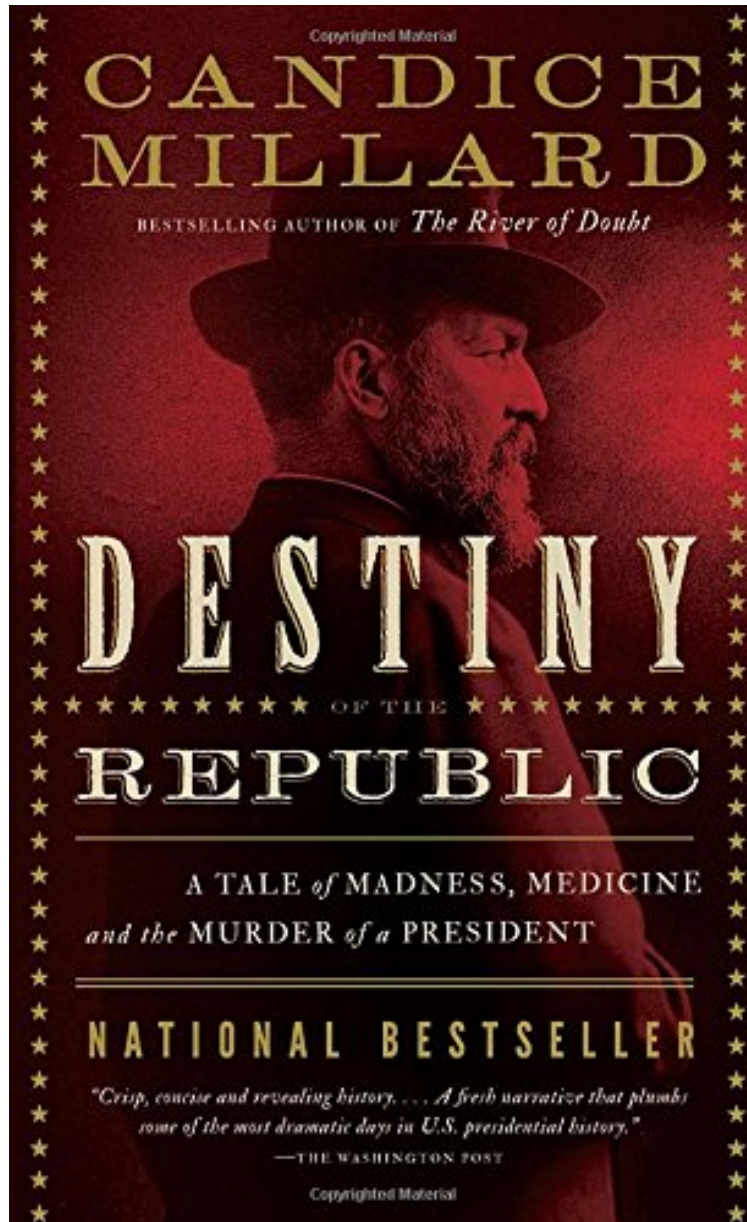


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Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine and the Murder of a President

Candice Millard

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Candice Millard : Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine and the Murder of a President before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Destiny of the Republic: A

Tale of Madness, Medicine and the Murder of a President:

603 of 611 people found the following review helpful. A dead president brought to life

By TChrisJames 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.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Of Millard's Three Books, This May Have the Widest Appeal

By Eros Faust

Having read all three of Candice Millard's three books, I have trouble deciding which one I like the best---but this might be it. James Garfield, who was only President for four months before being shot, is no one's candidate for America's greatest President. However, after reading this compelling portrait you realize that he could have been, had he not died from infection. Millard weaves together interesting stories into a single moving tapestry---the assassin, the shipwreck, the Centennial Exposition, the invention of the telephone, and the reluctance of physicians to consider "germs" to be real---all come together in the telling of the story. Because the author isn't tethered to one man--Garfield---she's free to tell the stories of many men and women. Her exploration of the love affair between Lucretia and James (I won't give away their secret) will ring true to people even today.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Ripping Yarn

By Layton P.

This lady has one of the most interesting and erudite styles of writing in that it seems as if I was watching a movie. I had only a passing knowledge of the details of Garfield's assassination, Charles Guiteau, or the bungling ineptitude of the security measures of the day. The descriptions of the physicians' attempts to dig and probe the president searching for the bullet, while seemingly ignorant of the basic tenets of cleanliness, are almost unbearable. The book is sourced to a fault as most of this information is public record, but Ms. Millard brings history to life while seeming chatty and informative. There's no dry pedantry here, just a gut churning empathy for a man who is slowly being tortured to death by his doctors. Millard's book about Theodore Roosevelt's adventure is another page turner that I highly recommend.

A Booklist Notable Book of 2012 The extraordinary New York Times bestselling account of James Garfield's rise from poverty to the American presidency, and the dramatic history of his assassination and legacy, from bestselling author of *The River of Doubt*, Candice Millard. James Abram Garfield was one of the most extraordinary men ever elected president. Born into abject poverty, he rose to become a wunderkind scholar, a Civil War hero, a renowned congressman, and a reluctant presidential candidate who took on the nation's corrupt political establishment. But four months after Garfield's inauguration in 1881, he was shot in the back by a deranged office-seeker named Charles Guiteau. Garfield survived the attack, but became the object of bitter, behind-the-scenes struggles for power over his administration, over the nation's future, and, hauntingly, over his medical care. Meticulously researched, epic in scope, and pulsating with an intimate human focus and high-velocity narrative drive, *The Destiny of the Republic* brings alive a forgotten chapter of U.S. history.

.com A Letter from Author Candice Millard At the heart of *Destiny of the Republic* is the story of the assassination of President James Garfield. What made me want to write this book, however, was not what I knew about President Garfield—that he had been shot by a deranged man in the summer of 1881—but all that I did not. In everything I read, I am always looking for the thread of an idea, something that surprises me, and leaves me wanting to know more. To me, that's the best part of being a writer—following an idea to see where it leads. Most of the time, after doing a little research, I quickly come to a dead end. One day four years ago, however, I found much more than I had ever expected. While reading a biography of Alexander Graham Bell, I learned that Bell had tried to help save Garfield's life after the President was shot. I wondered why a man as famous and powerful as Bell, who had invented the telephone just five years earlier, would abandon everything he was working on, put his life on hold, to help any man, even a President. The only way to answer that question, I realized, was to understand exactly what Bell had invented, and, more than that, to find out what kind of man Garfield had been. After the assassination attempt, Bell devoted himself night and day to inventing something called an induction balance, a type of metal detector, to locate the bullet lodged in the President's body. The induction balance that Bell used for the final time on Garfield is on display in the National Museum of American History, on the National Mall. What most people don't know, however, is that the museum also has all of the versions of Bell's induction balance, in various shapes and sizes, with hanging wires and unfinished edges, that he created while trying to perfect his invention. As I held these fragile instruments in my gloved hands, carefully examining their intricate workings, I could almost see Bell's mind working, and his heart racing, as the President drew closer and closer to death. Although, in the end, I would spend three years working on this book, it took only a few days of research to realize what Bell must have known—that President Garfield was not only a tragic figure, but one of the most extraordinary men ever elected President of the United States. A passionate abolitionist, Garfield was not only hailed a hero in the Civil War, but was a fierce champion of the rights of freed slaves. At the same time, he was a supremely gifted scholar who had become a university president at just 26 years of age, and, while in Congress, wrote an original proof of the Pythagorean Theorem. With each diary entry and letter I read, each research trip I took, Garfield came more clearly and vividly to life. It was not until I visited the National Museum of Health and Medicine in Washington, D.C., however, that I began to understand the extent of the suffering that Garfield, and the nation with him, had endured. In its archives, in a large metal cabinet with long, deep drawers, the museum keeps the remains of two presidential assassins: John Wilkes Booth and Charles Guiteau, the man who shot Garfield. In the same cabinet, in a drawer just below Guiteau's, lies a six-inch section of Garfield's spine, a red pin inserted through a hole in the knobby, yellowed bone to show the path of Guiteau's bullet. It is impossible to look at this heartbreaking collection without being struck by the fact that this story, now hardly remembered, was once a tragedy so wrenching that it transfixed and terrified an entire nation. This book is my attempt to step back in time, to understand these men and this moment in history, and to tell a story that should never have been forgotten. A New York Times Notable Book "Crisp, concise and revealing history. . . . A fresh narrative that plumbs some of the most dramatic days in U.S. presidential history." The Washington Post "A spirited tale that intertwines murder, politics and medical mystery. . . . Candice Millard leaves us feeling that Garfield's assassination deprived the nation not only of a remarkably humble and intellectually gifted man but one who perhaps bore the seeds of greatness . . . splendidly drawn portraits. . . . Alexander Graham Bell makes a bravura appearance. The Wall Street Journal "Fascinating. . . . Gripping. . . . Stunning. . . . The haunting tale of how a man who never meant to seek the presidency found himself swept into the White House. . . . Millard shows the Garfield legacy to be much more important than most of her readers knew it to be." The New York Times "Destiny of the Republic displays Millard's energetic writing and rare ability to effortlessly educate the listener." USA Today "A staggering tale. . . . Millard digs deeply into the turmoil that got James A. Garfield elected, the lunacy that got him shot and the medical malfeasance that turned a minor wound into a mortal one." Janet Maslin, Top 10 Recommendations for 2011 One of the many pleasures of Candice Millard's new book, *Destiny of the Republic*, [is] that she brings poor Garfield to life and a remarkable life it was. . . . Fascinating. . . . Millard has written us a penetrating human tragedy. The New York Times Book Brings the era and people involved to vivid life. . . . Takes the reader on a compelling fly-on-the-wall journey. . . . Millard takes all of these elements in a forgotten period of history and turns them into living and breathing things. Associated Press Think

you're not interested in James Garfield, our 20th President? Millard's action-packed account of his life and truly strange death should change your mind. People Filled with memorable characters, hairpin twists of fate and consequences that bring a young nation to the breaking point, *Destiny of the Republic* brings back to roaring life a tragic but irresistible historical period. The *Christian Science Monitor* A winning amalgamation of history and adventure. They [Millard's books] exhibit a keen eye for human frailties. The *Washington Post* "Fascinating. . . . Millard colorfully recreates the political milieu of 1880." The *Seattle Times* "Millard provides a splendidly written and suspenseful account of this fascinating episode in American history." The *Oregonian* By keeping a tight hold on her narrative strands, Millard crafts a popular history rich with detail and emotion. One of the pleasures of the book is the chance to learn more about Garfield, who appears as a fully realized historical figure instead of a trivia answer. *Salon* This tale of physician error contextualized by politics and murder makes for riveting reading. Ms. Millard recounts this episode of our nation's history in a style that keeps readers on the edge of their seats even though the ending is known. The *Washington Times* Splendid. . . . recovers for us just what a remarkable even nobleman Garfield was. . . . She also chillingly depicts his killer. . . . This wonderful book reminds us that our 20th president was neither a minor nor merely a tragic figure, but rather an extraordinary one. The *Plain Dealer* An aching good, suspenseful read. . . . compelling characters and nail-biting storytelling, and [readers] will no doubt walk away even more emotionally affected by Garfield's tragedy. The *Kansas City Star* Blends science, medicine, and politics in a crime story that grabs tight and it does not let go until the very last page. . . . A remarkable book. It is crisply written and riveting. *Tucson Citizen* "Millard finds the ironies of history throughout this stirring narrative, one that's full of suspense even though you know what's coming. She makes you a witness, not a reader." *Erie Times* *Destiny of the Republic* is popular history at its best accessible, educational and entertaining and Millard renders it with grace, power and sympathy. *Richmond Times-Dispatch* Make[s] for compulsive reading. Superb American history." *Kirkus*, starred review "Splendidly insightful. . . . stands securely at the crossroads of popular and professional history." *Booklist*, starred review Sparklingly alive. . . [Millard] brings to life a moment in the nation's history when access to the president was easy, politics bitter, and medical knowledge slight. Under Millard's pen, it's hard to imagine it being better told. *Publishers Weekly* Historian Candice Millard's *Destiny of the Republic* is first-rate history, political intrigue, and a true-crime story all rolled into one. . . . An epic must-read! Douglas Brinkley, author of *The Wilderness Warrior* In this brilliant and riveting work, Candice Millard demonstrates the power of narrative nonfiction. Through exhaustive research and flawless storytelling, she has brought to life one of the most harrowing and fascinating sagas in American history. . . . This is a book that is impossible to put down. David Grann, author of *The Lost City of Z* Candice Millard has done it again: She's turned the sometimes stodgy realm of presidential history on its head with a gripping tale of high danger and stoic endurance, a tale that had nearly completely vanished from public memory. What an exceptional man and what an exciting era Millard has brought to elegant life on the page! Hampton Sides, author of *Hellhound on His Trail* In President Garfield's assassination, Candice Millard has rediscovered one of the great forgotten stories in American history. Millard has turned Garfield's story into a crackling tale of suspense and a panoramic picture of a fascinating but forgotten era. Debby Applegate, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for *The Most Famous Man in America* As she did in *The River of Doubt*, Candice Millard has written another riveting narrative. . . . She has skillfully allowed us to share this traumatic moment. Ken Burns *About the Author* Candice Millard, the *New York Times*-bestselling author of *The River of Doubt*, is a former editor and contributing writer at *National Geographic* magazine. She lives in Kansas City with her husband and children.