

Other holes are more endemic of the state of the literature in general (specifically, pipe and cigar smoking, the most popular forms of smoking in the nineteenth century). The book is strongest in the earlier sections on Native and early European consumption of tobacco where Goodman draws from a broad range of literature and creatively gives important context (for example, the comparison of tobacco to coca in the indigenization process). The well-developed research on the agricultural and commercial history of tobacco is also nicely synthesized. It is only in the more modern period that the suspicious thematic format of the book becomes a narrative device that obscures lack of research. It would have been more useful to point out the problem of gaps in the research by emphasizing the different periods of tobacco use. At any rate, *Tobacco in History* is a useful guide to the vast amount of research on tobacco and will be helpful to future researchers on the subject.

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William A. Tidwell — *April '65: Confederate Covert Action in the American Civil War*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1995. Pp. vii, 264.

In our conspiracy-minded age, historians increasingly feel compelled to evaluate presidential assassination theories. We live in a time, after all, when Oliver Stone's *JFK* packs movie theatres and when supposedly rational scientists exhume the body of innocuous Zachary Taylor to investigate rumours of foul play. In this atmosphere, it was perhaps inevitable that we would revisit one of the oldest of these "plots": the alleged conspiracy to kill Abraham Lincoln.

Speculation about a cabal going beyond John Wilkes Booth and his cohorts surfaced soon after Lincoln's assassination in 1865. In the years since, various accusers have fixed culpability on U.S. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, Vice-President Andrew Johnson, and Radical Republicans in Congress. In his second book on the assassination, William Tidwell offers yet another perspective. He argues that the plan which ultimately resulted in Lincoln's murder originated in the highest levels of the Confederate government.

Drawing on his previous work in *Come Retribution: The Confederate Secret Service and the Assassination of Lincoln* (1988), Tidwell explores the entire range of Confederate covert operations. He exposes an intricate network of military men, diplomats, and private individuals who tried to win through stealth what the Confederacy had lost on the battlefield. In the process, Tidwell analyzes the role of covert warfare in the nineteenth century, the escalating brutality of the Civil War, and the creation of a Southern usable past.

Tidwell holds that Jefferson Davis and his Secretary of State, Judah Benjamin, decided in late 1864 to kidnap Lincoln and recapture the initiative in the Civil War. To plan this effort the Confederacy relied on a large intelligence organization, which included John Wilkes Booth. As matters grew more desperate for the Confederacy in early 1865, the kidnapping plan evolved into a plot to blow up the

White House in a last-ditch assassination mission authorized by Jefferson Davis. When the mission failed, John Wilkes Booth, acting without orders but believing himself to be carrying out Richmond's wishes, launched his own assassination conspiracy, with regrettable success.

Tidwell supports his thesis through newly discovered evidence documenting an extensive Confederate secret service organization with a long tradition of behind-the-lines action. These recently unearthed Confederate Treasury records list \$1.5 million in expenditures approved by Davis for unspecified covert operations. Many of these funds went to support a sophisticated Rebel intelligence apparatus in Canada designed to support the North's "Copperhead" peace movement and to launch raids like the failed assault on St. Albans, Vermont, in 1864.

Military historians have often touted the Civil War as a time of innovation in technology and tactics — the first modern war. But Tidwell argues that the conflict also launched a revolution in intelligence. "The Confederacy", he asserts, "came to an understanding of clandestine operations that is unique in the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (p. 83). Confederates pioneered use of underwater explosives, established an elite training school for irregular warfare, and developed an innovative strategy for utilizing private resources and individuals to support government aims. Most significantly, the Confederate government overcame Victorian cultural strictures mandating "honourable" warfare and embraced ruthless covert tactics including sabotage and use of land mines against the enemy's rear echelon. By 1863 the Confederate government was financing full-fledged terrorism against the North. They even tried to burn down New York City in November 1864. The brutal logic of total war soon impelled the Confederates to consider even assassination as a legitimate tool of combat.

After 1865 these events were obscured in the postwar haze of reunion. In the mood of sectional reconciliation which predominated during the Gilded Age, the troubling facts of the Lincoln plot had no place. Tidwell describes how an evolving Southern mythology characterized its war effort as an honourable one conducted by chivalrous men in open battle. In this myth, Lincoln was revered as "the South's best friend" (p. 3), who sought to prevent a harsh Reconstruction and whose death represented a tragedy, not a victory, for the former Confederacy. The Lost Cause myth served to dissociate a noble Confederacy from the Lincoln assassination, a process expedited by several ex-Confederate intelligence officers. After the incident at Ford's theatre, Confederate agents in Canada began a concerted campaign to absolve the Davis government of responsibility for the murder. These operatives leaked disinformation to federal investigators and prevented the truth about Richmond's involvement from emerging. This campaign was the Confederate secret service's most significant accomplishment.

Tidwell avoids the hysterical implausibility of many conspiracy theorists and methodically attempts to reconstruct a logical premise based on new evidence and rational calculation of the Confederacy's wartime options. His conclusions will probably outrage those who still cling to the legend of a gentlemanly Civil War, but his research concurs with much of current historiography. The book's tantalizing explorations into the social history of the war years are too brief, but pose some

interesting questions regarding public opinion toward warfare and the construction of the Lost Cause mythology.

*April '65* also suffers from some serious flaws, however. Given the events he describes, one must question the author's assertion that the Confederacy launched a revolution in intelligence. Aside from the assassination itself, which was almost an accident, none of the covert operations Tidwell describes amounted to much. The effort to transform the Copperhead movement into a Confederate fifth column never came close to success. Ambitious Southern plans to free thousands of Confederate prisoners of war held in the North never proceeded far beyond the planning stage. Confederate saboteurs annoyed Union forces, but much less so than conventional military units such as Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry. Given these facts, it is difficult to share the author's claims of Confederate success.

Tidwell's effort to tie Lost Cause mythology into his work is admirable; indeed, it is the most interesting part of the book. But the author's rather broad brush strokes simplify a complex social phenomenon. The reader almost gets the impression that the entire effort to glorify the Southern cause, from the apotheosis of Robert E. Lee to D. W. Griffith's hagiographic *The Birth of a Nation*, was merely part of a counter-intelligence effort to conceal the truth behind Lincoln's assassination. Tidwell ignores the racial element which lay at the heart of the Lost Cause and its relevance to the politics of Reconstruction. Admittedly, this is not the author's focus, but any analysis of Confederate mythology demands more detail.

Tidwell has an unfortunate tendency to quote secondary research to support key arguments. As a result, the reader is left wondering about the documentation of important evidence. Even when the author does use important primary sources, he sometimes extrapolates elaborate assumptions from limited information. The secret service financial records, for example, are a remarkable new find, but they do not provide enough proof for this historian. They do not list names of Booth or any of the other known conspirators, nor do they specify any planned attacks on the White House or Lincoln. Tidwell assumes that some of these monies funded Booth's surveillance and the attempted demolition of the White House — the author calls this his "smoking gun" (p. 164) — but he offers little supporting evidence.

Indeed, *April '65* is filled with speculative conclusions. Tidwell admits at the outset that much of his evidence is "circumstantial" (p. 7), but this does not prevent him from making some startling statements. For example: Confederate spy Rose O'Neil Greenhow "likely [had] an unnamed somebody keeping track of ... cipher systems" (p. 61); the Union vessel *Sultana*, sunk in 1865, "could have contained a [Confederate] torpedo"; many Confederate agents "would have been perfectly happy to see Lincoln dead and may well have said so in Booth's presence" (p. 196). Such statements do little to support the credibility of Tidwell's claims and in the end leave the reader with nothing to bite into. At base, much of Tidwell's argument is sheer conjecture. Until more evidence is uncovered, it will remain so.

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