

Assassins Attempt To Flee Miseries, Specialist Says

CHICAGO (AP)—Before picking up a weapon, assassins typically try to escape from their problems into what they see as a utopia, says a psychoanalyst who has become a specialist on political assassins.

Dr. Lawrence Z. Freedman of the University of Chicago says that the men who gunned down Presidents Abraham Lincoln, James A. Garfield, and William McKinley fit this profile, as did Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of President John F. Kennedy.

Dr. Freedman, who drew up a psychological profile of potential assassins for the Secret Service after President Kennedy's death, said that Oswald tried to escape from an unsatisfactory relationship with his mother into the Marine Corps. "Then he escaped from that to Russia," the psychoanalyst said, adding that Oswald saw both the Marines and the Soviet Union as potential utopias.

Assassins, he said, are generally "acting out private miseries," and differ strikingly from other murderers. "Most people who kill choose as the victim their wife, their business partner and so on," he said. "The selection of a powerful political figure is a very special kind of solution. It is "a reasonable hypothesis," he said, that the assassin is acting out an urge to kill his father and that his victim is a paternal figure in his unconscious mind, although, he added, this explanation was "greatly oversimplified" in that some assassins may also be suffering from a murderous rage toward their mothers. Dr. Freedland said it was "interesting" that the Kennedy assassin was willing to shoot while Mrs. Kennedy was in the car, although John Wilkes Booth was an exception and plotted with others.

However, he said, there is a "contagion effect." Those who commit "personal violence" against a spouse or business partner very often experience a religious conversion in prison, Dr. Freedman said, but that is not so for assassins and terrorists. "They go to their death believing that they are doing God's work, or society's work—their theories become their religion," he said. "I believe that is because the conversion comes before the killing occurs."