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Tuesday, May 16, 1972

The assault on Wallace

The entire nation is joining in sadness, shock — yes, and in shame — at the attempt to murder Gov. George C. Wallace. Decent Americans of all political faiths will pray for his recovery, for the crime, as always, is against all Americans.

History has been violently altered in our time by assassins' bullets — first with President Kennedy and within a short time the Rev. Martin Luther King and Kennedy's brother, Robert. Now it has happened once more, to an extent we cannot yet know.

In imposing his rash judgment upon the nation, the assassin is the most dangerous man in our midst — the paranoiac saboteur of the democratic process.

For in this system rooted in mutual faith and respect, any public man going about his task of mingling with and learning from his fellow-Americans can sooner or later become an open target for a madman bent upon destroying him.

And this era of turbulent emotions roiled by deep-churning social tides has produced a tragically outsized share of such madmen.

What these men in their supreme megalomania are trying to accomplish

is irrelevant. It is what they are doing to the vital processes of the nation itself that must concern us all. For a pattern that embraces such a disparate gallery of figures as the Kennedys, King, and Wallace can envelop any leader, of any persuasion, at any time.

It is an agonizing problem for the nation and its political leaders to carry into a summer and fall of maximum activity and maximum exposure of the candidates.

Elaborate precautions have been proposed in times past—and have been resolutely rejected or disregarded by the politicians. Wallace himself, fully aware of the animosity he created, has used a special bullet-proof lectern — of no help, of course, when as in this case he left the lectern to mingle with the crowd.

Better precautions are clearly called for.

But for now the nation's earnest hopes must be concentrated upon the Maryland hospital where George Wallace fights for his life.

At least, the bullets left their victim with a fighting chance. We can all trust that the physicians' skills, aided by the governor's own fighting spirit, will pull him through.