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Not long before President Lincoln attended the play at Ford's Theatre, on the 14th of April 1865, he was sworn-in at his second inaugural. His plan was to "bind up the nation's wounds" as soon as the "War between the States" was over. Historians tell us that Lincoln's second inauguration marked the first time that African-Americans marched in the Inaugural-Day parade. Image online via the Library of Congress.

The President and First Lady were late for the April 14, 1865 evening performance of *Our American Cousin* starring the popular actress, [Laura Keane](#). It had been a [busy day](#) for Mr. Lincoln.

Meeting with his cabinet in the morning, [the President](#) (the link takes you to his last known photograph) urged compassion toward the defeated South. Secretary of the Navy [Gideon Welles](#) recorded Lincoln's sentiments:

*I hope there will be no persecution, no bloody work after the war is over. No one need expect me to take part in hanging or killing those men, even the worst of them. Frighten them out of the country, open the gates, let down the bars, scare them off, enough lives have been sacrificed. We must extinguish our resentment if we expect harmony and union.* (W. Emerson Reck, *Abraham Lincoln, His Last 24 Hours*, at page 37).

[General Grant](#) had planned to attend the play that night. When he was unable to make it, Mrs. Lincoln invited another couple: 28-year-old [Major Henry Reed Rathbone](#) and his fiancé, [Clara Harris](#).

The performance had already begun as the President (who wore his trademark [top hat](#) to [Ford's Theatre](#)) took his seat in a [red rocking chair](#) in the presidential box.



Shortly after 10 P.M., John Wilkes Booth entered the President's box, derringer in hand. As an actor who had performed on stage at Ford's Theater, Booth knew the place well.

This time, however, he came to play a different role.

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

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

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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

## Questions 2 Ponder

### How Does Resentment Fuel Disharmony and Disunity?

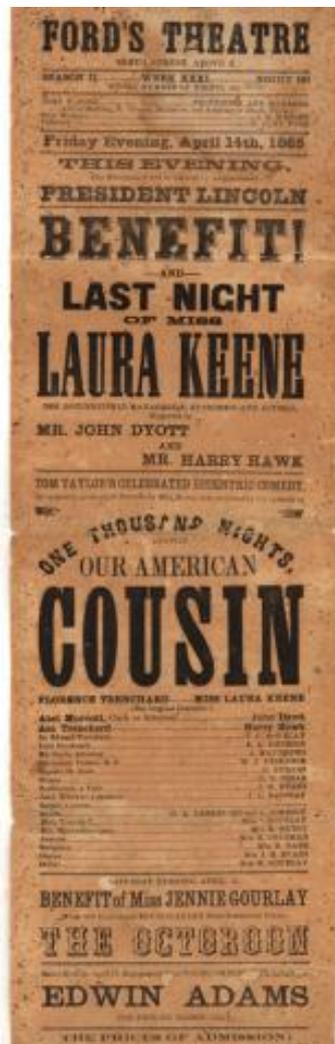
What did President Lincoln mean when, on the day he was shot, he told his cabinet members (among other things): "We must extinguish our resentment if we expect harmony and union?"

How does resentment fuel disharmony and disunity?

Was the President naive in thinking that people, who'd just fought a long and deadly war, could "extinguish our resentment?" Explain your answer.

Do you think President Lincoln's words apply today, both in our own countries and throughout the world? Why, or why not?

## Media Stream



Ford Theater Ticket - Our American Cousin

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Ford-Theater-Ticket-Our-American-Cousin>



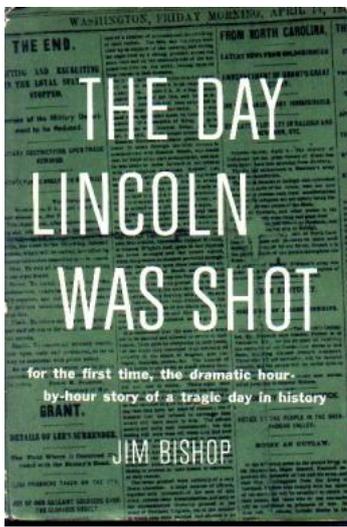
Laura Keene - Star of "Our American Cousin"

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Laura-Keene-Star-of-Our-American-Cousin->



### The Day Lincoln was Shot - by Jim Bishop

Image of book cover, online courtesy Amazon.com.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Day-Lincoln-was-Shot-by-Jim-Bishop>



### Henry Reed Rathbone - Stabbed by John Wilkes Booth

Photo of Henry Reed Rathbone, maintained at the Lincoln Museum (in Fort Wayne, Indiana); online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Henry-Reed-Rathbone-Stabbed-by-John-Wilkes-Booth>

### Clara Harris - Present at Lincoln's Assassination

The image on the left depicts Clara Harris after she married her fiancé, Major Henry Reed Rathbone. Both Rathbone and Harris were present, at Ford's Theatre, on the night that John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Lincoln.

A photo depicting a younger woman, on the right—which is maintained at the U.S. National Archives—is often misidentified as Clara Harris. Historians have verified, however, that the right-side image is not Clara Harris.

Later in life, Major Rathbone—who never quite got over what happened the night Lincoln was killed—seems to have lost his mind. Booth had injured him, too—with a knife—and just before Christmas, in 1883, Rathbone took a knife and a pistol and tried to kill himself and his children. He succeeded in killing his wife, Clara.

Click on the image for a better view.

Photo on the left, by an unnamed photographer, depicting Clara Harris Rathbone is [online via Ford's Theatre](#). Public Domain.

Photo on the right, by an unnamed photographer and maintained at the U.S. National Archives (where it is misidentified as "Clara Harris"), [online via U.S. National Archives](#). Public Domain.

View this asset at:

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### President Lincoln's Top Hat

Photo, courtesy Smithsonian Institute.

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View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/President-Lincoln-s-Top-Hat>



### Lincoln's Red Rocking Chair

Image online, courtesy the Travel and Escape website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lincoln-s-Red-Rocking-Chair>



### Ford's Theatre - Where Lincoln Was Shot

While President Lincoln was attending a play at Ford's Theatre—on the night of April 14, 1865—John Wilkes Booth, an actor, entered the Presidential box and shot Lincoln at close range. This image (of an albumen print) depicts the exterior of Ford's Theatre as it appeared soon after the murder. We can see the appearance of blank bunting, depicting a nation in mourning, draped on the building.

Created in 1865, this print is maintained at the Library of Congress. Its original caption is:

*Ford's Theatre, scene of the assassination*

*Click on the image for a much-better view.*

*Print, maintained at the Library of Congress, has a digital ID number of LC-DIG-ppmsca-23872 and is based on an original print (LC-B8184-7765). Public Domain.*

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Ford-s-Theatre-Where-Lincoln-Was-Shot>



*dropped my night-key in pulling out my knife, I hurried back to the theatre; and when I went into the box, and was searching around for it on the floor; I knocked my foot against the pistol, and stooping down, I picked it up. I held it up and cried out, "I have found the pistol!"*

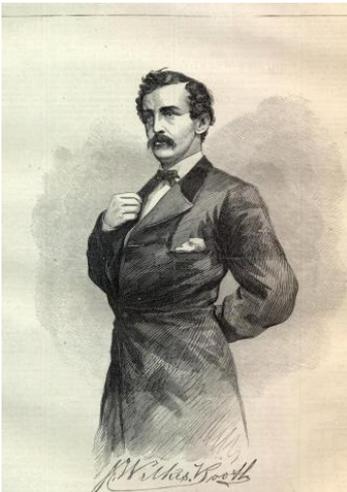
### Murder Weapon - Derringer of John Wilkes Booth

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Park Service (NPS).

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View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Murder-Weapon-Derringer-of-John-Wilkes-Booth>

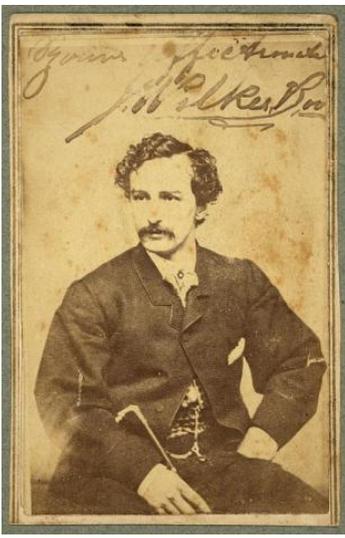


### John Wilkes Booth

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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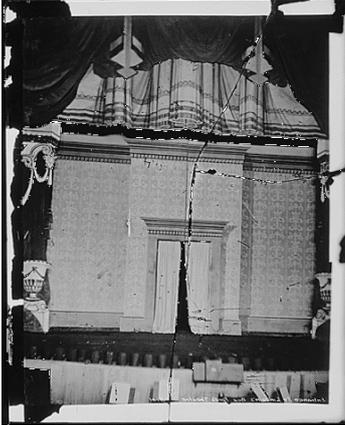


### John Wilkes Booth Portrait and Autograph

Image, described above, maintained by the Library of Congress. Its reproduction numbers are: LC-DIG-ppmsca-23892 (digital file from original) LC-USZ62-9713 (b&w film copy neg.). Public Domain.

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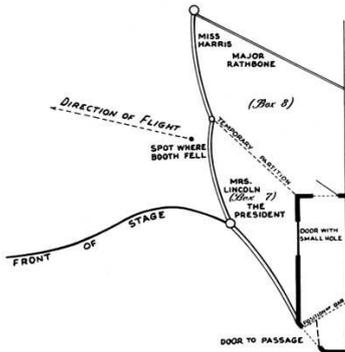
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/John-Wilkes-Booth-Portrait-and-Autograph>



### Stage at Ford's Theater

Image online, courtesy the U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Stage-at-Ford-s-Theater>



### Ford's Theater - Seating, Time of Lincoln Shooting

Image online, courtesy the U.S. National Park Service.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Ford-s-Theater-Seating-Time-of-Lincoln-Shooting>