



Responding to Lincoln's Assassination

A Student Activity from Ford's Theatre

Created by David McKenzie

Grade Range: 6-8

Introduction:

On April 14, 1865, the actor, Confederate sympathizer, and white supremacist John Wilkes Booth shot President Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. Lincoln died the following morning.

Immediately, word of Lincoln's death spread around the United States and eventually circled the globe.

How did people react? In this activity, you'll take a tour of what was then the United States, exploring that question. What you'll find may surprise you.

In some of these primary sources, you might find unfamiliar words. Some definitions are in the activity, but we encourage you to look up any words you don't know!

How to Use This Activity:

This activity contains primary sources showing how people reacted to the Lincoln assassination. Each primary source includes:

- *A map, showing where it came from.*
- *Information about the document or object.*
- *Questions for you to ponder as you look at it.*

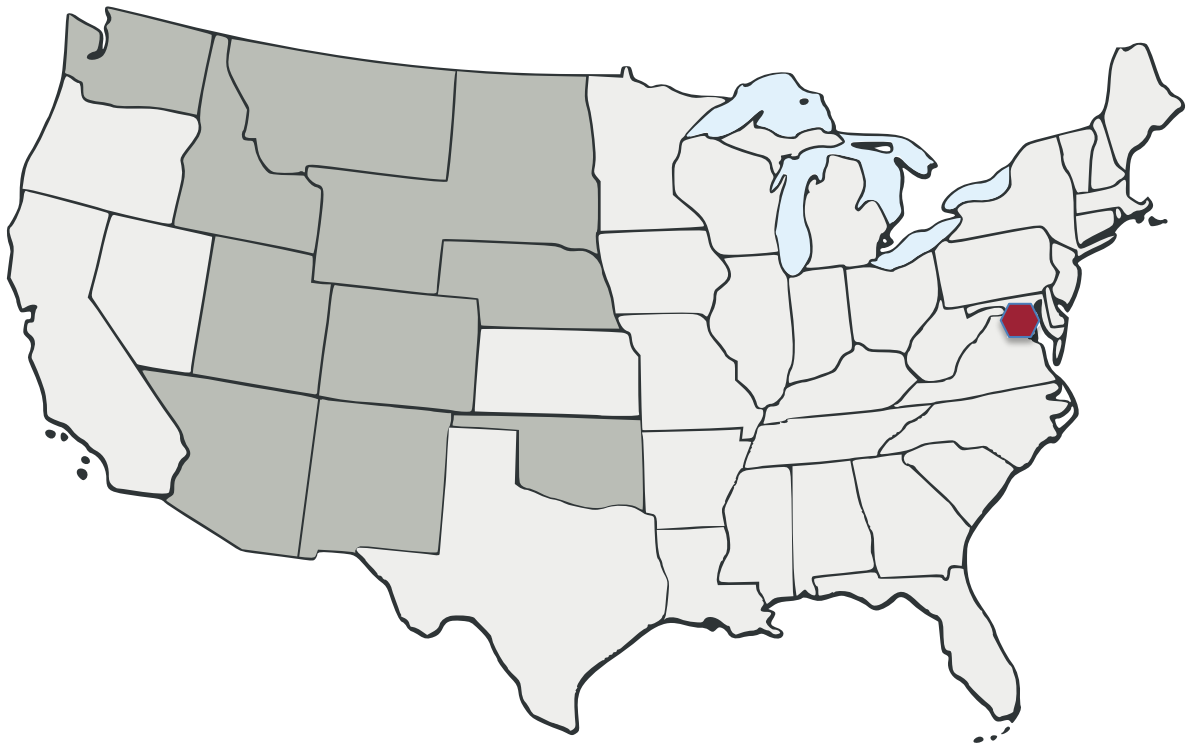
This activity concludes with a writing assignment.

Turn the page to begin the activity.



Washington, D.C.

April 14, 1865



Each map shows the origin of the source as a red dot. The states that had been admitted to the U.S. at the time of Lincoln's assassination are in light gray; the dark gray areas were still territories in 1865.

Booth shot Lincoln around 10:15 p.m. on April 14, 1865, at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C.

After Lincoln died the following morning, plans were made for the slain president's funeral. Eventually, federal officials decided to hold a funeral procession on Wednesday, April 19, 1865, along Pennsylvania Avenue, between the White House and U.S. Capitol.

George Harrington was placed in charge. Immediately, different groups of people asked him for permission to participate in the procession. **Turn the page to see a letter from one of those groups.**

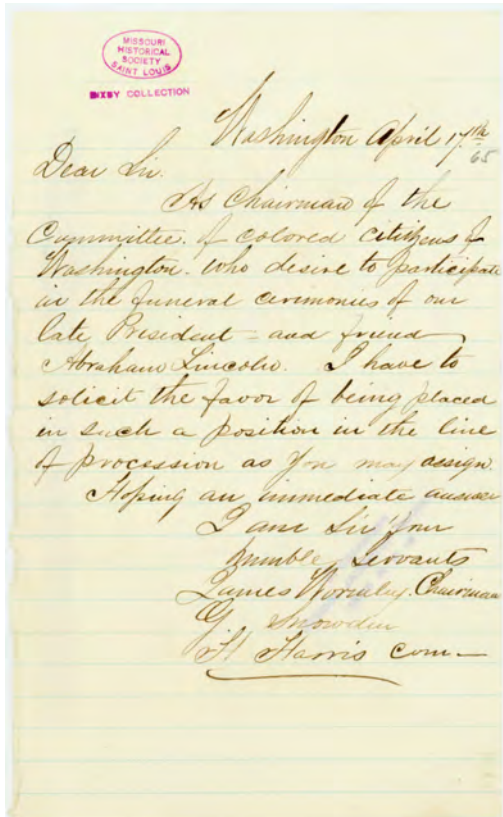


Letter: James Wormley, G. Snowden and H. Harris to George Harrington

Washington, D.C.

April 17, 1865

Full source: <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/524>



Transcription:

Washington, D.C.

April 17th, 1865

Dear Sir

The chairman of the Committee of Colored Citizens of Washington - who desire to participate in the funeral ceremonies of our late President - and friend, Abraham Lincoln. I have to solicit the favor of being placed in such a position in the line of procession as you may assign.

Hoping your immediate answer,

I am Sir your humble servants,

James Wormley, Chairman

G. Snowden

H. Harris, Com.

Questions

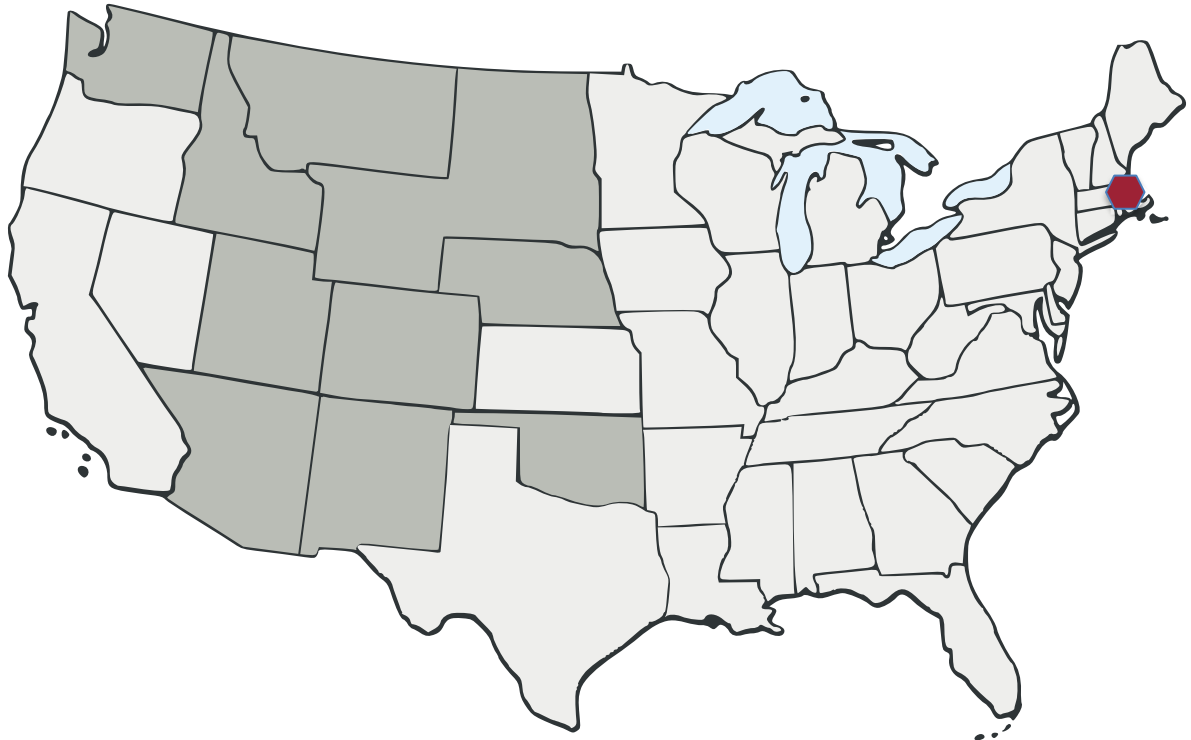
1. Who might the Committee of Colored Citizens of Washington have represented?
2. How did the Committee of Colored Citizens of Washington feel about Lincoln's assassination?
3. How did they want to express their feelings?

Turn the page.



Boston, Massachusetts

April 15, 1865



Each map shows the origin of the source as a red dot. The states that had been admitted to the U.S. at the time of Lincoln's assassination are in light gray; the dark gray areas were still territories in 1865.

News of Lincoln's assassination quickly spread around the country. Places on the telegraph line, like Boston, Massachusetts, found out almost immediately. Massachusetts had supported the United States (Union) cause during the Civil War.

Turn the page to see how a 14-year-old girl reacted when she found out the news.



Sarah Gooll Putnam Diary

Boston, Massachusetts

April 15, 1865

Full source: <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/285>

14 April
glee. The little dog was taken away by John
I read Quentish Dunsford, and dear Aunt
Louisa came in in the evening, and so did
Mr. Greenough, and Mr. Parker.
15 Thus I packed up some of my things, and
stayed to Alice Russell to dinner tea, where I
stayed awfully late.
16 This packing went on at a great rate. Just
think, we shall be out of this house Monday
or Tuesday. I went to Aunt Louisa's to tea.
Grandmother came to our house for tea.
17 The last - Now guess my feelings, when
coming down to breakfast, at Mother's saying
"The president is killed!" I stood so for
a few minutes without speech. ^{Oh} ^{Oh}
sing. I can not realize it yet. ^{Oh}
Poor, dear, old, Abe. Now I
will tell how his death came
on, without any sentiment, for that does
no good. Last night he went with Mrs
Lincoln to see "Our American Cousin", acted
(at Washington) During one of the acts
a pistol shot was heard, and a shriek
from Mrs Lincoln, and before people were
could collect their senses. A man flourishing

Massachusetts Historical Society

Transcription:

15th Sat. Now guess my feelings when
Coming down to breakfast as Mother's saying
"The President is killed!" I stood so for
A few minutes without speak -
Ing. I can not realize it yet -
Poor, dear, old, Abe,"

- Sarah Gooll Putnam

Questions

1. What emotions did Sarah Gooll Putnam express about Lincoln's assassination?
2. Notice the drawing. What do you think it is? How can that help us know how Putnam felt?
3. Sarah refers to the president as "poor, dear, old Abe." What does this tell us about how she felt about him? Would we use this language to describe a recent president? Why or why not?

Turn the page.



Cleveland, Ohio

April 15, 1865



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News of Lincoln's assassination quickly spread around the country. Places on the telegraph line, like Cleveland, Ohio, found out almost immediately. Ohio had supported the United States (Union) cause during the Civil War.

Turn the page to see what the city government planned to show how local citizens felt—and what happened when one man expressed a different opinion.

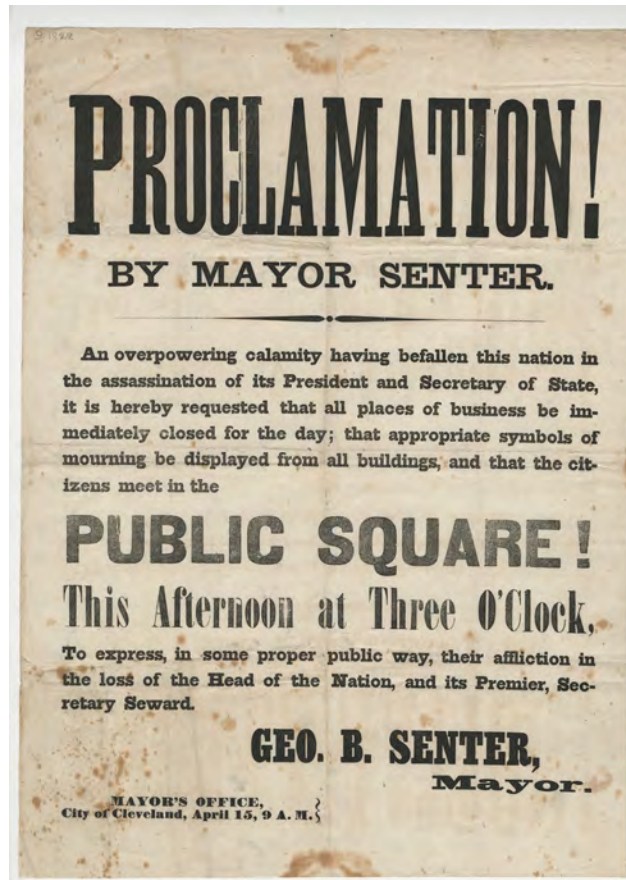


Proclamation! By Mayor Senter

Cleveland, Ohio

April 15, 1865

Full source: <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/221>



Questions

1. What steps did Mayor Senter order residents of Cleveland to take immediately?
2. How do you think he expects locals to feel about the events?

Turn the page to see a different opinion that one local citizen expressed.

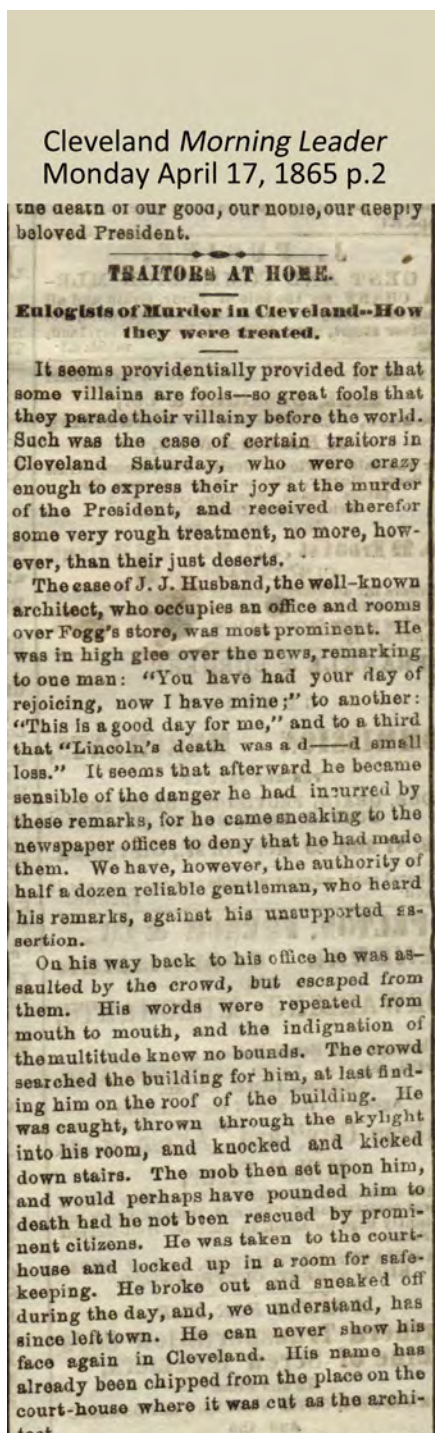


Cleveland Morning Leader: "Traitors at Home"

Cleveland, Ohio

April 17, 1865

Full source: <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/223>



Questions

1. Did everyone at the rally on Public Square mourn Lincoln's death?
2. What opinion did J.J. Husband express about Lincoln?
3. How did the crowd react to J.J. Husband showing his different opinion?

Turn the page to see how else locals in Cleveland showed their feelings toward J.J. Husband.



Cornerstone of Third Cuyahoga County Courthouse

Cleveland, Ohio

April 17, 1865

Full source: <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/224>



This is the cornerstone from the Third Cuyahoga County Courthouse in Cleveland, Ohio, erected in 1858. A cornerstone typically shows the name of the officials responsible for a building, along with those who designed and built it.

Questions

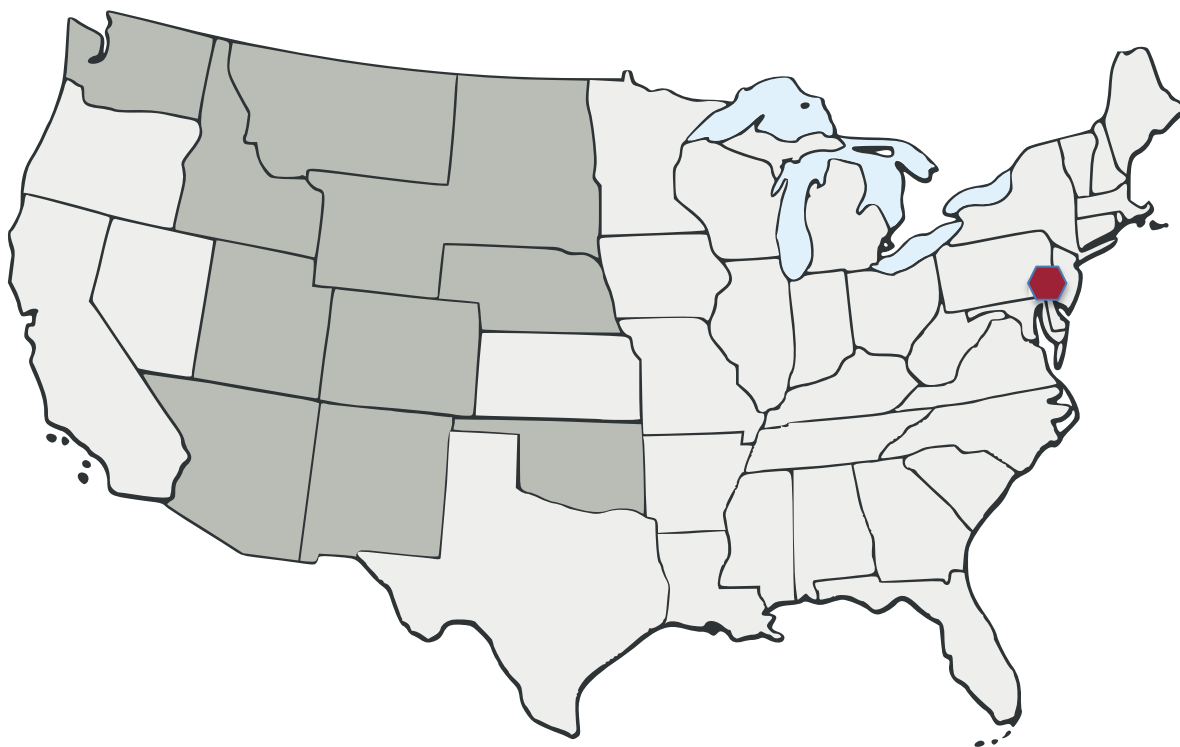
1. What do you notice about this cornerstone? Is there a piece that seems to be missing?
2. The architect who designed this courthouse was named J.J. Husband. What did you learn about Husband on the previous page?
3. Why do you think Husband's name is no longer on the cornerstone?

Turn the page.



Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

April 15, 1865



Each map shows the origin of the source as a red dot. The states that had been admitted to the U.S. at the time of Lincoln's assassination are in light gray; the dark gray areas were still territories in 1865.

Philadelphia was on the telegraph lines and found out almost immediately about Lincoln's assassination. Pennsylvania had supported the United States (Union) cause during the Civil War.

Turn the page to see how Emilie Davis, an African American woman living in Philadelphia, talked about Lincoln's assassination.

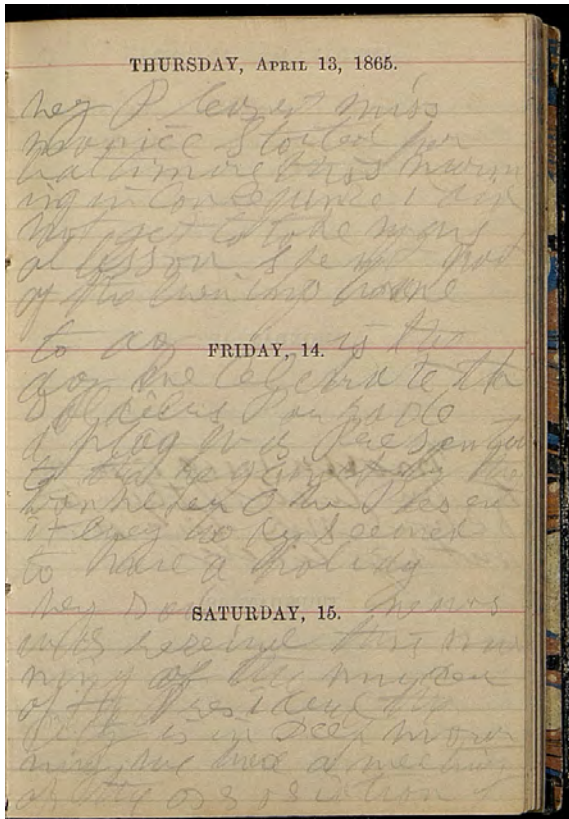


Emilie Davis Diary

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

April 14-16, 1865

Full source: <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/549>



Transcription:

Friday, April 14, 1865

to day is the day we Celebrate the soldiers Parrade
a flag was presented to the regiment by the [...] very
Plesent it every body seemed to have a holiday

Saturday, April 15, 1865

very sad newes was received this morning of the
murder of the President. the city is in deep mourning,
we had a meeting of the association

Sunday, April 16, 1865

It Decided to PosPone the fare very fine Day everyone
seems to Partake of the solemnity of the times Docto
Jones spoke for us

- Emilie Davis

Questions

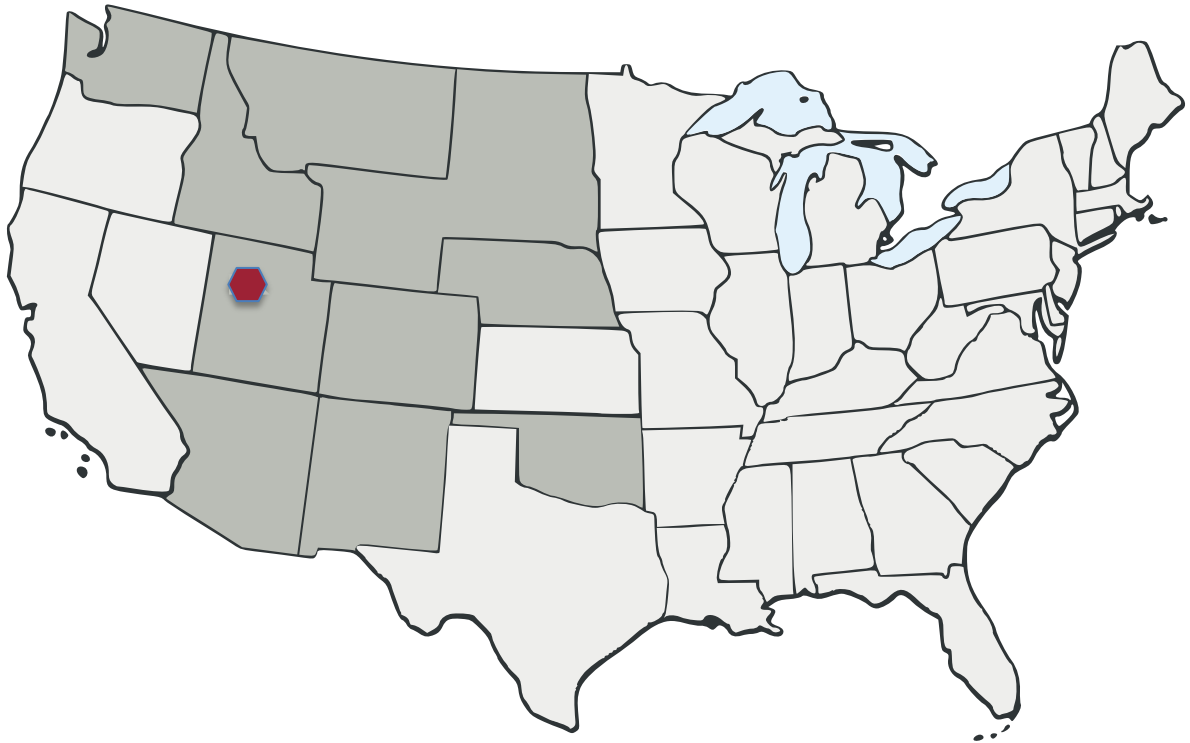
1. What differences do you see between Davis's diary entries on April 14 and 15?
2. How do you think she feels about the events?

Turn the page.



Salt Lake City, Utah Territory

April 15, 1865



Each map shows the origin of the source as a red dot. The states that had been admitted to the U.S. at the time of Lincoln's assassination are in light gray; the dark gray areas were still territories in 1865.

Salt Lake City was on the telegraph lines and found out almost immediately about Lincoln's assassination. Utah Territory had supported the United States (Union) cause during the Civil War.

Turn the page to see how elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints drew on their own experiences to comprehend what had just happened.

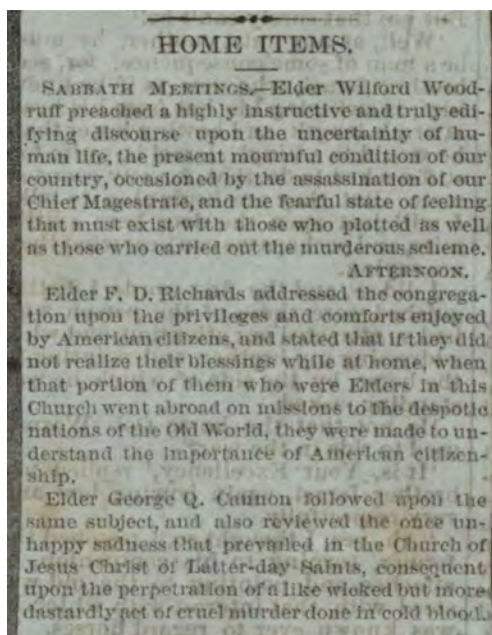


Deseret News: "Home Items"

Salt Lake City, Utah Territory

April 19, 1865

Full source: <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/1210>



Transcription:

HOME ITEMS.

SABBATH MEETINGS. – Elder Wilford Woodruff preached a highly instructive and truly edifying discourse upon the uncertainty of human life, the present mournful condition of our country, occasioned by the assassination of our Chief Magistrate, and the fearful state of feeling that must exist with those who plotted as well as those who carried out the murderous scheme.

AFTERNOON.

Elder F. D. Richards addressed the congregation upon the privileges and comforts enjoyed by American citizens, and stated that if they did not realize their blessings while at home, when that portion of them who were Elders in this Church went abroad on missions to the despotic nations of the Old World, they were made to understand the importance of American citizenship.

Elder George Q. Cannon followed upon the same subject and also reviewed the once unhappy sadness that prevailed in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, consequent upon the perpetration of a like wicked but more dastardly act of cruel murder done in cold blood.

Questions

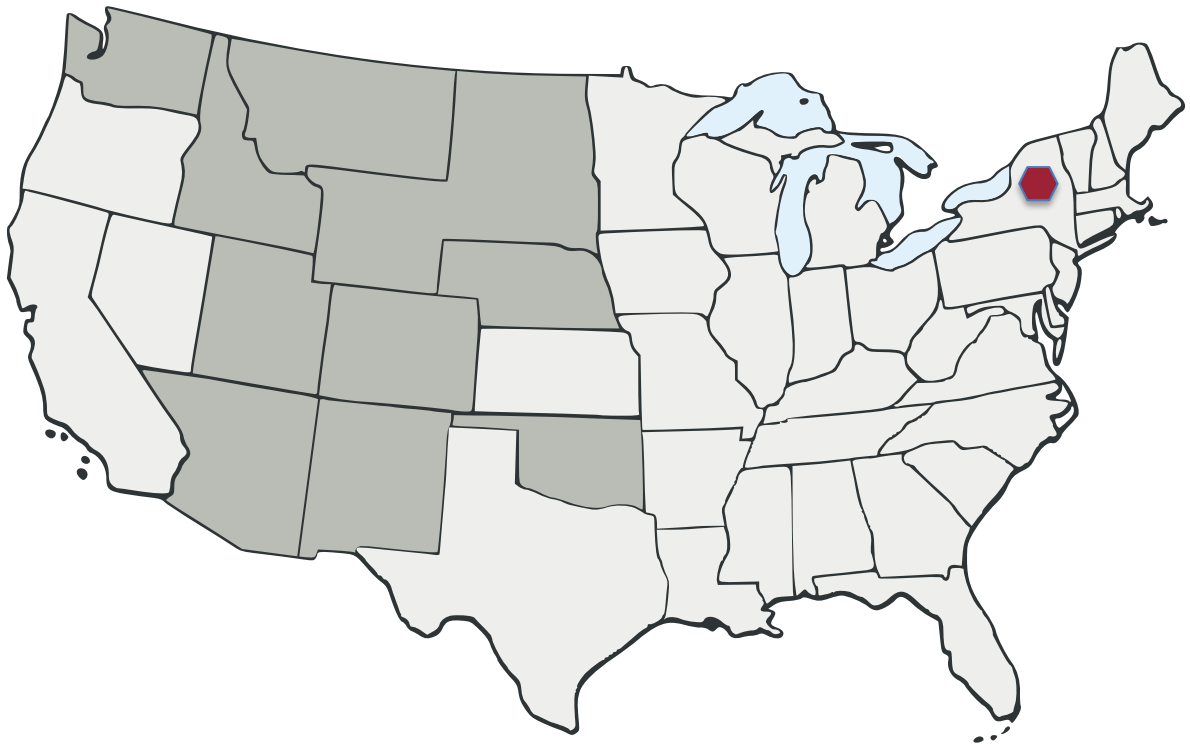
1. How did these elders of the Mormon church talk about Lincoln's assassination?
2. Elder George Q. Cannon referred to the murder of the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1844. How did he compare it to Lincoln's assassination?

Turn the page.



Troy, New York

April 16, 1865



Each map shows the origin of the source as a red dot. The states that had been admitted to the U.S. at the time of Lincoln's assassination are in light gray; the dark gray areas were still territories in 1865.

Booth assassinated Lincoln on Good Friday, a holiday in the Christian calendar that commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus. The following Sunday was Easter (the commemoration of Jesus's resurrection) for Christians, and during Passover for Jewish Americans. Ministers, priests, and rabbis across the country addressed Lincoln's assassination in sermons. New York had supported the United States (Union) cause during the Civil War.

Turn the page to see how a minister in Troy, New York, made sense of Lincoln's assassination.

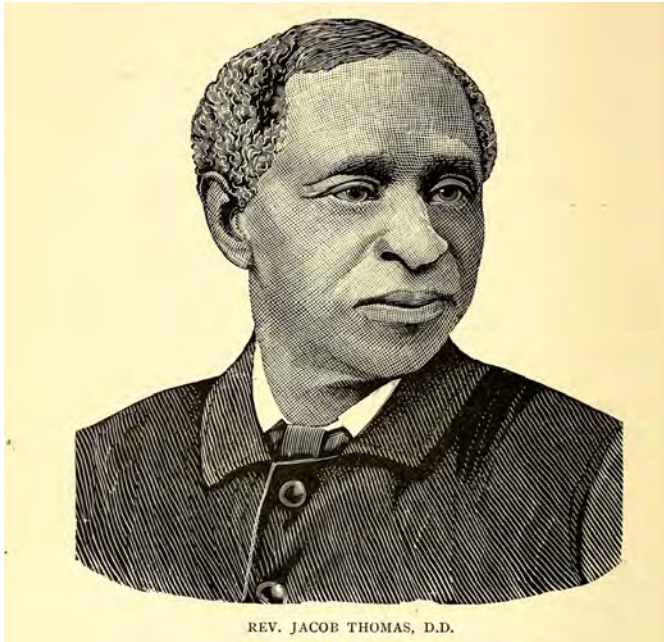


Sermon Preached in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

Troy, New York

April 16, 1865

Full source: <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/1203>



REV. JACOB THOMAS, D.D.

Transcription:

"A few days ago joy and gladness filled every heart. All who were loyal to the government rejoiced and gave thanks to Almighty God because of the victory won, the downfall of the rebel capital. This intelligence was too glorious to be unalloyed.

Ere our joy had subsided, sorrow overtook us. News reached us from Washington of the bloody deed perpetrated there. We would not believe it. It could not be possible that a creature in the form of man could be found so God-forsaken, as to take the life of the man who had malice for none but charity for all!"

- Reverend Jacob Thomas, Troy, N.Y., April 1865

Questions

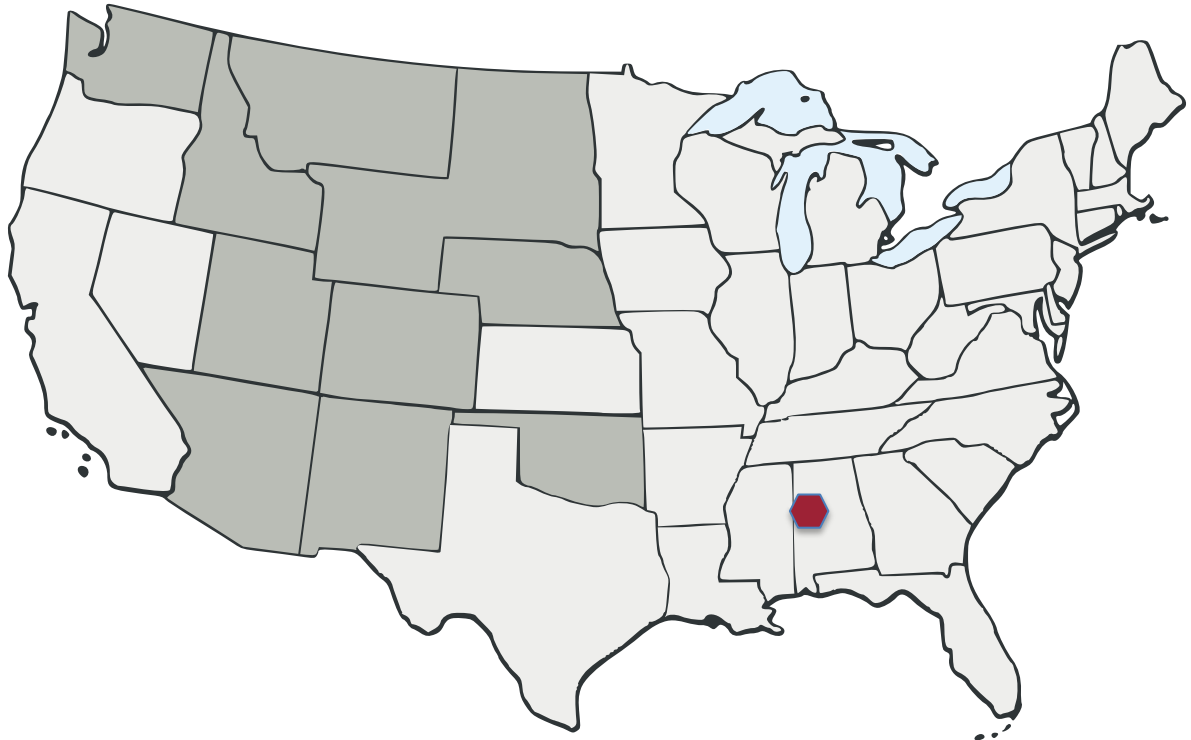
1. What emotions did Reverend Jacob Thomas express about Lincoln's assassination?
2. How might it have felt to go from celebration to sorrow in the course of a day?

Turn the page.



Demopolis, Alabama

April 19, 1865



Each map shows the origin of the source as a red dot. The states that had been admitted to the U.S. at the time of Lincoln's assassination are in light gray; the dark gray areas were still territories in 1865.

Some parts of the United States, particularly states like Alabama that had seceded, took longer to find out about the Lincoln assassination. Rumors spread—some true, some false—in the following days. News reached Demopolis, Alabama, on April 19, 1865. Alabama had supported the Confederate cause during the Civil War.

Turn the page to see how the newspaper in Demopolis reported the news, and what other news the editors heard.



Alabama Beacon (reprinted from Demopolis Herald): "Glorious News"

Demopolis, Alabama

April 19, 1865

Full source: <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/192>

[From Demopolis Herald, 19th.]
GLORIOUS NEWS.
Lincoln and Seward Assassinated !
LEE DEFEATS GRANT.
Andy Johnson Inaugurated President.

We have been favored with the following private dispatch, which we hasten to lay before our readers, with the hope that it may prove true :

DEMOPOLIS, April 18, 1865 —TO COL. GARNER :—
SIR—The operator at Meridian, has just telegraphed me that Memphis papers state, over the signature of Secretary Stanton, that Lincoln and Seward were both assassinated the same night at Washington City. Lincoln was shot through the head in the theatre : Seward slain while sick in bed.

Andy Johnson was inaugurated as President of the United States on the 15th.

This is said to be true beyond a doubt.

I inquired particularly from the operator as to whether there was anything more in regard to Lee's capitulation, and he said nothing at all from Northern papers.

A gentleman just from Selma says it is believed in Selma that Lee and Johnston had effected a junction and whipped Grant soundly. Passengers, wounded soldiers and officers confirm this.

This is given on the authority of the operator at Meridian.

JOHN W. HENLEY, Operator.

Questions

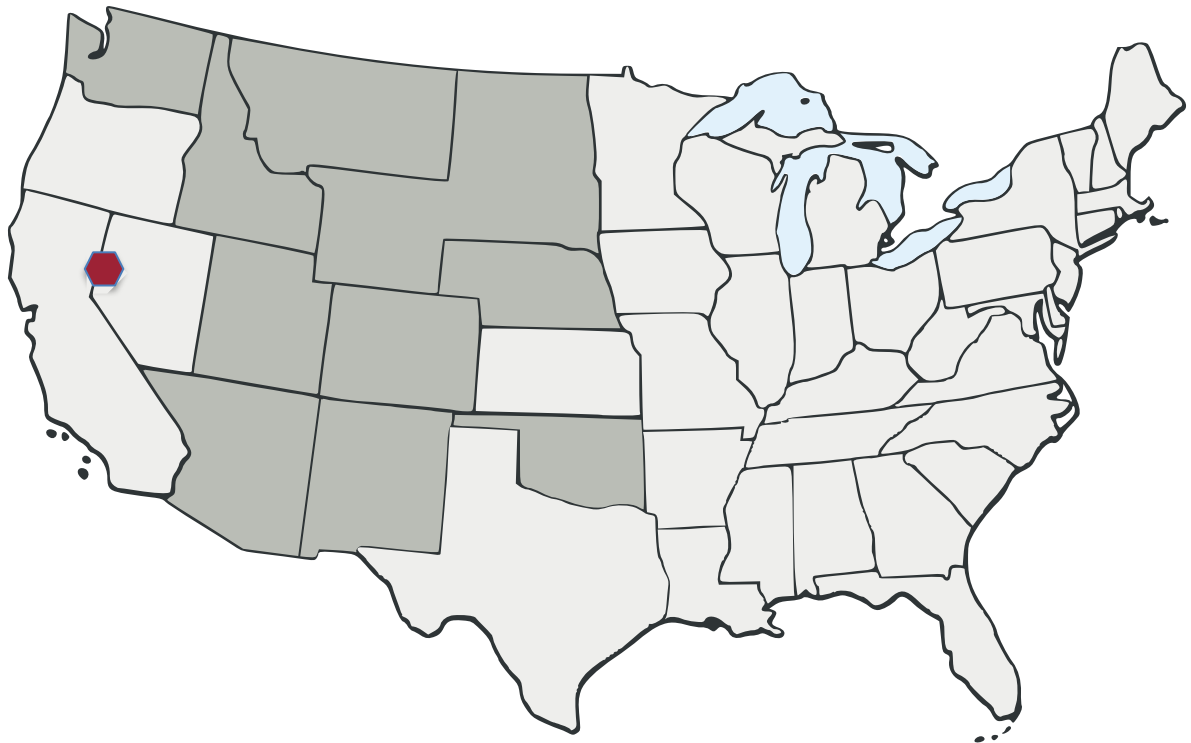
1. What sentiment did the *Demopolis Herald* express about Lincoln's assassination?
2. What other news did this story report? Based on your knowledge of the Civil War, is the headline "Lee defeats Grant" accurate?
3. What is the source of the *Herald's* information? Do you think that source is accurate?

Turn the page.



Virginia City, Nevada

April 23, 1865



Each map shows the origin of the source as a red dot. The states that had been admitted to the U.S. at the time of Lincoln's assassination are in light gray; the dark gray areas were still territories in 1865.

While the U.S. Civil War raged, French troops invaded Mexico and, working together with Mexican monarchists (people who supported having a king or queen, rather than an elected president), put an emperor in charge of Mexico. The republican government of President Benito Juárez kept resisting. Across the West, groups of Mexican Americans formed *juntas patrióticas*—patriotic clubs—to support Mexican republicans and the Union cause in the U.S. Civil War. They saw those causes as one. Nevada had supported the United States (Union) cause during the Civil War and had become a state in 1864.

Turn the page to see how a *junta patriótica* in Virginia City, Nevada, spoke about Lincoln's assassination.



Patriotic Club of Mexico

Virginia City, Nevada

April 23, 1865

Full source: <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/1086>

El Sr. Gonzalez pidió la palabra y dijo :

Señores : Un hecho inesperado ha venido á llenar de luto los corazones de todo hijo del continente americano. ¡ Abraham Lincoln ha sido victima de un asesinato ! En la noche del 14 de abril fué asesinado por mano del infame John Wilkes Booth. ¡ Que la maldicion de toda la América caiga sobre este Cain, que ha hecho desaparecer del mundo á este grande ciudadano, la estrella del Norte, y el guardian de toda la América. Y se atreven á llamar tirano, todos los cómplices de este asesinato, á un hombre que ha sacrificado su existencia por la libertad de cuatro millones de seres humanos. ¿ A éste llaman tirano ? Hijos del continente americano ! La mano parricida de un asesino, nos ha quitado á Abraham Lincoln, á ese hombre inmortal de América que hizo libre al infeliz esclavo. A ese grande hombre que tuvo la gloria antes de expirar, de ver la rendicion de Richmond, capital de los Estados rebeldes, y la de Lee, general en jefe de las fuerzas de los mismos Estados.

Mejicanos ! Llorémos la pérdida de este virtuoso ciudadano, mártir de la libertad de América : Si llorémosle, por

que ha sido victima de un asesinato, mas sus doctrinas que entrañó en el corazón de los pueblos no desaparecerán jamás, y su nombre será eternizado en la historia al lado de los de Washington y Franklyn. Hoy lo sucede Andrew Johnson como presidente, y éste primer magistrado que vá á dirigir los destinos del país, esperámos siga el mismo sendero en su administracion, que su antecesor , y que con la ayuda de las armas de Grant, Sheridan, Sherman y otros gefes del partido republicano, active la causa que sostienen, y pronto verán realizada la paz que es lo que descan los pueblos.

Translation:

"Gentlemen: An unexpected event has come to fill with grief the hearts of every son of America. Abraham Lincoln has become a victim of assassination! On the night of April 14, he was assassinated by the hand of the villainous John Wilkes Booth. May the curse of all the Americas fall on this Cain for this evil of taking from the world this great citizen, the Northern Star, and the guardian angel of all the Americas. To dare call tyrants, all the accomplices of this assassination, of a man who sacrificed his existence for the liberty of 4 million human beings. Do you call this tyranny? [...]

Mexicans! Let us cry for the loss of this virtuous citizen, martyr for the liberty of America. Let us cry because he has become the victim of an assassin. His teachings engraved upon the hearts of the people shall never disappear, and his name shall eternally live in history alongside Washington and Franklin."

- Rafael González, Virginia City, Nevada, April 23, 1865

Questions

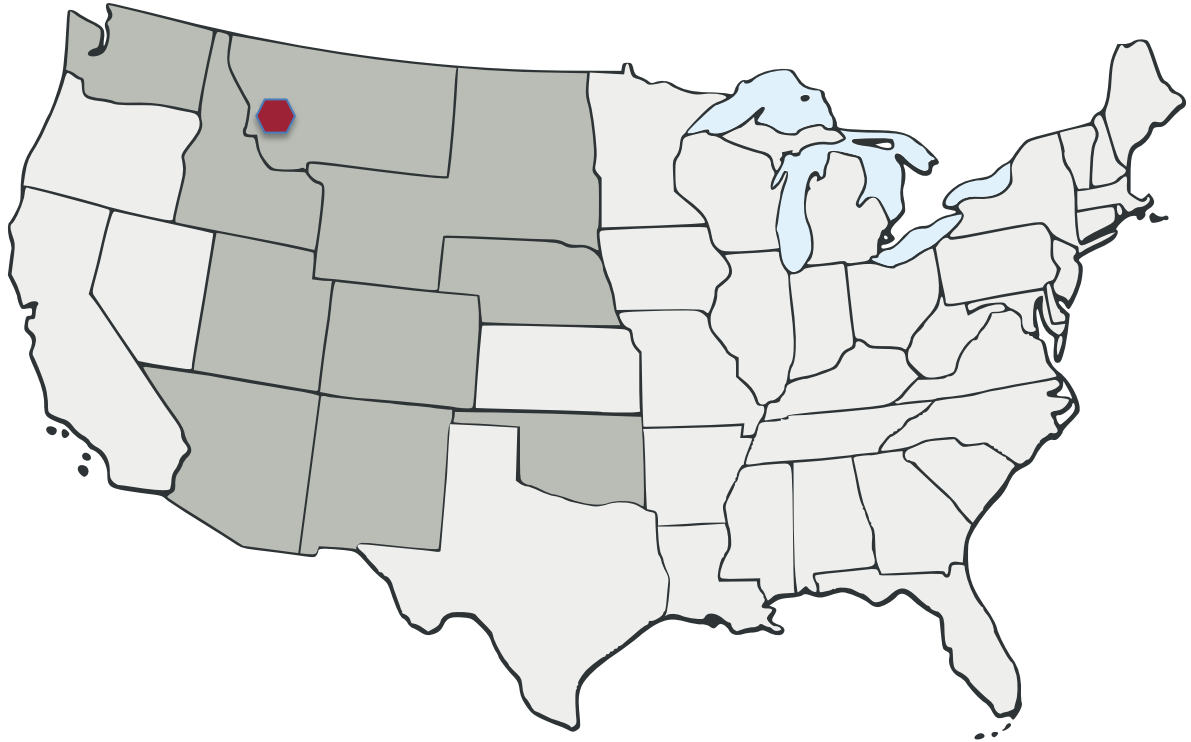
1. What emotions did Rafael González express about Lincoln's assassination?
2. What does González mean when he refers to the "Americas"? Does he just think Lincoln is significant for the United States?

Turn the page.



Virginia City, Montana Territory

Late April 1865



Virginia City, Montana, was part of a gold mining area by 1865. A few years before, a group of white Southerners had founded the town and decided to call it Varina—in honor of Varina Davis, the wife of Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Not surprisingly, the U.S. Post Office refused, and Virginia City was the compromise name. Montana Territory had supported the United States (Union) cause during the Civil War.

Turn the page to see what a young girl in Virginia City, Montana Territory, remembered (many years later, when she was in her seventies) about how she and her friends reacted to Lincoln's assassination.



Mary Sheehan Ronan Memoir

Virginia City, Montana Territory

1929

Full source: <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/550>

Transcription:

"It pains me to recall what we did when we were told of Lincoln's death. The news reached Virginia City in April 1865. [...]"

The Southern girls, by far the majority, picked up their ankle-length skirts to their knees and jigged and hippity-hopped around and around the room. They cheered for the downfall of that great, good, simple man whom they had been taught to regard as the archenemy of the South. They believed him the first and last cause of any and every misfortune that had befallen their parents and driven them to seek new fortunes amid the hardships of a far western frontier.

When my playmates called, "Come on, Mollie, come on join the dance; you're from Kentucky; you're a Southerner!" I did join half-heartedly, with a guilty feeling.

At home that evening I told what we had done. My father was shocked. 'I am ashamed of you, Mollie,' he said, 'I am a Democrat, but I am first, last, and always for the Union and for Lincoln.'"

- Mary Sheehan Ronan, Virginia City, Montana, 1929



Questions

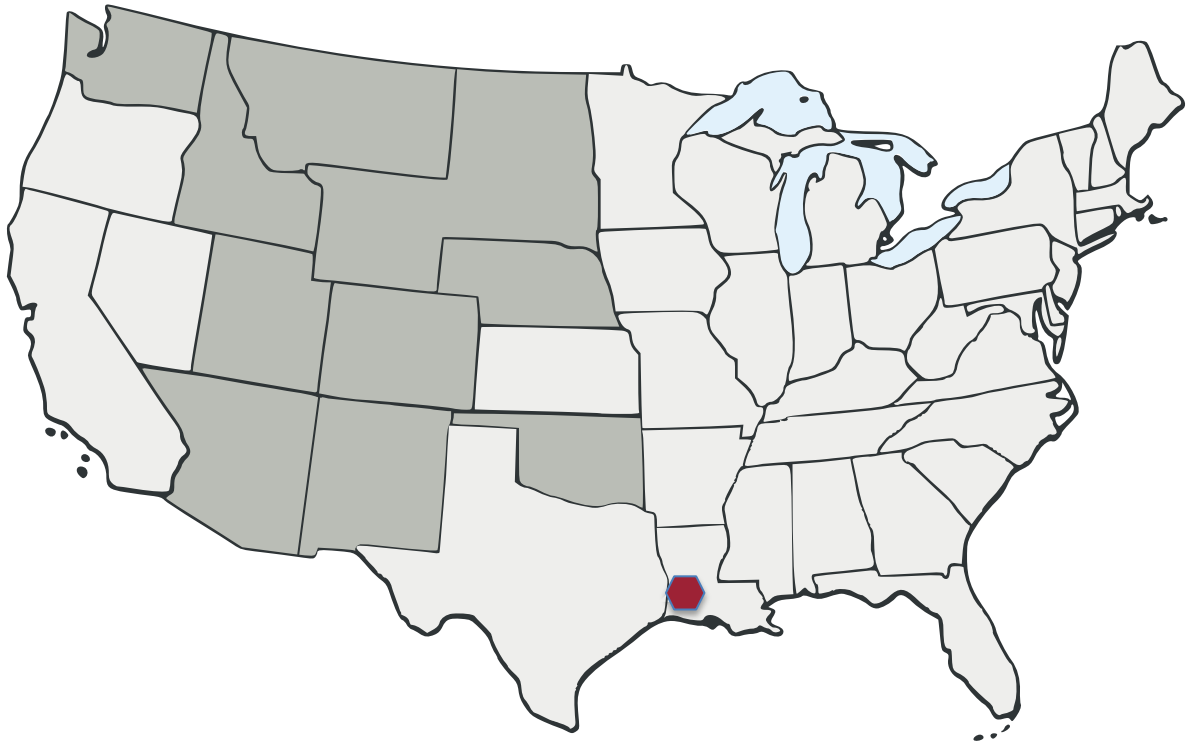
1. What emotions did Ronan and her friends express about Lincoln's assassination?
2. Ronan wrote this memoir in 1929—seven years after the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial, and at a time when even former Confederates praised Lincoln. How do you think that might have influenced what she wrote?
3. What does this tell us about the difference between using a diary and using a memoir as a primary source?

Turn the page.



Avery Island, Louisiana

May 12, 1865



As the Civil War wound to a close and news of Lincoln's assassination spread, people wondered how the new president, Andrew Johnson, would bring the country back together. Dudley Avery, who owned a plantation in Louisiana, wondered if and how Johnson would punish Confederate supporters like himself. Louisiana had supported the Confederate cause during the Civil War.

Turn the page to see how Dudley Avery thought about the Lincoln assassination and what actions Johnson might take.



Sermon Preached in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

Troy, New York

April 16, 1865

Full source: <https://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/1203>

support. Although the future is dark, it may
not be as dark as we anticipate and should
the slaves be allowed to come back with their
southern friends, we have much yet to hope
for. Much punishment will many others think
this will be the case. He has been among the
Yankees and his judgment is probably more
correct, than either yours or mine. The Yankees have
not recognized the bogus Government of Berlin
and it is probable that the whole people of the
state will be allowed to choose their executive
officer. ^{They} in regard to the assassination
of Lincoln, are the same as you. I think that
in the present condition of the country, it
is a great fortune to the South. Herod being
to be a more void of principle and honor
and if he is not restrained by the Conservative
party in the North, he will be a Herod.
Next to our being outgated, I regard his being
placed, to produce some more serious results.
I hope that dear Maria and the good old
lady, who has been at Troy, that she will
for her brother's sake, go to New Orleans, to see
him and she will be able to see him in New
Orleans, who would otherwise be impossible to see.
New Herod, I believe, through the law,
every day without difficulty, the business that
has been opened by the Yankees, hope, however.

Transcription:

"My views in regard to the assassination of Lincoln are the same as yours. I think that in the present condition of the Country it is a misfortune to the South. Johnson seems to be a man void* of principle and honor and if he is not restrained by the Conservative party at the North, he will out Herod, Herod.**"

- Dudley Avery, May 12, 1865

*void: without, lacking

** Herod: Roman-allied king in present-day Israel, known for his brutal, tyrannical style of rule

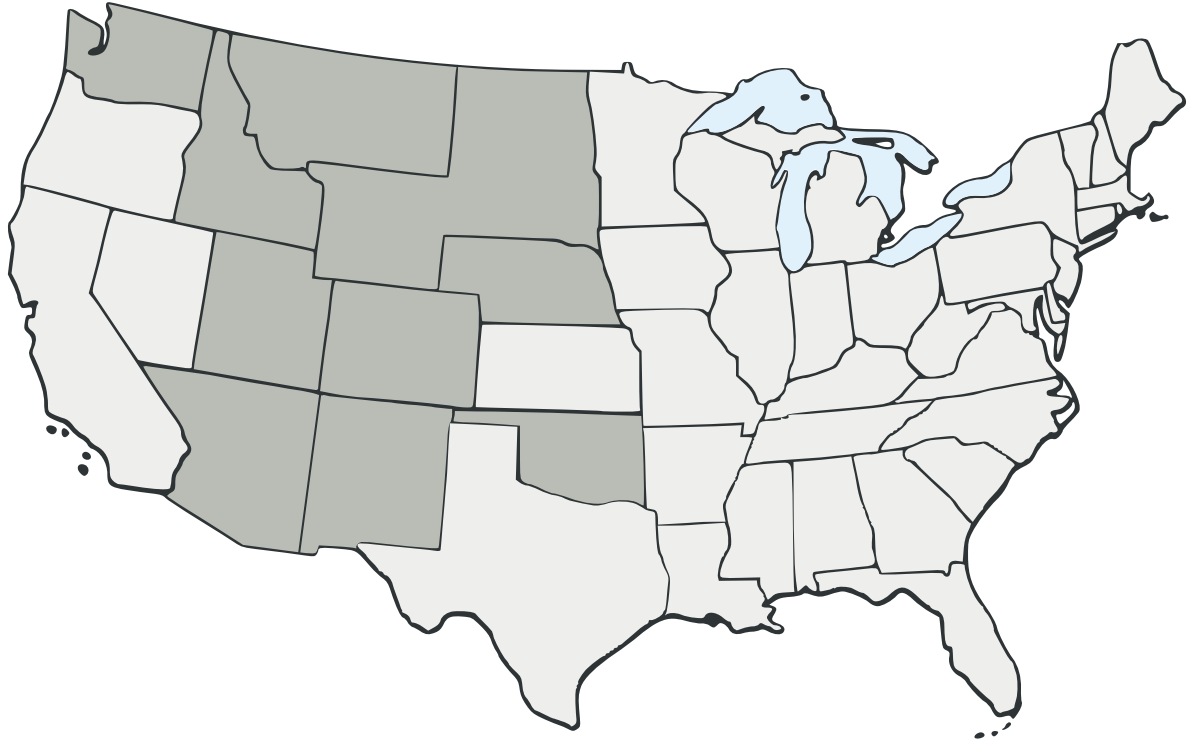
Questions

1. What emotions did Dudley Avery express about Lincoln's assassination?
2. How did Avery expect President Andrew Johnson to treat people who had rebelled against the United States, like him?
3. As it turned out, Johnson pardoned many former Confederates and worked to allow them into regain power. What does this tell us about our ability to predict the future?

Turn the page.



Wrap-Up Activity



Congratulations! You've finished your tour of the country. Now, you're going to tell others what you learned.

You're a newspaper reporter in 1865. Your job is to write a 500-word story about how people around the United States reacted when they heard the news of the Lincoln assassination. Make sure to include quotes from individuals and describe how they felt, and give your own take on this question: What can we learn about the country as it moves from its four-year Civil War? How might where you lived in the U.S. affect how you felt about the assassination of President Lincoln?

Turn the page to write your article.



Wrap-Up Activity: Newspaper Article

Headline: _____

Body of article: