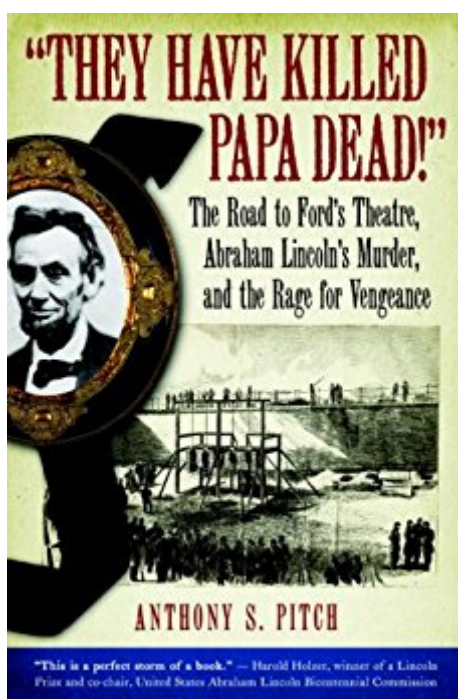


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"They Have Killed Papa Dead!": The Road To Ford's Theatre, Abraham Lincoln's Murder, And The Rage For Vengeance



Synopsis

The assassination of Abraham Lincoln is a central drama of the American experience. Its impact is felt to this day, and the basic story is known to all. Anthony Pitch's thrilling account of the Lincoln conspiracy and its aftermath transcends the mere facts of that awful night during which dashing actor John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln in the head and would-be assassin Lewis Payne butchered Secretary of State William Seward in the bed of his own home. "They Have Killed Papa Dead!" transports the reader to one of the most breathtaking moments in history, and reveals much that is new about the stories, passions, and times of those who shaped this great tragedy. Virtually every word of Anthony Pitch's account is based on primary source material: new quotes from previously unpublished diaries, letters and journals – authentic contemporary voices writing with freshness and clarity as eyewitnesses or intimate participants – new images, a new vision and understanding of one of America's defining moments. With an unwavering fidelity to historical accuracy, Pitch provides new confirmation of threats against the president-elect's life as he traveled to Washington by train for his first inauguration, and a vivid personal account of John Wilkes Booth being physically restrained from approaching Lincoln at his second inauguration. Perhaps most chillingly, new details come to light about conditions in the special prison where the civilian conspirators accused of participating in the Lincoln assassination endured tortuous conditions in extreme isolation and deprivation, hooded and shackled, before and even during their military trial. Pitch masterfully synthesizes the findings of his prodigious research into a tight, gripping narrative that adds important new insights to our national story.

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Customer Reviews

Only a couple of years ago, a full-length book about John Wilkes Booth's twelve days in the wilderness was published. The condensed version of that saga related in this book is even better, somehow making the reader feel sorry for the suffering endured by that evil fellow. Mr. Pitch is quite a good writer, and his nine years of research in primary source material shows up in these pages. Back in the 60's I visited Ford's Theater, and the Peterson House in which Lincoln died. At the theater, I managed to get away from the crowd and walk alone at the rear of the balcony, overlooking Tenth Street. I found a room between the auditorium and the front wall of the building that looked as if it had been untouched in 100 years. That moment, along with looking at the assassination items displayed on the main floor, has stayed fresh in my mind all these years. This book brings the tragic events to vivid life, from the threats aimed at Lincoln en route to take office for his first term, to the savage murder attempt in the home of Secretary of State William Seward. I'm a Yankee, and so I have no sympathy for Booth's decision to kill Mr. Lincoln after his plans for a kidnap were ruined by Lee's surrender. Yet sympathy for some of his co-conspirators is possible. Eight were tried together after Booth's killing in Virginia, and four of those were hung. The other four were imprisoned under horrid conditions for four years before being paroled. Mr. Pitch does not provide his own scholarly opinion as to whether Mary Surratt was guilty enough to deserve hanging, or Dr. Mudd innocent enough to escape it (by one vote).

It is almost impossible to find fault with this book. The author has written a readable, detailed history of Lincoln's Assassination. I expect this book to become the standard secondary source on the subject, while raising the bar on assassination histories to an almost impossible height in the process. We have an excellent overview of the kidnapping plot and the change to murder by Booth. Each of the assassins, conspirators and helpers has a full portrait. The attack on Lincoln and Seward is detailed, as is the escape of each of the attackers. The pursuit, capture, interrogation and confessions of the participants are well reported. The indictment, military trial, imprisonment and execution are almost a book within the book. The author covers the questions raised by the military

trial, the defense lawyers actions and press coverage in an evenhanded non-judgmental way giving us a full picture of the events. All of this detail stays in a story that always is moving and never drags. Somehow, the author manages to work the details into the story without burdening it. These details form a personal interaction with the participants that most histories lack. The account of the assassination and the hours following are very well done. The author captures the uncertainty, fear and anguish Washington feels as the event unfolds. This is powerful writing, showing how different America was and how upsetting things were. Lincoln was the first President murdered which adds to the horror and fear. We tend to overlook this 145 years later but this is an important fact that the details impress on us. While this is a different America, some things do not change. Throughout the book are little asides about the scramble for the reward.

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