

Destiny of the Republic By Candice Millard

Discussion Questions

1. Before you started this book, how much did you know of James A. Garfield? Do you agree with Millard that Garfield would have been considered one of the country's great presidents? Is Millard's case for Garfield's potential greatness convincing?
2. How would you describe James Garfield? Discuss his numerous accomplishments outside the field of politics. What do you find most impressive about him?
3. To what degree did Garfield's early years shape the man he later became? How do you account for his spectacular rise? In fact, trace his steps as he rose from his work on the Erie and Ohio Canal to become President of the United States.
4. Talk about the convention madness that catapulted Garfield into the candidacy for the U.S. presidency. Compare the political environment of the time: would you describe it as more polarized than today's...or similar?
5. What were Garfield's political views?
6. Charles Guiteau was no stranger to Garfield or to members of his family and administration. He also made his intentions to murder the president quite clear. What could/should have been done, within legal bounds, to prevent him from carrying out his assassination of Garfield? Talk about Guiteau. How would you characterize the madness that led to his carrying out the assassination?
7. Perhaps the most shocking revelations in *Destiny of the Republic* are those concerning the maltreatment at the hand of the Garfield's doctors, who seemed almost willfully ignorant of sound medical practices. How do you explain their mistreatment? What was the medical establishment's attitude toward Joseph Lister's theory on antiseptics? How did Dr. Bliss gain so much power of the president's medical care?
8. Discuss the patronage system and the way in which Americans felt entitled to government appointments regardless of competency. Would you say that today's system, based on merit, is an improvement, even though it can be difficult to remove underperforming employees?
9. Why was the courtship between Lucretia and James Garfield so difficult? Talk about the fault lines in their marriage and later their deep attachment to one another.
10. Talk about how Garfield's participation in the Civil War affected him. He made the comment later that "something went out of him...that never came back; the sense of sacredness of life and the impossibility of destroying it." What did he mean? Is his disillusionment common for soldiers of any war? Or was the Civil War particularly savage?
11. Talk about Roscoe Conkling and his relationship with Vice President Chester Arthur. How would you describe Chester's subsequent administration after Garfield's assassination?

