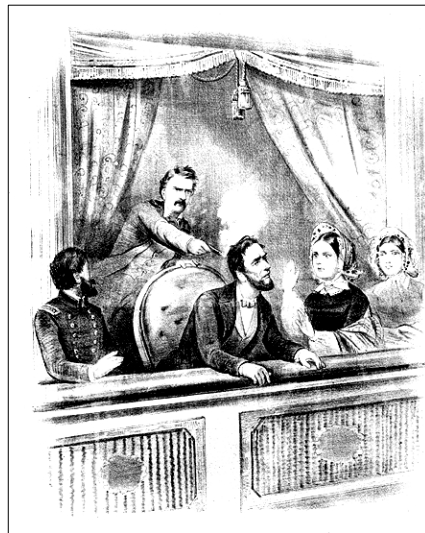


Uncovering the Truth (A-1)

On April 15, 1865, John Wilkes Booth, a well-known actor of the day, shot President Abraham Lincoln during a play at Ford's Theater in Washington, DC. The investigation showed that the ASSASSINATION was part of a conspiracy, but how large was that conspiracy, and who was involved? Study the facts and theories in the case and see what you think.

THE FACTS:

- President Lincoln and his wife were supposed to attend the play with General Grant and his wife, who cancelled. Another couple took their place.
- During the play Booth entered the State Box and shot Lincoln, who died the next morning. After shooting Lincoln, Booth jumped from the box onto the stage, breaking his left leg.
- Being familiar with the theater, Booth escaped from backstage and fled the city to the home of Dr. Samuel Mudd to have his leg set.
- At about the same time Lincoln was shot, another man, Lewis Paine, forced his way into the house of Secretary of State William Seward and tried to kill him. Though injured, Seward survived the attack.
- Booth was found eleven days later in a barn and was shot and killed.
- Eight people were arrested and tried by a military court, found guilty, and sentenced. Four were hanged at the Old Penitentiary in Washington, DC, on July 7, 1865. The others were given prison sentences, and two of those were later pardoned by President Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's successor.



THE THEORIES:

- The simplest theory is that Booth was the leader of a small band of Confederates that planned to kidnap Lincoln so the South could rise again. Evidence suggests that there was a kidnapping plot, which failed. The theory holds that conspirators then decided to assassinate Lincoln, Vice President Johnson, and the Secretary of State instead.
- Another theory asserts that Booth and his friends were members of a large group of Confederate conspirators; there is some evidence of contact with Confederate leaders. This plan included both a kidnapping plot and one to blow up the White House. When these failed, the conspirators turned to assassination. It is interesting to note that President Johnson may have believed in this theory, since he ordered the arrest of the former Confederate President Jefferson Davis.
- A third theory suggests that the U.S. government may have been involved in Lincoln's death in attempts to end his gentle post-war approach toward the South. This theory centers on the fact that Grant did not attend the theater on April 15, and suggests that Secretary of War Edwin Stanton ordered Grant to change his plans. (Other than Lincoln, Stanton was the only person who could give Grant orders.) Had Grant been with Lincoln, military guards with the general would have known better than to allow Booth, a Confederate, to enter.
- This theory also hinges on suspicious events following the assassination. Among these are: Stanton ordered all escape routes from DC closed, except the one at the Navy Yard Bridge which Booth took; telegraph communications were disrupted in the hours following the attack; and some pages from Booth's diary, which was presented as evidence in the trial, were removed. This theory also supposes that Booth's death before he could stand trial was suspicious.
- There are other, less credible theories about the assassination as well. One suggests that Andrew Johnson may have ordered Lincoln's death in order to become president. Another implies that the Catholic Church may have played a role in Lincoln's death after Lincoln defended a former priest against charges by Church leaders. The only real support for this theory lies in the fact that the son of one of the conspirators left the U.S. and wound up in the Vatican in Rome.