

# Reactions to the lincoln assassination

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



Reactions to the Lincoln Assassination Washington, DC, April 14, 1865, 10:45 p. m., the President of the United States was shot with a Philadelphia Deringer pistol at Ford's Theatre while attending the play *Our American Cousin*. He was carried across the street where he died early the next morning. The assassin, John Wilkes Booth, made his escape by horse and rode to the house of Doctor Mudd, a resident of Maryland who repaired his leg. The next day Booth was found hiding in a barn and was killed, shot by a Union soldier through a crack in the barn wall. Within a week, news of Abraham Lincoln's assassination spread throughout the country. In some parts of the country the reaction was one of shock and sorrow, however, in some southern states there was private and public celebration for various reasons. The fact that he was the head of the Union, supported the restriction of slavery, along with his other political views, found John Wilkes Booth a hero in many households. Abraham Lincoln is arguably most famous for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, which essentially abolished slavery from nine of ten slave-holding states. It was officially abolished a few months after Lincoln's death in December of 1865 when the thirteenth amendment was added to the U. S. Constitution. This amendment read: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction. " These bills understandably angered the southerners further, most of whom already hated Lincoln since he was the head of the Union. This angered them because they relied on the slaves to work their plantations, which was their number one source of income. In addition to the Emancipation Proclamation

Lincoln accomplished many other things in his lifetime. He was elected the sixteenth president of the United States in 1860 and was reelected in 1864. He also led America through the Civil War. He was challenged further at the end of the war with the idea of how to deal with the confederates and freed slaves; this period was called reconstruction. However, he was killed in the beginning of this period and many question whether this period would have been dealt with differently if he hadn't been killed. Involvement in these controversial issues led Lincoln to be a target for threats on his life. In fact, he would receive threatening letters, offensive poems and gruesome drawings in the mail daily. A newspaper in the state of Alabama offered \$1 million for Lincoln to be killed. His legendary top hat had previously been shot off his head and one woman even attempted to infect him with smallpox by giving him a kiss while she was contagious with the virus. Lincoln once told a friend, " I long ago made up my mind that if anybody wants to kill me, he will do it. " He was a relatively easy target by president's standards. He didn't like the secret service to be heavily guarding him all the time. He would leave parts of the White House unguarded and doors open day and night. Visitors would enter the White House without being searched for weapons and the booth he was sitting in the night he was shot was unguarded, which gave Booth the opportunity, in addition to the motive he already harbored to kill Lincoln. Lincoln's killer, John Wilkes Booth, was a popular actor and confederate born in 1838. He was born in Bel Air, Maryland to his father Junius Brutus Booth, who was also an actor, and his mistress Mary Ann Holmes. Booth was a racist from his early days as a southern boy. He believed that America was made for white people and that black people

were made to serve them. He was a confederate who believed that abolitionists and “black Republicans” deserved to burn in hell. In 1864 Booth plotted a kidnapping of Lincoln after he was reelected. He planned to kidnap him while on the way to see a play and hold him hostage in the south until ransom was paid. This plot did not succeed because Lincoln changed his plans for that evening. Later Booth attended a speech where Lincoln said that he favored suffrage for the freed slaves. After Booth heard this he claimed that that was the last speech Lincoln would ever make. At the time of Lincoln’s death he was not a popular president, which is quite the opposite of today since Lincoln is considered the best president of all time. The Union had defeated the Confederates in the Civil War six days before so the South understandably despised him. In fact, children in southern schools were taught poems saying horrible things about Lincoln. They were also taught that Lincoln wanted to eventually enslave all the white children. In addition to the Southerners, the Democrats were politically against him, and even some of his fellow Republicans opposed him. Nonetheless there was general, nation-wide shock once news of Lincoln’s death spread; however the contrasts between the emotional reactions for the North vs. the South are quite dramatic. The South hated Lincoln for many reasons, several of which link to slavery. The main reason for their hatred was because Lincoln supported the restrictions of slavery. Agriculture was the main source of income in the South. The southern plantation owners relied on the slaves to work on their plantations because they were much cheaper than hiring workers to work for wages since the owners just had to buy the slaves and pay for their food. This was a situation that was clearly in the favor of the

South and abolishing slavery would negatively affect their livelihood. Another reason the Southerners might have been dancing in the streets was because of Lincoln's views as a member of the Republican Party. One of the reasons the Republican Party started in 1854 was to restrict slavery, which obviously did not sit well with the Southern Democrats. Lincoln also supported raising internal tariffs meaning that the Southern plantation owners would have to pay more to send their crops to other states. One more Southern strike against him was his belief that the new western states should be anti-slavery. All of these beliefs contributed towards the Southern hatred of Lincoln and Booth's drive to kill him. In the North the reaction to Lincoln's assassination was one of sorrow. They attended services, draped the buildings in black, and closed their businesses to honor their president. In the South, however, many southerners celebrated publically, for which they were often harshly punished. Others like religious and political figures were forced to show sympathy. An example of a Southerner's private view is found in the personal diary of Mary Boykin Miller when she says, " The death of Lincoln I call a warning to tyrants. He will not be the last President put to death in the capital, though he is the first. " This diary entry shows one woman saying that Lincoln deserved being murdered because he was a traitor and that his assassination was a warning for any other traitors. Many people's reactions were shown most accurately through their diary entries and private conversations as opposed to public displays, often because of fear of the Union soldiers that occupied much of the South at that time. Shortly after the assassination the tables were turned. The South went from being enraged with the North because of the abolition of slavery (amongst

other things) to the North being outraged with the South for what they felt was an inappropriate reaction of Lincoln's death. Members of the Union and northern mobs would beat and often shoot Southerners who reacted foolishly. Southerners would be imprisoned and they were even tar and feathered for reacting in ways that didn't please the North. Of course there were some Southerners who were not celebrating the assassination. These people were mainly people in the national public eye like the newspaper writers and the freed slaves for whom Lincoln essentially gave his life. One freed slave exclaimed, " The colored people have lost their best friend on the earth. " This quote demonstrates the slaves' love and appreciation for Lincoln. The Weekly Times in New Orleans reported that, " Every citizen present, it matters not what his occupation or calling, were of the most unfeigned regret at the atrocity of the crime. " This was the general statement from most newspapers nationwide, however the sincerity of some of the writers is questionable. An example of one newspaper showing happiness for Lincoln's assassination is a Texas paper that published, " In the plenitude of his power and arrogance he was struck down, and his soul ushered into eternity, with innumerable crimes to answer for. " This is basically saying that Lincoln died with many strikes against him in the eyes of the Texans. This article was allowed to print in Texas because Union soldiers didn't inhabit it. Otherwise the printer would've faced the serious consequences. Although Lincoln wasn't the most popular president at the time, over 7 million people from the North came to see his body on his path from the White House to Springfield, Illinois where he was buried. In conclusion, there are many reasons that the South reacted so differently

than the North to the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. It was not necessarily because the Northerners deep affection towards the president, it was the contrast of so many Southerners that despised him. The Southerners were not unpatriotic, since they thought that they were protecting America from some sort of dictator, and they were afraid of the change that Lincoln was pushing for leading them to resent Lincoln and go against everything he tried to accomplish. This fear led to their celebration of his death as opposed to the mourning felt by the Northerners. In the words of United States Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, " Now he belongs to the ages. "

----- [ 1 ]. Marrin, Albert. Commander in Chief Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. Dutton Childrens Books, 1997. 207. [ 2 ]. Marrin, 201. [ 3 ]. Swanson, James. Manhunt. William Morrow & Co, 2006, p. 6. [ 4 ]. " Historians Presidential Leadership Survey." C-SPAN February 16, 2009: n. pag. Web. 20 Apr 2010. . [ 5 ]. Marrin, 203 [ 6 ]. Civil War Letters and Diaries, Alexander Street Database. <http://solomon.cwld.alexanderstreet.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/cgi-bin/asp/philos/getobject.pl?c.19102:7.cwld.9934> [ 7 ]. " THE LINCOLN ASSASSINATION AND ITS AFTERMATH." American Civil War Roundtable of Australia . American Civil War Roundtable of Australia , 2006. Web. 20 Apr 2010. . [ 8 ]. Harrell, Carolyn L. When the Bells Told for Lincoln (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997), 77. [ 9 ]. Harrell, 76. [ 10 ]. Harrell, 85. [ 11 ]. Steers, Edward, and Will Irwin. The Jedburghs. Univ Pr of Kentucky, 2005. 13