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A Show of Violence

Violence has no place in a free, lawful society. It is a contemptible effort to win by force what cannot be earned by reason and persuasion. Violence is repugnant when it is used against anyone, whether poor and defenseless or rich and powerful. It not only injures its victim but it also tears a gaping hole in the web of mutual trust and goodwill that holds society together.

When the intended victim is the President of the United States—as it was the other evening in the rock-throwing at San Jose—the damage to the social fabric is doubly great. The affront is to all Americans, not solely to the President and those in his vicinity.

In this time of turmoil, the security of the President takes on extra importance. Unfortunately, Mr. Nixon has not been as careful in this regard as the tragic experience of the last decade suggests he should be. He is still plunging into crowds on handshaking forays where he is needlessly exposed to danger. At San Jose, with the lights from a television news crew limning him against the night, he climbed on the hood of the Presidential limousine and gestured to the hostile crowd.

Nor does it lower tensions when Mr. Nixon makes such a point of playing off the emotions of his audience against tiny groups of abusive hecklers. These may be effective campaign tactics, but it is impossible to say what sparks they strike in some disordered minds. The President's safety is too important to the nation to justify any enlargement of the risks that surround all public officials these days.