

Views on Attempt Against Ford

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Lloyd E. Ohlin

Professor of criminology at Harvard

It shows the disposition to use violent means to resolve personal problems. It seems to me that the rise since the Vietnam war in individual violence on the streets and the rise in public confrontations are all part of a pattern of release of control and restraints. When you think back on the history of the last 20 years, you can see a very sharp increase in the use of public demonstrations to express frustration and maybe a sense of alienation from authority. In the middle 'sixties you had the urban riots and we got this heavy exposure to violence in Vietnam which made people identify with a sort of official sanctioning of violence for solving problems.

When you get widespread violence of that sort it releases the individual restraints controlling personal violence and changes the constraints that are normally built into a community. We saw this in 1967 when the crime statistics began going up year after year.

The problem is to restore civility, to find as many ways as possible to create dialogue with dissident groups, to try and bring them into some kind of common sense of identification with the dominant groups in the country, to try to cool out and play down the use of confrontation in public discussion.



William F. Buckley
Columnist and Author

What you need here is a request to the President by Congress to restrict his move-

ments. If the President is caught restricting his movements by himself, he has a problem of machismo. But I think that a perfectly solemn request by Congress, one that he would be obliged to accept, would solve the problem. . . .

If a President removes himself from public view, or goes behind a barricade, it could have the effect of persuading some people that he is a physical coward, or the object of such intense hatred that he can't show his face. Obviously, he can't do this. Congress should do it for him.

Norman Podhoretz

A writer and the editor of Commentary.

I agree with Ford—tighten security procedures. It would be very bad for the country if public figures did not act in public. It would be very bad if they acted as if the country was mad. It would make them prisoners of people who are mad or criminal; it would make them hostages, reinforcing the whole climate of fear and terror. . . .

Assassination attempts come in waves, like plagues. No one, so far as I know, tried to assassinate Nixon; no one tried to assassinate Johnson. . . .

It's interesting that the lady who tried to kill Ford had once been interviewed by the press. Squeaky Fromme had been interviewed. Hadn't she been on television? I was furious when Time and Newsweek had Squeaky on the cover. I know you can't pass laws forbidding that, but there's no question that that sort of attention is an incitement to people of the same type.



Barbara C. Jordan
Democrat of Texas

I would say that the assassination attempts are a reflection of what we have always known—that there is a mindless element among the citizenry. It is a minority element, whose actions can have devastating results.

I would suggest that the President reduce his schedule to the confines of the Washington, D. C., area and the White House until there is a reduction of the hysteria which seems to creep into the minds of the mindless. The least the President should do is allow the passage of sufficient time so that there will have been a diminution of this mindlessness. I don't see how this would be harmful. I recognize the necessity of the President to get out among the people and smile and be seen, but with two assassination attempts coming within 17 days of each other, I think he should curtail this kind of activity.

But I don't think there is this mindlessness in the general public. I don't think we should project that it is reflective of the attitude of the larger American community.

Alex Inkeles

Stanford University sociologist and educator

Profiles of people who attempt to assassinate Presidents are extremely consistent. They tend to be extremely isolated, given to fantasies with no corrective influences on their personal system of belief. Words used in normal criticism of the President therefore can take on a very different meaning to them.

The pool of potential assassins is considerable. Closed societies don't have this contagion problem. If someone tried to assassinate Khrushchev, no one would know about it.



United Press International

Margaret Bush Wilson

Chairman of the board of directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

I always have some feeling of hesitancy about restricting the movement of anyone—a President or anyone else. But I have a related feeling. I want the President to set the tone for the nation. If we don't have the right kind of leadership, then we do open the floodgate for violent people.

I've been concerned about some of the President's statements and about his ruling by veto. He can't do this and expect the people to be supportive. . . .

I'm not prepared to say that the President must go into some kind of shell. What he must do—what we must do—is to work at muting the hostilities that divide us all.



The New York Times

Saul Bellow

Author

I think the country is in a deplorably bad state. I do feel that the publicity given all these attempts—seeing Squeaky Fromme on the cover of Newsweek, for instance—encourages people to get in on the celebrity festival.

There is a difference between meeting people to obtain views and shaking hands to obtain votes. The first I would applaud; the second I would not. The President does not obtain views when he goes into a crowd like that and he makes speeches if he wants to clarify his views. But I think he shouldn't expose himself this way until this madness dies down. I think the chief executive should not gamble with his life in the crowd. There is plenty of evidence that it is not safe. If it is imperative, if he is imparting policy to the crowd, that is one thing. But this sort of primitive rejoicing is no use at all.



Jack Valenti

President of the Motion Picture Association of America and a former aide to President Lyndon B. Johnson

Well, I was in the motorcade in Dallas so my judgment may be a little scarred, but I think the President must continue to campaign. He can't stay behind barricades. His greatest security, the Secret Service used to tell President Johnson, is surprise—just not announcing routes and appearances in advance. . . .

There's a viral contagion to assassination; it spreads. But an American President can't allow a potential assassin to cancel his appearances. He can't traffic with nuts—any more than the country can traffic with terrorists.

Alphonso Pinkney

Professor of sociology at Hunter College and author of "The American Way of Violence"

If the citizens of a country are treated decently, then a President has nothing to fear. . . . It boils down to an economic question. If the citizens feel a responsibility to a country, then a President can walk anywhere among them unarmed. . . .

There is basically an anti-humanitarian ethos that has run through our culture. If Gerald Ford goes around running the country by veto, by offering welfare to Lockheed, there could be more assassination attempts. I'm not convinced that all the people who do these things are crackpots. . . .