Franklin Hudson, 1920), 262-63.

<sup>286</sup> Capt. Charles Augustus Hill to his wife, 12 December 1863; Lt. Warren Goodale to his children, 15 April 1865, both in Joseph T. Glaathaar, Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers (New York: Meridian, 1990), 208-209.



Some members of Congress also felt the magnetic force of Lincoln's paternal nature. A White House secretary noted that they "became bound to him by near ties of mutual understanding and respect. A sort of family feeling grew in the hearts of many, unconsciously regarding themselves as watching the control of the common household by a man who oddly combined the functions of a father and an elder brother."<sup>287</sup> (Others saw in Lincoln that amalgam of brother and father.)<sup>288</sup>

One of the most important elements in Lincoln's success as president was his ability to inspire in congressmen, senators, and their constituents filial trust and devotion. In part, it stemmed from the eloquence of his public utterances, which Harriet Beecher Stowe said "more resembled a father's talks to his children than a State paper."<sup>289</sup> Other literary figures echoed the theme. "So wise and good he was," George William Curtis told his friend Charles Eliot Norton. "Never had a country a father so tender and true."<sup>290</sup>

Even Lincoln's harshest critics among the abolitionists paid their tribute. Parker Pillsbury called him as "[o]ur kind, gentle, noble hearted chief magistrate."<sup>291</sup>

Lincoln radiated the positive Old Man archetype, embodying the Wise Father. Many Northerners sensed this intuitively and trusted him. Without that trust, Northern morale might well have flagged, crippling the administration and the war effort. Few

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<sup>287</sup> William O. Stoddard, Abraham Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life (New York: Fords, Howard, & Hulbert, 1884), 359.

<sup>288</sup> Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Rollin H. Neale in Sermons Preached in Boston on the Death of Lincoln, 164-65.

<sup>289</sup> Christian Watchman and Reflector (Boston), 7 July 1864.

<sup>290</sup> George William Curtis to Charles Eliot Norton, n.p., 15 April 1865, Curtis Papers, Harvard University.

<sup>291</sup> Parker Pillsbury to George B. Cheever, Concord, New Hampshire, 27 April 1865, Cheever Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

things contributed more to Lincoln's success as president than his ability to inspire the kind of confidence that children accord a benevolent father.

### LINCOLN'S GREATNESS

Lincoln's personality was the North's secret weapon in the Civil War, the key variable that spelled the difference between victory and defeat. He was a model of psychological maturity, a fully individuated man who attained a level of consciousness unrivaled in the history of American public life. He managed to be strong-willed without being willful, righteous without being self-righteous, and moral without being moralistic. Most politicians, indeed most people, are dominated by their own petty egos. They take things personally, try to dominate one another, waste time and energy on feuds and vendettas, project their unacceptable qualities onto others, displace anger and rage, and put the needs of their own clamorous egos above all other considerations. A dramatic exception to this pattern, Lincoln achieved a kind of balance and wholeness that led one psychologist to remark that he had more "psychological honesty" than anyone since Christ.<sup>292</sup> If one considers Christ as a psychological paradigm, the analogy is apt. (In 1866, John Hay stated flatly that "Lincoln with all his foibles, is the greatest character since Christ.")<sup>293</sup>

Lincoln's high degree of consciousness enabled him to suppress his own egotism while steadily focusing on the main goal: victory in the Civil War. As a friend observed, he "managed his politics upon a plan entirely different from any other man the country

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<sup>292</sup> Morton Prince to Albert J. Beveridge, Nahant, Massachusetts, 13 October 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>293</sup> Hay to William H. Herndon, Paris, 5 September 1866, in Michael Burlingame ed., At Lincoln's Side: John Hay's Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 111.

has ever produced. . . . In his conduct of the war he acted upon the theory that but one thing was necessary, and that was a united North. He had all shades of sentiments and opinions to deal with, and the consideration was always presented to his mind: How can I hold these discordant elements together?”<sup>294</sup> In a less conscious man, envy, jealousy, self-righteousness, false pride, vanity, and the other foibles of ordinary humanity would have undermined his ability to maintain Northern unity and resolve.

Strengthening that resolve was Lincoln’s exceptional eloquence. The public letters – to Horace Greeley, Erastus Corning, James C. Conkling, and Albert Hodges – as well as his formal addresses and state papers – including the speech at Gettysburg, the two inaugurals, and the messages to Congress – inspired profound respect, confidence, and trust. So, too, did his character and personality, which made him loved as well as respected and trusted. Few leaders in American history combined those qualities as well as Lincoln.

Lincoln’s greatness was widely acknowledged even before his death, and after it, his fame grew dramatically, spreading around the globe. In Switzerland, a leading historian of the Reformation predicted two weeks after the assassination that the “name of President Lincoln will remain one of the greatest that history has to inscribe on its annals.”<sup>295</sup> In England, Professor Goldwin Smith declared that Lincoln would “live in the love of the nation and of mankind forever.”<sup>296</sup> Leo Tolstoy’s tribute, given during an interview in 1909, provides moving testimony to the universality of Lincoln’s fame.

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<sup>294</sup> Leonard Swett to William Herndon, Chicago, 17 January 1866, in Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 165.

<sup>295</sup> Merle d’Aubigne to George G. Fogg, Geneva, 27 April 1865, New York Evening Post, 29 July 1865.

<sup>296</sup> Goldwin Smith, Macmillan’s Magazine, June 1865, copied in the New York Evening Post, 15 June 1865.

The Russian novelist admired Lincoln’s “peculiar moral power” and “the greatness of his character.” Lincoln, he said, “was what Beethoven was in music, Dante in poetry, Raphael in painting, and Christ in the philosophy of life.” No political leader matched Lincoln, in Tolstoy’s judgment: “Of all the great national heroes and statesmen of history Lincoln is the only real giant. Alexander, Frederick the Great, Caesar, Napoleon, Gladstone and even Washington stand in greatness of character, in depth of feeling and in a certain moral power far behind Lincoln. Lincoln was a man of whom a nation has a right to be proud; he was a Christ in miniature, a saint of humanity, whose name will live thousands of years in the legends of future generations. We are still too near to his greatness, and so can hardly appreciate his divine power; but after a few centuries more our posterity will find him considerably bigger than we do. His genius is still too strong and too powerful for the common understanding, just as the sun is too hot when its light beams directly on us.” Lincoln “lived and died a hero, and as a great character he will live as long as the world lives. May his life long bless humanity!”<sup>297</sup>

### Postlude

Lincoln speaks to us not only as a champion of freedom, democracy, and national unity but also as a source of inspiration. Few will achieve his world historical importance, but many can profit from his personal example, encouraged by the knowledge that despite a childhood of emotional malnutrition and grinding poverty, despite a lack of formal education, despite a series of career failures, despite a miserable marriage, despite a tendency to depression, despite a painful midlife crisis, despite the early death of his mother and his siblings as well as of his sweetheart and two of his four children, he

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<sup>297</sup> New York World, 7 February 1909.

became a model of psychological maturity, moral clarity, and unimpeachable integrity.

His presence and his leadership inspired his contemporaries; his life story can do the same for generations to come.