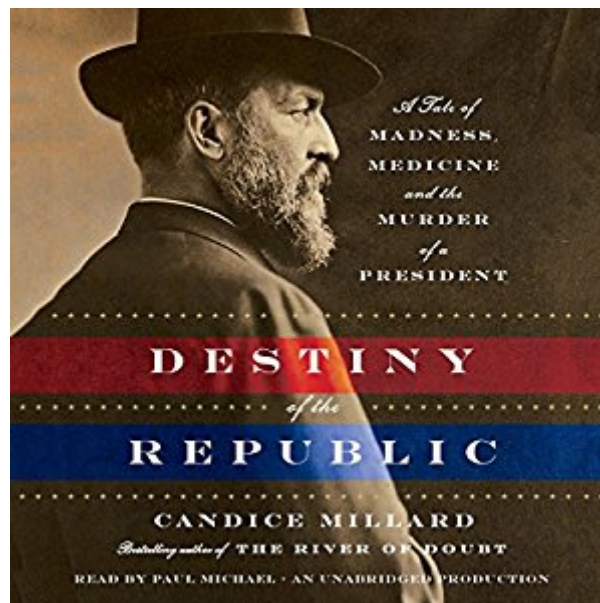


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# Destiny Of The Republic: A Tale Of Madness, Medicine And The Murder Of A President



## Synopsis

James A. Garfield may have been the most extraordinary man ever elected president. Born into abject poverty, he rose to become a wunderkind scholar, a Civil War hero, and a renowned and admired reformist congressman. Nominated for president against his will, he engaged in a fierce battle with the corrupt political establishment. But four months after his inauguration, a deranged office seeker tracked Garfield down and shot him in the back. But the shot didn't kill Garfield. The drama of what happened subsequently is a powerful story of a nation in turmoil. The unhinged assassin's half-delivered strike shattered the fragile national mood of a country so recently fractured by civil war, and left the wounded president as the object of a bitter behind-the-scenes struggle for power over his administration, over the nation's future, and, hauntingly, over his medical care. A team of physicians administered shockingly archaic treatments, to disastrous effect. As his condition worsened, Garfield received help: Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, worked around the clock to invent a new device capable of finding the bullet. Meticulously researched, epic in scope, and pulsating with an intimate human focus and high-velocity narrative drive, *The Destiny of the Republic* will stand alongside *The Devil in the White City* and *The Professor and the Madman* as a classic of narrative history. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

James Garfield is most often remembered, if at all, as the president who was assassinated shortly

after taking office. *Destiny of the Republic* brings the dead president back to life. This is not, however, a biography of Garfield. Rather, it is a stirring account of American life and politics during the time of the Garfield presidency, not long after the conclusion of the Civil War, and of a presidential murder. Garfield's early years are sketched out in cursory fashion, his (sometimes troubled) relationship with and eventual devotion to his wife Lucretia is covered in only a few pages, and the death of his youngest child receives little more than a mention. Rather than focusing on Garfield's personal life, Candice Millard devotes her attention to political divisions within the Republican Party (particularly Garfield's battles with New York Senator Roscoe Conkling and the vice president he controlled), as well as Garfield's frustration with the obligations of the office that he had little desire to hold. The president's assassin is given nearly as much attention as the president. There are times when the book has the feel of a thriller, as the ominous Charles Guiteau weaves in and out of the text, inching himself closer to the president. Millard depicts Guiteau as a con man with delusions of grandeur whose madness was characterized by a growing belief that his plan to assassinate Garfield was divinely inspired. The assassination occurs at the book's midway point. Millard then treats us to a different kind of political battle, a medical drama about doctors who vie for the opportunity to treat the president and who, ironically, become responsible for his death. Arrogant in their refusal to believe in the existence of germs, American doctors rejected evidence that antiseptic surgical conditions increase a patient's chance of survival. The dirty finger and unwashed probes inserted into Garfield's wound in search of a bullet sealed the president's fate, infecting an injury that Garfield would likely have survived if left untreated. The book concludes with an account of Garfield's autopsy and Guiteau's trial. *Destiny of the Republic* succeeds on two levels. First, it is informative. Millard fills the text with interesting facts culled from a variety of primary and secondary source materials, including frequent quotations from contemporaneous news stories and Garfield's diary, to set the scene for Garfield's presidency. We learn enough about the man to understand that he would have made an admirable president. It's interesting to note that Garfield, despite his love of farming, was a scholar, a professor of literature and ancient languages, well versed in mathematics and keenly interested in science, the sort of man who, if running for office today, would likely be branded an "elitist." Garfield's speeches condemning slavery and the unequal treatment of black Americans are eloquent and moving; the book is worth reading for those passages alone. Second, the book is entertaining. Millard's prose is lively. She captures personalities as if she were writing a novel. She seasons the narrative with humor and creates tension as the events leading to Garfield's encounter with Guiteau unfold. Despite its attention to detail, the narrative moves at a brisk pace. My sole complaint concerns the attention that Millard gives to Alexander Graham Bell. Granted that

Bell's life intersected with Garfield's more than once, and that Bell worked diligently to invent a device that would pinpoint the location of the bullet lodged in Garfield's body, the full chapter and parts of several others devoted to Bell's life seem out of place, as if Millard felt the need to pad her relatively short book with filler. I would have preferred a more thorough discussion of the political aftermath of the shooting. Millard tells us of its unifying effect on a nation that emerged from the Civil War still deeply divided, but provides few facts to support that proposition. A more extensive look at the impact of the assassination on the country would have been more germane than the pages devoted to Bell's life before and after his invention of the telephone. That criticism aside, *Destiny of the Republic* is perfect for readers (like me) who want to know about a key moment in American history without being subjected to mind-numbing detail or leaden prose. Millard's book is enlightening and enjoyable. Garfield is a dead president I'm happy to have met.

I first heard about this book on a PBS radio interview with the author. Candice Millard was a very interesting guest and her synopsis of her book about President Garfield was spell bounding. When I had the chance, I ordered the book from , but, didn't read it until a year later. I thought possibly that it was a "dark" depressing story about how President Garfield suffered after the assassination attempt and it would be kind of grueling to get through. 2014 wasn't a very good year for me and I wanted to read lighthearted stories with happy endings. Here it is September 2015 and the world for me is a bit brighter, so, I gave the book a try. How surprised I was to find that this story is compelling, full of actual facts, and very much like 3 biographies in one! If you are a fan of biographical history books, you will really enjoy this one. Candice Millard is a very fine author and describes in detail the story of how Garfield became president, how Alexander Graham Bell tried to help the President recover from his wounds with another of his inventions, and how the crazed lunatic assassin plotted to shoot the President. I didn't learn any of this in history class! The story certainly doesn't have a happy ending, but, it really made me think of the strides and progress in modern medicine that we take for granted today. If only Garfield were wounded today, he would not have succumbed to his injuries. I look forward to reading future writings by this author.

The title makes it sound like a boring book but I read it in one day since I could not put it down. James A. Garfield, the 20th President of the US shot by a lunatic at a train station died of massive sepsis causing by doctors sticking unclean instruments and sometimes fingers into a bullet wound that would have otherwise been nonfatal. This book has not just the life of the President but of his assassin and of the people who tried to save his life-- Alexander Graham Bell (inventor of the

telephone who also tried to invent a machine to locate the bullet inside the President) and Dr Bliss, Lincoln's and now Garfield's primary physician who put his reputation before what was best for his patient. Even after the Secret Service was formed after Lincoln's assassination, they only investigated counterfeiting. The President had no bodyguards and the public had access to the White House and to petition the President-- the American people thought the President should not be separated from the people he serves. It would take a 3rd assassination of a President, William McKinley in 1901 for the Secret Service to be assigned to protect the President. Another weird fact I learned was that Robert Todd Lincoln was present at the president's side after 3 of the 4 presidential assassinations. Overall this book made me greatly admire a President that I formerly knew very little about (like being raised in poverty and using his love of learning and discipline and near death experience to raise himself up) and wish that this great man had been able to finish out his presidency.

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