

became pj's. Cups sized as A, B, C, and D came in during the late '30s. Young wearers had their own categories: *nubbins*, *bubbins*, *chubbins*, *droopers*, and *super-droopers*.

The war brought plenty of customers but not enough raw material. Shortages produced bras made of coarse, colorful Mexican cotton; the flat chested wore padding of milkweed fuzz. In the military atmosphere of the 1940s the torpedo bra silhouette was introduced, "which turned breasts into a pair of nose cones," as the authors put it. (It survived, unfortunately, into the 1960s.) Bombs may have been more important than bras, as one advertiser said to excuse late orders, but the Sweater Girl was an essential morale builder among the troops.

After the war, brassiere makers competed for attention with amusing, sometimes bizarre features. The "Mon-e-Bra" had a zippered compartment in which to stow cash; strapless bras abounded; there was a number featuring ocelot fur; "Très Secrète" was inflatable—you adjusted your size to suit the occasion. Advertising such as Maidenform's "I Dreamed" campaign, which variously depicted the supposed female fantasy of disporting in public while clad only in a bra from the waist up,

became as important as new designs. But there could be slips. "I Dreamed I Was a Matador" went over like a lead balloon in the Spanish-speaking world.

In the 1960s, the women's movement brought chaos and the threat of extinction. Bras were for burning, and girdles mercifully dropped out of sight with the appearance of pantyhose. By 1969, say the authors, legs were in and breasts were out. Twiggy, measuring 31–24–33, represented the new ideal.

The ideal didn't last long. Today, the profits in this business are considerable. In 1999 Victoria's Secret grossed \$2.1 billion, and it is not even one of the biggest makers. The irony is that because of costs—Warner's spent a million dollars to develop a stretch strap—almost all bras are now made abroad; simply sewing on a label justifies claiming them to be "Made in U.S.A."

The *Uplift* authors' survey among older women found that about half of their respondents don't like to wear bras, made in the U.S.A. or not, while many have given them up entirely and don't give a damn about fashion.

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## Catching the Conspirators

LINCOLN'S ASSASSINS:  
*Their Trial and Execution.*

By James L. Swanson and Daniel R. Weinberg. Arena Editions. 151 pp. \$45

*Reviewed by Thomas Mallon*

THE literal theatricality of Abraham Lincoln's assassination, that audience participation event in which John Wilkes Booth broke the fourth wall, has blinded the average citizen's historical memory to much else that transpired in Washington on that night and over the following three months. Booth's supporting cast—the conspirators who plotted at Mrs. Surratt's boarding house (with or without her knowledge)—are more or less forgotten now, but in the spring and summer of '65, following

the death of the spectacle's murderous star, they served the country as emotional understudies. "Their names were on every citizen's tongue," write James Swanson and Daniel Weinberg in this weirdly handsome pictorial recreation of the conspirators' hooded imprisonment, military trial, and, for four of the eight, quick execution. "Newspapers in every city, town, and hamlet across the country wrote about them. People bought their photographs." The episode was, according to the authors, "a

landmark in the history of American journalism and popular culture,” and anyone who examines this coffee-table assemblage of old documents and images will be hard-pressed to dispute their judgment.

Signing off on their preface in July 2001, Swanson and Weinberg could not have anticipated the peculiar relevance their text would acquire by fall. When President Andrew Johnson agreed with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton’s insistence upon a military trial, he sparked this now familiar-sounding criticism from Lincoln’s former attorney general, Edward Bates: “Such a trial is not only unlawful, but it is a gross blunder in policy: It denie[s] the great, fundamental principle, that ours is a government of *Law*, and that the law is strong enough, to rule the people wisely and well; and if the offenders be done to death by that tribunal, however truly guilty, they will pass for martyrs with half the world.” (Stanton did give way enough to allow the public and press into the proceedings, but the nine judges, Swanson and Weinberg remind us, were “most of them army generals and not one of them a lawyer.”) Along with debate over judicial procedure, the trial gave rise to a discussion—again contemporary seeming—of whether the Confederacy had plotted “to spread yellow fever throughout the North and win the war by contagion instead of the cannon.”

The most absorbing items in this display—photographs that Alexander Gardner made of the accused, on the deck of their initial shipboard prisons and later on the scaffold—establish a connection between this sepia subject and our whole age, not just the present military moment. The only photos Gardner copyrighted were ones he took of the man who had stabbed Secretary of State Seward, Lewis Powell (alias Lewis Payne), whose hunky looks and physique set him quite apart from the rest of Booth’s ragtag associates. Swanson and Weinberg speculate that Gardner may have made so many Powell pictures, in such various poses, “to show to members of Seward’s household to establish Powell’s identity as Seward’s assailant,” but the authors go on to note the “directness and

modernity” of the images in which “Powell leans back against a gun turret, relaxes his body, and gazes languidly at the viewer.” Indeed, Powell, whose picture earns the back cover of this new book, looks exactly like a blank-eyed beefcake in a Calvin Klein underwear ad. With Booth gone, Powell was, however unacknowledged in psyches mourning Lincoln, the New Boy.

He didn’t die quickly, either. Once the drop fell from the scaffold erected in the yard of Washington’s Old Arsenal Penitentiary, according to the *National Intelligencer*, Powell’s muscles continued contracting for at least seven minutes: “At one time he drew himself up so far as to assume the position one would take in sitting down.” Powell’s is one of the bobbing, struggling bodies that appear as a blur in Gardner’s execution photographs. The pictures render him a kind of stage star making the leap to motion pictures.

Swanson is an attorney and author who has been collecting Lincolniana since he was 10; Weinberg owns Chicago’s Abraham Lincoln Book Shop, a remarkable store known to any writer who has ever ventured into the life of the 16th president. Their *Lincoln’s Assassins* has a careful but definite point of view. (The descendants of Samuel A. Mudd, the doctor who set Booth’s broken leg during his flight from Ford’s Theatre, will not be using this book in the family’s long-running campaign to clear their ancestor’s name.) The volume’s lavish, painstaking production allows many of the reproduced printed materials to be not only savored in their yellowish antiquity, but actually read off the page in something like their original form. Still, for all its scholarly utility, there’s no getting away from the book’s function as a gruesome reliquary, one that allows a strangely thrilling visit to the patch of ground—now a tennis court—over which Lewis Powell and his confederates, in their varying degrees of guilt, once dropped to their deaths.

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