

Exhume! Exhume!

by Murray N. Rothbard

So what if it didn't work out? It was a great theory. Like Miss Clara Rising, I, a long-time fan of historical whodunits, had long been suspicious of the remarkably sudden death of Zachary Taylor, twelfth president of what used to be called These United States. The difference is that Miss Rising, a descendant of Old Rough-and-Ready, had the moxie to do something about it. Getting the necessary bureaucratic clearances, she plunked down \$1,200 to get old Zack's body disinterred and exhumed, to find out at last what done him in.

The facts of the case are these. Zack, though a man with no political experience, was inflicted on the country in 1848 by the increasingly desperate Whig Party, purely on the strength of his being a hero of the Mexican War. It proved, indeed, to be the last presidential election won by the Whigs. At a July 4 picnic, after eating a bowl of cold cherries in milk, he was taken violently ill and died several days later. As in every other case of a president dying in office, his death was minimized. The invariable rule has been: if a president is not visibly shot, then his death, though sudden, must have been by natural causes. If actually and visibly shot, then the perpetrator must have been a "lone nut." God forbid that more than one person might have been involved in the assassination, because that, heaven forfend, would be a "conspiracy theory," and we all know that the Establishment in the U.S. has virtually outlawed any such theory. Or, at the very least, it has been quite beyond the pale of correct thinking and permissible discourse.

To return to old Zack: his death had always seemed peculiar to me. If ptomaine or whatever had run rampant at this presidential picnic in the July heat of our nation's capital, why is it that only Zack Taylor, of all the picnickers, had caught this disease? Was the stomach disease aimed only at him? In short, was he poisoned?

It's peculiar that no one else seems to have even thought of this possibility. Miss Rising reveals that the Taylor family has long been rife with such speculation, but it took until 1991 for a family member to do something about it. The suspicion is that Taylor had been put

under by a massive dose of arsenic, and the body was now exhumed to test for that poison.

Naturally, Establishment historians, as always, sniffed at the very idea. Take, for example, the reaction of Professor Roger Brown, distinguished expert, at American University, on the history of violence in the United States. "If you're going to construct a theory of assassination, you've got to find somebody who would stand to gain from killing Taylor. I'm not sure that she has constructed a persuasive hypothesis about what somebody would gain." Cutting through the convoluted English, this strikes me as an astonishingly silly remark. Look, Professor Brown: In any death of a president, there is always one person who clearly stands to gain: the vice president, in this case Millard Fillmore, who, because of these possibly lethal cherries vaulted to the august office of the presidency.

Is this being outrageous? But as everyone knows, in any murder or suspicious demise, the first suspect that the police investigate is the person who most stands to gain by the death. Who is the beneficiary of granddaddy's will? Etc. Now, this does not of course mean that the main beneficiary was actually responsible for grandpa's death. But at least the theory has to be investigated. So why not also in a sudden death of someone who means more to most of us than one wealthy individual: the president of the U.S.? Shouldn't the vice president always be the first suspect, his whereabouts checked, etc.? So why has this never happened? Why, for example, did not Lyndon Baines Johnson immediately become the first prime suspect in the indubitable murder of John F. Kennedy?

If anything, Miss Rising's own theory of the assassination is a bit too broad. Zachary Taylor, though born in Orange County, Virginia and himself a slaveholder, surprised everyone by leading the battle to prohibit any admission of western slave states into the Union. He also opposed the Compromise of 1850, which managed to delay the War Between the States for a number of years. So Miss Rising postulates that Southern slave-owners bumped off this dangerous traitor to his region and culture. Well, that's certainly interesting, but where's the evidence? Surely Millard Fillmore is a more plausible *a priori* bet.

It turns out that the exhumation shows only normal trace quantities of arsenic in Old Rough-n-Ready's remains. Shucks. The terrible thing is that this result might discredit the exhumation movement. It shouldn't. Let's find out, at long last. Let's follow the path blazed by the courageous Miss Rising; let's exhume the body of every president who died in office, and let's take another more scientific look.

Let's go down the list. First was "Old Tippecanoe" William Henry Harrison, another *verdante* war hero (the War of 1812), who allegedly spoke too long at his inaugural, walked out in the rain, caught the flu, and died, only a month after his inaugural. Supposedly natural causes. Humph. Let's exhume Old Tippecanoe and look for poison. Beneficiary? John Tyler, a Democrat when Harrison was a Whig. Another Southern Democratic plot?

Then came Zack Taylor. The third death in office, of course, was the sainted Abraham Lincoln. Oddly, even though his killing was clearly a conspiracy, the Establishment has injected into the popular consciousness the image of a lone nut, John Wilkes Booth, declaiming wildly after he shot Lincoln. Moreover, the conspiracy was hushed up, military courts delivering summary justice in secret. There is a substantial revisionist review that the major conspirator was Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, who contrived to have every one above him in the line of succession to the presidency shot at (only the assassination of Lincoln was successful). I don't know exactly how an exhumation of Lincoln's body would help test the Stanton thesis, but since the body is being exhumed anyway (to test for Marfan's Syndrome, and why should anyone care whether Abe had Marfan's Syndrome or not?), they may as well poke around further and see what they can find. It sure can't hurt.

Next came James A. Garfield, bumped off by someone eternally tarred with the epithet "disappointed office-seeker." Another lone nut. Charles Guiteau was apparently driven off his nut by not getting a job in the Garfield administration, and this was then successfully used by the Establishment to inflict the monstrous Civil Service system on this country, protecting every bureaucrat for life in his invasion of the pockets and the liberties of the taxpayer. Let's exhume and investigate. Beneficiary? Vice President Chester A. Arthur, a New York corruptionist and protectionist, opposed to Garfield's relatively laissez-faire wing of the Republican Party. Or maybe the civil service reformers were responsible, using Guiteau as an excuse for pushing through their Civil Service.

Next president to die in office was William McKinley of Ohio, long-time Rockefeller tool. Another lone nut was responsible, the "anarchist" Leon Czolgosz, who, like Guiteau, was quickly tried and executed by the Establishment. Even though Czolgosz was considered a flake and was not a member of any organized anarchist group, the assassination was used by the Establishment to smear anarchism and to outlaw anarchist ideas and agitation. Various obscure anti-sedition and anti-conspiracy laws trotted out from time to time by the Establishment were passed during this post-McKinley assassination hysteria. Beneficiary? The vaulting to power of Teddy Roosevelt, long-time tool of the competing Morgan (as opposed to Rockefeller) wing of the Republican Party. Teddy immediately started using the anti-trust weapon to try to destroy Rockefeller's Standard Oil and Harriman's Northern Securities, both bitter enemies of the Morgan world empire. Exhume McKinley, and also start a deep investigation of the possible role of Teddy and the Morgans. Was Czolgosz only a lone nut?

Next sudden death in office was that of my favorite president of the twentieth century, Warren Gamaliel Harding, in the camp of the Rockefellers. His death was quickly dismissed by the Establishment as of natural causes, but Gaston Means, a Secret Service agent in the Harding White House, wrote a sensational book, *The Strange Death of Warren Harding*, charging that Harding was poisoned by his wife, for

two possible, though somewhat contradictory reasons: (a) Harding's notorious womanizing, and (b) to spare Harding the scandal of the Teapot Dome revelations, which were just emerging. Means's charge was brusquely dismissed on the grounds that he was an unreliable character. Perhaps, but so what? Surely, the grounds for exhumation are overwhelming. Chief beneficiary of Harding's death? Vice President Calvin Coolidge, member of the prominent Massachusetts family long in the Morgan ambit. (Hmmm. Another sudden death that replaced a Rockefeller person with a Morgan man?!)

The next presidential death in office was of course that of the revered Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This is perhaps the most mysterious death of all. FDR's health had long been swathed in layer after layer of official and medical lies. And when he died, in his fourth term, the official mystery was unprecedented: his coffin was covered, and an autopsy was never performed on the body. All sorts of rumors abounded: that he died of syphilis, or of a gunshot wound, either self-inflicted or inflicted by someone else. Was Mrs. Lucy Mercer there when he died? And what was the role of the mysterious Russian painter, Mrs. Elizabeth Shoumatoff? The cause of historical truth and justice cries out for exhumation and deep analysis of FDR's remains.

Main beneficiary of FDR's death was, of course, Harry S. Truman. In broader political terms, a pro-Commie president, manipulated as we know now by brain truster, top foreign policy adviser, and unregistered KGB agent Harry "the Hop" Hopkins, was suddenly replaced by the first launcher of the Cold War, at the behest of such venerable Establishment "Wise Men" (as they modestly called themselves): Henry L. Stimson, W. Averill Harriman, Dean G. Acheson, and John J. McCloy. Exhume, exhume!

Finally, of course, matching FDR in mystery is the last president to die in office; the shining prince of Camelot, whose shine gets more tarnished every year: John Fitzgerald Kennedy, allegedly assassinated by lone nut Lee Harvey Oswald, who in turn was promptly assassinated by another, independent lone nut: Jack Ruby! This is the shakiest, most convoluted Establishment theory of all: for the two lone nuts had to be independent, couldn't have known each other so that this kooky official theory could work. So much so in fact that the mysteriously sudden deaths of all those who knew both Oswald and Ruby and who knew that the two were linked, is one of the most powerful counter-indications to the official doctrine. Here the number of books and investigations rebutting Establishment theory is legion, although orthodox writers still act as if dissenters are somehow tetchy: powerful works from such writers as Mark Lane, the bullet-and-body revisionism of David Lifton (in his *Best Evidence*), the work of the smeared Jim Garrison, etc.

Here the case for a new investigation with subpoena power is overwhelming. Not only is there persuasive evidence that the Parkland autopsy report was to say the least deeply flawed, as well as the possibility that the Kennedy body was switched, but also we find that Kennedy's brain is mysteriously "missing" from the National

Archives. Hell, libraries lose books all the time, right? Exhume, investigate!

Beneficiary? As I indicated, Lyndon Baines Johnson, who as Texan students of his career know, was not above using a little hanky-panky to advance his political career. And what about that intrepid Kennedy assassination researcher who, analyzing the motorcade with Zapruder, etc. films, concluded that Lyndon hit the deck of his car 2.7 seconds before the sound of the first shot? More broadly, the assassination of Kennedy removed from power, by force and violence, a representative of the "Yankee" Eastern Establishment, and replaced him by a leader of the Sun Belt (Florida, Texas, southern California) "Cowboys" – as explained in Carl Oglesby's perceptive work, *The Yankee and Cowboy War*. On this analysis, the Watergate Affair consisted of a counter-coup leveled by the Yankees, installing Establishment rep Gerald Ford, and ousting Cowboy (southern California) Richard Nixon (see Carl Oglesby, *The Yankee and Cowboy War*, Kansas City: Sheed Andrews & McMeel, 1976).

All this is not only of fascinating interest to the history buff. Who knows: there might come a time when yet another beloved president dies, unexpectedly and quite suddenly, in office. What we need to adopt is a mind-set that, if and when such an event occurs, we better be prepared to cast a cold eye and ask all the right and the upsetting questions.