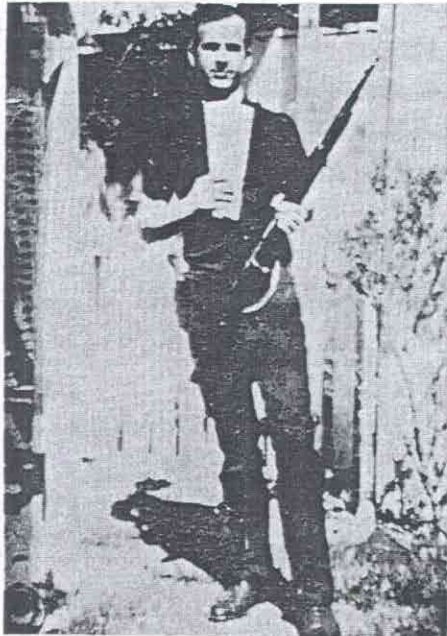


## The Presidential Disease

One man writes President Kennedy, "You have to die"; another tries to ram a truck through a White House gate. Both are as sick as any victim of a physical disease, and at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in New York last week, psychiatrists attempted to delineate the nature of what they called the "Presidential Assassination Syndrome" and the "White House Cases."

Beginning shortly after the Kennedy assassination, Dr. David A. Rothstein of the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners, Springfield, Mo., interviewed 27



© 1964 Detroit Free Press

Oswald: The pattern was predicted

Springfield inmates who had made verbal or written threats against a Chief Executive. Among his cases, seventeen had threatened President Johnson; eight, President Kennedy; and two, President Eisenhower. Rothstein says the parallels between these men and Lee Harvey Oswald, Mr. Kennedy's presumed assassin, were readily apparent: several were young men, and many came from unhappy homes. Typically, they were raised by dominant mothers, while their fathers stood ineffectually by or were absent altogether.

Although their threats were directed at men, Rothstein found the underlying source of their resentment was directed at their mothers. Rage against mother, he said, "is only later displaced onto male authorities." In adolescence, many of the men joined the armed forces, presumably to fulfill needs unmet within the family. But usually their service careers were unsuccessful; many of the men, like Oswald, were dis-

charged under unfavorable circumstances. The resentment of these men, Rothstein reported, shifted inexorably from the government to the President, "the embodiment of the U.S. Government." The letters and statements the men directed at this ultimate authority figure were occasionally obscene or of a homosexual nature, reflecting, perhaps, the confusion in sexual identity Rothstein found characteristic of the inmates.

**Interviews:** In the course of his research, Rothstein found he could predict certain patterns of behavior about Oswald. For example, based on the Springfield interviews, Rothstein decided that a history of suicidal gestures was characteristic of the would-be Presidential assassin; Oswald, when his Russian diary was published, proved to have precisely this characteristic.

Rothstein suggests that work like his might eventually help psychiatrists identify potential assassins. But more immediately, he believes the discovery of a distinct pattern of abnormal behavior among persons who have threatened the President helps discount the conspiratorial theory of the Kennedy crime.

Complementing Rothstein's report, Drs. Joseph A. Sebastiani of the University of Cincinnati and James L. Foy of Georgetown studied 48 men and women who attempted to enter the White House and were stopped by guards. These "White House Cases" had been referred by the Secret Service to the District of Columbia General Hospital. The patients were "profoundly delusional," the researchers found.

Three patients said they were bringing "messages from God" to the President; several came to claim vast financial fortunes, three claimed to be the President, and one 75-year-old lady said she was President Eisenhower's mother. The majority of the patients were paranoid; twenty declared they were being persecuted and one reported a spy network around her Pennsylvania farm. Persistence in their mission was also characteristic; the patients often wrote or wired ahead to announce their arrival at the White House, and returned again and again.

**Personality:** Apparently, the personality of the President, the investigators noted, plays a part—as yet not fully understood—in attracting White House Cases. For example, only eight such persons were admitted to the hospital during the last year of President Eisenhower's Administration, but 32 appeared at the White House during President Kennedy's first year in office.

But on the whole, the psychiatrists noted the generally nonviolent behavior of the White House Cases. "Those paranoid persons, approaching the White House openly," Sebastiani and Foy say, "appear to be committed to a confronta-

charged under unfavorable circumstances. The resentment of these men, Rothstein reported, shifted inexorably from the government to the President, "the embodiment of the U.S. Government." The letters and statements the men directed at this ultimate authority figure were occasionally obscene or of a homosexual nature, reflecting, perhaps, the confusion in sexual identity Rothstein found characteristic of the inmates.

Interviews: In the course of his research, Rothstein found he could predict certain patterns of behavior about Oswald. For example, based on the Springfield interviews, Rothstein decided that a history of suicidal gestures was characteristic of the would-be Presidential assassin; Oswald, when his Russian diary was published, proved to have precisely this characteristic.

Rothstein suggests that work like his might eventually help psychiatrists identify potential assassins. But more immediately, he believes the discovery of a distinct pattern of abnormal behavior among persons who have threatened the President helps discount the conspiratorial theory of the Kennedy crime.

Complementing Rothstein's report, Drs. Joseph A. Sebastiani of the University of Cincinnati and James L. Foy of Georgetown studied 48 men and women who attempted to enter the White House and were stopped by guards. These "White House Cases" had been referred by the Secret Service to the District of Columbia General Hospital. The patients were "profoundly delusional," the researchers found.

Three patients said they were bringing "messages from God" to the President; several came to claim vast financial fortunes, three claimed to be the President, and one 75-year-old lady said she was President Eisenhower's mother. The majority of the patients were paranoid; twenty declared they were being persecuted and one reported a spy network around her Pennsylvania farm. Persistence in their mission was also characteristic; the patients often wrote or wired ahead to announce their arrival at the White House, and returned again and again.

Personality: Apparently, the personality of the President, the investigators noted, plays a part—as yet not fully understood—in attracting White House Cases. For example, only eight such persons were admitted to the hospital during the last year of President Eisenhower's Administration, but 32 appeared at the White House during President Kennedy's first year in office.

But on the whole, the psychiatrists noted the generally nonviolent behavior of the White House Cases. "Those paranoid persons, approaching the White House openly," Sebastiani and Foy say, "appear to be committed to a confronta-

tion for the purpose of self-recognition of themselves. On the other hand, the surreptitious, covertly hostile, paranoid persons, who avoid confrontation could be considered more dangerous. END