

THE LINCOLN ASSASSINATION AND ITS AFTERMATH

Introduction:

The date of the 14th April 1865, Good Friday no less, witnessed one of the darkest episodes in the history of the United States. On that day, as President Abraham Lincoln relaxed in the audience of a Washington theatre, his life was cut short at the hands of an assassin. President Lincoln had arrived at Ford's Theatre at 8:25 in the evening to attend a performance of Laura Keene's *Our American Cousin*. He was attended by his wife and a Miss Morris and Major Rathbone, a couple engaged to be married. Just before 9 p.m. the President's bodyguard, John F. Parker, became bored standing outside the Presidential box and left the Theatre. He and Lincoln's cab driver decided to have a drink at a nearby tavern.

As the play was in progress, a man named John Wilkes Booth arrived at Ford's Theatre, armed with a small, brass single-shot Derringer pistol and a large knife. He also carried a false beard and a wig. Finding no guard on the door to the President's box, Booth slipped inside and quietly moved up behind Lincoln. The assassin pointed the pistol and fired, hitting the President between the left ear and his spine. The report of the pistol was not loud, and many in the audience did not hear what happened. Booth turned to Mrs. Lincoln, Miss Harris and Major Rathbone and said in an ordinary tone "*Sic Semper Tyrannis*" or "Thus always to tyrants", the state motto of Virginia. Major Rathbone tried to grapple with the assassin, but Booth slashed the Major's arm to the bone with his knife. Booth then climbed over the balcony and let himself drop to the stage. However, his foot got caught on a Treasury regimental flag and caused Booth to land awkwardly. The impact broke the assassin's left leg above the instep, but nevertheless Booth got up and fled across the stage and out of the Theatre. Booth had a horse waiting outside and rode quickly through Washington's streets to avoid any pursuit.

This event had a profound impact on the United States. The political leadership in the North were stunned, the public were distraught. This response is not so surprising. Some of those here today will retain a memory of the assassination of another great American leader, John F. Kennedy, and will recall the anguish evoked by his death. President Kennedy's murder, captured on film and promptly beamed around the world by the television media, became a global tragedy, not merely an American one. The news of the death of Abraham Lincoln, on the other hand, took many hours to spread across the American continent. However, the reaction of the people, who saw no repeated footage of the assassin's act, was far more emotionally volatile.

The intention of this talk is not simply to rehash the events surrounding the murder itself, but to also look at the immediate impact this event had on the American people, particularly those in the Northern states. A considerable factor in the depth of the public response to Lincoln's assassination was the fact that the American Civil War had all but ended. Only the army under Confederate General Joseph Johnston remained unvanquished, in addition to several small units in the west. The Northern states were in a celebratory mood after the news of capture of Petersburg and Richmond, followed by the surrender of General Robert E. Lee and the army of North Virginia. The formal celebration of Lee's, and in effect the South's, surrender had taken place on 11th April, during which Lincoln gave a speech from the White House to crowds outside about the problems of reconstruction. One man in this crowd, whose name was John Wilkes Booth, did not share the delirious joy of the people around him. After President Lincoln finished his message, Booth was heard to mutter "That's the last speech he will ever make".

The Conspirators:

John Wilkes Booth was the leader of the plot to murder Abraham Lincoln. Booth was an actor that hailed from a family of actors. His father, Junius Brutus Booth, was a Shakespearean actor of considerable renown in both Great Britain and the United States. In particular, he was famed for his ferocious sword fights during plays, and fellow actors often feared playing his stage enemy such as his apparent determination. One account tells of Junius forcing a fellow actor offstage in a display of desperate combat, continuing out of the theatre, down several street blocks, and into a hotel lobby. John Wilkes was no amateur himself. He had taken to the stage at age 17, but was known more for his enthusiasm than measure. This did not prevent him from some level of success. During one year, John Wilkes Booth had earned \$20,000 dollars for his performances, a incredible amount of money for that time. He was 26 years old, lean and well-groomed. Booth was the epitome of cultivated manliness, a fine horseman, an expert fencer and a crack shot. Booth's one physical flaw was that he was bow-legged. This did not seem to bother women, as Booth was equally renowned for his sexual liaisons. One historian would state that "Wilkes took his women as he took his brandy, in long careless draughts, and tossed the empties on a refuse heap". On one occasion Booth's womanising almost caused him injury. In Indiana, one young lady slashed at Booth with a knife, only to miss and stab herself in the chest. Historians typically characterise Booth as vain and willful. There is general consensus that Booth, despite his professional achievements, felt frustrated with his own perceived lack of success.

The cause of John Wilkes Booth's antipathy towards Lincoln is not so easy to establish. Booth was from Maryland, and although a strong advocate of the Confederate cause he never made any attempt to fight in the Civil War. Some people would claim that Booth had a deep fear of having his face scarred; other sources suggest that in 1859 or 1860 Booth had been accidentally shot in the buttocks by his manager, and that the wound was still painning him at the start of the Civil War. Friends and acquaintances noted that Booth's hatred of Lincoln was pronounced, and that he had sincerely believed that Lincoln would be voted out of office in the elections of 1864. It was after Lincoln's re-election in November that year that Booth began to make plans for the abduction of President Lincoln, with the intention of smuggling him to Richmond, the Confederate capital. The intention behind the plan had as much to do with personal fame as it did success for the Southern cause. To this end Booth made considerable preparations. He explored all exits from Washington and had chosen an escape route. Between December 1864 and April 1865 Booth spent \$4,000 on plans for kidnapping the President from a Washington theatre. He also recruited several men to help him in his mission.

Booth chose the 31 year old Michael O'Laughlin, and 24 year old Sam Arnold were both Confederate veterans who had left the army in 1861 for health reasons. George Atzerodt, who spoke with a strong German accent, was a carriage maker from Port Tobacco, Maryland; David Herold was a 23 year old failed pharmacist, well educated but considered immature for his age; John Surratt was a Confederate courier. The abduction plot was foiled by poor luck and poorer planning. The first attempt took place on 18th January, but was thwarted when President Lincoln failed to show at Ford's Theatre. The plotters dispersed in dismay. It was after this that Booth introduced another member to the conspirators ranks. Lewis Powell, alias Lewis Paine, was a big, strong young man from Florida. Like O'Laughlin and Arnold, Powell was a Confederate Veteran. He would boast that he never wounded a Union soldier – he either killed them or missed them outright. Powell had met Booth before the war, and was impressed by the actor's sophisticated and genial manners. Reintroduced in February 1865, Powell became a faithful follower of Booth.

On March 13th the plotters gathered again. They went to Ford's theatre to watch a play from the President's box before going to dinner to discuss their plans. It appears that some of the plotters began to have second thoughts about the overall plan, especially Sam Arnold. A second attempt to abduct the President failed on the 20th March, and afterwards the plotters departed in acrimony, some vowing never to take part again. The defeat of the South put an end to any further plans to abduct Lincoln, as there was no longer any Confederate government to deliver him to. It was on 13th April, however, that Booth brought Lewis Powell, David Herold and George Atzerodt together to

inform them of his plan to kill Abraham Lincoln, Vice President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of State William Seward in one fell swoop. Powell was assigned to assassinate Seward, with Herold to help the slow witted veteran to navigate his way through Washington streets. Atzerodt was to murder the Vice President, while Booth himself would kill the President.

The Assassination:

The threat of assassination was not new to President Lincoln. Since his inauguration in 1861, the President lived under the ever present possibility of being murdered by sectional fanatics. During 1864 newspapers had published dramatic stories of plots against Lincoln. The Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, controlled a spy network that uncovered many plans to harm the President. So great were Stanton's concerns that in early 1865, 4 plainclothes policemen from the Washington police department were appointed as personal guards to avail Lincoln 24 hour protection. Additionally a troop of Ohio light cavalry were ordered to escort the President whenever he left the Executive mansion. It seems that Lincoln was himself more fatalistic about his personal safety, and occasionally made a game of trying to evade his military escort. It is frequently claimed that some weeks before his death, Lincoln dreamed of his own assassination. In any case, the protection afforded to the President had little effect in preventing harm to his person.

Booth's role in the wider assassination conspiracy was the only one that met with success. George Atzerodt was not a courageous man, and once having established in which room at Kirkwood Hotel Vice President Andrew Johnson resided, he went and got drunk to strengthen his resolve. His resolve never did harden, and when he heard news of the President's assassination he went to stay at a friend's home. At around the same time as Booth made his way towards the President's box at Ford's Theatre, Lewis Powell and David Herold arrived at the Secretary of State William Seward's residence. Nine days before, Seward had been injured in a carriage accident, and suffered fractures to his left arm and jaw, in addition to sustaining multiple contusions. Lewis Powell, claiming to have been sent by Seward's doctor, made his way into Seward's residence, but was stopped by Frederick Seward, the Secretary of State's son. Powell turned as if to leave, but swung about unexpectedly and tried to shoot Frederick. The pistol misfired, so instead the assassin used the weapon to bludgeon the younger Seward to the head and neck, fracturing the skull in two places. Powell then barged into the Secretary of State's darkened bedroom and stabbed at the figure lying in the bed. Another of Seward's sons, assisted by a male nurse, tried to wrestle with the assailant. Powell broke free and fled the house, stabbing a State Department messenger on his way out, and yelling "I'm mad, I'm mad". Secretary of State Seward suffered two stab wounds in the attack, one on either cheek. He was saved from more serious injury by the leather bound iron brace he was wearing around his jaw and neck.

The assassins, successful or not, either went into hiding or fled the city. John Wilkes Booth crossed the Navy Yard Bridge at 10:45 p.m., followed shortly after by David Herold. Together they rode to a tavern in Surrattsville, Maryland, in order to pick up a couple of carbines and other assorted items that Booth had prearranged. The two conspirators then went on to Bryantown to seek medical assistance from Dr Samuel Mudd for Booth's broken leg.

John Wilkes Booth and his companions had created pandemonium in Washington. The audience at Ford's Theatre was confused by what had occurred, but when word passed that President Lincoln had been shot fear and anger gradually took control. The unconscious Lincoln was attended by three doctors from the audience, who quickly ascertained that the wound was mortal. In light of the President's condition, the doctors agreed that it would not be prudent to return him to the White House, nor was it thought appropriate to leave him to die in the Theatre. Four soldiers from the Pennsylvania Light Artillery helped to carry the President through angry crowds from the Theatre and across 10th Street to the closest house, that of William Petersen, a tailor.

Outside the crowds grew. One man exclaimed "I'm glad it happened" and was immediately set upon by a mob. Only the presence of three policemen with revolvers drawn saved the man's life. Word quickly spread that John Wilkes Booth was the assassin and the angry crowds came to the conclusion that management of Ford's Theatre had been involved. They wanted to burn down the theatre in response.

Amidst the crowds and chaos, the Secretary of War Edwin Stanton took control. After arriving at the Peterson House, where a death watch for Lincoln had commenced, Stanton began a special court of inquiry into events. He also ordered the Washington police department, the Military police, the Secret Service and thousands of soldiers to search for the culprits and prevent further attacks against the government. The Secretary of War also tried to control the spread of the news by telegraph. While Stanton spent the night bringing order to chaos, and creating a considerable amount of chaos himself, the President's health gradually ebbed away. At 7:22 a.m. on the 15th April, Abraham Lincoln died of his wound. He was 56 years of age.

The Public Reaction:

By the time of his death Lincoln had become a minority political leader; he was despised by the disenfranchised South, and opposed by the Democratic Party in the North and radical elements in the Republican Party. Many influential newspapers were against Lincoln, and he was held in low esteem by most politicians. Therefore the depth and spontaneity of emotion raised by President Lincoln death struck many by surprise. Herman Melville described the situation aptly in verse:

"There is sobbing of the strong,
And a pall upon the land;
But the people in their weeping
Bare the iron hand:
Beware the people weeping
When they bare the iron hand."

On the 15th April, as word of the murder crossed the nation bells tolled and cannons were fired every half hour for a day and night. Union armies were aroused by the news and wanted to wreak vengeance on the South. There was widespread suspicion among soldier and citizen alike that the assassinations were part of a wider Confederate plot. As buildings were draped in black and businesses closed, mobs forced known or suspected sympathisers of the South (including two ex-Presidents) to decorate their own homes in mourning black. Grief and anger struck the Northern states in roughly equal proportion. Even many who had hated Lincoln were enraged, and Southern sympathisers hid from mobs either in their homes or police stations. Some were tarred and feathered, others were ridden on rails. There were instances of open supporters of the South being beaten to death, and of Union troops shooting people who exulted in Lincoln's death. Police arrested some for insulting Lincoln, dragging them to courts where prison sentences were meted out. Alternately police were called upon to save the lives of others who had uttered some similarly foolish sentiments.

Hatred had beset the North. This emotional state was fuelled by newspaper editors, many of whom had previously reviled Lincoln. Admittedly there were some staunchly Democratic and anti-Lincoln areas in the North that widely celebrated the President's murder, such as Union County, Illinois and Marietta, Indiana. News of such celebrations provoked further outrage in the larger population. Radical Republicans seized control during this period, whipping up public anger, and pleading with the new President, Andrew Johnson, to allow reprisals against the former Rebels. The Radicals had long believed that Lincoln's plans for amnesty and reconstruction in the South were weak, and dearly wanted the South to suffer for its secession. In general, the South reacted against the assassination of Lincoln. Confederate army veterans were particularly quick to express their abhorrence to the assassination. Most Southern newspaper editors also denounced the act of

Booth and his accomplices. However, the Southern response was equally motivated out of sympathy for Lincoln and fears for the South, for they saw the instatement of President Johnson as a great calamity.

On 16th April, Easter Sunday, churches were fuller than they had been for the previous 10 years. From the pulpits came additional cries for vengeance against the slave-holding South, ignoring any need for evidence of the South's involvement in Lincoln's assassination. Rare amongst the religious leaders was the voice of moderation and conciliation. A number of preachers even implied that Lincoln had been removed by God's intent because he was too merciful towards the South. A resounding theme that emerged, and would remain, in religious services was that Lincoln had been ordained by God to do his work on earth. The politician had taken on a divine image, compared frequently to Moses, sometimes even to Jesus. Parallels were drawn with the fact the Lincoln was assassinated on Good Friday, which was seen as further evidence of his martyrdom. Unlike Christ the President did not rise again. Nevertheless, Abraham Lincoln's human qualities were downplayed while his heart and soul were lionised.

Plans began to be made for Abraham Lincoln's burial. Many states desired to inter the dead President within their borders, citing Lincoln's strong connections with their respective areas; eventually Springfield, Illinois, was chosen. There was great demand to see the body, and a long path by rail was selected for Lincoln's journey to his grave, mapped to retrace his path to Washington in 1861. Nobody had predicted the depths of mourning that would greet the dead President. Over 25,000 people went to the White House on 18th April to see the body, which was then taken by grand procession to the Capitol where another 25,000 paid their respects. When the dead President left Washington by a funeral train, 7 days after his death, massive crowds came to witness its passage. Both cities and town were packed with mourners, often bidding to outdo rival cities in their display of grief. People would travel for days to line alongside the rail tracks in the hope of a brief glimpse of the funeral train as it passed by. It is estimated that a staggering total of 7 million Northerners looked upon the hearse or coffin, of which 1.5 million had looked upon Lincoln's face. The funeral procession finally ended after 14 days in Springfield, Illinois.

The Trial:

As the Northern states went into deep mourning the hunt for the assassins continued. Many historians contend that the manhunt for the perpetrators was botched. Secretary of War Stanton was understandably distracted by fears that the assassination was part of a wider Confederate plot. The chief of the Secret Service, Col. Lafayette Baker, was placed in charge of the search, and issued large rewards for the assassin's capture; \$25,000 for David Herold and John Surratt, and \$50,000 for John Wilkes Booth. These rewards proved to be a hindrance to the authorities' investigations. Much misinformation was passed onto police by people eager for the large reward, and dark-haired, handsome men with even a passing resemblance to Booth were arrested, some repeatedly. The reward also proved a distraction for detectives, who became overzealous in their arrests of suspects, and created an intense rivalry between the Secret Service and the army for the capture of the assassins.

The first to be caught was Lewis Powell. After his attempt on the Secretary of State's life, Powell had hidden in ditches for three nights before returning to the Surratt Boarding House. The large assassin walked straight into a group of police who were raiding the Surratt property and had arrested all its occupants. The police were hoping to discover the whereabouts of John Surratt, who was believed to have been responsible for the attack on Secretary Seward. Powell was arrested as he knocked on the door shortly after midnight, even though the police did not know of his connection to the assassination plot. The owner of the Boarding House, Mary Surratt, was a widow and a close friend of Booth. She told police she did not know who Powell was, a lie that would later contribute to her being hung for treason. Lewis Powell was soon identified by Secretary Seward's son, Major Augustus Seward, and his servant for his involvement in the assassination

attempt. Powell was taken aboard the ironclad monitor *Saugus*, moored in the Potomac River, and was chained up in its hold. Shortly after his capture, Powell tried to commit suicide by bashing his head against the iron door to his cell. A quilted black hood was placed over his head to prevent further attempts to kill himself. All the other conspirators later captured had the same type of hood placed over their heads, which were only removed after physicians claimed they were driving the prisoners to insanity.

George Atzerodt left an easy trail for detectives to follow and was picked up by police on 20th April in Germantown, Maryland. Atzerodt's room at Kirkwood House, where Vice President Andrew Johnson had been staying, was searched in the days after the assassination. Found there were various items linking Atzerodt to Booth and John Surratt, including a knife, a pistol and ammunition, and a map of the Southern States. The other main players in Booth's conspiracy had been caught shortly before. Sam Arnold was arrested on 17th April and quickly confessed to his involvement in the abduction plot against Lincoln. Michael O'Laughlin turned himself into the Baltimore Police on the same day after hearing that federal officials were searching for him. An employee at Ford's Theatre named Edmen Spangler was also arrested because he was known friend of Booth and had briefly held Booth's horse outside while the assassination took place. The physician who had helped the injured Booth with his broken leg, Dr. Samuel Mudd, was likewise taken into custody. When Dr. Mudd was initially questioned by detectives about treating Booth he became badly rattled and lied. When he finally admitted to the act he was arrested and imprisoned on suspicion of being involved in the assassination conspiracy. All these accused suffered the same fate as Powell, and were put in chains aboard ironclad monitors on the Potomac under heavy guard.

John Wilkes Booth and David Arnold were at large for almost two weeks before they were tracked down by authorities. Booth had been dismayed to find that the South did not openly applaud his actions in the newspapers he avidly read. The two assassins stealthily made their way southwards through Maryland and into Virginia. Booth and Herold were finally captured on 26th April at the Garrett farm near the Rappahannock River. The conspirators had been locked in a tobacco shed by the farm's owner who mistakenly believed the men might be horse thieves. Union troops, accompanied by several secret service detectives who had picked up the assassins' trail, arrived at the Garrett farm during the night. Discovering that Booth and Herold were trapped in the barn, the soldiers tried to coax the conspirators out. David Herold quickly surrendered, but Booth refused repeated calls to give himself up. The soldiers set fire to the building in the hope of smoking out the arch assassin. However, a mentally disturbed sergeant, who often claimed that God spoke directly to him, acted against orders and shot Booth in the head through a crack in the barn's wall. Ironically, Booth sustained an almost identical wound to that he had inflicted upon President Lincoln, and he died within several hours.

Soon after Booth died, his corpse was bundled into a cart and rushed back to Washington along with David Herold. After Booth's corpse was properly identified it was kept briefly on the same ironclad monitor as the other conspiracy suspects. Secretary Stanton was concerned that Southern sympathisers might seek to collect relics or trinkets from the body. His concerns were not without justification. One woman came aboard the naval vessel on which Booth's body lay, where she was prevented from taking a lock of the assassin's hair that she had cut off. Subsequently, Stanton decided to bury Booth in strict secrecy. On the same evening that Booth had been returned to Washington, two members of the Secret Service, including its head, placed Booth's corpse in a small boat and set off down the river. Large and curious crowds on the shore followed the boat for two miles, until they lost track of it in the great swamp behind Geeseborough Point. There the Secret Service officers waited quietly until midnight, and convinced that all pursuit was lost, they rowed upstream to the Old Arsenal Penitentiary where Booth's body was buried under a warehouse floor. The mysterious burial caused all sorts of doubts and wild rumours, including the belief that it was not actually Booth who had been killed.

With the capture of Herold and death of Booth the trial of the other conspirators began. A military court was established, directed by Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt of the Bureau of Military Justice and presided over by Major General David Hunter. The court also included ten other

military commissioners. The trial began on 11th May 1865, just a month after Lincoln's assassination. The prisoners appeared in black outfits, handcuffs, leg manacles, and with a 75 pound cone of iron attached to the left leg. The trial was initially held in secret, although the press corps howled such protests that soon reporters were allowed to witness proceedings. Judge Advocate General Holt, although supposed to ensure a fair trial, was obviously preoccupied with gaining convictions against the conspirators, in addition to linking the assassination to the Southern political leadership. The questions directed towards witnesses revealed this second intent, but the witnesses often proved to be unreliable and Holt's efforts to uncover some diabolical Confederate plot failed.

However, the key conspirators Lewis Powell, David Herold and George Atzerodt had strong cases against them and were handed the death penalty. Powell, for one, freely admitted his guilt on several occasions. The men involved in the earlier abduction conspiracy, Sam Arnold and Michael O'Laughlin, received life sentences. The unfortunate Dr. Samuel Mudd also received a life prison sentence for assisting Booth's escape. It was established in the trial that Mudd was a long acquaintance of John Wilkes Booth, although many of the witnesses who testified against the Doctor were shown to be of dubious character. The theatre employee Edmen Spangler was handed a term of 6 years imprisonment in the mistaken belief that he had assisted Booth in his plot against the President.

The most controversial of the convictions was that of Mrs. Mary Surratt, who was the fourth person to receive the death sentence. The case against Mrs. Surratt hinged upon three factors. One was the testimony of John M. Lloyd, the manager of the Surratt tavern. Lloyd swore that five or six weeks before the assassination, John Surratt, Herold and Atzerodt came to the tavern to hide two carbines, ammunition, rope and a wrench. In the week before Lincoln's murder, Mrs. Surratt had twice instructed Lloyd to ensure that the "shooting irons" were ready to be picked up. The second factor in the case against Mrs. Surratt was the testimony of Louis Weichmann, a 23 year old boarder at the Surratt Boarding House. Weichmann gave evidence that demonstrated the close friendship between Mrs. Surratt and John Wilkes Booth, and the suspicious behaviour of Mrs. Surratt before the assassination. Historians generally concur that the evidence of these two witnesses was unreliable. The third, and most damning, piece of evidence against Mrs. Surratt was her denial of knowledge of Lewis Powell when he arrived at her boarding house on the 17th April. In fact most people and newspaper editors did not believe that Mrs. Surratt would actually be hung. Even five of the officers in the court signed a clemency plea in the case of Mrs. Surratt. However, President Andrew Johnson refused to pardon the 43 year old woman or even consider applications for her reprieve, and had suspended *habeas corpus* in the case.

The executions of the four condemned prisoners took place on 7th July 1865 at the Old Arsenal Penitentiary. The execution of Mrs. Mary Surratt continued to be problematic to authorities. Prison employees refused to dig the graves, and the executioner had to ask members of a military regiment, with the promise of a drink of whiskey at the conclusion of the execution. There were over 2,000 people present to witness the executions. Half were civilians and reporters, the other half were United States infantry. The condemned prisoners were escorted to the prison yard by priests and guards at 1 p.m., and were seated on the execution platform while a General read the execution orders. The prisoners' arms were then pinioned to their sides, and hoods placed upon their heads. On the final orders from General Hancock the four condemned persons were hanged simultaneously. Afterwards the dead prisoners were buried in unmarked graves next to the prison walls, with only an identification note placed in a bottle inside each coffin.

The other four prisoners were sent to Fort Jefferson to serve out their sentences. Located on Dry Tortugas, an island one hundred miles off the coast of Florida, Fort Jefferson was considered the most cruel of government prisons. It was complete with a wide moat that contained 10 sharks for extra security. In 1868 Yellow Fever broke out at the prison which resulted in the deaths of many prisoners and guards alike. After the last prison Surgeon died, Dr. Samuel Mudd offered his services and soon had the epidemic under control. In appreciation the officers of the Fort Jefferson petitioned President Johnson for Dr. Mudd's pardon, which was secured on 8th February 1869.

Three weeks later the other Lincoln conspirators were also freed, except Michael O'Laughlin who had died during the epidemic.

The last of the men wanted by authorities for Lincoln's murder, John Surratt, was tried by a civil court for his part in the conspiracy in June 1867. Surratt had fled to Canada then Europe after hearing news of Lincoln's assassination, and had even enlisted in the Papal Zouaves in Italy until his identity was discovered. Arrested in Egypt, John Surratt was bought back to the United States to face trial. Since the execution of John's mother, Mary Surratt, there had been a national change of heart about her punishment, which had produced widespread revulsion. There was considerable public hostility focused towards the young man, Louis Weichmann, who had testified to her involvement in the conspiracy to kill Lincoln. In any case, the government had little success in convicting John Surratt on any charge. The prosecutors tried to establish that Surratt had been in Washington at the time of the assassination, although the witnesses called gave obviously incorrect or unreliable evidence. In fact, John Surratt was in the town Elmira on 14th April, which is in New York State. The trial resulted in a divided jury, and John Surratt was released.

Conclusion:

The trial of John Surratt was by no means the closing chapter in the story of conspiracy to assassinate Abraham Lincoln. Those implicated in the plot, justly or otherwise, in addition to those who were involved in the prosecution of the suspects, often tried to explain or justify their actions in the decades to follow. This defensiveness reflected the continuing public interest in Lincoln and his death. The assassination had a profound impact on public and political consciousness, perhaps attributed to the rapid telegraphic spread of the news and, in consequence, a more acute sense of national grief. The public mourning for the murdered President evolved into an idolisation of Lincoln. This process was assisted by political leaders who sought to use Lincoln's death for their own ends, and religious leaders, who imbued the President with a religious significance akin to Sainthood. No doubt many Americans in the northern states were genuinely moved by Lincoln's death. They were struck with the bittersweet sensation of being victorious in war, while suffering the most grievous loss in peace.

The effect of Lincoln's assassination on American history and mythology is immense. The event itself spawned so many conspiracy theories, both at the time and today, that Oliver Stone would be envious. Even Lincoln's murderer would be elevated to the status of folk legend, although the stories of Booth never being captured lingered on, and the deaths of many "real" John Wilkes Booth occurred in the later parts of the 19th century. The paper I have presented today only outlines the event, the trial that followed, and impact of Lincoln's death on the public mind. Needless to say, Lincoln maintains a special and revered place in the minds of many Americans, as well as foreigners. His symbolic value was crafted in his untimely death, which overshadowed many of his political and personal flaws. Abraham Lincoln's assassination became a defining moment in history. Lincoln's Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, was most prescient when he witnessed the President's last breath and declared:

"Now he belongs to the ages".