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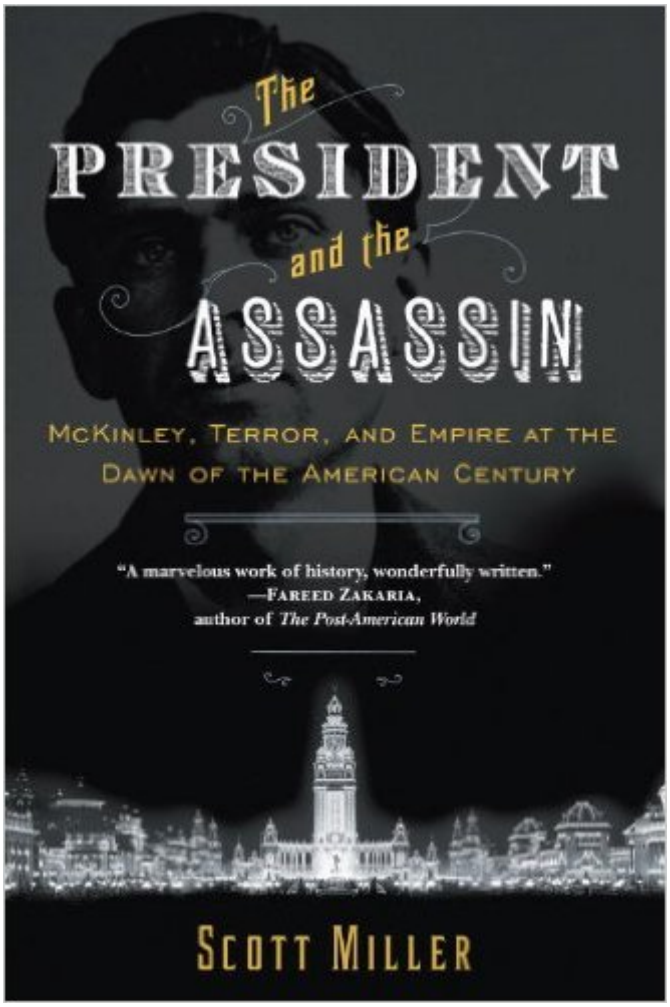
The President And The Assassin: McKinley, Terror, And Empire At The Dawn Of The American Century



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Synopsis

A SWEEPING TALE OF TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY AMERICA AND THE IRRESISTIBLE FORCES THAT BROUGHT TWO MEN TOGETHER ONE FATEFUL DAYÂ In 1901, as America tallied its gains from a period of unprecedented imperial expansion, an assassinâ ™s bullet shattered the nationâ ™s confidence. The shocking murder of President William McKinley threw into stark relief the emerging new world order of what would come to be known as the American Century. The President and the Assassin is the story of the momentous years leading up to that event, and of the very different paths that brought together two of the most compelling figures of the era: President William McKinley and Leon Czolgosz, the anarchist who murdered him.The two men seemed to live in eerily parallel Americas. McKinley was to his contemporaries an enigma, a president whose conflicted feelings about imperialism reflected the countryâ ™s own. Under its popular Republican commander-in-chief, the United States was undergoing an uneasy transition from a simple agrarian society to an industrial powerhouse spreading its influence overseas by force of arms. Czolgosz was on the losing end of the economic changes taking placeâ ”a first-generation Polish immigrant and factory worker sickened by a government that seemed focused solely on making the rich richer. With a deft narrative hand, journalist Scott Miller chronicles how these two men, each pursuing what he considered the right and honorable path, collided in violence at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York.Along the way, readers meet a veritable whoâ ™s who of turn-of-the-century America: John Hay, McKinleyâ ™s visionary secretary of state, whose diplomatic efforts paved the way for a half century of Western exploitation of China; Emma Goldman, the radical anarchist whose incendiary rhetoric inspired Czolgosz to dare the unthinkable; and Theodore Roosevelt, the vainglorious vice president whose 1898 charge up San Juan Hill in Cuba is but one of many thrilling military adventures recounted here. Rich with relevance to our own era, The President and the Assassin holds a mirror up to a fascinating period of upheaval when the titans of industry grew fat, speculators sought fortune abroad, and desperate souls turned to terrorism in a vain attempt to thwart the juggernaut of change.Praise for The President and the Assassin Â â œ[A] panoramic tour de force . . . Miller has a good eye, trained by years of journalism, for telling details and enriching anecdotes.â •â ”The Washington Independent Review of Books Â â œEven without the intrinsic draw of the 1901 presidential assassination that shapes its pages, Scott Millerâ ™s The President and the Assassin [is] absorbing reading. . . . What makes the book compelling is [that] so many circumstances and events of the earlier time have parallels in our own.â •â ”The Oregonian Â â œA marvelous work of history, wonderfully written.â •â ”Fareed Zakaria, author of The Post-American World Â â œA real triumph.â •â ”BookPage Â

â œFast-moving and richly detailed.â •â ”The Buffalo News Â â œ[A] compelling read.â •â ”The Boston Globe Â One of Newsweekâ ™s 10 Must-Read Summer Books

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The most remarkable thing about Miller’s eminently readable discussion of the assassination of William McKinley by anarchist Leon Czolgosz in September 1901 is how little attention is paid to the deed itself. Miller is about more here than a "tick-tock" retelling of a sad event in American history; he places the assassination squarely in context by devoting the majority of the book to a survey of McKinley’s highly consequential Presidency, the growth of the anarchist movement in the U.S., and the aimless Czolgosz’ gradual absorption by the anarchist subculture. The Haymarket bombings and trial, the Cuban insurrection against Spain, the Spanish-American War, the career of Emma Goldman, and the establishment of an American empire are among the topics covered here, with chapters generally alternating between the McKinley material and the anarchist/Czolgosz matter. Once you get used to the book’s structure, the narrative flows reasonably well. In intertwining the McKinley and anarchist threads, Miller in no way argues that Czolgosz -- who, while a shiftless loner, appeared to be eminently sane -- killed McKinley because of opposition to imperialism. However, the juxtaposition of the two stories leads the reader to wonder whether the social inequalities and unrest of the turn of the 20th century, coupled with what the American Left at the time thought was an unseemly grab for worldwide power by government and business working in harmony, provided the necessary spark for Czolgosz’ solitary explosion.I’m pleased to see that

Miller resists the temptation to resort to common stereotypes and characterize McKinley as a cipher or a simple puppet of big business.

These were the words uttered by President McKinley's assassin immediately after he had shot the American president. Did he regret it? No. Before being executed, the assassin, Leon Czolgosz, cried out:" I killed the President for the good of the laboring people, the good people. I am not sorry for my crime but I am sorry I can't see my father".The presidency of McKinley was the one when the modern American nation, economy and foreign policy were forged. These were the times when the USA conducted a war against the Spanish empire and acquired more territories, such as Hawaii, and Cuba was firmly under American control, while Taft was turning the Philippines into a peaceful colony during his watch as governor there. The American society was undergoing a deep and significant change from an agrarian one to an industrial one. This process meant, on the one hand, that some got very rich, and, on the other hand, millions of workers were conducting a battle of existence, performing the same mind-numbing tasks for 10 or even 16 hours a day. In fact, one observer described the situation of the masses as "one of unmitigated serfdom". New inventions and manufacturing techniques made it possible to produce more and more with fewer workers, and those who were lucky went on frequent strikes. Labor unions were still weak and the interests of the workers were mainly discussed and raised by the anarchists, whose number was spreading constantly. In other words, those desperate workers turned to violence, and the anarchists provided the fuel for it.One of these frustrated people, who was a Polish immigrant and factory-worker, Leon Czolgosz, decided that president McKinley was focusing on making the rich richer.

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