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Experts Feel Violence Stalks U.S. Public Life

'Poison Shadow' Waits, Then Strikes

By SID MOODY and JOHN BARBOUR
AP Newsfeatures Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Violence stalks through American public life like a poison shadow: waiting, waiting and then—striking. Lincoln. Garfield. McKinley. Medgar Evers. Malcolm X. Kennedy. King. and now, another Kennedy.

With the shooting of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy Wednesday psychiatrists saw violence shown once again as coming closer to the surface of American life.

"Once the pattern of behavior is established, it tends to be repeated," said Dr. John Spiegel, director of the Center for the Study of Violence at Brandeis University.

PATTERN SET

"It is in the public mind that this kind of thing can be done. The pattern was set with Lincoln. And it always seems to be with a gun."

The gun. It is not an American invention but has long been an American institution.

"The populace as a whole is conditioned to expect violence," said Spiegel. "Behind this is America's gun fetish and the notion that a gun can be used to solve conflict. It begins with children, acting out with guns."

And it began long ago.

"Violence by gun is an American trait," said Dr. David Abrahamsen, a New York psychiatrist experienced in criminal cases. "We are still living under the legend of the Wild West where action was the easiest solution. On the frontier, settlers solved their problems with the gun."

Violence was not only commonplace in the Old West but came with the immigrants from the Old World. "We arrived here by way of revolution," said Dr. Thaddeus Kostrubala of Chi-

cago, a member of the American Psychiatric Association's Task Force on Aggression and Violence.

"They say we are a melting pot," said Abrahamsen. "We're not a melting pot. We're a damned pressure cooker. Our society is not built on the restraints of family or class. It's built on success. If you don't have it, you're frustrated."

Frustration. The wet nurse of violence.

"Students at Columbia are

frustrated, so they seize the university," said Abrahamsen. "Negroes are frustrated, so they riot."

Violence gains currency. But what brings from the frustrated many the few, the assassins?

"They think of themselves as avenging angels," said Dr. Jacob Chwast, a New York psychologist. "They are destroying some one they think threatens them and the people they feel they represent. Such people are very vulnerable to the stimulation of a public appearance by a national figure."

Sen. Kennedy shot at a victory celebration . . . his brother in a parade . . . Lincoln at a theater . . . Malcolm X at a rally . . .

"Public figures are symbols of what America stands for," said Abrahamsen. "They become authority figures and as such have to be killed by those who feel frustrated by authority."

HIGHLY ISOLATED

"The person who delivers the act is a highly isolated individual," said Dr. David Hubbard of Dallas, psychiatric consultant to the U.S. Medical Center for federal prisoners at Springfield, Mo.

"He feels himself wounded by the life machine around him, yet thinks he is a very special person quite close to the godhead. He may very well feel he is called to this action as a sub-

stitute for speech. While some of us may just say 'that's the way the cookie crumbles,' this kind of person looks at the dent on his car as a special dent put on the car of a special person—himself. He may feel that there is a malevolent force acting on a parking attendant and, ergo, he is a bad man and something must be done about him.

"This kind of paranoid also has the infinite ability to transfer hate from the individual who deprived him to the fountainhead, particularly public figures who raise emotions.

"This type of public figure draws on himself the feelings of these people."

The Kennedys, controversial in national politics: does their very name haunt them?

The psychiatrists doubted it although Chwast said:

"You can't overlook the impact of the Kennedy family on the American mind, the jealousy of its wealth."

There is irony that in a democracy, where such passions

raised by politicians are designed to be resolved by the vote, there has been such frequent resort to the gun.

Blame the frontier. Blame lack of gun laws. But blame the American way of life? Some of the psychiatrists do.

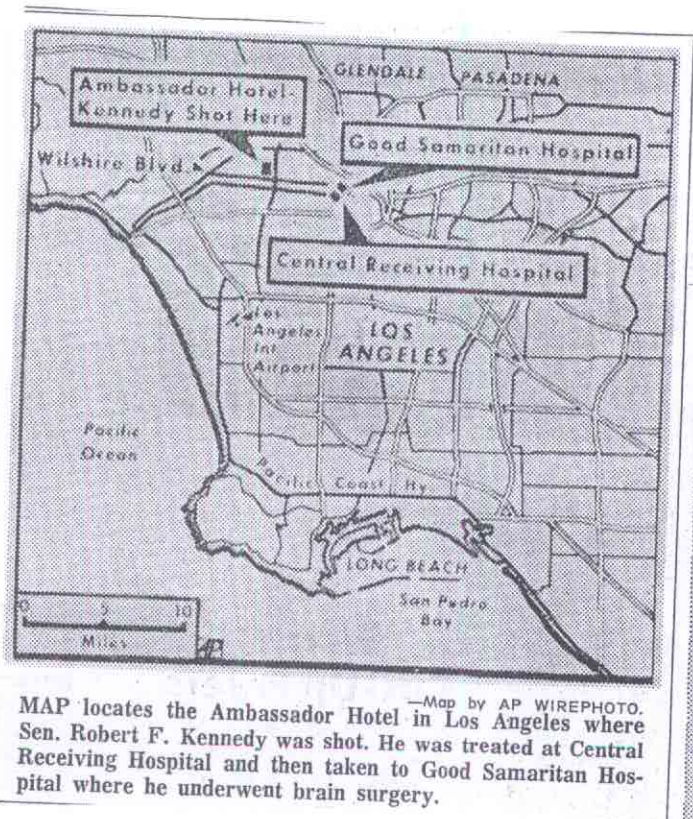
"We Americans don't like violence," said Abrahamsen. "We love it. Look how people flocked to see 'Bonnie and Clyde'."

"Every TV Western has its murder," said Kostrubala.

But millions see television and movies, hunt with guns, work hard for success. Which is the assassin, loaded and ready?

"There is a personality profile," said Kostrubala, "but so many individuals fit it, it would be impossible to put your finger on them. There are so many potential triggers on the streets, it is impossible to round them up."

So the assassins remain among us, waiting.



MAP locates the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles where Sen. Robert F. Kennedy was shot. He was treated at Central Receiving Hospital and then taken to Good Samaritan Hospital where he underwent brain surgery.