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Mourning — and Celebrating — Abraham Lincoln's Death

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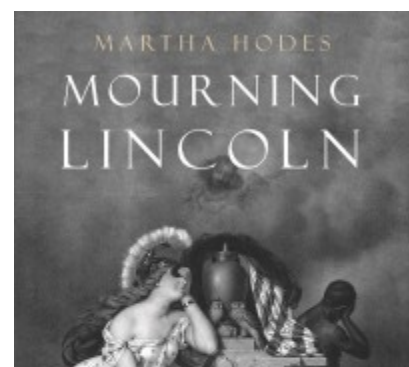
The president literally stopped the show when he walked into Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865. Abraham Lincoln and his wife, Mary, had arrived late to that night's performance; the comedy *Our American Cousin* already had begun. As they took their seats in the dress circle, the actors onstage paused and the audience cheered. Lincoln bowed. Around 10:15 p.m., as Lincoln laughed at a line in the play, John Wilkes Booth shot him in the back of the head. The next morning, Lincoln was dead.

The nation's seemingly universal reaction to the first presidential assassination is well documented in contemporary newspapers, in the formal expressions of condolences that followed, and in memoirs published in later decades. In *Mourning Lincoln*, Martha Hodes *91 asks: What were the "raw reactions" of people on the street, with their families, and by themselves when they heard the news? Some felt that "North and South are weeping together" but others thought the news was "glorious," Hodes writes. She also explores how the aftermath of the assassination ultimately shaped the legacy of the Civil War.

Hodes was inspired to explore the responses to Lincoln's death after examining her reaction and those of the people around her to catastrophes that have occurred in her lifetime, such as President Kennedy's assassination. After the events of Sept. 11, 2001, she says in an interview provided by the publisher, "It felt like the world had stopped, but of course it had not. ... People still had to feed their children and walk their dogs. Everyday life, both then and now, always intrudes into catastrophe."



Martha Hodes *91



Hodes is a professor of history at New York University. She also is the author of *The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* and *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South*.



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