



The Trial of the Assassin Guiteau: Psychiatry and the Law in the Gilded Age

Charles E. Rosenberg

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In this brilliant study, Charles Rosenberg uses the celebrated trial of Charles Guiteau, who assassinated President Garfield in 1881, to explore insanity and criminal responsibility in the Gilded Age. Rosenberg masterfully reconstructs the courtroom battle waged by twenty-four expert witnesses who represented the two major schools of psychiatric thought of the generation immediately preceding Freud.

Although the role of genetics in behavior was widely accepted, these psychiatrists fiercely debated whether heredity had predisposed Guiteau to assassinate Garfield. Rosenberg's account allows us to consider one of the opening rounds in the controversy over the criminal responsibility of the insane, a debate that still rages today.

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