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Assassination Weapons

Let's try it again.

The other day a young woman whose brain was drenched in the cabalistic prophecies of Charles Manson pointed a .45 automatic at President Ford from two feet away. The quick reflexes of a Secret Service agent plus the lady's failure to have a cartridge in the chamber saved Mr. Ford from being the fifth man to enter the pantheon of assassinated American Presidents.

Several parts of a monstrous equation were involved.

First, there is the mental state of most assassins. They are obsessives, people whose minds are locked on some grievance or vision of immortality which subverts reality. The famous and the powerful are often blamed by the obsessive for his grievance — or he fixes on murdering someone notable as his means to glory.

Second, there is the fact that, because of mass communications in general and television in particular, public personalities are instantly recognizable.

Third, another fact: the weapons which the assassin uses in his work are now more efficient and easier to come by than at any other time in history.

These are three, basic reasons that our era has been made wretched by so many assassinations and attempted assassinations of public figures.

A day may come when science, medicine or a benevolent Providence frees the human mind of its miserable affinity for obsession. But until that day arrives, common decency and sense demand that we work on those parts of the assassination equation that are susceptible to immediate alteration.

Obviously, we can't do much about the instant recognizability of our leaders. To be governed by men who were forever off screen or who were faceless speakers in the night would doubtless create even more madness among us.

That brings us to the weapons. It isn't certain where the killers of Lincoln, Garfield and McKinley bought or stole their guns. But Lee Harvey Oswald got his through the mail with no questions asked.

And, from the latest episode, it seems likely that a flaky waif drifting in the American sub-strata of drugs, occult paranoia, strobe-lit hate fantasies and blood worship had no problem finding a hand cannon that could blast a water buffalo into the next county and aiming it at the President of the United States from an approximate distance of 24 inches.

Could we go through those arguments against gun registration and control one more time?