

0. ASSASSINATION PLOTS - Story Preface

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This image, a panel from a cartoon series titled "The Special Train," was published in *Harper's Weekly* on the 9th of March, 1861. It references what was known as "[The Baltimore Plot](#)," showing Abraham Lincoln escaping from would-be assassin(s). The published image includes this caption: "He wore a Scotch plaid Cup and a very long Military Cloak, so that he was entirely unrecognizable."

To some people with Southern sympathies, the worst enemy of all was the President himself.

Ever since Lincoln was elected to serve as America's 16th President, he had received letters warning him of assassination plots. The trouble started before he even took the oath of office.

Harper's Weekly (in its [March 9, 1861](#) issue) told Americans of a plan to derail the future president's train as it traveled to Washington for the inauguration:

The Times correspondent says: On Thursday night after he had retired, Mr. Lincoln was aroused and informed that a stranger desired to see him on a matter of life or death. He declined to admit him unless he gave his name, which he at once did. Of such prestige did the name carry that while Mr. Lincoln was yet disrobed he granted an interview to the caller.

A prolonged conversation elicited the fact that an organized body of men had determined that Mr. Lincoln should not be inaugurated, and that he should never leave the city of Baltimore alive, if, indeed, he ever entered it.

The list of the names of conspirators presented a most astonishing array of persons high in Southern confidence, and some whose fame is not to this country alone.

Statesmen laid the plan, bankers indorsed it, and adventurers were to carry it into effect. As they understood Mr. Lincoln was to leave Harrisburg at nine o'clock this morning by special train, and the idea was, if possible, to throw the cars from the road at some point where they would rush down a steep embankment and destroy in a moment the lives of all on board. In case of the failure of this project, their plan was to surround the carriage on the way from depot to depot in Baltimore, and assassinate him with dagger or pistol-shot.

So authentic was the source from which the information was obtained that Mr. Lincoln, after counseling with his friends, was compelled to make arrangements which would enable him to subvert the plans of his enemies.

How did the man, slated to become president in a few days, respond to the information?

Mr. Lincoln did not want to yield, and Colonel Sumner actually cried with indignation; but Mrs. Lincoln, seconded by Mr. Judd and Mr. Lincoln's original informant, insisted upon it and at nine o'clock Mr. Lincoln left on a special train. He wore a Scotch plaid cap and a very long military cloak, so that he was entirely unrecognizable. Accompanied by Superintendent Lewis and one friend, he started, while all the town, with the exception of Mrs. Lincoln, Colonel Sumner, Mr. Judd, and two reporters, who were sworn to secrecy, supposed him to be asleep.

The telegraph wires were put beyond the reach of any one who might desire to use them. (Harper's Weekly, March 9, 1861, page 151.)

Lincoln was safely inaugurated, but the threats against his life continued.

One letter, sent by Frederic Bates in the fall of 1863, even warned that a plan to kill Lincoln would also target Secretary of State William H. Seward.

Figments of imagination are sometimes precursors of reality.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ASSASSINATION-PLOTS-Assassination-of-Abraham-Lincoln>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/ASSASSINATION-PLOTS-Assassination-of-Abraham-Lincoln>

Questions 2 Ponder

Is Disabling the Means of Communication Always a Restraint of Free Speech?

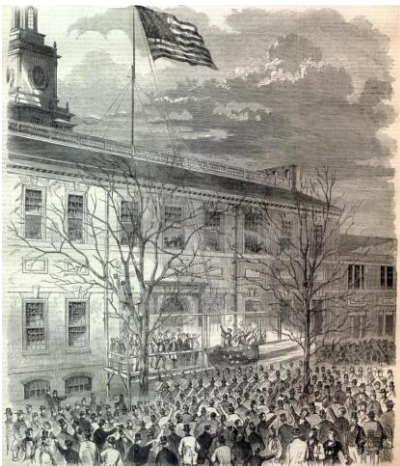
When Abraham Lincoln traveled by train to Washington, for his inaugural in 1861, his closest advisors learned of an assassination plot. Lincoln was forced to wear a disguise and leave the train. Why were "telegraph wires ... put beyond the reach of any one who might desire to use them?"

Was disabling the telegraph wires a restraint of free speech, preventing journalists from reporting on events, or was such an action taken in the interests of national security?

Do we have tensions, today, between the exercise of free speech and the need to keep the country safe? What are some examples?

Are such restrictions justified under certain circumstances? What are examples of justified circumstances?

Media Stream



Lincoln in Philadelphia - February, 1861

Image from the cover of *Harper's Weekly*, 9 March 1861 issue, online courtesy U.S. Library of Congress.

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Plot to Kill Lincoln - Discovered

Harper's Weekly, March 9, 1861, page 160. Online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Plot to Kill Lincoln - Unraveled

Harper's Weekly, March 9, 1861, page 160.

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ASSASSINATION PLOTS

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