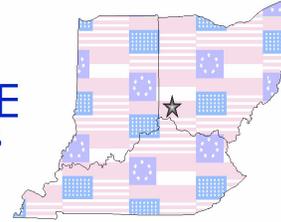




CINCINNATI
CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE
SERVING OHIO, KENTUCKY AND INDIANA SINCE 1956



Book Review By Thomas L. Breiner

American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies by Michael W. Kauffman, Random House, New York, NY, 2004, 508 pages, Hard cover \$29.95.

American Brutus by Michael Kauffman is a wonderful book that is well-researched, well-written, and very readable work. By far, the best work that I have read on the subject. The author has created a fascinating manuscript that place to rest many of the old myths and folklore concerning the Lincoln murder conspiracies that become accepted as fact due to the constant repeating. Mr. Kauffman has finally taken all the known information and documents to form a realistic and highly plausible re-evaluation of the events associated with the assassination of President Lincoln.

The author provides his reader with a look into the mind of John Wilkes Booth to understand how he created a conspiracy within a conspiracy to bind his associates together and incriminate many others to cover his activities prior to his final act of desperation. The entire process of creating the abduction plot is laid open for re-examination in order to better understand Booth's motivations that eventually led to his murder plot.

In his coverage of the conspirator's trial, Kauffman explains the differences in the rules of evidence and the laws for prosecutions in 1865 from today - how the government could not use a co-defendant to testify against the other conspirators; therefore, several potential accomplices were allowed to go free in order to be used as witnesses. Unlike today, there was no negotiating a reduced sentence to turn state's evidence. The government either prosecuted you or used you as a witness. It was all or nothing.

Mr. Kauffman also provides a good look into the lives of the people involved. He discusses the tragedy that followed the marriage of Major Henry Rathbone and Clara Harris, how Ned Spangler was incriminated and convicted based on the testimony of a confused stage hand at the Ford Theater. The author exonerates Secretary of War Edwin Stanton from the myth that he helped Booth escape from Washington by leaving open one bridges and that he disabled the telegraph network. He also add to the irony of the situation by revealing that John Wilkes Booth and laid in the same bed in which President Lincoln died a few days prior to the assassination.

American Brutus is definitely a must read for anyone interested in the Lincoln assassination conspiracy. It is well-researched, extremely entertaining and highly provocative account of the assassination. The author has both educated and fascinated. While there are no headline gabbing theories, what the author does is place the story in the proper context and put to rest the extraordinary myths that have become accepted as fact. For this we should be forever grateful.