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Edward Steers, Jr, editor. *The Trial: The Assassination of President Lincoln and the Trial of the Conspirators*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 423 pages, 2003.

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In the last 40 years, enough books have been written about the Kennedy assassination to occupy more than a few library shelves. Although works about the murder of our 16th president have not quite competed in number, Americans, nevertheless, continue to be fascinated by the story of the Lincoln conspiracy, the tragic events in Ford's Theater, the dragnet which allegedly cornered the president's killer in a Virginia tobacco barn, and the trial of John Wilkes Booth's alleged accomplices.

The Trial: The Assassination of President Lincoln and the Trial of the Conspirators is a recent addition to the literature. The book contains a series of commentaries by Edward Steers, noted Lincoln assassination expert; Terry Alford, eminent John Wilkes Booth scholar; Burrus Carnahan, military law expert; Joan Chaconas, recognized authority on the Surratt family; Percy Martin, specialist on the alleged conspirators Michael O'Laughlen and Samuel Arnold; Betty Ownsbey, authority on alleged conspirator Lewis Powell; Lincoln scholar, Thomas Turner, expert on the military tribunal that tried the conspirators; and Laurie Verge, Director of the Surratt House and Museum. The bulk of the volume is the reprinted Benn Pitman transcription of the trial.

Pitman, a British emigre, was the stenographer charged with compiling and editing the trial proceedings for publication. His was not the only published account of the conspiracy trial. Another version was published under the title *The Trial of the Alleged Assassins and Conspirators at Washington City, DC, May and June 1865 for the*

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Murder of President Abraham Lincoln by T.B. Peterson and Brothers, Special Correspondents of the *Philadelphia Daily Enquirer*. A handwritten version also exists in the National Archives.

Besides the trial transcript itself, the book contains a fascinating exhibit list of 98 items including everything from conspirators' weapons to John Wilkes Booth's boot recovered from Dr. Samuel Mudd's house. It is not clear what role a "piece of liquorice" played in the conspiracy but it is there along with a map of Ford's Theater and the assassin's calling card.

"The Trial of the Century," the cliched term the media once used to label the most sensational of 20th century court cases--Scopes, Leopold-Loeb, Rosenberg, O.J. Simpson--really applied to the trial of the Lincoln conspirators. The very heinousness of the crime and the rough and tumble trial proceedings generated considerable public interest. After all, this was the very first presidential murder! Viewed both by contemporaries and from our 21st century vantage point, the trial was truly an anomaly in the annals of American justice and has remained a subject of much debate as to its legality. The alleged conspirators--all civilians--were tried by a military tribunal in peacetime. Even though all Confederate forces had not yet capitulated by May when the trial got under way, both Lee and Johnston had surrendered their armies. For all intents and purposes, the Civil War was over. Yet some have argued that a state of war still existed making a military trial technically legal. No one can argue, however, that the proceedings were unprecedented; normal constitutional guarantees for the accused did not apply.

Edward Steers, the book's chief editor, points out that most historians who have previously written about the Lincoln assassination and its aftermath have failed to make proper use of, or any use at all, of the trial testimony, thereby rendering that story incomplete. Steers is correct. Reading the trial transcript, although a bit tedious, does much to flesh out the details. For the first time in many years, Lincoln scholars and those

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of us still intrigued by the classic account of Lincoln's murder can again study an often neglected but essential primary source.

Despite the value of Pitman's reintroduced transcript, this work holds few surprises. It is still the traditional, time-honored version of the Lincoln assassination with all the usual suspects. Few minds will be changed by what the commentators say or what the transcript discloses. The alleged conspirators either got the justice they deserved or they were railroaded; four paid with their lives.

Coincidentally, this year gave Lincoln conspiracy buffs another book well worth reading. Leonard Guttridge and Ray Neff's *Dark Union: The Secret Web of Profiteers, Politicians, and Booth Conspirators That Led to Lincoln's Death* offers an untraditional and contrasting view of the Lincoln assassination based on very compelling documentary evidence, much of it readily available in public archives or from private sources revealed by the authors for the first time. If their allegations are true, then the time-honored story of what really happened 139 years ago merits a very new and dramatic interpretation.