

Letters to the Editor

Wallace Assassination Attempt: Reactions

To the Editor:

In the wake of the attack on Governor Wallace, the country asks itself: What can be done to stop these assaults on our leaders?

It is a fact in our media-dominated society that a notorious act becomes a visual fact on our TV screens and a recurrent theme on radio and in the newspapers. It bestows a kind of instant national fame on the killer and binds him in history with the leader.

Perhaps one way to diminish the attraction of political murder is to lessen the psychological reward by forbidding any publicity of the picture or name of the killer. He should remain unknown and unheralded, except to social scientists and to the authorities.

If the killer escapes detection or belongs to an organized conspiracy, the no-publicity plan wouldn't work. But it might inhibit the lone killer who expects to be caught and recognized and against whom we have found no defenses.

Withholding identity might be considered inimical to the idea of a free press, but right now the very viability of our Presidential system is at stake. In effect, the free press is an incentive for killing. It's time we deglamorized all form of violence and most especially political assassination.

JOEL HARNETT
New York, May 16, 1972

To the Editor:

In the wake of the George Wallace shooting there will be a spate of lofty public breast-beating about the real guilt resting morally and ethically with the public and lack of respect for democratic processes and conduct.

This will be the usual self-deceiving bunk. The real guilt lies elsewhere, in a very practical area. There are now some 200 million people in this country. Among that many people there inevitably will be a sizable number of

disturbed individuals capable of awful violence.

Our collective guilt lies in the fact that we have never really come to grips with this problem. We sweep these people under the rug in underfunded medieval prisons and latter-day Bedlams equipped to deal no more than superficially with the problem.

Our Federal appropriation for mental health programs this year was \$612-million: \$3 per citizen—only a fraction of what we spend on cosmetics, tobacco, liquor, pet foods and other non-essentials.

Until we muster a lot more intellectual courage and become much more practical about the problem of mental aberration, there will be an endless succession of these shocking incidents.

GLADWIN HILL
Los Angeles, May 17, 1972

To the Editor:

The most recent assassination attempt against a public figure should come as no surprise. When the entire social and legal structure accepts, condones and even encourages violence to solve problems (e.g. war, electric chairs), can we really expect that individuals will not consider similar methods as viable means to settle differences?

We take comfort in calling the assassins "deranged," but are they any more deranged than any of us who approve of murder "under certain circumstances"? Indeed, the very description of the act as "senseless" implies that there can be murder which makes sense.

It becomes, then, merely a matter of which murder we approve, not whether we approve of murder. As long as murder is a national policy and pastime, we can continue to expect to see such acts as were attempted against Governor Wallace's life.

MICHAEL SCOTT
Brooklyn, May 17, 1972