1. Allan Pinkerton was fond of saying that “the ends justify the means, if the ends are for the accomplishment of Justice.” Does this rationale justify his actions in Baltimore?

2. Abraham Lincoln believed that he had an obligation to make himself available to “both friends and strangers,” and refused to make compromises for the sake of his personal safety. As a result, as one supporter noted, his life was always “in reach of anyone, sane or mad, who was ready to murder and be hanged for it.” Lincoln’s sense of obligation to the public may have been admirable, but was it justifiable?

3. Kate Warne, America’s first female private eye, had a talent for striking up useful friendships with the wives and mistresses of suspected criminals. “A female detective may go and worm out secrets in ways that are impossible for male detectives,” she told Pinkerton. Would her methods be effective today?

4. Horace Greeley, the influential newspaper editor, claimed that “there was forty times the reason for shooting” Lincoln in 1861 than in 1865, “and at least forty times as many intent on killing or having him killed.” If this is an accurate statement, why was Lincoln so reluctant to acknowledge threats against his life?

5. Ward Lamon, Lincoln’s “particular friend,” equipped himself with an arsenal of weapons at the start of the journey to Washington, and believed that he could handle any danger that might cross Lincoln’s path. Was this realistic? In hindsight, were Lamon’s efforts a help or a hindrance?
6. History remembers Allan Pinkerton for his failures as General McClellan’s chief of intelligence during the Civil War, and for the violent strikebreaking work carried out by the Pinkerton agency. Based on his actions in this book, does this judgment represent Pinkerton fairly?

7. “The role of a detective is a high and honorable calling,” Pinkerton once wrote. “He is an officer of justice and must himself be pure and above reproach.” Yet Pinkerton himself often flouted the law, defying the Fugitive Slave Act to assist runaways on the Underground Railroad. Do you believe his actions were justified, or was this a form of vigilantism?

8. Pinkerton drew criticism for hiring Kate Warne and other women to do work that was not only dangerous but also morally compromising. His detractors charged that “no respectable woman who becomes a detective can remain virtuous.” This view may seem old-fashioned today, but was there any validity to it at the time?

9. Much has been written about Mary Todd Lincoln’s stormy disposition. A cousin remarked that she had “an emotional temperament much like an April day.” Do her actions during the journey to Washington support or contradict this portrait?

10. “We are not enemies, but friends,” Lincoln declared in his inaugural address. “We must not be enemies.” Seven states had already seceded as he spoke these words. Was it realistic to hope for a peaceful resolution to the secession crisis?

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