



The Man He Became: How FDR Defied Polio to Win the Presidency

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With a searching new analysis of primary sources, NBCC award winner James Tobin reveals how FDR's fight against polio transformed him from a callow aristocrat into the energetic, determined statesman who would rally the nation in the Great Depression and lead it through World War II.

Here, from James Tobin, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award in biography, is the story of the greatest comeback in American political history, a saga long buried in half-truth, distortion and myth— Franklin Roosevelt's ten-year climb from paralysis to the White House.

In 1921, at the age of thirty-nine, Roosevelt was the brightest young star in the Democratic Party. One day he was racing his children around their summer home. Two days later he could not stand up. Hopes of a quick recovery faded fast. "He's through," said allies and enemies alike. Even his family and close friends misjudged their man, as they and the nation would learn in time.

With a painstaking reexamination of original documents, James Tobin uncovers the twisted chain of accidents that left FDR paralyzed; he reveals how polio recast Roosevelt's fateful partnership with his wife, Eleanor; and he shows that FDR's true victory was not over paralysis but over the ancient stigma attached to the crippled. Tobin also explodes the conventional wisdom of recent years—that FDR deceived the public about his condition. In fact, Roosevelt and his chief aide, Louis Howe, understood that only by displaying himself as a man who had come back from a knockout punch could FDR erase the perception that had followed him from childhood—that he was a pampered, too smooth pretty boy without the strength to lead the nation. As Tobin persuasively argues, FDR became president less in spite of polio than because of polio.

The Man He Became affirms that true character emerges only in crisis and that in the shaping of this great American leader character was all.

The Man He Became: How FDR Defied Polio to Win the Presidency Details

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James Tobin

From Reader Review The Man He Became: How FDR Defied Polio to Win the Presidency for online ebook

Aaron Million says

Increasingly, I have found books that focus on one particular aspect or period of a president's life to be a nice change of pace from the traditional full-length biography (not that there is anything wrong with the latter, because there certainly is not). By honing in on an event or specific place of importance, one may be able to better identify a turning point in the life of someone before he (so far) achieved the highest office in the land. So it is with James Tobin's excellent study of the severe polio attack suffered by a highly energetic and relatively youthful Franklin D. Roosevelt. Tobin seeks to determine, as best anyone can, the profound impact that the crippling disease had on Roosevelt, how it changed him, and what it taught him. The result is informative and entertaining, being neither a dry clinical narrative nor a series of unsubstantiated assumptions.

Tobin begins by taking us to Inauguration Day, March 4, 1933 – describing the elaborate series of actions that Roosevelt had to go through in order to be able to stand up and then “walk”. He then very briefly reviews FDR's early life, going almost immediately to summer 1921 when FDR was stricken with polio. He interweaves medical discussion about the polio virus and how it is communicated between people with snippets of FDR's exact movements over the course of several weeks in July and August 1921. He writes so well that for awhile it almost seems like fiction, following the virus around as it somehow gets into FDR's body, then proceeds to attack his cells. Tobin writes that, realistically, the chances of it affecting FDR the way it did were extremely small. Despite there having been recent outbreaks of the disease, most people were able to fight it off; indeed, most probably never knew that it passed through their bodies as they have had no more than a cold or a fever for a few days.

While I am familiar with the basic conclusion that FDR most likely got the virus from his attendance at a Boy Scout picnic in a New York state park, Tobin makes sure to note other things that have been commonly overlooked by most FDR biographers. Based on how he was raised, FDR was more susceptible to the virus. This is because he never attended any public schools where he could be exposed to and thus immunized against many of the germs that always float around such places. He was raised in an isolated environment with private tutors, and he had few childhood friends. Also, his physical constitution was never robust: he was someone who frequently got sick, even after he grew into adulthood. Another key factor at play here was that he was exhausted, having recently been consumed with defending himself over events that occurred in the Navy Department back when he was the Assistant Secretary. And finally, when the disease struck him full-force, being on Campobello Island which is past the eastern edge of Maine, he was way away from the best medical care, especially in those days before air travel. All of these factored in enormously in FDR being vulnerable to getting polio in the first place, not being able to fight it off in the second place, and not having top-notch medical care until it was way too late to try to correct any damage (which may not have been possible, but will never be known).

Once FDR is afflicted, Tobin turns to examining how he tried to cope with his paralysis. Physically, he only improved slightly (as far as his legs were concerned – thankfully he retained full feeling and use above his hips), and that mainly from when he went swimming and sunbathing in warmer climates. Tobin notes how Roosevelt alternated between trying to work hard at being able to walk again, to just not really trying once he had built up his upper body. It seems that, at some unknown point, FDR came to realize that he never was going to walk unaided again, and that he would never fully be able to stand on his own power unless he was in a pool of warm water. Yet he went through with plans to buy the grounds of Warm Springs, GA. One

wonders if this was as much something for FDR to focus on as far as the ownership and management of the entire complex was concerned, as it was about trying to recover more movement in his legs.

Louis Howe, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Sara Roosevelt are featured prominently in this tale. Howe, Roosevelt's political guru, kept Roosevelt's name alive in political circles, and while not outright lying about his condition, was able to spin things so that people either forgot or most likely didn't think about FDR's affliction. Eleanor was crucial in getting FDR through the first few weeks, and then months, of his illness. One wonders if he would have even made it without her help. Probably not. And Sara, his mother, while providing financial stability, was nonetheless an irritant as she basically wanted FDR to return to his boyhood home of Hyde Park and live the remainder of his life as a semi-invalid country squire. FDR, Eleanor, and Howe were having none of that.

Al Smith also becomes a major player later on in this book. The New York Governor pressures FDR to run to replace him in 1928. FDR does and wins, and his relationship with Smith – never personally close to begin with – deteriorates rapidly. At this point, Tobin speeds up and quickly brings us up to FDR's election as President in 1932. Very little attention is paid to his years in Albany, except to show that FDR managed to do the job of Governor just fine with no issues resulting from his relative immobility. He concludes with a very good epilogue about whether FDR would still have been president had he not contracted polio, and how his triumph in being able to work his way back at least partially from his affliction may have led him to make a terrible mistake in running for reelection in 1944, when he knew he was gravely ill with heart disease.

This book is best for those who are at least somewhat familiar with FDR's life and his presidency. Not that someone who is unfamiliar will not be able to follow it, but rather that reader would be lacking the necessary context and understanding of both FDR's privileged childhood, his personality, and his policies that he instituted while president in order to better appreciate the point that Tobin attempts to convey: that FDR was somewhat of a callous and selfish man whose life was dramatically upended; someone who was used to doing things that he wanted to do (for the most part) but who suddenly had to rely on others for basic needs; someone who for the first time faced intense struggle – both physically and emotionally; and finally, someone whose tribulations helped him ultimately become America's longest-serving president and an advocate for those who were less fortunate in life. Anyone interested in FDR will almost surely find Tobin's book a well-balanced look at probably the most critical period of FDR's life.

Grade: A

Bill Rogers says

On one hand, this book is narrow. It concentrates only on Franklin Roosevelt's polio case, how he responded to it, and how it affected-- Tobin thinks it perhaps made-- his political career. Narrow isn't good, usually. But on the other hand Roosevelt's polio is an aspect of his life which has been downplayed, if not ignored. It is part of his life which is vital to understand if you wish to understand him. It is time to study it in detail, then, and that's exactly what Tobin sets out to do.

Today the United States is a nation of publicity worshipers. Otherwise rational members of small groups and subcultures agonize about explaining themselves to the nation, never considering whether or not they have anything to gain from it. There are always ready supplies of freaks and geeks eager to make fools of themselves on so-called reality TV. The public and politicians alike are so used to having the most trivial details of the lives of political leaders exposed to idle curiosity that a young person could take her one chance

to ask a presidential candidate a question on a national news program and blow it by asking "Boxers or briefs?" and not only did the watchers think it clever, but the candidate actually answered the question.

Looking back on FDR from this viewpoint, it seems the only reason his handicap wasn't shown in excruciating detail in newspapers and newsreels must be a "magnificent deception" to hide it from the people. The truth, to our eyes, is far stranger. The people were fully aware that FDR was crippled. But they had somehow reached the benighted conclusion- or so our news, or noise, channels of today would call it- that even a politician was allowed to keep some of the uncomfortable details of his life out of the public view. The public knew FDR was handicapped. They took up collections on his birthday to pay for polio research. But they had decided the details of his disease and the difficulties it caused him were none of their damned business. Amazing!

But if the public didn't seek photos of FDR falling off his crutches, they were still fully aware he used them. They admired him for his efforts in fighting the disease. They feared it had destroyed his health, so that he would be unable to serve if elected to political office. Political spin and tricks of all kinds pivoted on the fact of FDR's polio, tricks and spin both in his favor and against him.

If you want to know about FDR, about how he struggled, and about a strange era when politics was as dirty as today and yet the people thought that even politicians deserved some privacy, then you should read this book.

Ashleyjo says

I was lucky enough to win a copy of this book on Goodreads:) Honest review:

Since I have long admired and read about FDR, I was excited to read "The Man He Became."

Focus on this aspect of FDR's life is seldom written in detail. The author is on target in doing so and in recognizing how polio and the effects therein were instrumental in helping to shape FDR as both a man and politician leading our country through one of its' darkest times.

As he had done with his disability, FDR focused on what could be done in time of crisis versus what couldn't. He was full of empathy and unflinching resolve.

Thanks to the author for his account of FDR's challenges, defeats, and victories. It should certainly be an example to those who still labor under the false assumption that physical disabilities make for lesser men.

Inspiring reading!

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

Franklin D. Roosevelt was 39 years old when he was stricken with infantile paralysis (polio). Just one day he couldn't stand up anymore and the hope for a fast recovery faded fast when he just got worse and the doctor had no clue to what had stricken him and, in the end, misdiagnosed him. Precious time was wasted before another doctor recognized what ailed him and by then it was too late for Roosevelt to be able to walk again

properly. He would have to rely on other people to support himself to stand, or a cane, leg braces or a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

Still, he became, in the end, the president of the United States.

I find Franklin D. Roosevelt's life fascinating and this book was a very interesting and well-written account of his life just before he was stricken with infantile paralysis, his period of illness and his struggle to walk again and reclaim his life and career again. I found the best part of the book was 2/3 of the book that focused on Roosevelt and how infantile paralysis struck him and how his life was forever changed because of it. The ending of the book was not bad; it was just a bit too much about politics for me. Besides learning more about Roosevelt was it interesting to learn more about infantile paralysis what a devastating illness it was.

Mark J Greene says

It's a good read for someone who is trying to come to terms with their own disability!

John Behle says

Riveting, uplifting, and amazing. What FDR accomplished, the man he became, the life he lived and, most of all, the millions of lives he touched vaults Tobin's book to an easy five star.

Tobin writes with verve and you-are-there realism, that for me, turned this story into impulse reading. I tore through this book in four days. I planned extra time so I could have long stretches to better absorb how FDR defied this "fool disease of infantile paralysis" and achieve the mantle of a world leader.

Tobin places the reader at the dinner table discussions at the family estate in Hyde Park, the beneficial warm springs in Georgia, the endless half-day physical therapy sessions. I felt as if I was a delegate, on the floor, cheering his words at the Democratic conventions of 1924, '28 and, whoa, 1932, the big one.

Tobin culminates his treatise with what FDR's saga did, and still does, to uplift the morale and well being of physically challenged humans.

Yes, Franklin Roosevelt continues to touch--I am making better changes to my nutrition and fitness regimens as a result of this book. If this man can beat a cruel crippling disease, go on to achieve greatness, surely I can lose 15 pounds and run a 10K.

Matt says

GOODREADS FIRST READS REVIEW

Franklin Delano Roosevelt's dream to follow his cousin's Theodore to the Presidency seemed to be exactly on course until he was stuck down with polio and appeared to be derailed forever. But as James Tobin recounts in his new book "The Man He Became: How FDR Defied Polio to Win the Presidency", Roosevelt's illness and his determination to regain his health and the use of his legs enabled him to make his way to the White House in a quiet unexpected way.

Tobin begins his account at his time period's end with Inauguration Day 1933 following Roosevelt through the ceremonies of the day and how he proceeded to stand up, walk the new way he had learned, and sit down. Then we are taken back to summer 1921 to an athletic and healthy Roosevelt just before he contracted the poliovirus. The contrast is stark and makes the reader want to see how Roosevelt went from the latter to the former, a task that Tobin skillfully chronicles.

Within the recounting of Roosevelt's contraction, illness, recovering, and physical rehabilitation from polio Tobin enlightens readers on a number of issues. The first is the mechanics of the poliovirus and how it became major epidemic disease in the early 20th-century. The second is the societal attitudes towards the disabled in the 1920s and early 1930s that many faced and were amplified when Roosevelt returned to politics. The third was political dynamics that the nation and the Democratic party was facing throughout the mid-1920s especially when it came to New York Governor Al Smith and Roosevelt's relationship towards him. The fourth is Roosevelt's dealings with the press about his physical condition and how much he actually used a wheelchair.

At 311 pages of text, Tobin for the vast majority of the book is both detailed and efficient in his writing. The only time the text seemed to wander was when Tobin discussed the societal attitudes towards the disabled during the time period, mainly because he continued to show example after example of attitudes and biases after clearly giving the reader ample evidence already. If being given an overabundance of information on a particular issue that Roosevelt had to confront is the only noticeable "glare" then it might come down to the individual reader and not the writer.

Upon finishing the book, Tobin's view that polio helped Roosevelt win the Presidency does hold up. A polio-free Roosevelt had all the talent to become President, whether he would have succeeded would be another matter. However, it was a post-polio Roosevelt who learned to use his talents in another way like he had to learn to use his muscles in another way that helped create a recipe for a successful return to politics and then ascension to the Presidency.

Julie says

In depth and specific

Well researched, well told

FDR "defied" polio but wasn't "defined" by it ... yet it definitely shaped the President he became. Polio sharpened his character and remodelled his ethics. The argument presented isn't that FDR became President

in spite of his polio, or that FDR became President *because of his polio*, but, as the title says so clearly, the argument is about the man (and President) he became.

The author stays on task and presents a lot of interesting information and statistics about polio, its causes and its effects. There is also a lot of social information about the perception of those with disabilities and how FDR challenged this. FDR had to overcome the illness (physically and mentally) and not waver from his ambition to be President.

Not just a fascinating account of polio and FDR, but also full in interesting insights into the society of the day, this is an excellent read. The book finished with FDR's nomination, but I would have liked a little more of the "man he became" of the title, not just winning the Presidency but an indication of the "man he became" as evidenced in his policies and actions as President.

Nancy says

"The guy never knows when he is licked." ~ Harry Hopkins on FDR

"Because he had beaten his illness, Roosevelt thought that he could beat anything." ~ John Gunther

James Tobin's new book *The Man He Became: How FDR Defied Polio to Win the Presidency* covers Franklin D. Roosevelt's life between 1921 when he contracted infantile paralysis and 1932 when the Democratic party nominated him as their candidate for Governor of New York State. Tobin shows how polio brought out amazing strengths of character in FDR and ultimately prepared him to become a great leader.

At age 39 FDR was charming, handsome, rich, and determined to gain the presidency. He had served as Secretary of the Navy and on President Wilson's subcabinet.

Then he encountered the virus that left him crippled. Tobin's narrative accessibly explains the disease, how it is spread, how it attacks the human body, and how the medical doctors treated it. At a time when most children were naturally inoculated through exposure to the virus, FDR's privileged and sheltered life left him vulnerable. Overworked and tired, he arrived at the isolated family summer resort at Campobello and soon after became ill. By the time the doctors knew he had contracted polio, the damage was done.

FDR's mother assumed he would return to his childhood home and live out the rest of his life puttingter with his stamp collection and watching the Hudson River flow by. But FDR was not a man to sit and watch life pass him by. He was determined to win the presidency, and he was going to walk to the podium to give his acceptance speech.

His recovery was not a straight or easy path. He did not follow doctor's orders and he avoided painful exercise. He hated the leg braces and crutches. FDR became his own physician, and took to exercising in warm water. So when he read about a polio victim who could walk after therapy at Warm Springs resort in Georgia FDR determined to experience for himself the properties of the mineral springs. The resort was isolated and in bad repair. FDR was charmed. The warm mineral water enabled him to endure long hours of exercise without pain.

FDR needed a project. He liked to run things. He longed to own something of his own. He needed a source of income. FDR determined to buy the run-down resort, an economical and practical decision that seemed

foolish. He imagined a place where polio victims could only heal their bodies but also find acceptance and normality in a world that shunted cripples out of sight.

FDR's ability to walk again was truly due to physiotherapists Helena Mahoney and Alicia Plastridge who taught him how to use his good muscles to compensate for the lost ones. Working with Mahoney at Warm Springs in 1927 FDR was finally able to walk with two canes.

Tobin challenges commonly held beliefs about Franklin's hiding his infirmity. Although FDR did strive to keep the more undignified aspects of his infirmity out of sight, such as being carried up stairs, once he returned to public life he did not, could not, hide that he was handicapped. Republicans had a field day attacking FDR as a cripple, a 'poor man' of pity who was not up to the job.

"The role he must play was a paradox. Normally the actor puts on a mask and becomes someone else. FDR's role now was to play the man he actually was--a strong man capable of leadership in the highest seats of power. The trick was to remove the mask that his audience would otherwise force him to wear. He must persuade the audience to discard its ancient, inherited belief about a man who was crippled. He must persuade them that a crippled man could be strong."

FDR went on the campaign trail, traveling by auto caravan across New York state. He had to change the way society viewed 'cripples'. Two weeks before the election he faced four thousand people and openly spoke about polio. "Seven years ago, through an attack of infantile paralysis, I was completely put out of any useful activity." People in audience were heard crying. "By personal good fortune, I was able to get the best kind of medical care. The result is that today I am on my feet." And in admitting he was a cripple, FDR also declared himself to be a fighter and a man of action.

I think it was a shining moment in American history when a man's ability made voters forget his handicap, that we judged him by the 'content of his character' and not by his physical abilities or disabilities.

James Tobin's first book, *Ernie Pyle's War*, American's Eye-Witness to World War II won him the National Book Critic's Circle Award. He was able to leave his position with the Detroit News to write full time. He wrote a companion book to the PBS series *Great Projects: The Epic Story of the Building of America*, *From the Taming of the Mississippi to the Invention of the Internet*. It was followed by *To Conquer the Air: The Wright Brothers and the Great Race for Flight*.

To me, each book has at its core the story of men willing to go to great lengths to achieve the goals they hold dearest. Tobin's books are inspiring and dramatic narratives. To learn more visit <http://authors.simonandschuster.com/J...>

Note: Tobin used the word *cripple* purposefully. He explains in his Prologue, "To understand Roosevelt's situation--in his time, not ours--one needs to enter a realm in which the stigma of physical disability was like the presence of oxygen in the air: utterly taken for granted, and therefore terribly powerful."

Lisa McAllister says

This book did an excellent job focusing on the topic, which was how FDR's disability affected his life and his political life. The author really hit some key elements of the disabled experience, admirably for an able-bodied person. I especially appreciated his organization, and his citation of other works he read as he

researched. This gives me more to read on the topic. It also made me think about my life in terms of my disability, which I don't often consider. While I try my best to just ignore the facts of my situation, and just go, I was happy and sad to see very similar attitudes in both FDR's story and mine. Some things really haven't changed in 60+ years, but many more things have changed for the better. Anyway, for anyone interested in this subject, this was a fast read, because it is so well-structured. Very enjoyable and enlightening.

Adam Christian Smith says

In no way comparing a back injury to Polio but bits of the agony and trying to fight back and stand up is difficult.

I've never read such detailed and awe inspiring deeper realty. My love of FDR on this reason alone is accentuated. Our nation was different but also the same.

Mikey B. says

The FDR Memorial in Washington DC

This is a vivid portrayal of Franklin Roosevelt when he became afflicted by poliomyelitis (infantile paralysis) in 1921 and his life-long adjustment to it. It covers the period of onset until he ran for President in 1932.

The author gives us an excellent perspective of the individuals surrounding Roosevelt, particularly of his secretary/advisor Louis Howe. Louis attached himself to Roosevelt in the 1910's and never gave up on him. Both always believed that Roosevelt would one day be President. In many ways it is remarkable that both adhered to this vision after 1921. It was Louis Howe that tutored Roosevelt (and Eleanor as well) politically – and he worked hard to keep him publicly visible after the onset of poliomyelitis. The book explores the many nuances of how Roosevelt continued his governmental endeavors after 1921 – and how he decided to successfully run for New York State Governor in 1928. We see how he out-dueled ex-New York State Governor Al Smith when Smith decided to run for the Presidency in 1928.

The author also examines how Roosevelt handled his illness – he never stopped believing that he would one day regain his ability to walk. However when he decided to re-enter active politics in 1928 some part of him must have realized that he would need to significantly reduce the amount of time he could devote to his rehabilitation. This demonstrates the ascendancy of politics in Roosevelt's life over his personal drive for better health.

We are given an interesting analogy of Roosevelt trying several different procedures to improve his ability to walk – he never stuck with one methodology. He followed much the same pattern politically, by never following an ideological formula, for example during the depression if one approach was not working out he would not hesitate to introduce new programs.

This is a well written book with many insights of Roosevelt and the era.

Jason says

As a disabled individual with a deep interest in politics and a avid fascination in the study of the American Presidency, Franklin D. Roosevelt has occupied a very special place in my heart for many, many years. It fascinates me just to think that less than a century ago this country faced (what seemed like at the time) two insurmountable obstacles one directly following the other: the Great Depression and World War II, respectively.

A favorite quote of mine is: "When this country was on its knees, it took a man in a wheelchair to bring it to its feet." I don't know who said it originally, but it's a phenomenal quote nonetheless.

President Roosevelt never fully discussed his paralysis with anyone in his administration or (as far as I know) with anyone in general. I think that due to the atmosphere of the times that he lived in, it generally just was NOT talked about. That was one of the highlights of this story for me. The author delves into the stigma of disability and the origins of it (ie: the word cripple). He also starts the story by describing just how the polio virus begins its infection cycle in the host's body.

Eleanor Roosevelt has said that if it weren't for her husband's "trial by fire" (as she described his initial fight with paralysis) that it never would have given him the ability to govern and/or lead the country in its hours of great national peril. For as much as the polio virus had paralyzed him, it gave Franklin Roosevelt a deeper sense of self-worth and empathy with the common people. This book just reaffirmed to me what a great man that FDR was. For that reason alone, I simply cannot recommend this incredible, inspiring story enough! Read this and trust me, you'll be thrilled that you did!

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN 2013.

Carrie Kilgore says

Well-written, thoroughly researched story of FDR's fight with polio and its aftermath. As a polio survivor myself (I was two when I contracted the disease in the last big US epidemic in 1955) I found the descriptions of the illness right on the money, as well as FDR's physical, mental, and emotional struggles to regain some of what he'd lost. But this book should resonate with anyone, not only those who struggle with disability, but who struggle, period. FDR's courage and determination served him well in leading this country during the dark days of the Big Depression. I think he continues to encourage those who read about him today. Yes, he's the guy who told us that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Hearing about FDR inspired me as a child, and I connected with his drive for people to see him as a vibrant, capable person. What disabled person does not? But let's change that sentence: What person does not? Whatever your personal difficulties, whether they are clearly visible to others or not, it helps to have someone willing to inspire us by getting on with the business of living, of doing whatever it takes to become the person you want to be. FDR had presidential aspirations long before polio struck; the fascination of his story is how he refused to let it change the true direction of his life.

Highly recommended.

Lorraine says

At the age of 39, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a rising star in Democratic politics. Handsome, charming, ambitious and liberal, he was able to navigate the tricky waters of the Democratic Party. Then on an outing he went swimming, came home feeling unwell and was never able to walk unassisted again. The story of how he worked to strengthen not only his body, but also the public's perception of what it means to be "crippled" is inspiring. In this period, being "crippled" meant being pitied and shunned. Some were convinced that a "cripple" would become as "twisted" as their legs. Roosevelt was, for many years, determined to walk like a normal person again. That didn't happen. Becoming incapacitated meant that he would, for the rest of his life, have to rely on others to help him. The fact that he learned to accept help graciously and with his beaming smile and good humor says a lot for a man who had pretty much seen almost everything come easily. His determination to get well took him to Warm Springs, GA where he learned about the problems of the South which was, at the time, deeply mired in poverty. That experience stood him in good stead when he decided to seek the Presidency. The author takes considerable time to explain how polio is spread including the fact that sanitation inadvertently led to more polio. In addition, there were recognized treatments for polio at the time which, tragically, Roosevelt did not receive as a result of misdiagnoses. Would Roosevelt been elected President if he had NOT had polio. The author doubts it. Polio shaped him, not only physically, but also mentally. It's an important lesson for everyone.
