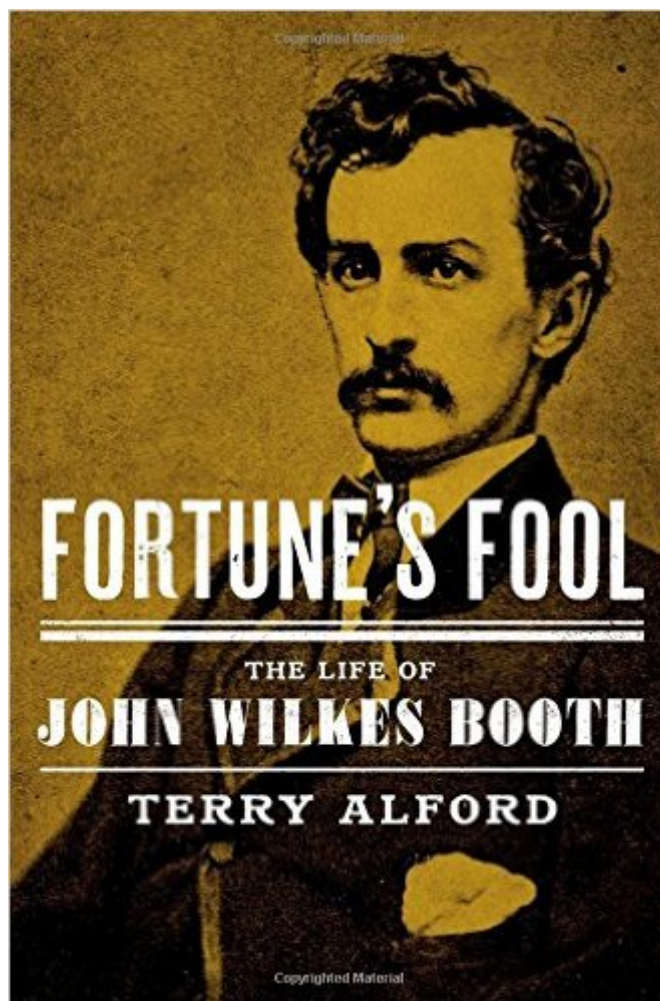


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# Fortune's Fool: The Life Of John Wilkes Booth



## Synopsis

2016 Los Angeles Times Book Prize Finalist for Best Biography  
2016 National Book Critics Circle Book Prize Finalist for Best Biography  
2016 Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters Award Finalist for Best Nonfiction  
2016 Abraham Lincoln Institute Book Award Winner

With a single shot from a pistol small enough to conceal in his hand, John Wilkes Booth catapulted into history on the night of April 14, 1865. The assassination of President Abraham Lincoln stunned a nation that was just emerging from the chaos and calamity of the Civil War, and the president's untimely death altered the trajectory of postwar history. But to those who knew Booth, the event was even more shocking--for no one could have imagined that this fantastically gifted actor and well-liked man could commit such an atrocity. In *Fortune's Fool*, Terry Alford provides the first comprehensive look at the life of an enigmatic figure whose life has been overshadowed by his final, infamous act. Tracing Booth's story from his uncertain childhood in Maryland, characterized by a difficult relationship with his famous actor father, to his successful acting career on stages across the country, Alford offers a nuanced picture of Booth as a public figure, performer, and deeply troubled man. Despite the fame and success that attended Booth's career--he was billed at one point as "the youngest star in the world"--he found himself consumed by the Confederate cause and the desire to help the South win its independence. Alford reveals the tormented path that led Booth to conclude, as the Confederacy collapsed in April 1865, that the only way to revive the South and punish the North for the war would be to murder Lincoln--whatever the cost to himself or others. The textured and compelling narrative gives new depth to the familiar events at Ford's Theatre and the aftermath that followed, culminating in Booth's capture and death at the hands of Union soldiers 150 years ago. Based on original research into government archives, historical libraries, and family records, *Fortune's Fool* offers the definitive portrait of John Wilkes Booth.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 464 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (April 14, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195054121

ISBN-13: 978-0195054125

Product Dimensions: 9.3 x 1.5 x 6.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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## Customer Reviews

I have been a passionate student of the life and ideas of Abraham Lincoln for a very long while and currently own approximately 250 to 275 books either by or on the man I believe to be not only the greatest American president, but the greatest American. But there is a gap in my large Lincoln collection: I own only two books on the assassination of Lincoln. Furthermore, I always get a sense of dread when a biography approaches April 1865. I believe it to be one of the great tragedies in American history, and especially in Southern history. No one caused more harm to the South, in my opinion, than John Wilkes Booth. Instead of a president who genuinely believed in reconstruction, we instead got an inept president who favored retaliation and a Congress that shared his mood, if they shared almost nothing else. As a result of this avoidance on my part of reading about the killing of Lincoln I have really not learned much more about Booth than I learned from various Lincoln biographies. That is actually quite a bit, but nonetheless I found that this wonderfully researched and well-written biography of Booth to be exceptionally informative. I came away from it understanding significantly more about Booth, how his personal beliefs were formed, and the why he thought killing Lincoln to be a heroic act instead of the utterly stupid event that it actually was. One also gains a sense that Booth's killing of Lincoln was not just a horrible loss to America by losing a genuinely great president, but a meaningless waste of Booth's own life. "Fortune's Fool" is an apt phrase for the title. So much loss for such a ill-conceived project. I heartily recommend this book. If you are interested in Abraham Lincoln, I strongly recommend two books about the assassination and burial of Lincoln.

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