

Hinckley's not crazy...

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Hinckley: "... because Travis (the character that assassinated a politician in *Taxi Driver*) brought so many handguns. Ask him, not me."

Newsweek: "... Which Americans are being helped most by Reagan and which are being hurt most?"

Hinckley: "I believe all Americans will eventually be helped by Mr. Reagan's changes. He is the best president we've had this century. Let's give the man a chance."

Yeah, let's give the man a chance, Hinckley says. Only he means himself, not the president. In fact, the whole interview is a plea for himself.

It's exactly the plea he'll give when tried for the assassination attempt of the president of the United States: innocent by reason of insanity.

Hinckley's answers to *Newsweek* are so calculatingly absurd, so predictably "crazy," that he blew his cover. They cry out, "Hey, look at me. I'm in love with a movie star. I tried to kill the president. I'm insane."

Trouble is, he's trying too hard. He's like Klinger in television's *M*A*S*H*, wearing dresses, pantyhose and high heels to put his insanity on display. Klinger's looking for a discharge; Hinckley's looking for a lenient sentence.

That's why the *Newsweek* article will probably hurt Hinckley. He comes off not as insane, but as smart. Lines like "I don't admire any political leaders, except perhaps, Mr. Reagan" are too crafty to be crazy.

It's gotten to the point where it sounds like a game to Hinckley. It's like once he got the Jodie Foster story rolling, it was too much fun to stop. "Doing it for Jodie" seemed as insane an alibi as any, and insane is the ruling the man wants.

Now, if he tried to put his game to the test in a trial, it will most likely (and hopefully) explode in his face. If he parrots the *Newsweek* article - parading his insanity as proudly as Klinger wears his dresses - he's sure to lock himself out of the looney bin and in to a federal prison forever.

Liberals threatened by loss of status

By Joseph Sobran

My colleague in the column-writing business, Carl Rowan, has launched an extraordinary attack on Thomas Sowell, the black economist, likening him to Vidkun Quisling, the Norwegian collaborator with the Nazis, charging that Sowell is helping those who Rowan says are "taking food out of the mouths of black children."

Sowell's offense? He favors the free market and opposes, as self-defeating, federal poverty programs. Note that Sowell, who can speak harshly himself, has never accused people like Rowan of helping to snatch food out of children's mouths. Why does Rowan find it necessary to resort to such violent imagery?

The president of Yale University likewise couldn't content himself with simple criticism, on rational grounds, of the religious Right: he called them "violent," "racist," and "coercive," and linked them to a recent increase in acts of antisemitism. Why? When has any Moral Majoritarian engaged in the sort of behavior the gentlemen alleges?

Never, as far as I know. Heaven knows there are plenty of violent acts committed daily in this country. But they are not the work of Thomas Sowell, or Jerry Falwell.

Again, why? These are serious charges. The men who make them should be called to account. Where is their evidence?

Poses threat

The answer, I think, is to be sought in the imaginations of the accusers. Carl Rowan belongs to a political and cultural establishment that has staked its prestige on the social policies Sowell is criticizing.

In that sense, Sowell poses a kind of threat to the social status of Carl Rowan. Rowan, naturally, reacts with violent emotions. But he projects his reaction onto Sowell in the form of a violent metaphor - snatching food from children. That is Rowan's rhetorical way of trying to share his sense of menace with others.

Likewise with Yale's president. The psychology is the same. The new religious Right poses a threat to the liberal cultural values Yale represents. If Falwell rises, Yale declines in importance. Yale too feels menaced.

To communicate its fear to others, its spokesman tries to represent the Moral Majority as an actual physical threat to all citizens, Ivy League or not.

Silly, of course. But this is a natural reaction, and to understand it is not necessarily to condone it. Declining establishments often react to their status rival by

portraying them as "dangerous radicals" - dangerous not just to the establishment, but to the society at large. By portraying conservatives as actual physical threats, liberals are trying to rally the public behind them in their own peculiar hour of peril.

Collies vs. dachshunds

During the 1980 campaign, Jimmy Carter tried to portray Ronald Reagan as a racist and war monger who would set race against race, Jew against Christian, and collie against dachshund. A grain of salt, in such instances, is recommended.

Carter was roundly - and rightly - chastised for his rhetoric, but I doubt that he would have said those things if he hadn't at least partially believed them. Losing status is a painful experience.

In 1929 Wall Street investors leaped from buildings, not because they faced starvation, but because they faced what was for them unbearable social ruin. Of course that ruin was only symbolic, but "only" is a heartless word for pain that is all too real.

At the moment liberals are losing more than personal status; they are seeing the failure of ideas they have believed in. The so-called battle of the budget is actually a battle over important social principles. I devoutly believe the

liberals' principles are wrong, as Thomas Sowell does and Jerry Falwell does. And of course I wish they would tone down their language.

But they are not cynics. They are idealists with a heavy stake in their ideals. Having been on the losing side myself for quite a while, I know what they are going through. And for all their mistakes and excesses, I think they have earned a little compassion for themselves.

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