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History Repeats

## Assassins: Brothers Under the Psyche

By Robert J. Donovan

WHAT IS unique about Arthur Bremer, the smirking loner who has been convicted of the attempted assassination of George C. Wallace? Nothing.

Consider this appraisal: He was "moved by an overriding hostility to his environment. He does not appear to have been able to establish meaningful relationships with other people. He was perpetually discontented with the world around him . . . He sought for himself a place in history—a role of a 'great man' who would be recognized as having been in advance of his times . . . He also had demonstrated a capacity to act decisively and without regard to the consequences when such an action would further his aims of the movement."

A description of Bremer? No, the Warren Commission's conclusion about Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin of President John F. Kennedy.

Or consider this appraisal: He has been "in a more or less morbid state throughout his life." He has had "a tendency to delusive or insane opinion and to the creation of morbid and fantastical projects." He has "a marked element of imbecility of judgment." Finally, he had "a tendency to misinterpret the real affairs of life, especially those of a complex nature, and to interpret these affairs in some way as having a connection with himself, the starting point being the exaggerated self-feeling of the morbid egotist in this case."

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BREMER? NO. This was the testimony of Dr. Edward C. Spitzka, future editor of "The American Journal of Neurology," in the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia in the defense of Charles J. Guiteau, who assassinated President James A. Garfield in Washington in 1881.

Or: "The examination of this individual reveals a perverse character wilfully wrong, remorseless and expressing contempt for the opinions of others. While his intelligence is not necessarily inferior, his distorted judgment and temperament is incapable of adjustment to the average social standards. He is inherently suspicious and anti-social.

"Such ill-balanced, erratic types are classified as a psychopathic personality. From this class are recruited the criminals and 'cranks' whose pet schemes and morbid emotions run in conflict with the established order of society."

This is from the report of the two psychiatrists who examined Giuseppe Zangara in prison after he had attempted to assassinate

President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt in Miami in 1933 but, when his arm was deflected, shot and killed Mayor Anton Cermak of Chicago instead.

Again: He "is suffering from insane delusions, grandiose in character and of the systematic variety . . . he undoubtedly considers himself a man of heroic mold. At no time did he express or exhibit remorse for his act."

This is from the psychiatric report in the case of John Nepomuk Schrank, who shot

and wounded Theodore Roosevelt in Milwaukee during the Bull Moose campaign of 1912.

Once more: "While in this physical and mental condition of sickness and abnormality, it is probable that he conceived the idea of performing some great act for the benefit of the common and working people. This finally developed into a true delusion that it was his duty to kill the President, because he was an enemy of the people, and resulted in the assassination."

So wrote Dr. Walter Channing, professor of mental diseases at Tufts Medical School, about Leon F. Czolgosz (pronounced Cholgosz) a year after he had assassinated President William McKinley in Buffalo in 1901.

Bremer's life and conduct, as revealed in his diary, have been remarkably similar to that of practically all of the other classic political assassins in the United States—lonely misfits who have never caused much trouble to anyone until they suddenly came out of obscurity to fire a shot heard round the world.

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EVEN BREMER'S diary, which he thought would become a famous work ("one of the most closely read pages since the scrolls in those caves") and could be sold to "Time" for \$100,000 after he had shot Wallace, was not unique. Before shooting Garfield, Guiteau wrote an autobiography as well as a book, "The Truth" and "An Address to the American People." In advance of the crime he wrote a note bequeathing his papers and revolver to the State Department Library and a letter granting the "New York Herald" the right to syndicate his book.

To make sure this material would reach the public and make him famous he packaged it and left it at the newsstand at the old Baltimore and Potomac Depot in Washington before stepping into the waiting room to shoot Garfield.

First, Bremer stalked President Nixon, then Wallace. But on May 7 he wrote in his diary: "Yesterday, I even considered McGovern." In such a deluded state of mind the random killing of any political leader serves the purpose. Eleven years before he tried to shoot Franklin Roosevelt, Zangara bought a pistol and set out to assassinate King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy. But just as the Secret Service and the crowds frustrated Bremer in his attempt to shoot the President in Ottawa, the Royal Guards and the spectators blocked Zangara off from Victor Emmanuel.

Then Zangara came to the United States, thought about killing President Calvin Coolidge but never got around to acting until Herbert Hoover was President. While in Miami he made up his mind to kill Hoover, but suddenly President-elect Roosevelt came to town and was a more convenient target.

How familiar is Bremer's account of stalking Mr. Nixon and Wallace. Revolver in pocket, Guiteau for weeks trailed Garfield through the streets of Washington and even into church. ("I could not think of a more sacred place for removing him than while he was at his devotions"—except that the angle of fire was inopportune.) And Schrank pursued Teddy Roosevelt through eight states before he pulled the trigger in Milwaukee.

Bremer is where we came in.