



# Good Friday, 1865

THE PLAY HAD ALREADY STARTED when the Lincolns arrived. As the honored guests made their way up the stairway to the dress circle, the actors stopped and the audience cheered. As the band struck up “Hail to the Chief,” the president took an impromptu bow. It was Good Friday, April 14, 1865.

The *Washington Evening Star* had carried a front-page advertisement for Laura Keene’s appearance at Ford’s Theatre in the lighthearted comedy *Our American Cousin*, and an announcement inside indicated that the president and Mrs. Lincoln would be attending that night. The Lincolns had extended an invitation to General Ulysses S. Grant and his wife, Julia, and when they declined, to Assistant Secretary of War Thomas Eckert, who declined as well. Next down the list were Clara Harris and Major Henry Rathbone, who happily accepted. She was the daughter of a New York senator, and he, Clara’s stepbrother and fiancé. It was an evening that would ruin their lives.

The presidential box, personally decorated by one of the Ford brothers for the occasion, hovered above stage left. Lincoln lowered himself into the walnut rocking chair, with Mary seated to his right. At perhaps a quarter past ten, the audience roared with laughter as the actor Harry Hawk, in the role of the backwoods American cousin of British relatives, uttered the



John Wilkes Booth fires into the back of Lincoln's head. This 1865 lithograph shows Clara Harris seated next to Mary Lincoln while Henry Rathbone attempts to stop the assassin. Lincoln's hand is grasping the drapery fashioned from an American flag. *LC-USZ62-2073, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.*

line, “Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old gal—you sockdologizing old mantrap!” Then came a pistol crack. Was it part of the play? An accidental firing by a soldier in the audience? Now a man leapt to the stage—was *that* part of the script? But he’d jumped from the president’s box and caught one foot in the decorative swags, waving a knife. Some heard him shout, “*Sic semper tyrannis!*”—*Thus always to tyrants*. Some heard, “The South is avenged,” and others heard nothing at all. It didn’t seem like a play anymore, and for a split second everything froze. By the time the audience jolted from their seats, the gunman had vanished.

Up in the presidential box, Clara Harris’s hands and face were covered with blood, her clothes saturated. Henry Rathbone hadn’t seen or heard a thing until the shot rang out. He had tried to prevent the assailant from vaulting to the stage, provoking the man to slash his arm from elbow nearly to shoulder. After that, Rathbone could only shout, “Stop that man!” Then Mary Lincoln thought that the blood all over Harris was her husband’s and kept screaming, “My husband’s blood, my dear husband’s blood!” Now came shouts from the audience about murder and calls for doctors. People rushed the stage. Women fainted. Soldiers hurried in with bayonets.



John Wilkes Booth lands on the stage at Ford's Theatre after jumping from the presidential box. In this engraving, Mary Lincoln and Clara Harris assist the wounded president while men in the audience jump to their feet, pointing at the assassin. *McLellan Lincoln Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University.*

At 10:30 p.m., from Tenth Street outside Ford's Theatre, the news traveled through the darkness, people shouting, rapping on windows, pounding on doors. Mounted patrols galloped through throngs of frightened people, with soldiers, sailors, and policemen everywhere. Members of the audience had recognized the intruder as the well-known Shakespearean actor John Wilkes Booth, and his name spread rapidly. Word came as well about Secretary of State William Seward: another man had knocked on the door of his Washington home at about 10:00 p.m., forced his way upstairs, and assaulted Seward right in his bed, where he was recuperating from a recent carriage accident. As the city embarked on a manhunt for the killer and his accomplices, trains and ferries were ordered halted, and guards stood posted at all roads leading out of the capital.

Booth and his recruited conspirators had at first planned to abduct the president and hold him hostage in exchange for wartime prisoners, but after Confederate general Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox on April 9, they changed the scheme from kidnapping to murder. Simultaneous with Booth's deed, three other men were set to carry out two related

missions. George Atzerodt would kill Vice President Andrew Johnson in his suite at the Kirkwood House Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue, and Lewis Powell would kill Seward while David Herold, on horseback, held Powell's waiting horse for the escape. Atzerodt lost his nerve at the last minute, and Powell's plan went awry when his ruse of delivering medicine to the ailing secretary of state failed. Instead, Powell violently fought his way into the Seward residence, where he shot Seward's grown son (he would recover), then stabbed the intended victim in his bed (he too would recover) before another son intervened. Powell managed to break free, but Herold, flustered by the screams coming from inside the house, had already galloped off on his own horse. Later that night, Herold would meet up with Booth, the two disappearing together into the surrounding countryside. Among the other conspirators were a carpenter at Ford's Theatre, who briefly held on to Booth's horse in the back alley; Dr. Samuel Mudd, who later that night would treat the broken bone Booth had sustained from his leap to the stage; and Mary Surratt, a widow who ran a Washington boardinghouse near the theater and owned a Maryland tavern, both of which were implicated in the conspiracy.

Unlike his collaborators, John Wilkes Booth had executed his portion of the plot nearly flawlessly. Three days earlier, on Tuesday, April 11, the twenty-six-year-old actor had stood among a crowd gathered outside the White House, listening to Lincoln deliver a victory speech about reconstructing the nation. When the president spoke of voting rights for black men, Booth was roused to fury. "That means nigger citizenship," he uttered, according to a companion. "Now, by God, I'll put him through." When Booth entered the box at Ford's Theatre, he stood directly behind the president, aimed his derringer, and fired one shot into the back of Lincoln's head.

When the audience's moment of motionless shock passed, and after people raced outside to tell the world what had happened, three doctors and four soldiers took charge of the unconscious president. With no stretcher available, and the half-mile to the White House too far to travel, they crossed the street to a boardinghouse run by a German tailor named William Petersen. (In years to come, an impossible number of men would claim to have carried the president's body out of the theater that night.) At Petersen's, the men maneuvered Lincoln's gangly frame into a first-floor

chamber, placing him diagonally across the small bed. The president's eldest son, twenty-one-year-old Captain Robert Lincoln, soon arrived, as did Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, who right there in the back parlor directed the search for Booth and his conspirators. Mary Lincoln had followed, but eventually those in charge could no longer withstand the sounds of her torment and insisted that she move from the back bedroom into the front parlor. All through the night and past dawn, the cramped space hosted a somber parade of statesmen and friends, lingering, departing, and returning, alongside the doctors trying to save the president's life, even as his head wound bled on. Death came at twenty-two minutes past seven o'clock in the morning. At that moment, Edwin Stanton said something. Some heard the words, "Now he belongs to the ages." Others heard, "Now he belongs to the angels." Ages or angels, history or heaven, Lincoln belonged to both.

It was Saturday, April 15, 1865. Word spread across the telegraph wires, north, south, and west. Soon, with dispatches read aloud to gathering bystanders, glances at newspaper headlines, and the sight of stricken faces at front doors, millions across the country knew.<sup>1</sup>

THE STORY OF THE NATION'S first presidential assassination has been told many times over, in biographies of Lincoln and inquiries into the conspiracy, in chronicles of the Civil War and textbooks of American history. These accounts often portray the nation's (and the world's) response by looking to newspapers, sermons, formal expressions of condolence, and the phenomenal crowds that turned out for religious services and civic ceremonies. The outlines of that portrait are consistent, describing shock, grief, and anger. But how well does that familiar picture capture the full range of responses? And how universal were the experiences captured in those public sources?

Two personal experiences of collective catastrophe prompted me to ask: How did people respond—at home, on the street, at work, with their families, by themselves—when they heard the news that Abraham Lincoln had been assassinated?

September 11, 2001, was the first day of the fall semester at New York University. When I set out to teach my 9:30 a.m. class, I'd already heard a phenomenal boom, though I had no idea what it was. In the streets of

Greenwich Village, I joined a knot of people gazing skyward toward the fractured North Tower of the World Trade Center a mile and a half downtown, thick smoke streaming from the upper windows. Then, as the second plane crashed from the other side, I saw an orange ball of fire burst from the South Tower. It astonishes me now that I went on to class, that the students—they too had seen the burning towers—arrived on time and sat in their chairs. Not until someone opened our classroom door with news of the buildings' collapse did I dismiss the students, all of us just beginning to comprehend the magnitude of the event.

Out on the street, people looked into one another's faces to verify that it wasn't a terrible nightmare, then rushed home to confirm everything by television. Most important was to communicate with loved ones, at least until the phone lines and Internet went dead. Especially for those who lost family and friends, life would never again be the same, but the world did not stop that morning. Even those separated from the flames, ash, and bodies by as little as a mile walked their dogs or finished up work that seemed important. At the same time, the city's residents began to create makeshift shrines, amassing thousands of candles, flowers, flags, and signs. The cellophane-wrapped bouquets made clear that people in flower shops and corner delis were still at work.

At sunrise the next day, I walked north in search of a newspaper—another way to confirm what still seemed like a dream. I fell in step with a neighbor on the same mission, passing through a police checkpoint and continuing on for dozens of blocks before we found an open newsstand. "U.S. ATTACKED," read the *New York Times* headline. Across the country that day, headlines universalized the nation's reaction: DEVASTATION, read the *Baltimore Sun*; OUTRAGE, cried the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. UNTHINKABLE, proclaimed the *Salt Lake City Tribune*.

People put their feelings into words by chalking messages onto sidewalks and taping up handwritten or hastily printed signs. Some imparted information that testified to the disaster: "Vigil in park @ dusk" or "For obvious reasons our screening this evening has been cancelled." The signboard outside a bar read, "Sports Today: None." Many posters revealed a spirit of unity, thanking police and firefighters, offering compassion, or asking for prayers—in English, Spanish, German, Chinese, Japanese, Hebrew, and Arabic. Others revealed more confusion than conviction: "I don't

know how to feel,” read one; a slip of paper, posted in multiple locations, read simply, “Why?”

It felt as if the whole world was grieving and in shock, yet evidence of tension and contention could be read everywhere. One sign called for peace, another for “peace after payback.” Messages calling for harmony were defaced with calls to war, in turn answered with cries for justice without revenge. Some signs spewed fury at the peacemakers; others warned mourners to distrust the media.

I began right away to gather tokens and relics: along with the newspapers from that day, I bought special issues of magazines paying tribute to the lost, and searched for postcards of the city skyline with the Twin Towers intact. As if in a trance, I dropped off an armload of warm clothes and helped prepare a meal for rescue workers. Three days later, as I rode a train out of New York, I found myself startled at the conversation in the seats just ahead: someone was talking about something unrelated to September 11.

Hazier in my memory (and undocumented in my personal archives) is the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, about which Americans continue to ask one another, or their elders, “Where were you when you found out?” My sole recollection of that day in November 1963, when I was five years old, consists of walking up Third Avenue in the Murray Hill neighborhood of New York with Mary Gallagher, the devout Catholic woman who took care of us while my father was at work. Schools had been dismissed early, and Mary and I were going to pick up my sister. How Mary loved Kennedy! His murder might as well have been the crucifixion, my father would say later—or if he was not quite Jesus, then JFK felt to Mary like a brother or a son, and she must have asked God why, struggling to find spiritual consolation. Up the avenue we walked, tears streaming down Mary’s face as she pressed a transistor radio to her ear. Other grown-ups on the street must have been weeping too, searching one another’s faces to make sure the awful tidings were true. In my sister’s first-grade classroom, the loudspeaker had crackled with an announcement that the president had been shot. At a Ford dealership on the West Side, my father had been paying for auto parts when the man behind the counter gruffly announced the news to his customers, then turned the volume up high on his back-room radio. Along with everyone else at the counter, my father completed his purchase.

If I'd been watching our small black-and-white television that afternoon, I'd have seen Walter Cronkite break into a soap opera broadcast to announce the shooting. When the camera switched to the CBS affiliate in Dallas, viewers saw the hotel ballroom where so many had gathered to hear President Kennedy deliver a speech. For a long moment, the lens trained on an African American man in waiter's vest and bowtie, wiping his eyes repeatedly with a linen napkin. The Texas reporter soon passed on the emergency room's unofficial pronouncement of death, informing viewers that the doctor himself was in tears. Minutes later, from the New York studio, Cronkite told his audience that Kennedy had died at 1:00 p.m. central standard time. Looking into the camera, he struggled just a bit to remain composed.

The grown-ups around me knew they were part of history-in-the-making that day, yet the world had not stood still then either. The next day, my father taught his dance class at the Martha Graham School, and Mary, still stricken, came to work. Soon I joined the one hundred million viewers watching the funeral on television. Surely it felt as if the shock and sorrow were universal, yet I now know that despite the overwhelming grief, there were also disagreements and anger, even fistfights between mourners and exulters. Indeed, just before Walter Cronkite officially announced Kennedy's death on air, he told the nation that Dallas had called out an extra four hundred policemen owing to "fears and concerns" for the president.

THESE EXPERIENCES, ENCOMPASSING ONLY A fraction of the range of reactions to transformative events, led me to wonder what stories we might find if we listened for immediate personal responses to Lincoln's assassination: of northerners and southerners, Yankees and Confederates, African Americans and whites, soldiers and civilians, men and women, rich and poor, the well known and the unknown. What would we find by reading extensively through the diaries people kept and the letters they wrote during the momentous hours, days, weeks, and months that followed the crime at Ford's Theatre? Here was a key moment of confusion and conflict that has been left out of the story or glossed over with generalities. The record of personal responses overlaps with public pronouncements, but the two are not the same, as individual writings reveal experiences that

cannot be recovered elsewhere. Drawing on evidence from hundreds of letters, diaries, and other sources that disclose personal responses, *Mourning Lincoln* delves into the moment of Lincoln's assassination to uncover a profusion of real-time sentiments, creating a multivocal narrative history that takes us far beyond the headlines to tell the story, and illuminate its meanings, on a human scale.

In the quest for raw reactions, I have bypassed memoirs. Although all private writings are in some respects written from memory, responses to Lincoln's assassination from the spring and summer of 1865 differ considerably from the polished reminiscences of burnished recollections. Consider the diary of Union soldier Henry Gawthrop, who lay in an army hospital in Virginia. In April 1865, Gawthrop recorded that President Lincoln had stopped by to shake hands with the wounded soldiers. Some fifty years later, the veteran elaborated on this memory, writing that Lincoln had greeted a Confederate soldier with the words, "I hope you will soon be well and return to your home." It's hard to tell whether Gawthrop neglected to record that scene at the time or if he embellished his memory bit by bit over the years until he came to believe it had happened that way. The fact is, the words that Gawthrop later attributed to Lincoln make the most sense in the context of white North-South reconciliation, fully under way by the early twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

Many memoirs, moreover, comfortably corroborate a static portrait of a weeping nation. In September 2001 and November 1963, many perceived the whole world to be in grief, and so did Lincoln's mourners in April 1865. When the bereaved wrote about the immediate aftermath of the assassination, they tended toward extravagant descriptions of *everyone, everywhere*, of universal grief and worldwide sorrow. When church bells chimed on a hillside, it felt as if bells were tolling across the land. With every building in a village draped in black, it seemed the whole country must be shrouded. Sharing feelings of shock and horror, out on the street or in church, it was easy to envision the entire nation in a state of distress, the whole world under the same spell of gloom.

None of this was literally true, and personal responses from the spring of 1865 make that eminently clear. Grieving men and women described a nation and a world in mourning, but it was they who constructed that uni-

versality, nourished by personal rituals: spreading the word to neighbors, tacking black drapery to windows, crowding together into church pews. All of those actions made the calamitous crime both more real and more bearable, and illusions of collective grief served the same purpose. As a black preacher in upstate New York put it, “No deeper sorrow ever filled the universal heart of the country.” In the words of a white Washington correspondent from California, horror “swept over the land,” while “from sea to sea a smitten nation wept.” People made the same kinds of observations in their personal writings. The shock, a mourner wrote to her brother, was soothed by the “universal feeling of one sorrow that overcame all.” After four years of bloody conflict, moreover, the bereaved were ready to see all enmity between Union and Confederate suddenly evaporated. “North & South are weeping together,” a woman wrote to her husband. Around the globe, the chorus echoed. In the West Indies, it seemed to a Christian missionary that even the most bitter sentiments of secession had melted away. In South Africa, a U.S. diplomat thought that “even those who never sympathized with our holy cause” were “overwhelmed with horror.” As the English novelist Elizabeth Gaskell insisted, “*Everyone* is feeling the same. I never knew so universal a feeling.” Accordingly, black worshippers in San Francisco resolved to “join our grief with that of the World.”<sup>3</sup>

In fact, though, not everyone was included in this vision of a monolithic grieving nation, nor did everyone wish to be. Even as many of Lincoln’s mourners were eager to universalize their responses, their own accounts contradicted that very yearning. Grand and impressive as the public ceremonies might have been, this end-of-war moment was less a time of unity and closure and much more a time of ongoing dissension. And no matter how comforting was the thought of universal grief, mourners knew that others responded to the assassination with gratitude and glee. Indeed, despite the common invocation of the Civil War as a conflict between North and South, regional boundaries prove inadequate, since the populations of neither section were of one mind. Lincoln’s supporters encompassed black southerners and black northerners and the majority of white northerners. Lincoln’s opponents encompassed the majority of white southerners and a significant minority of white northerners, the so-called Copperheads. In the pages that follow, I thus avoid the popular usage of *the North* and *the South*, writing instead about Lincoln’s mourners, Union supporters, and

Yankees on the one hand, and Confederates, rebels, and Lincoln's antagonists on the other.

THE CIVIL WAR WAS A revolutionary war, and Lincoln's assassination complicated its ending. The strife provoked by conflicting political stakes at war's end was inseparable from irreconcilable personal responses to Lincoln's assassination. No single moment can by itself explain the war's meaning, and responses to the startling burst of violence in Ford's Theatre cannot explain what lay in the future any more than can the Emancipation Proclamation, the military turning point at the Battle of Gettysburg, or the president's stirring second inaugural address. If one legacy of the war was an extraordinary moment of black freedom and equality during radical Reconstruction that foreshadowed the Civil Rights Movement, we can find the beginnings of that historical development in the post-assassination determination of African Americans and their white allies. If another legacy was a replication of the violent and oppressive conditions of racial slavery that lasted well into the twentieth century, we can find the roots of that trajectory in the Confederate defiance that followed Lincoln's death.

Responses to the crime at Ford's Theatre were intertwined with different understandings of the war that had just ended and, in turn, different hopes and fears about what would come next. When Lincoln was assassinated, mourners cast him as the best friend Confederates could have hoped for, and some Confederates reluctantly agreed, as Union victory and the end of black slavery seemed to usher in their subjugation to tyrannical Yankees. Whether they imagined Lincoln as merciful or malicious, defeated white southerners hoped the assassination was God's plan to vindicate their downfall, looking back to the days when military victory and independence had seemed certain, and farther back to the lost world of white mastery. When Confederates looked ahead, it was to a day when God would ultimately prove their cause right and righteous, or at least to a time when they could wreak vengeance upon their conquerors.

Lincoln's mourners, by contrast, wanted to believe that the assassination was part of God's plan to render the outcome of the four-year conflict more meaningful and long-lasting. They had just experienced the exhilaration of victory, and for African Americans and white abolitionists, that triumph encompassed the remarkable achievement of black freedom. With

the overthrow of secession and slavery, and now with a martyred chief, the victors looked optimistically toward a reconstructed nation, to God's graces for themselves, and to divine punishment for their enemies, out of whose ranks had emerged the assassin. Yet catastrophe and crisis can breed contradiction, and in shaping visions for the future, Lincoln's mourners portrayed their slain leader in two different ways. On the one hand, they pointed to evidence of the president's moderation and lenience; on the other, they drew attention to hints of his political radicalism. If the lenient Lincoln was an ally of Confederates, the radical Lincoln was an ally to African Americans. Had Lincoln lived, he could hardly have been both, but while President Andrew Johnson recoiled from demands for equal rights, Lincoln's martyrdom permitted black Americans and their white friends to invoke his name in the quest for post-emancipation equality. Amid fears for the future, they looked to Lincoln's most admirable actions—and to what little he had said on the subject in his last days—to fortify their impassioned calls for justice.

*MOURNING LINCOLN* BEGINS WITH THE fall of the Confederate capital and the surrender of General Robert E. Lee in early April 1865. The story continues through the execution of four of the conspirators in early July, concluding with a brief look at the postwar decades. Each chapter tells a story, and together the chapters complicate the larger story of the assassination, charting the optimism evinced by the victors-turned-mourners and exposing the formidable challenges to visions of a unified nation, including fissures between black and white mourners.

The experiences of three protagonists, for whom surviving records are particularly rich, open each chapter and serve as a template for broader investigations. The first two, husband and wife Sarah and Albert Browne, were white abolitionists from Salem, Massachusetts, who despaired mightily at Lincoln's death. The third, Rodney Dorman, was a Confederate lawyer living in Jacksonville, Florida, who delighted in Lincoln's murder. The Brownes and Dorman represent two ends of the ideological spectrum and two of the most powerful ideologies of the Civil War era—abolitionism on the one hand and diehard rebeldom on the other—and thus together serve as excellent conduits through which to understand the conflicts that raged on after Union victory and Lincoln's death. Although the Brownes and



Albert Browne Sr. and Sarah Browne, about 1865.

*Browne Family Papers, The Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.*

Dorman never met, at times they seem to be talking directly to each other. Here I introduce them more fully.

The Brownes lived within a passionate ideological universe of abolitionist Protestant ethics. Though not radicals like the followers of William Lloyd Garrison—the man who publicly burned a copy of the U.S. Constitution for its complicity with slavery—they were liberal Christians (first Congregationalists, then Unitarians) who prayed for black freedom and demanded suffrage for black men. Steeped in convictions about the virtues of individual striving in a burgeoning capitalist nation, Sarah and Albert dedicated themselves to the moral superiority of free labor, a central tenet of the new Republican Party that had risen from the ashes of the antebellum Whigs. In this promising view, work was an inherently noble and dignified enterprise, and unfettered opportunity guaranteed that hard work would bring uplift and upward mobility.

When they looked to the South, antislavery Republicans like the Brownes saw both an un-Christian evil and a backward civilization of economic exploitation and stagnation. Slave labor, the exact opposite of free labor, permitted no incentive or chance for improvement and, worst of all, degraded the very act of work, thereby spreading indolence and immorality throughout the population, black and white, rich and poor. The problem was that the Brownes' brand of free-labor ideology glorified landowner-

ship just when the northern landscape was seismically shifting from farm to factory. As the North saw a steadily growing and increasingly divided population of employers and wageworkers (the latter including women and children), the Brownes held fast to their ideals, pressing for the transfer of southern land from former masters to former slaves in order to emulate a northern economic system that was already rapidly breaking down. At the same time, a conventional brand of paternalistic racism marred their earnest professions of equality.

Albert Browne was a rope manufacturer, a partner with Whiton, Browne, and Wheelwright, a maritime supply dealer in Salem and Boston. Between 1863 and 1865, he worked for the Union army, as an agent of the U.S. Treasury Department, taking charge of abandoned enemy property in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. General William Tecumseh Sherman remembered Albert as a “shrewd, clever Yankee,” crediting him with the idea of sending a telegram about the fall of Savannah to President Lincoln in December 1864; that advice resulted in Sherman’s then-and-now famous message to the president, “I beg to present you as a Christmas-gift the city of Savannah.” Albert made his southern home in the town of Beaufort, on Port Royal Island in the South Carolina Sea Islands. When the Union occupied the islands early in the war, much of the native white population fled, and Beaufort’s gracious homes stood empty. Along the streets, Albert likely encountered only Yankee soldiers and former slaves—one visitor saw black children playing happily, “now that the dark shadow of slavery hangs over them no more.” Albert’s job included raiding expeditions that yielded mostly bales of cotton left behind by fleeing Confederates, though he and his men seized everything from scrap iron to buried silver. They also halted blockade running and personally informed African Americans of their freedom.<sup>4</sup>

Back home in the dynamic port town of Salem, Sarah Browne tended their spacious residence at 40 Summer Street on the corner of Broad. She managed the household, including directing a group of servants (likely Irish immigrants) who lightened her day-to-day burdens considerably. Sarah sewed, tended to the family’s health, and taught her younger son French and Latin. She advised her husband on professional matters, visited neighbors, and received guests. She worked hard, though with plenty of time for reading and the luxury of lying down midday whenever she felt tired. In

the spring of 1865, Sarah was living with Edward, nearly twelve (two more sons had died in infancy), and Alice, in her early twenties. The eldest child, Albert Jr., had graduated from Harvard College in 1853, at eighteen the youngest member of his class. Through the war, Albert Jr. served as military secretary to Massachusetts governor John Andrew, making frequent visits home to his mother and siblings. Nellie, the Brownes' other daughter, had died the year before, at the age of twenty-two.<sup>5</sup>

Sarah Browne avidly kept up with the war news. Salem had supplied the Union with more than three thousand soldiers and sailors over the course of four years (out of a population of just over twenty thousand). Black residents served in the Fifty-Fourth and Fifty-Fifth Massachusetts regiments, and white residents served as their officers. Salem men fought at Bull Run and Antietam, Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, Gettysburg and Cold Harbor. They also stepped in to quell the New York City draft riots in 1863 and marched through Georgia and the Carolinas with General Sherman. Men from Salem entered the fallen Confederate capital of Richmond at war's end, and some were present for Lee's surrender at Appomattox. When the war was over, more than a hundred came home wounded, and more than two hundred never came home at all.

Sarah and Albert's antislavery sentiments emerged even more strongly in some of their children. As a law student, Albert Jr. had gotten himself arrested for participating in a violent fight outside the Boston courthouse on behalf of a fugitive slave. At school, Nellie Browne befriended Charlotte Forten, the daughter of a well-to-do black family in Philadelphia. Forten had moved to Salem at sixteen, eager for an education unavailable in the segregated classrooms of her native city. Boarding with a family of prominent black abolitionists, she nonetheless found life trying in the "conservative, aristocratic old city of Salem," as she put it, for African Americans in and around Boston still suffered "insulting language" and could be treated as pariahs. Girls at school might be "kind and cordial," Forten confided to her diary, while out on the street "they feared to recognize me." In her journal, Forten referred to Nellie Browne as *Brownie*. "There is one young girl and only one," she wrote of Nellie, "who I believe thoroughly and heartily appreciates anti-slavery, *radical* anti-slavery and has no prejudice against color." In 1855, when Charlotte was eighteen and Nellie fourteen, the two went together to join the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society. When Nellie

left Salem to attend school in Cambridge in 1856, Charlotte missed her white friend. "More lonesome than ever now," she wrote one day, longing for Nellie's company, and on another day, "Feel sorry that *Brownie* has gone."<sup>6</sup>

Beginning in 1858, Sarah Browne kept a diary that would continue through 1884, the year before she died. In pocket-sized annual journals, she captured her activities and thoughts in neat handwriting. The wartime separation of husband and wife meant that the couple also wrote each other long letters during those years, and Albert's, often addressed to the whole family, were particularly loquacious, serving nearly as his own diary. In the Brownes' experiences, we find not only the complexities of shock, sorrow, and ferocious anger over Lincoln's assassination but also a record of preoccupation with private loss: the death of Nellie Browne in 1864.

IN JACKSONVILLE, RODNEY DORMAN COULD count himself a devotee of the most virulent proslavery ideology to emerge in the antebellum South, characterizing the enslavement of African Americans as economically efficient and benevolent, rooted as it was in white superiority and black inferiority. Dorman further understood black people as incapable of desiring or fighting for freedom and thus blamed meddling white abolitionists for everything that proved otherwise. For Dorman, the entire Civil War was an act of Yankee aggression that unlawfully interfered with the natural and constitutional rights of white southerners, and he rapidly became a die-hard rebel, utterly despising the enemy and conceding no possibility of reconciliation. The only satisfactory sequel to Confederate defeat would be retribution and ultimate redemption.

Jacksonville lay on the Saint Johns River in the northeast corner of Florida, just inland from the Atlantic, and Dorman had arrived there as a young man, from up north. That this zealous Confederate was a native of western Massachusetts who spent part of his boyhood in Ohio is not surprising. With other economically ambitious New Englanders, Dorman had come to Florida in the late 1830s. Many such men made their fortunes in the lumber business, but Dorman became a prosperous attorney and never looked back. In 1850, nearly half the city's population was enslaved, and Dorman owned a forty-year-old black man, whom he likely hired out to the sawmills. Also in Dorman's household in 1850 lived a free black woman, listed

in the census as his servant, and it's possible that their relationship encompassed sexual exploitation in return for legal freedom. Ten years later, on the eve of the Civil War, Dorman no longer owned a slave or had a live-in servant, though his personal wealth had increased five times over. He never married.<sup>7</sup>

Yankees had done well in northern Florida through the booming 1850s, but as sectional hostilities heated up, fierce secessionists began to accuse them of abolitionism. Maybe that's why Dorman told the census-taker in 1860 that he was born in South Carolina; by then he had so thoroughly become a southerner that he wanted no one to mistake him for anything else. In the months leading up to Lincoln's election that year, even silence could be construed as disloyalty to the Confederate cause, and self-appointed vigilance committees in Jacksonville harassed the Unionists in their midst, sometimes violently. In January 1861, Florida became the third state to secede from the Union, following South Carolina by three weeks and Mississippi by a day. (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas departed next, followed in the spring by Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina.)

Dorman's home, which included his law office, stood downtown on Pine Street (present-day Main Street), just west of the intersection of Ocean and Bay. Over the course of the war, Jacksonville changed drastically. The Union blockade of the Saint Johns halted the city's lively river trade, and the Confederate army claimed most of its young white men. Slaves either escaped or were forced by their masters into the interior, and many of the northerners who clung to Unionist sentiments fled as well. The homes and churches that lined the once elegant, gaslit streets soon stood empty and shuttered. Weeds choked the sidewalks, the railroad depot lay abandoned, and merchants' once crowded shelves held precious few goods.<sup>8</sup>

Even as other well-to-do Confederate men departed with their families, Rodney Dorman stayed, and for him the pivotal event of the Civil War was the third of four Union occupations of Jacksonville. This mission, cut short after a mere three weeks in March 1863, had been intended as a grand one. Two months earlier, Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring legal freedom for all slaves in areas in rebellion against the United States and providing for the enlistment of black men into the Union army. Now the Florida expedition was to be undertaken by the First and Second South Carolina regiments, the first black units of the Civil War, recruited

from the ranks of former slaves and led by white abolitionists. Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, commanding the First South Carolina, envisioned the assignment as a moral and political endeavor to prove the capabilities of black soldiers and to help destroy slavery: the presence of black troops would facilitate freedom, as slaves in the Deep South escaped to Union lines. It's possible that the slave once owned by Rodney Dorman fought with these first black regiments; some of the men were from northern Florida, and as Higginson noted, "Many were owned here & do not love the people." Indeed, the expedition's other explicit purpose was to unsettle local whites. A black woman who traveled with the regiment remembered Jacksonville Confederates as "bitterly against our people," and Dorman accordingly called them "Higginson's nigger occupation."<sup>9</sup>

Rodney Dorman was apoplectic as the occupiers took over his city and threatened imprisonment for any white resident who refused to take an oath of allegiance to the United States. At some point, Dorman left home to live with other refugees west of the city, near enough to make his way in and out of the main streets as he pleased (though he would never take the oath). Then, just when Colonel Higginson decided to raid the interior, higher-ups suddenly ordered the Union regiments out of Jacksonville, probably because white troops were needed in Charleston and the black regiments could not sustain the Florida operation alone. Most observers agreed that it was the white soldiers who set fire to the city, just before leaving. Some said that black men helped out or at least watched with satisfaction as the spring breezes fanned the flames. When the vessels left the docks, a good third of Jacksonville was burning. Fire consumed Dorman's entire home and law office, scorching even his fences and shrubbery. Sure that the Union forces had invaded his property before they set the building aflame, Dorman declared his losses in a claim filed with the Confederate government: more than sixteen thousand dollars' worth of property, either stolen or burned. In the same distinctively flat and wide handwriting found in his journals, Dorman itemized everything, from furniture, firearms, and fishing equipment to a gold watch, a chess set, and a silk umbrella—even a hat brush and a dog whistle. Most egregious of all was the destruction of his nearly four-hundred-volume law library.<sup>10</sup>

Union forces, including the black men of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts, returned to occupy Jacksonville in early 1864, and this time they



Newly free African Americans in Jacksonville, Florida, pose in front of the building appropriated as the Union Provost Marshal's office, in 1864. The presence of freedpeople and Union army soldiers, especially black soldiers, continually infuriated Rodney Dorman. *Courtesy of Jacksonville Historical Society, with assistance of Dr. Daniel R. Schafer.*

stayed. One soldier described the city as “heaps of ashes.” Another saw former slaves meeting hungry former mistresses in the sutler stores and noted the once grand homes of white people serving as hospitals for his comrades. In early April, President Lincoln conveyed his pleasure to the abolitionist general David Hunter. “I am glad to see the accounts of your colored force at Jacksonville,” he wrote. “It is important to the enemy that such a force shall not take shape and grow and thrive in the South, and in precisely the same proportion it is important to us that it *shall*.” Still, Rodney Dorman declined to leave, for Jacksonville was the only home he knew. Just to walk in and out of town, he now needed a pass, which he felt sure Union officials would deny him in light of his refusal to take the oath. But Dorman managed to exempt himself from declaring allegiance to the United States by having someone vouch for him—probably his brother, the better-known lawyer Orloff Dorman, who had moved from New England to Chicago to Saint Augustine. Orloff, who had remained a Unionist and served as a paymaster for the Union army in the Department of the South (the Civil War did indeed pit brother against brother), likely assured the occupying authorities that Rodney generally minded his own business.<sup>11</sup>

By the time the Confederacy surrendered, Rodney Dorman lived a mostly isolated life. Though he recorded occasional interactions with like-minded locals, his journal was his steadiest companion. The first extant tome (the volume covering 1862 and 1863 was destroyed in the fire) opens in 1864, and six more take him through 1886. Each notebook, free of printed dates, contains hundreds of pages of writing. The third and fourth volumes comprise the year 1865 and run nearly seven hundred pages apiece. Dorman later entitled his wartime journals “Memoranda of Events that transpired at Jacksonville, Florida, & in its vicinity; with some remarks & comments thereon,” the last phrase referring to the fact that he inserted additional commentary when he copied them over in the postwar years. Dorman penned lengthy meditations on legal and historical subjects, but the diaries also gave him a place to vent his fury, sheltering extended rants against the federal government, the enemy army, President Lincoln, northern politicians, and especially Yankee abolitionists—people just like Sarah and Albert Browne.

LONG AFTER I SELECTED MY protagonists, I discovered that the Brownes and Rodney Dorman had crossed paths, if obliquely, during the Civil War. In the spring of 1864, Dorman wrote angrily about a “cow-stealing raid” up the Saint Johns River led by one General Birney. He mentioned a local newspaper account of the raid, written by the U.S. treasury agent, a man named Browne (spelled with an *e*, he noted), a tale Dorman found infuriatingly self-aggrandizing, not to mention self-incriminating. Indeed, Albert Browne had been part of that expedition. Moreover, Sarah, Eddie, Alice, and Nellie had left New England that April for an extended visit south, and while Albert was off on his raid, the rest of the family made an excursion to Jacksonville. Sarah found the city disappointing, wrecked as it was by the “havoc of war,” but they all nonetheless had a lovely time as guests of the Union commanders, touring the splendid mansion appropriated for army headquarters, enjoying teatime on the veranda, taking leisurely boat rides, and visiting the men of the U.S. Colored Troops. The family also visited with one Lyman Stickney, the U.S. tax collector to whom Rodney Dorman would later write an angry letter in reference to his destroyed property. When Albert Browne returned in soiled and tattered clothing, he regaled the family with accounts not only of captured cattle and cotton but also of

black people whom he and his men had alerted to emancipation. A year later, Sarah sorted through a parlor closet in Salem during spring cleaning, arranging “little mementoes from Beaufort, St. Augustine—Jacksonville.”<sup>12</sup>

FOR SARAH AND ALBERT BROWNE and for Rodney Dorman—just as for so many others—thinking about, articulating, and documenting their responses to the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln became part of working out an understanding of the war. The polyphonic din that followed that night at Ford’s Theatre pointed toward long-lasting legacies that remain part of our world today.

We begin as the battlefield war drew to a close, in early April 1865. At that moment, the call to find meaning had already taken on a new urgency. How would Union victory play out? What did Confederate defeat portend? What kind of nation would the people and their leaders create? Black freedom had been seized and delivered, but would it last? Peace would soon be declared, but could it endure? How could Confederates be brought back into the citizenry? Where and how would former slaves live and work? Could they become citizens too? The pages that follow explore the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, convictions, and questions of Lincoln’s mourners and his antagonists as they confronted an event that transformed both the Civil War and the nation’s history.