

## “The President is murdered,” 1865

### Introduction

---

At 10:13 p.m. on Good Friday, April 14, 1865, while attending a play at Ford’s Theatre in Washington DC, President Abraham Lincoln was shot in the back of the head by John Wilkes Booth. Lincoln, unconscious and bleeding, was rushed across the street to a nearby house. Though doctors tended to Lincoln throughout the night, his wound proved fatal. The “Great Emancipator” died at 7:22 a.m. on April 15.

The assassination of Lincoln was part of a wider plot that included the deaths of the vice president and the secretary of state. The man who intended to kill Andrew Johnson did not go through with the plan, but Lewis Powell got into William Seward’s home and slashed his face before escaping.

This letter from Colonel John B. Stonehouse to his son, Johnny, captures the turmoil in Washington DC as news of the attacks spread across the city. Stonehouse was staying at the Ebbitt House, a hotel near Seward’s home and the White House.

### Excerpt

---

Just as I was going to bed a man ran in breathless and pale enquiring which of the Theatres the President was attending – ‘he said he must find him at once as M<sup>r</sup>. Seward had been murdered in his bed – We followed him to the door and there met people rushing from the Theatre saying the “President is shot, “the President is murdered” such a time I never before beheld and never want to again

At first no one seemed to believe it but it soon became certain that it was all true

Just as I got to Fords Theatre they were carrying the President to a house across the street. he did not move or speak after he was shot –

### Questions for Discussion

---

Read the introduction and study Colonel John Stonehouse’s letter. Then apply your knowledge of American history and evidence from the letter to answer the following questions:

1. According to John Stonehouse, how was Washington DC affected by the surrender of Robert E. Lee?
2. What is the tone of the excerpt describing the night of April 19, 1865? How is the tone of this section different from that of the sections before and after it?
3. What specific details of the Lincoln assassination does Stonehouse provide? What do we learn about the attempt on Seward’s life?

## “The President is murdered,” 1865

### Transcript

---

Washington

April 16.1865

Dear Johnny

Since I have been here this time the most exciting times that this Country ever saw have taken place

Thursday evening Washington was crazy with joy over the surrender of Lee. every one of the Public Buildings was illuminated, and every private house was blazing with candles from top to bottom. the people were wild with excitement. Men women & children were all out of doors.

The next evening a grand performance was advertised to be given at Fords Theatre and it was announced that the President & ladies and Gen<sup>l</sup> Grant and wife were to be present.

Just as I was going to bed a man ran in breathless and pale enquiring which of the Theatres the President was attending – ‘he said he must find him at once as M<sup>r</sup>. Seward had been murdered in his bed – We followed him to the door and there met people rushing from the Theatre saying the “President is shot, “the President is murdered” such a time I never before beheld and never want to again

At first no one seemed to believe it but it soon became certain that it was all true

Just as I got to Fords Theatre they were carrying the President to a house across the street. he did not move or speak after he was shot –

You have seen in the papers a full account of it I have no doubt

I was at Secretary Swards house several [4] times yesterday. I saw the knife the assassin stabbed M<sup>r</sup>. Seward with and the Pistol with [*struck: wich*] which he broke M<sup>r</sup> Frederick Swards skull there is blood and hair sticking to it still neither of the men have as yet been caught

I am as well as usual & glad to hear you are the same. I have been instructed to remain here until further orders – Love to Mamma Matey and yourself

Your Affectionate father

JB Stonehouse

"The President is murdered," 1865

Images

EBERT FOLSE,  
 WASHINGTON D.C.  
 Washington  
 April 14. 1865  
 Dear Johnny  
 Since I have  
 been here this time the  
 most exciting times  
 that this Country ever  
 saw have taken place  
 Thursday evening  
 Washington was crazy  
 with joy over the  
 surrender of Lee. Every  
 one of the Public Buildings  
 was illuminated, and  
 every private house was  
 blazing with candles  
 from top to bottom.  
 The people were wild  
 with excitement. Men  
 women & children

John B. Stonehouse to John B. Stonehouse Jr., April 16, 1865, p1. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC00368.01)

"The President is murdered," 1865

~~was~~ were all out of doors.

The next evening a grand performance was advertised to be given at Fords Theatre and it was announced that the President & ladies and Gen Grant and wife were to be present.

Just as I was going to bed a man ran in breathless and pale enquiring which of the Theatres the President was attending - he said he must find him at once as Mr Seward had been murdered in his bed - We followed him to the door and there met people

John B. Stonehouse to John B. Stonehouse Jr., April 16, 1865, p2. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC00368.01)

"The President is murdered," 1865

rushing from the Theatre  
 saying "the President  
 is shot," "the President  
 is murdered". Such  
 a ~~time~~ time I never  
 before beheld and  
 never want to again  
 At first no one seemed  
 to believe it but it  
 soon became certain  
 that it was all true  
 Just as I got to  
 Fords Theatre they  
 were carrying the  
 President to a house  
 across the street. he did  
 not move or speak  
 after he was shot—  
 You have seen in the  
 papers a full account  
 of it I have no doubt  
 I was at Secretary  
 Swards house several

John B. Stonehouse to John B. Stonehouse Jr., April 16, 1865, p3. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC00368.01)

"The President is murdered," 1865

terms yesterday. I saw  
 the Knife the assassin  
 stabbed Mr. Seward with  
 and the Pistol with which  
 which he broke Mr  
 Frederick Seward's skull  
 there is blood and hair  
 sticking to it still  
 Neither of the men  
 have as yet been caught  
 I am as well as  
 usual. & glad to hear  
 you are the same. I  
 have been instructed to  
 remain here until further  
 orders - Love to Mamma  
 Mary and yourself  
 your affectionate father  
 J B Stonehouse

John B. Stonehouse to John B. Stonehouse Jr., April 16, 1865, p4. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC00368.01)