***When the Bells Tolled for Lincoln:   
Southern Reaction to the Assassination* by Carolyn L. Harrell**

The outpouring of grief and anger in the Northern states following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln was unparalleled in the history of the American experience. People freely displayed their emotions in both private and public, urged on by the elaborate and rather macabre funeral tour the deceased president's body took on its journey home to the Illinois prairie.  
  
The reaction of Southerners, who had recently been forced back into the Union after the surrender of Lee's army at Appomatttox, was less demonstrative. Outwardly, and officially, the former Confederate states now under Union military control, mourned as well, but in a more subdued manner. Their military overseers ordered official periods of mourning and religious leaders were directed to hold memorial services. A few people did turn out for these ceremonies, but only because they were required or expected to do so. True public opinion in the South was not expressed publicly, but was reserved for hushed tones and quiet conversations. Few, if any, recorded their true feelings in public writings or orations. Rather, honest response to the death of Lincoln in the South was only set down in writing in private diaries and journals.  
  
Carolyn L. Harrell has now produced a book based on these private reactions to Lincoln's assassination, that gives insight into the true reaction of Southerners to the assassination of the civil leader of the Union government. To write *When the Bells Tolled for Lincoln, Southern Reaction to the Assassination,* Harrell searched both previously published sources and unpublished papers throughout the nation. The story she constructs reveals the true collective Southern opinion of the momentous occurrence of the death of Lincoln.  
  
The story that emerges is one of mixed emotions. On the whole, it was difficult for many Southerners to feel true sorrow at the death of the man many blamed for the strife wrought upon them. Many in the South privately expressed their pleasure at the poetic justice of their conquerors losing their beloved leader at a time when they were celebrating their victory.  
  
However, most of the diarists also greeted the news with trepidation and rightfully so. Many feared that the act would further enrage and already angry foe. Certainly, blame would fall upon the South for this act, and the process of reconciliation would be made more difficult as a result of the murder of the beloved president. Additionally, the death of Lincoln placed Andrew Johnson at the head of the nation. Many in the South hated Johnson more than Lincoln, for he was a Southerner, a Tennessee Unionist, who had cast his lot with the North rather than support his native South. And Johnson's disgust with the Southern elite, the plantation class, was well known, and made the possibility of a smooth transition back into the Union even more remote.  
  
Harrell's book does an excellent job at seeking out these sources of *true* public opinion of a momentous event. In an atmosphere where even the appearance of jubilation at the death of Lincoln may have brought upon the celebrant sanction, imprisonment, or even death, many citizens of the South entrusted only themselves with their true feelings. Carolyn Harrell now shares with us a peek at those feelings, long hidden, but fortunately not forgotten.  
  
*When the Bells Tolled for Lincoln, Southern Reaction to the Assassination* is a well written account of true Southern opinion. In separate chapters she examines reaction in the upper South, the deep South and the border states. A brief bibliographic essay precedes an extremely detailed listing of her sources, itself a useful tool for those wishing to explore the subject of Southern sentiment more fully. The author, and Mercer University Press, is to be commended for using footnotes rather than endnotes.  
  
Carolyn Harrell's *When the Bells Tolled for Lincoln, Southern Reaction to the Assassination,* makes a fine addition to any Lincoln library. © Copyright Daniel E. Pearson, 1999

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN": http://www.nytimes.com/1865/04/21/news/murderer-mr-lincoln-extraordinary-letter-john-wilkes-booth-proof-that-he.html?pagewanted=2

Right or wrong. God judge me, not man. For be my motive good or bad, of one thing I am sure, the lasting condemnation of the North. I love peace more than life. Have loved the Union beyond expression. For four years have I waited, hoped and prayed for the dark clouds to break, and for a restoration of our former sunshine. To wait longer would be a crime. All hope for peace is dead. My prayers have proved as idle as my hopes. God's will be done. I go to see and share the bitter end.

I have ever held the South were right. The very nomination of ABRAHAM LINCOLN, four years ago, spoke plainly, war -- war upon Southern rights and institutions. His election proved it. "Await an overt act." Yes, till you are bound and plundered. What folly! The South was wise. Who thinks of argument or patience when the finger of his enemy presses on the trigger? In a foreign war I, too, could say, "country, right or wrong." But in a struggle such as ours, (where the brother tries to pierce the brother's heart,) for God's sake, choose the right. When a country like this spurns justice from her side she forfeits the allegiance of every honest freeman, and should leave him, untrameled by any fealty soever, to act as his conscience may approve.

People of the North, to hate tyranny, to love liberty and justice, to strike at wrong and oppression, was the teaching of our fathers. The study of our early history will not let me forget it, and may it never.

This country was formed for the white, not for the black man. And looking upon African Slavery from the same stand-point held by the noble framers of our constitution. I for one, have ever considered if one of the greatest blessings (both for themselves and us,) that God has ever bestowed upon a favored nation. Witness heretofore our wealth and power; witness their elevation and enlightenment above their race elsewhere. I have lived among it most of my life, and have seen less harsh treatment from master to man than I have beheld in the North from father to son. Yet, Heaven knows, no one would be willing to do more for the negro race than I, could I but see a way to still better their condition.

But LINCOLN's policy is only preparing the way for their total annihilation. The South are not, nor have they been fighting for the continuance of slavery. The first battle of Bull Run did away with that idea. Their causes since for war have been as noble and greater far than those that urged our fathers on Even should we allow they were wrong at the beginning of this contest, cruelty and injustice have made the wrong become the right, and they stand now (before the wonder and admiration of the world) as a noble band of patriotic heroes. Hereafter, reading of their deeds, Thermopylae will be forgotten.

When I aided in the capture and execution of JOHN BROWN (who was a murderer on our Western border, and who was fairly tried and convicted, before an impartial judge and jury, of treason, and who, by the way, has since been made a god), I was proud of my little share in the transaction, for I deemed it my duty, and that I was helping our common country to perform an act of justice. But what was a crime in poor JOHN BROWN is now considered (by themselves) as the greatest and only virtue of the whole Republican party. Strange transmigration! Vice to become a virtue, simply because more indulge in it

I thought men, as now, that the Abolitionists were the only traitors in the land, and that the entire party deserved the same fate of poor old BROWN, not because they wish to abolish slavery but on account of the means they have ever endeavored to use to effect that abolition. If BROWN were living I doubt whether he himself would set slavery against the Union. Most or many in the North do, and openly curse the Union, if the South are to return and retain a single right guaranteed to them by every tie which we once revered as sacred. The South can make no choice. It is either extermination or slavery for themselves (worse than death) to draw from. I know my choice. I have also studied hard to discover upon what grounds the right of a State to secede has been denied, when our very name, United States, and the Declaration of Independence, both provide for secession. But there is no time for words. I write in haste. I know how foolish I shall be deemed for undertaking such a step as this, where, on the one side, I have many friends, and everything to make me happy, where my profession alone has gained me an income of more than twenty thousand dollars a year, and where my great personal ambition in my profession has such a great field for labor. On the other hand, the South have never bestowed upon me one kind word; a place now where I have no friends, except beneath the sod; a place where I must either become a private soldier or a beggar. To give up all of the former for the latter, besides my mother and sisters whom I love so dearly, (although they so widely differ with me in opinion,) seems insane; but God is my judge. I love justice more than I do a country that disowns it; more than fame and wealth; more (Heaven pardon me if wrong,) more than a happy home. I have never been upon a battle-field; but O, my countrymen, could you all but see the reality or effects of this horrid war, as I have seen them, (in every State save Virginia.) I know you would think like me, and would pray the Almighty to create in the Northern mind a sense of right and justice, (even should it possess no seasoning of mercy,) and that he would dry up this sea of blood between us, which is daily growing wider. Alas! poor country, is she to meet her threatened doom? Four years ago I would have given a thousand lives to see her remain (as I had always known her) powerful and unbroken. And even now, I would hold my life as naught to see her what she was. O, my friends, if the fearful scenes of the past four years had never been enacted, or if what has been had been but a frightful dream, from which we could now awake, with what overflowing hearts could we bless our God and pray for his continued favor. How I have loved the old flag, can never now be known. A few years since and the entire world could boast of none so pure and spotless. But I have of late been seeing and hearing of the bloody deeds of which she has been made the emblem, and would shudder to think how changed she had grown. O, how I have longed to see her break from the mist of blood and death that circles round her folds, spoiling her beauty and tarnishing her honor. But no, day by day has she been dragged deeper and deeper into cruelty and oppression, till now (in my eyes) her once bright red stripes look like bloody gashes on the face of Heaven. I look now upon my early admiration of her glories as a dream. My love (as things stand to-day) is for the South alone. Nor do I deem it a dishonor in attempting to make for her a prisoner of this man, to whom she owes so much of misery. If success attends me, I go penniless to her side. They say she has found that "last ditch" which the North have so long derided, and been endeavoring to force her in, forgetting they are our brothers, and that it's impolitic to goad an enemy to madness. Should I reach her in safety and find it true, I will proudly beg permission to triumph or die in that same "ditch" by her side.

A Confederate doing duty upon his own responsibility. J. WILKES BOOTH.