

# Book review on purpose of the book

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## **Book Review: Destiny of the Republic**

Candice, Millard. *Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine, and the Murder of a President*. New York: Random House, 2011.

### **Introduction**

In both her books that she has written about American presidents, Candice Millard has concentrated on historical events that other authors have largely overlooked. Candice Millard's *Destiny of the Republic*, follows her superb first book, *River of Doubt* (2005). She conducted the same interesting research to the life and assassination of Garfield, the same way she did to Theodore Roosevelt's exploration of more than a thousand unknown and potentially lethal river miles in Brazil. Candice Millard is a former writer and editor for National Geographic, which put her in better place to write interesting investigative pieces. Her book on Theodore Roosevelt, *Darkest Journey*, became the New York Times best seller and was named one of the best books of the year by Washington Post, the New York Times, Christian Science Chronicle, and San Francisco Chronicle.

### **Critical Summary**

The book is composed of several, intricately woven themes. First, she brings a living Garfield, the general, the man, the congressional representative, the scholar, and the president, to the attention of her readers, and restores him to the modern world. She realizes that Americans have a weak grasp of history, and thus likely to dismiss presidents of the late Nineteenth century as bearded nonentities who could be interchangeable even if they are interesting enough to consider. Many writers and other scholars assume the same

position, but they err in doing so. The presidents had significance and strengths of their own. Millard ensures that she makes this clear with regard to Garfield and acknowledges that Millard's book documents just how remarkable Garfield's life was.

Indeed, Garfield was remarkable. It amazes how anyone could conclude that this man, whose short term in office made his the second shortest of any presidency, would not have been a major force had he worked for another four years as a president; that his assassination was not historically important? As documented by Millard, even the previously hapless Vice President Chester Arthur rose to the occasion. Millard quotes one of Author's former associated who found that he had risen above machine politics, " He isn't ' Chet Arthur' anymore he's the president" (p. 250). Despite his machine background as a spoils man, he strongly supported, and signed the Pendleton Act establishing the foundation for Civil Service based on merit. Millard's narrative also presents the horrifying powerful and intensive description of the lethal attention Garfield received from his physicians. Although Lister had previously demonstrated that bacterial infection caused illnesses, and pioneered antiseptic techniques that had gained acceptance in Europe with remarkable success, majority of American medical community dismissed the findings as nonsense. Even today, majority of America's scientists reject findings of other scientist and turn for scientific information to political pontification, on matters such as vaccination, climate change, or healthcare delivery, Garfield's doctors preferred the " good old stink" of the operating rooms as being natural and healthy.

Millard presents an interesting story using a wonderful writing style. She

uses simple words that are easy to follow without “ getting lost” in trying to figure out what was being depicted or described. Her writing technique makes the book a quick read. Her writing style is effortless and gripping, that makes this nonfictional feels more like a story and less like a factual account of events. The book contains histories interwoven with basic story and other important and interesting happenings of the time. Millard tells the story through a narrative consisting of diary entries, personal letters, and newspaper reports lending it factual credibility as well as into the emotions of the main characters.

## **Conclusion**

Millard succeeds in turning the relatively unknown story of Garfield into an immersive suspense. She gives readers a sense of the social and political life of the late Nineteen Century and provides a more detailed account on the life of Guiteau than is given in Ira Rutkow’s James A. Garfield. I would recommend this book to those interested in presidential history and students of Gilded Age America.

## **Bibliography:**

Candice, Millard. *Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine, and the Murder of a President*. New York: Random House, 2011.

Rutkow, Ira. *James A. Garfield: The American Presidents Series: The 20th President, 1881*. New York City: Henry Holt and Company, 2006.