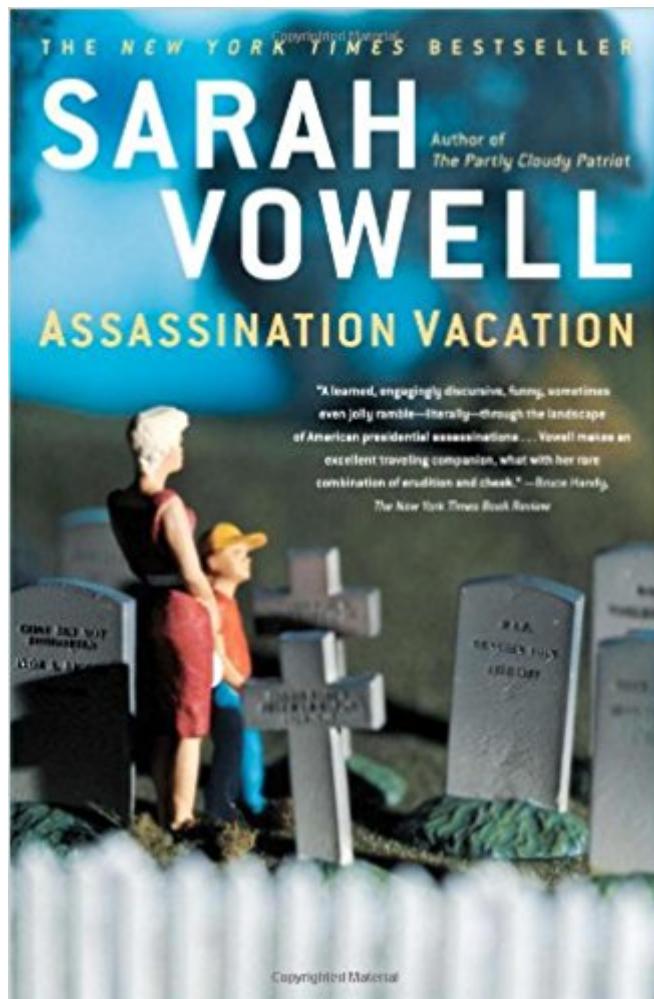


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# Assassination Vacation



## Synopsis

New York Times bestselling author of *The Wordy Shipmates* and contributor to NPR's "This American Life" Sarah Vowell embarks on a road trip to sites of political violence, from Washington DC to Alaska, to better understand our nation's ever-evolving political system and history. Sarah Vowell exposes the glorious conundrums of American history and culture with wit, probity, and an irreverent sense of humor. With *Assassination Vacation*, she takes us on a road trip like no other -- a journey to the pit stops of American political murder and through the myriad ways they have been used for fun and profit, for political and cultural advantage. From Buffalo to Alaska, Washington to the Dry Tortugas, Vowell visits locations immortalized and influenced by the spilling of politically important blood, reporting as she goes with her trademark blend of wisecracking humor, remarkable honesty, and thought-provoking criticism. We learn about the jinx that was Robert Todd Lincoln (present at the assassinations of Presidents Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley) and witness the politicking that went into the making of the Lincoln Memorial. The resulting narrative is much more than an entertaining and informative travelogue -- it is the disturbing and fascinating story of how American death has been manipulated by popular culture, including literature, architecture, sculpture, and -- the author's favorite -- historical tourism. Though the themes of loss and violence are explored and we make detours to see how the Republican Party became the Republican Party, there are all kinds of lighter diversions along the way into the lives of the three presidents and their assassins, including mummies, show tunes, mean-spirited totem poles, and a nineteenth-century biblical sex cult.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Offbeat and entertaining, this audio tour of the memorials, monuments and relics linked to the first three U.S. presidential assassinations features an impressive lineup of readers, including Conan O'Brien, Dave Eggers, Stephen King, Jon Stewart and, of course, Vowell herself, whose distinct voice and deadpan delivery will be familiar to fans of NPR's *This American Life*. Elements of that show are evident here, particularly in the way the music that accompanies the readings (scored by Michael Giacchino of *The Incredibles*) helps establish mood and heighten effect. Vowell handles most of the narration herself, with the guest narrators taking on specific roles. King, for example, voices the part of Abraham Lincoln. This approach works well most of the time, though it does make for some awkward shifts in tempo and voice. While Vowell's interplay with Eggers in the role of a tour guide sounds natural, her reenacted conversation with Catherine Keener as a museum curator seems stilted. Minor imperfections aside, however, this is a funny and expertly produced audiobook from a sharp social critic who wears her liberal heart on her sleeve. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Adult/High School  
Vowell has a perspective on American history that is definitely funny. She visits museums, historic sites, statues, libraries, anything remotely relevant to successful presidential assassins, and a few of those not so successful. This is an amusing way to learn history, but it is also an unusual look at the interconnectedness of things. Robert Todd Lincoln, a.k.a. Jinxy McDeath, was present, or nearly so, at three assassinations—his father's, Garfield's, and McKinley's. To understand Garfield's assassin, the author spends time at the Oneida Colony in upstate New York, a religious commune that preached a combination of free love and the second coming, and connects it with Jonathan Edwards. She tracks the Lincoln conspirators through the process of plot and escape to hanging and imprisonment, even describing Dr. Mudd's enormous contribution when the plague hit the prison island of Dry Tortuga. Garfield's assassin was deeply involved in the redirection of the Republican Party after the Civil War, and McKinley's was an anarchist following, he thought, the tenets of Emma Goldman. There are family anecdotes and real scholarship in this quirky road trip. Teens will get an interesting view of one aspect of American history while picking up odd bits of information about a whole lot more. There is much to enjoy in

this discursive yet somehow cohesive book. Susan H. Woodcock, Fairfax County Public Library, VA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

What a bizarre idea for a travel book! Yet so well written it makes me wish I had thought of it. Ms. Vowell has a style that is unique by anyone's standards - simultaneously snarky and sensitive, and ever insightful. There is also just a bit of an edge, appropriate for a country that has managed to kill several of its elected leaders. The book focuses primarily on sites related to the Lincoln assassination - some tenuously so (e.g. the island prison where Dr. Mudd was incarcerated) - weaving her visits in and around a historical narrative that is no less accurate for betraying an ultra-modern hipness. It's the second book of hers I've read, and the best; I eagerly await acquiring the others.

assassination vacation has been on my reading list since I saw sarah vowell talk about it on the daily show. I was expecting a humorous novel about the assassinated presidents and kinda got that but it was mostly about her journey, which was also entertaining. did I like it? it had its moments. would I read it again? probably not. do I recommend? depends on what kind of books you like. this book isn't definitely not for everyone.

Overall I enjoyed this book. Rather than bore the reader with the typical litany of dry, historical facts, Vowell entertains with (often humorous) recollections of, and offbeat observations from, her visits to numerous historical sites related to the three presidential assassinations in the post-civil war period. She also isn't bound by the typical norms of "tact" when it comes to the usually somber subject of gunned down presidents. For example, she admits to having a bit of a crush on John Wilkes Booth and calls Todd Lincoln, who was connected to all three assassinations, "Jinxy McDeath." There's more here than goofing around, though. Enough raw history is intermixed to give somebody new to the subject(s) at least a basic understanding of the facts and motivations. Furthermore, the gags are often conduits to thoughtful insights. At times the author's obvious anti-Right political leanings come through unfiltered and undiluted. Liberals won't be bothered at all while Conservatives will have to choke down a few insults. As one of the latter, I held my nose and continued through those bits, mindful of the fact that the "lack of a filter" is exactly what makes Vowell's work more interesting than your typical history writer's.

Assassination Vacation by Sarah Vowell - A young, awkward, female historian tours the countryside with her reluctant friends and family, visiting both interesting and not so interesting sites to do with assassinated presidents (specifically Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley) and the sites associated with their assassins. Vowell's odd humor brought a dark subject out in an entertaining way. The book was written during the first George W. Bush administration, so her personal political remarks unfortunately date what should be a timeless subject, but besides the intro, the comments were few and I would still recommend the book to anyone even remotely interested in American history. The first time I started it, I stopped because of the political stuff but read the reviews here and decided to push through and it does get better. I learned more than I ever knew I wanted to know about late 19th century sex cults who now make plates, how important a person needs to be to get their plumbing in a museum, and if you were president, why you wouldn't want to invite Robert Todd Lincoln to your parties.

Great read. Vowell does an unprecedeted job of making history both informative and hilarious. Each of her books is better than the last.

Fascinating look at some lesser-known events and characters from U.S. history. Anyone who enjoys American history, presidential trivia, travelogues, or slightly morbid topics will likely enjoy this book. Keep an eye peeled for the particularly interesting discussion of the Oneida colony in upstate NY. The one thing that bugged me a bit about the book was the often heavy-handed comparisons to the G.W. Bush administration. I share Vowell's outlook on the present-day topics she discusses (hello, Patriot Act!), but I can draw the lines between past and present incompetence myself--without a need for Vowell to "connect the dots" for me. By constantly pointing out the parallels, I feel Vowell sells her readers a bit short. Also, it makes the book feel a bit dated... which I realize sounds weird, since this is primarily a book about events that took place 100 or more years ago.

I very much enjoyed my introduction to this author. Her observations are well researched and sometimes humorously "snarky." I thought I knew much about Lincoln and his assignation, but I learned some fascinating things about him, Mary Todd, Robert, and that villain John Wilkes Booth. This is not just about Lincoln's assassination. I enjoyed traveling with Sarah Vowell on this sometimes macabre and often hilarious vacation. Highly recommend. "The wordy Shipmates" is awaiting my attention.

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