

Psychology Of Violence

Study of Kennedy Assassin Urged

The psychiatrists who examine the suspect in the shooting of Senator Robert F. Kennedy have an unusual opportunity, said an investigator of social violence.

For one thing, the assailant of a prominent public figure seldom survives to be studied, noted John P. Spiegel, MD, of Brandeis University, Waltham, Mass.

Dr. Spiegel directs a 10-city study of urban violence at Brandeis' Florence Heller School for advanced studies in social welfare.

The assassin, he noted, often meets violent death himself. Lee Harvey Oswald was shot; so was John Wilkes Booth. So was Carl Austin Weiss, MD, the man who killed Sen. Huey P. Long in 1935.

More important, Dr. Spiegel said, this latest incident may be an opportunity to examine a kind of violence that is rising in this country; the violent act of an individual against a public figure.

Since Abraham Lincoln, he pointed out, there have been assassination attempts on at least six of the last 20 presidents. Four presidents were killed.

"A lot of people are going to ask, 'What's wrong with this country? Why do we have so much violence?'"

"By some measurements, however, this country has a very low level of violence," Dr. Spiegel said.

The United States ranks low among the world's nations in "collective violence," he said. Measured by generally accepted social standards, this country still has fewer mass actions by crowds, urban riots, university student upheavals, etc., than do many Western European and Latin American nations.

A second category, the phenomenon of attacks by individuals on other individuals, "crime in the streets," is on the rise.

It is in a third category, however, that this country has truly high levels of violence, Dr. Spiegel said. This is the attack on a public figure by an individual.

"I don't have a ready answer as to why this occurs," he said, "but I believe a 'pattern' was established with the killing of Abraham Lincoln. After that, assassins 'knew what to do.'"

Once established, such "patterns

are difficult to destroy," he said.

Why is this particular variety of violence so prevalent in this country?

"Again, there is no ready answer, but this is a paradoxical society. We are peaceful, on the surface. We say we believe in talking things out rationally, in debating the issues, in settling disputes by elections.

"At another level, however, this nation has intense social conflicts which do not get into the political process."

This results in "vision splits." One faction simply cannot see another's problems.

"Apathy of the middle class," is too strong a description for one of the widely noted vision splits, he said.

"Middle class people are very busy, involved people. It is difficult for them to engage in conflicts because they have other interests—and because the penalties are often too great."

Our social system is strong, Dr. Spiegel said. "It will survive." It is only society's ability to correct existing errors that is weak, he said.

District Attorney Asks For An Embargo On Case Details

Physicians who attended Senator Robert F. Kennedy said that they had been requested by the office of the Los Angeles County District Attorney not to discuss details with representatives of communications media. This request was still in effect June 7.

A *JAMA* news editor on the scene learned that the request by the office of District Attorney Evelle J. Younger was a move to avoid possible prejudice by pre-trial comment. It was made after a televised press conference by Los Angeles Mayor Sam Yorty at which such evidential matters were discussed in detail.

One of the first physicians to reach Senator Kennedy was Ross Miller, Jr., MD, a general surgeon who was in the Ambassador Hotel at the time the Senator

was shot, shortly after 12:15 AM, Wednesday, June 5.

The ambulance carrying Senator Kennedy from the hotel arrived at the Central Receiving Hospital at 12:30 AM. V. Faustin Bazilauskas, MD, and Albert C. Holt, MD, gave emergency treatment.

The Senator was transferred to Good Samaritan Hospital at 12:57 AM.

He underwent surgery at 2:45 AM for a gunshot wound to the head. The surgery, performed by Henry M. Cuneo, MD, associate clinical professor of neurological surgery at the University of Southern California; Nat D. Reid, MD, and Maxwell M. Amdler Jr., MD, lasted three hours and 40 minutes.

Senator Kennedy was trans-

ferred to the hospital's intensive care unit on the hospital's fifth floor where he died at 1:44 AM, Thursday, June 6.

Thomas T. Noguchi, MD, chief medical examiner and coroner, said death was due to a bullet which entered through the mastoid bone behind the right ear. The bullet shattered, scattering fragments of bone and metal on a diagonal path through the mid-brain and cerebrum. The superior cerebellar artery was also damaged.

A second bullet which entered Senator Kennedy's body underneath the right arm was recovered from beneath the skin at the lower neck. The wound was not life-threatening.

Assisting during the autopsy were John Holloway, MD, and Abraham M. Lu, MD, of the coroner's staff, and three pathologists from the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, Pierre Fink, MC, USA; Donald C. Stahl, MC, USN, and Kenneth Earle, MD.