

Assassination of William McKinley
Handout

McKinley, the 7th of 9 children, was born in 1843 in Ohio to a religious household that believed in education. He enlisted in the Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment. In the Battle of Antietam McKinley drove a chuck wagon over enemy fire.

McKinley's wife: Ida was epileptic. That was coupled with the death of her mother and her second child at 4 months old. Their first girl died at 4 years of age. Ida may not ever have gotten over the children's deaths. McKinley was close to Ida. "Ida was the most beautiful creature I ever saw and the most gifted. . . at 20 I married her. She is beautiful to me now."

1877 – Hayes becomes President. He saw McKinley and made him a member of his staff. McKinley came to Washington as a Congressman. 1877 was the year of the great railroad strike.

McKinley was a war hero, a self-made man and a good Christian. He was friendly and a popular figure. As a Congressman, he saw tariffs as protective of American industry from European rivals.

Guam – defensibly suited between Hawaii and the Philippines – only 10,000 people.

December 1885 – Emma Goldman born in Russia and came to America. Became passionate on the subject of anarchy.

May 5, 1886 – The Hay Market Affair. 7 hanged on November 11, 1887.

1892-1896 – McKinley was Governor of Ohio

In 1893 the country was in a major depression. Bryan won the Presidential nomination in 1896. Famous line: "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns. You shall not crucify mankind on a cross of gold."

June 22, 1898 –U.S. invaded Cuba.

July 7, 1898 –Campaign to annex Hawaii. McKinley open to annexation.

Bryan received 176 Electoral College votes to 271 votes for McKinley.

Spanish vulnerability in the Caribbean: in Cuba and Puerto Rico. No particular enthusiasm to take Puerto Rico but no strong opposition either. Pressure to take Hawaiian Islands.

May 1 – Dewey had wiped out entire Spanish presence in a morning. 400 Spanish killed – 1 America. Overnight Dewey became a super star.

McKinley planned a trip to celebrate his overseas achievements: Cuba under American control, Hawaii annexed, America a power in China, and Taft turning the Philippines into a peaceful colony.

June 12, 1901 - McKinley attended the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, six weeks in all. Ida very ill.

Emma Goldman found herself in an unlikely place for an aspiring anarchist the summer of 1892 – behind the counter of a lunchroom in Worcester, Massachusetts, preparing sandwiches and grilling pancakes. Goldman had transformed a ramshackle store into an attractive restaurant that bustled from breakfast until well into the evening.

Goldman was a rising star on the lecture circuit by the late 1890s. Her audiences, while mostly consisting of leftists, increasingly included ordinary folks eager to see the famous young anarchists known as “Red Emma.” Her podium manners were legendary. Blunt, powerful, a “sledgehammer” in the words of one. She was the “very embodiment of the doctrine she preaches.”

The nation’s newfound passion for foreign conquests provided an especially juicy target. Patriotism, so key to providing the public support for aggression, was a sad excuse for killing, she complained. “To be patriotic,” she told a Pittsburgh audience. “One must wade ankle-deep in the blood of his fellow men. He must kill, slay, destroy, in every conceivable manner and form, else he is not living up to the sacred meaning of that sacred word.

Continuing her tour abroad, Goldman mocked the Spanish-American War to a London audience. The noble sentiment that had drawn the U.S. into the war—saving Cubans from Spanish brutality—only “served the American governors as a good pretext for fighting Spain in order to get Cuba into their clutches.” In the end, she went on the Cubans were hardly better off. “I say that all the blood spilt, all the lives lost, all the money spent has been in vain; the Cubans have been freed from the atrocious government of Spain but only to fall into the hands of another almost as unscrupulous.”

Czolgosz goes to Chicago, the last place he had seen Goldman. Goldman buys a newspaper article and sees McKinley is to be at the Pan American Exposition. Czolgosz says he is looking for a way to do something for anarchism.

McKinley and Ida step out of wagon to greet the crowd and then go on to Niagara Falls.

September 6, 1901 - McKinley goes back to Buffalo and Temple of Music where music was to be performed. Czolgosz shoots McKinley two times in the abdomen. Czolgosz beaten and seized as he attempted a third shot. He says he was doing a duty as an anarchist.

Those who attempted to write Czolgosz off as a nut, however, knew little of the man now behind bars. Calm, cool, and collected, he consistently impressed his guards with his grasp of current events and his levelheadedness.

While the police continued their hunt for conspirators and attempted to learn what they could about Czolgosz's motives, they also waited for on rather awkward matter to resolve itself before he could go to trial. Was Czolgosz to be charged simply with attacking the president or with killing him?

Goldman was arrested in Chicago.

McKinley was taken to the Exposition Hospital. Only one bullet caused the damage. The problem was the second bullet. Dr. Mann makes an incision and squeezes his finger through the holes. The doctors were unable to find the second bullet. He closes the incision and cleans the area.

Edison sends over an x-ray machine but a piece is missing. The machine was not used.

Gangrene sets in and doctors say they could not stop that.

Jury took only 33 minutes to find Czolgosz guilty. He was electrocuted on October 29, 1901.

In retrospect the similarities and contrasts between the McKinley and Garfield assassinations are striking. Both crimes were committed by disturbed cranks, sane only in the narrow legal sense of the term. Both Presidents were shot twice and in each instance one bullet caused minor damage. There is little doubt that the management of McKinley's case was influenced by the failure of Garfield's doctors to decide on immediate surgery. Mann remarked that if he and his colleagues had not acted promptly the world would have repeated the questions asked after Garfield's shooting in 1881: Why don't they do something?

The autopsies revealed that while both men were alive, the doctors did not know where the fatal bullet had stopped. In 1881, with x-rays still undiscovered, Garfield's doctors, after unhygienic probing, tried unsuccessfully to locate the bullet by electromagnetic induction and by dissecting bullet-riddled cadavers similar in build to the President. These crude techniques failed to reveal that the slug was only three inches from its point of entry in the lower back. Twenty years later there was an x-ray machine on display at the Pan American Hospital, but it was not brought in.

In one fortunate respect, however, the history of the Garfield case was not repeated. Dr. D. Willard Bliss of Washington, in charge of the 1881 group of doctors, lost his lucrative practice and died a poor man. Many of his colleagues also suffered professionally. Mann's reputation was undamaged and his success continued until his death in 1921. The McKinley case probably enhanced the standing of Park because there was always a strong belief in local circles that he could have saved the President. Nor did McBurney's faulty prognosis harm his later career, which ended just before World War I. The last survivor of President McKinley's principal physicians was Stockton, who died in 1931.

