



# Diagnosing Giants: Solving the Medical Mysteries of Thirteen Patients Who Changed the World

*Philip A Mackowiak*

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Could Lincoln have lived? After John Wilkes Booth fired a low-velocity .44 caliber bullet into the back of the president's skull, Lincoln did not perish immediately. Attending doctors cleaned and probed the wound, and actually improved his breathing for a time. Today medical trauma teams help similar victims survive—including Gabby Giffords, whose injury was strikingly like Lincoln's. In *Diagnosing Giants*, Dr. Philip A. Mackowiak examines the historical record in detail, reconstructing Lincoln's last hours moment by moment to calculate the odds. That leads him to more questions: What if he had lived? What sort of neurological function would he have had? What kind of a Constitutional crisis would have ensued? Dr. Mackowiak, a professor at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, offers a gripping and authoritative account of thirteen patients who took center stage in world history. The result is a new understanding of how the past unfolded, as well as a sweeping survey of the history of medicine. What was the ailment that drove Caligula mad? Why did Stonewall Jackson die after having an arm amputated, when so many other Civil War soldiers survived such operations? As with Lincoln, the author explores the full context of his subjects' lives and the impact of each case on the course of history, from Tutankhamen, Buddha, and John Paul Jones to Darwin, Lenin, and Eleanor Roosevelt. When an author illuminates the past with state-of-the-art scientific knowledge, readers pay attention. Candice Millard's *Destiny of the Republic*, about the medical malpractice that killed President James A. Garfield, was a New York Times bestseller. And Dr. Mackowiak's previous book, *Post-Mortem: Solving History's Greatest Medical Mysteries*, won the attention of periodicals as diverse as the *Wall Street Journal* and *New England Journal of Medicine*, which pleaded for a sequel. With *Diagnosing Giants*, he has written one with impeccable expertise and panache.

## Diagnosing Giants: Solving the Medical Mysteries of Thirteen Patients Who Changed the World Details

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# **From Reader Review Diagnosing Giants: Solving the Medical Mysteries of Thirteen Patients Who Changed the World for online ebook**

## **J.J. says**

Has a lot of medical terminology but really interesting case studies in what might have caused these Giants to die and possibly how modern medicine would have treated them differently.

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## **Cathymw says**

Since this was a history book, it was annoying that the author did not identify the patient until the latter part of the chapter. Of course, I got around that by looking ahead.

The writing style was a bit dry. My interest was flagging by the end of the book. It was interesting to read about the differential diagnoses.

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## **David F. says**

The medical case histories of thirteen historical figures whose illnesses or death present mysteries to this day. Each case history sheds new light on the subject's life and fresh perspectives on the history and evolution of some of medicine's most important concepts.

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## **Katherine Coble says**

It's a good idea for a book. But it suffers from a lot of padding that doesn't seem necessary, and often times the author doesn't pursue adequate differential diagnoses.

One example: he spends a lot of time speculating about what could have caused the gut problem in a patient who theoretically suffered from Ankylosing Spondylitis. He goes through many esoteric explanations--rare and exotic mushrooms, cooking methods--but never addresses the fact that inflammatory bowel is comorbid to AS.

The main problem, however, is the conceit of not identifying the patient until late in the chapter. I know this is how med school operates--you get physical and situational details from which to diagnose but are not given a full identity. However, given that this is a history book that we are reading because of the patients' identities that seems a bit backward. It's especially irksome as he plays word games to tease out the non-mystery. (One chapter is titled "Little Boots". Which is what "Caligula" means. So all the goofery about not mentioning the word "Caligula" felt tortured.)

One word of caution: I listened to this on audio from Audible. The narrator is TERRIBLE and really

distracts. I would recommend folks stick to the print version.

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### **Diana says**

The lives and deaths of thirteen famous patients are explored for medical clues and possible diagnoses.

This book was more scholarly than I expected. I loved the idea of it, but for someone without medical education, it was sometimes hard to read. I also didn't love that the patient name was not revealed in the chapter until the death, which had me wondering more than paying attention.

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### **Bobby Title says**

I'm guessing that I have a little more understanding of medical things than the average person, but nowhere near enough to fully understand all that this author discusses. However, I didn't let that stop me from finding this book fascinating. What was amazing to me was the active lives that some of these "giants" went on to lead in spite of the awful medical conditions they carried with them. Reading each story tempted me to go after a biography of that person, either because I didn't remember as much as I should have about his or her life, or because my interest was really piqued. I agree with other reviewers that I would have liked the identity of the person presented up front, but I simply looked at the back of each chapter first to clear up that little problem. I also read the chapters in reverse order, finding the younger folk much more interesting - and probably the reports a bit more valid - than the "ancient geezers."

I gave the book 3 stars only because of my lack of knowledge, and with the awareness that I probably am not the target audience the author had in mind when he put it together. Those stars are for other readers like myself. For more medically savvy readers, I really liked it 5 stars worth!

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### **Lisa says**

Very interesting for a medical person but I think anyone would find it readable. Really enjoyed it and am reading his first book "Post Mortum".

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### **Asuka says**

A quick read and sort of fun. The book says diagnosing the medical mysteries associated with historically interesting/powerful people. It includes Buddha, Caligula, King Tut, Eleanor Roosevelt, Goya, Lincoln, Lenin, and so on. Each chapter is on a different historical figure, and is at most about 10 pages. So it doesn't go into depth. I was hoping for more medical information, but the author spends more time providing biography of each person, and less on the medical mystery. Luckily I like history, so the book was still educational and interesting, but it's a bit disappointing as medical mystery bit is limited. The chapter on King Tut had the most interesting medical info, and the chapter on Eleanor Roosevelt was most inspiring as I knew little about her. What a woman!

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### **Jeanne says**

Very interesting.

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### **Alison says**

Diagnosing Giants: Solving the Medical Mysteries of Thirteen Patients Who Changed the World by Philip A Mackowiak is not a light and frivolous read. It's weighty in its subject matter and cerebral in its prose, and yet, Mackowiak manages to draw the reader in with every chapter. Admittedly, people who are interested in mysteries and/or forensics would enjoy this book, but it's also an engaging read for those of us who enjoy history.

Mackowiak doesn't identify his subject until a good part of the medical history has been disclosed. Therefore, I spent a goodly part of the beginnings of each section trying to see if I could figure it out before Mackowiak gave the 'patient's' name. Some of them I was able to guess very quickly (Stonewall Jackson, Darwin, Abraham Lincoln), while others like Buhdda and de Goya left me wondering until the identity was revealed.

Some of the chapters are more engaging than others. The one on King Tut wasn't really a ton of new information, but the chapter on Eleanor Roosevelt was quite well done. I also especially enjoyed the discussion on whether or not Abraham Lincoln could have survived John Wilkes Booth's bullet if he were shot today.

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### **Helen Harberts says**

Underwhelming. On a good day.

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### **Miriam says**

A little formulaic, but interesting.

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### **Angela Forfia says**

If you have always wanted to attend a rip-roarin' historical clinicopathological conference, this is the book for you! Detailed medical histories, differential diagnoses, and final (speculative) diagnoses of 13 historical figures. The early cases--Caligula, Saladin, the Buddha--are less satisfying than later histories of Stonewall Jackson, Lincoln, Lenin, and Eleanor Roosevelt where there is documentary evidence from contemporary physicians. A rather dry read with lots of citations, but you'll end up with fascinating cocktail party trivia about cyclic vomiting syndrome and mumps encephalitis...that you can use at your historical

clinicopathological after-party.

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**Jessica McCabe says**

Looking back at historical figures and trying to figure out their medical issues and what killed them. If I didn't have a medical background this would have been a less interesting read.

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**Mills College Library says**

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