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*James L. Swanson , Daniel R. Weinberg , Daniel Weinberg*

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Acclaimed as the definitive illustrated history of Abraham Lincoln's assassination, *Lincoln's Assassins*, by James L. Swanson and Daniel R. Weinberg, follows the shocking events from the tragic scene at Ford's Theatre to the trial and execution of Booth's co-conspirators. For twelve days after the president was shot, the nation waited breathlessly as manhunters tracked down John Wilkes Booth—the story that was brilliantly told in Swanson's *New York Times* bestseller, *Manhunt*. Then, during the spring and summer of 1865, a military commission tried eight people as conspirators in Booth's plot to murder Lincoln and other high officials, including the secretary of state and vice president. Few remember them today, but once the names Mary Surratt, Lewis Powell, David Herold, George Atzerodt, Edman Spangler, Samuel Arnold, Michael O'Laughlin, and Dr. Samuel Mudd were the most reviled and notorious in America.

In *Lincoln's Assassins*, Swanson and Weinberg resurrect these events by presenting an unprecedented visual record of almost 300 contemporary photographs, letters, documents, prints, woodcuts, newspapers, pamphlets, books, and artifacts, many hitherto unpublished. These rare materials, which took the authors decades to collect, evoke the popular culture of the time, record the origins of the Lincoln myth, take the reader into the courtroom and the cells of the accused, document the beginning of American photojournalism, and memorialize the fates of the eight conspirators.

*Lincoln's Assassins* is a unique work that will appeal to anyone interested in American history, Abraham Lincoln, the Civil War, law, crime, assassination, nineteenth-century photographic portraiture, and the history of American photojournalism.

## Lincoln's Assassins: Their Trial and Execution Details

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### Jessica says

An excellent addition to any Civil War historian's collection. Many of the items and pictures included have either never been seen before in book form before or are presented in a new light. Most interesting is the series of photos taken by photographer Gardner. They are a series of shots of the hanging, beginning with the empty gallows, the arrival of the condemned, the reading of the sentences, the hooding and the tying of the legs of the condemned, and concluding with a rare action shot of the victims struggling in their nooses and one final shot taken of the dead and now still conspirators. The last two are especially chilling. These photographs, along with the obsessive collecting of souvenirs done, illustrate perfectly the ghoulish Victorian obsession with memorializing death.

All in all, a very illustrative view of the assassination, the conspirators, the trial, the hanging and the aftermath of all four. As a side note, the main author of this book, "James L. Swanson" would write additional books in the Civil War canon. The first is "Manhunt!" all about John Wilkes Booth's flight from Washington and the subsequent manhunt to find him. The other is "Bloody Crimes" which concerns the funeral train of President Lincoln and the last days of President Davis' presidency. Both are very exciting and would look at home on any Civil War historian's bookshelf.

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### Drew Martin says

In 1991, Unsolved Mysteries ran a very important episode in my life. There was a segment on the Lincoln assassination, and the "legend" that history is wrong and John Wilkes Booth survived. From my first viewing of the segment at a young seven years of age, I've had an interest in Lincoln's assassination, Booth, his island of misfit toys, and all parts between connecting these subjects. Here I am at 35, having read and studied much on these subjects for close to 30 years. A book came to my attention years ago first published in 2001. I'd never heard of it, and this work isn't so much a book as a scrapbook. I had to have my own copy of the James L. Swanson and Daniel R. Weinberg effort, Lincoln's Assassins: Their Trial and Execution. The retail price is steep, but I found a good used copy to add to my bookshelf...

To read the rest of this review go to <https://drewmartinwrites.wordpress.co...>

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### Agatha says

This is the author of the Lincoln book (Manhunt) I read last year, so I went looking for his two other books. This was the first. (The second is Bloody Crimes, but I am still on the waiting list for that one.) This one is really more of like a coffee table book / scrapbook of original sources, photos, memorabilia, etc. surrounding the assassins' trial. The author has been a collector almost all of his life and all of these items are either from his private collection or that of his writing partner, who owns a Lincoln-based book shop in Chicago. The book is organized into an introduction, 5 chapters taking the assassination, manhunt, and trial play by play, and then a final chapter on "myth and memory." Swanson wrote all of the text, which sets the scene to then prominently display the relevant sources, photos, memorabilia, et al. for that chapter. I am now looking forward to getting Bloody Crimes, which is more of a narrative, like Manhunt was.

## **Klara says**

Hätte ich nicht einen Vortrag über dieses Buch halten müssen hätte ich es wohl nie gelesen. Weiß nun ziemlich viel über Lincolns Leben, Mord, den Medientumult in der damaligen Zeit und noch viel mehr über seine Mörder. So ein klasse Buch über ein geschichtliches Ereignis in Verbindung mit den Medien der damaligen Zeit habe ich noch nie in den Händen gehalten. Überlege sogar es mir selbst anzuschaffen. Wirklich ein richtig toller Bildband!

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## **Jennifer says**

Having just seen the new movie *The Conspirator* (2011, directed by Robert Redford), I was faced with the realization that, despite a life-long fascination with and admiration for Abraham Lincoln, I knew very little about the events that occurred following his assassination. The movie was thought-provoking enough to warrant me racing home from the theater and beginning to research how accurate the movie's portrayal was. The movie's website (<http://www.conspiratorthemovie.com/>) offers ample resources for those interested in learning more. However, the short answer to "was the movie accurate?" is that yes, indeed, it was accurate – and I was reassured by the involvement of historians during writing the script and filming.

So, it was under this pretense that I found myself picking up another James Swanson book. I had read *Chasing Lincoln's Killer* when it came out and found it a nice concise look at the post-assassination and pre-trial events. This title, *Lincoln's Assassins: Their Trial and Execution*, offers a bit more insight into the arrests, trial, and execution. However, readers need to be cautioned that, as Swanson himself states in the introduction, the book is not intended to be a complete account of events and, in fact, no such historical account exists. I suspect that Mr. Swanson is undoubtedly working on such an account; he seems perfect for the job given his previous works on Lincoln and obvious passion for this bit of history.

What the book does provide is a look at what citizens of the day were hearing and reading about the events. The introduction and the chapter summaries set the stage for what to expect, and, as warned, the book is mostly photos and news clippings detailing the arrests, trial and execution.

Was it enough? No. Did it whet my appetite for more? Most certainly. Will I pick up Swanson's more concise book on the trial and execution that is sure to be forthcoming (but entirely a guess by me)? Most definitely.

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## **Richard says**

Perhaps as much a "must see" as a "must read", this illustrated book provides the reader with a very good condensed version of the John Wilkes Booth conspiracy to kill President Abraham Lincoln, along with high quality illustrations of documents, photographs and artifacts related to the apprehension, trial and executions of the conspirators. I think this book has been criticized by some for not going deeply into the historical details of this assassination and resulting "trial of the century", but James Swanson delivers the full account of this story in his *"Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer."* The current edition of this book has been updated to serve as an illustrated companion to *"Manhunt"*. Many of the illustrations have been

published before, but never together in such a complete manner.

The reader of this book can get pretty up to date with the events chronicled in "Manhunt", in condensed form, but "Lincoln's Assassins" is primarily interested in the aftermath of the assassination. In some ways, this is a more compelling story, as the nation was engulfed in shock and anger over the events that occurred in Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C. on April 14, 1865. The event which kept the newspapers and gossipers humming was the quick trial of eight perpetrators, of varying degrees of guilt (or degree of innocence, especially in the case of the dupe Edman Spangler). By May 12 of that year, less than a month after the assassination, the military commission trial began. Seven weeks of testimony resulted in guilty verdicts against all of them. Four defendants in the "Great Conspiracy Trial" were sentenced to death, with their executions scheduled for the day following the judgement. Swanson's summary of their culpability includes the following facts:

Lewis Powell carried out an assassination attempt against Secretary of State William Seward timed to synchronize with Booth's assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Only a miracle saved Seward from death, but he did not escape serious injuries that would plague his health for the rest of his life.

David Herold accompanied Booth every inch of his flight from Washington the night of Lincoln's assassination. He aided and abetted the injured Booth and was captured when he decided not to share Booth's fate the night they were caught at a Virginia farm twelve days later.

George Atzerodt had a meeting with Booth, Powell and Herold the day of the assassination. He was assigned the task of assassinating Vice President Johnson but got cold feet and got drunk instead. He knew the details of the assassination plot and could have prevented it by notifying authorities, but chose to do nothing.

And then there is the constantly fascinating case of Mary Surratt. She knew Booth, who visited her home with Powell, Herold, and Atzerodt. Her son was a Confederate agent. She lied when she said she did not know Powell, even though authorities were present when he visited her home after the assassination. She passed information to Booth's friend John Lloyd about the caching of weapons for Booth. Booth visited her the same date as the assassination. As Swanson says, no single piece of evidence condemned her, but the cumulative weight of this evidence sealed her fate.

As to the other four:

Two associates of Booth, Samuel Arnold and Michael O'Laughlin were convicted and sent to prison, along with Dr. Samuel Mudd and Edman Spangler. They had both conspired with Booth in an earlier plot to kidnap Lincoln, but there never was any evidence of involvement in the assassination.

Spangler's only involvement in any of this was that he held Booth's horse while Booth ran a short errand to Ford's Theater. As Swanson states, unfortunately for Spangler the errand happened to be assassinating the president of the United States. Being caught in the wrong place at the wrong time cost him several years of his life.

Dr. Samuel Mudd, a slaveowner, had had several previous contacts with Booth. He was tied to a network of Confederate operatives; he had introduced Booth to John Surratt; he had known his patient as John Wilkes Booth; and he had lied to cover Booth's trail, after he would have heard Booth's name identified as Lincoln's assassin.

Swanson notes the continuing speculation over how this case would have concluded had they been tried by a civilian criminal court. It would have been highly unlikely that Arnold and O'Laughlin would have been convicted regarding this crime; Spangler certainly would not have been convicted. Powell, Atzerhodt and Herold would have been convicted on serious criminal charges; whether they would have received death

sentences is open to question. Swanson dismisses revisionist doubt about the cases of Mudd and Mrs. Surratt. They actively aided Booth and his conspirators while they engaged in both the kidnap plot and the assassination plot against Lincoln. The only valid speculation is whether they were aware of the actual assassination plans.

The short wait from pronouncement to execution of sentence in the capital cases was no doubt justified by the government as a necessary safeguard to get the hangings over with before mobs of people got word of the ceremony at the Old Arsenal Prison courtyard. Actually, with less than one day's notice, General Winfield Hancock, possessing the final authority on who would be admitted to see the spectacle, was besieged with requests by potential gawkers. Since only some influential people could be admitted in addition to army guards and officials, the public desire for knowing the details of the hangings of the four conspirators was satisfied in large part by the newspaper correspondents who were admitted, and who printed stories containing all of the grisly details. One such report from the "Evening Star" of July 7th, the same date as the executions, is reprinted in the book. It leaves nothing to the imagination regarding the manner in which the entire ceremony played out for each condemned person.

Adding to the realism of the newspaper reports, photographer Alexander Gardner was granted access to photograph the hangings. Gardner had earlier taken photographs of most of the defendants as they awaited trial, except Surratt and Mudd, who were held in other jails. Now, on July 7th, he took before, during and after photographs of the mass hanging. This book is the first time the entire series of photographs has been printed.

Distribution of written accounts, courtroom drawings, and photographs of the trial and aftermath of the Lincoln assassination conspirators, as well as pieces of the noose ropes and other available souvenirs, has only whetted the public appetite for everything related to Abraham Lincoln's death. Now, going into the second century after this occurred, there is still fascination with this tragic time. James L. Swanson's books provide a contemporary look at this subject.

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### **Laura says**

Mostly pictures of the main players and preserved memorabilia commemorating the event. Short on the story end, a photo-journal of what has survived to the present day (wanted posters, ribbons, small artworks, etc). Lewis Payne was a pretty intimidating looking guy, and one good picture of Booth that I hadn't seen before is included...

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### **R.Friend says**

Oddly, I found this companion piece to James L. Swanson's *Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer* to be superior to the original work itself.

Swanson has an curator's affinity for Lincoln assassination "memorabilia," and presents here a tremendous collection of rare and fascinating items—all of which paint a unique visual record of the assassins' final days.

I have yet to find a better showcase of this subject matter; the closest I can recall is the 1987 Time-Life Books Civil War Series volume, *The Assassination: Death of the President*.

While I enjoyed the narrative of *Manhunt*, I did not appreciate Swanson's frequent use of a rather broad brush in detailing the events of April, 1865. A perfect example is in his decision to quote Edwin M. Stanton at the moment of Lincoln's death as "Now he belongs to the **angels**." It has long been debated whether Stanton said "angels" or "ages"—and most historians believe it to be the latter. In fact, the phrase "Now he belongs to the ages" is literally carved above President Lincoln's very tomb. For Swanson to so casually propagate the "angels" quote without even mentioning the confusion over Stanton's words is disappointing.

He is a vivid writer with a gift of capturing the essence of a specific time and place, and transporting the reader. And for the most part, *Manhunt* is a worthy addition to any Lincoln library. But I feel that Swanson's notes also leave much to be desired, and perhaps he is better suited to documenting Lincolniana in books of this nature, rather than attempting to compete with Edward Steers' *Blood on the Moon* as the authority on the subject.

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### **Jeff Elliott says**

After reading Swanson's thrilling book "Manhunt" about the chase and capture of Booth I wanted to see the artifacts and photos that he has collected. They turned out to be much less interesting than the story he put together. I have, however, gained a new respect for research. It takes a lot of boring work to put all the facts together.

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### **Frances Levy says**

An excellent companion book to *Manhunt*. The images are, for the most part, new to me, as are the details of the arrests, trial and executions. The co-authors made the subjects as alive for me as if they were of recent memory -- particularly the officers and soldiers in whose care the prisoners were placed. Swanson's books on the death of Lincoln are indispensable to history lovers.

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### **FelipeTheSnorlax Suzano says**

Clear and shows many themes about Lincoln and the history of the assassins.

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### **Damon Lively says**

I was disappointed to find this book is more an illustrated history – then I was shocked to hear (via the book) there has never been a “true” comprehensive writing on the trial of the Lincoln conspirators (due in part to the thousands of documents that need to be poured over). So on the one hand I was somewhat turned off by this book initially – but then I took to attempting to accept the book for what it is. There are small portions of written history and interesting detail on the imprisonment and execution. Yet – there is equally some redundancy from the “Manhunt” and “Bloody Crimes” installments which makes the reading less enjoyable. The picture history is interesting– but this book is overall pretty vague and generally a letdown. If you look beyond the excuse at the beginning on why this book is not in greater detail – you question “why” it could not have been at least elaborated on - about characters involved (beyond the repeated Booth / Lincoln association). There certainly could have been more delved into regarding the likes of Mary Surratt, Mudd,

Herold, Payne, Atzerodt – on down the line. Who were these people? What is their past? Where did they come from? How did the group come together at this point? Beyond the main players – more on the later tribulations and general outcomes in life for those spared like O’Laughlen, Spangler, Arnold, (again) Mudd. The writing simply picks up on their acts in the conspiracy / assassination of Lincoln and cuts off (for the most part) as soon as the hangmen finish their job. I simply think more could have been done to make this a work even worth publishing – but it felt more like an aside for Swanson and possibly just a mere money grab on the coattails of a great project in “Manhunt”.

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### **Camille says**

If you read Manhunt by the same author, then you definitely must read this. Its basically a curio cabinet of assassination-related stuff! The first part of it, is a detailed account of the imprisonment and execution of the Lincoln assassination conspirators. The second part is a collection of photographs, newspaper clippings, souvenirs and other related ephemera that just brought me back into the time period to kind of experience the events.

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### **Heloyce says**

Recently saw the movie about Mary Sarratt and was anxious to read about this woman from an historical account in my library. The movie tracked the facts pretty well, taking into consideration the editing license of filmmakers. This book has numerous photographs and sources. There is still some caution about the trial and execution including her participation in the assassination of President Lincoln.

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### **Kimberly Ann says**



".....what this book Is NOT. It is not a complete history of the great crime of the nineteenth century--the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Nor is it a biography of his murderer, John Wilkes Booth, or the actor's band of conspirators. It is not a full account of the events of April, 14, 1865, of what happened at Ford's Theater, , of the assassin's escape into the night, or of the deathbed vigil for the president.

Instead this is a book about what happened after the assassination--after the frantic hunt for Booth and his accomplices was over....."

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