

BOOK REVIEW

FDR Unmasked: 73 years of Medical Cover-ups that Rewrote History by Steven Lomazow

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Steven Lomazow M.D. is an American neurologist and former president of the Neurological Association of New Jersey.

Retrospective diagnosis of disability and disease can lead to very misleading results, not only in world leaders, but here the author has used primary sources that enabled him to write for us a new medical biography of the thirty-second president of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was beset with medical problems that may not be known generally.

The extent to which these problems may have influenced his contributions to the government of his country may be difficult to discern particularly towards the end of his life. It does not appear that hubris has played a significant part as has been claimed with other leaders by, among others, the politician-doctor David Owen. Roosevelt's advice and leadership seem to have endured without his own opinion of his abilities leading to unwise actions and this is some achievement.

The story starts with his poliomyelitis in 1921 which others, including Armond Goldman, have argued might be due to a Guillain-Barré Syndrome. Whichever mechanism was operative, he suffered ensuing walking disability throughout his life. Attempts to conceal this, aided by his team, were largely successful for he was elected to office four times (from 1933) despite this disability, and surely rightly so since this should not have impinged upon his decision-making. Then there was the melanoma on his forehead, and in 1940 carcinoma of the prostate and hypertension, followed in 1943 by the final phases with the onset of cognitive decline attributed to multiple small strokes. Although he was involved in the talks at Yalta he died two months after those discussions involving Churchill and Stalin to which it appears Roosevelt may not have contributed as much as formerly thought.

This work provides a good read, in chronological form, and contributes to our knowledge of medical history.

Christopher Gardner-Thorpe
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