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Political Climate Spurs Assassins

By RAY CROMLEY

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Research studies show clearly the dreadful shooting of George Wallace falls into a vicious but predictable pattern which bears a lesson for all of us whatever our political views.

First.— With two exceptions, all those men who have assassinated or attempted to assassinate presidents or presidential candidates have been confused, alienated figures showing strong evidence of serious mental disturbance.

Almost all were withdrawn loners with no girl friends, unmarried or a failure at marriage, unable to work steadily, short, slight—and perhaps zealots.

Second—Quite frequently, before the assassination or assassination attempt, the victim has been vilified for some continued time openly and publicly by a voluble segment of the people.

The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, headed by Dr. Milton Eisenhower (in the Johnson administration), in one foreign assassination example, says "... in the climate of vilification, once the political actor was 'morally' branded, eliminated and destroyed, psychological restraints and controls of a potential assassin were weakened or even removed, and in his view assassination was justified."

In this way the vilification campaigns seem to trigger mentally deranged men into action—even though the vilifiers themselves might be appalled by the use of violence.

Third—The National Commission found the political philosophy of a president or presidential candidate appears to bear little relevance to an attack. It noted that McKinley and Garfield were moderate conservatives, while Kennedy and Truman were liberals. Franklin Roosevelt "was attacked at a time when his political philosophy was not yet identifiable ..."

Fourth—Assassination attempts seem to correlate directly with the general level of civil strife. Graphs have been charted which show every assassination attempt against a president or presidential candidate has occurred at or near a peak of civil strife in this country. Turmoil in general seems to trigger presidential assassination tendencies in mentally-unbalanced individuals.

The National Commission said that "attacks upon the legitimacy of democratic government and the loyalty of key government officials often characterizes a preassassination stage in a country's history. The extreme Right and some elements of the New Left ... help to create an environment of violence in which the assassination of political figures by mentally unstable persons becomes more likely ..."

"Even if the rhetoric of revolution and vilification of governmental authority is never translated into deed (by those using this language), the constant excoriation of America's institutions and leaders may destroy their legitimacy in the eyes of other segments of society ..."

Fifth — As for the future, rapid change in a society is another characteristic which correlates with high levels of assassination. Indications are the United States may undergo even more rapid socio-economic change in the next few years than in the recent past.

The National Commission in 1969 said "present trends warn of an escalating risk of assassination, not only for presidents, but for other office holders at every level of government, as well as leaders of civil rights and political-interest groups."

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