

The Slow-Motion Assassination

Self-described guardians of democracy spent years creating a lethal atmosphere around Donald Trump

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*Before the attempt on **Donald Trump**'s life, while questions raged about the health of **President Joe Biden**, officials downplayed the importance of the physical leader. White House spokesperson **Karine Jean-Pierre** [told](#) reporters to look at the administration, not the man. "What we are saying," she said, "is there are results, his record." As my podcast partner Walter Kirn [wrote](#), we were "being introduced to the idea that the presidency is a diffuse impersonal 'office,' and the bucks stops nowhere that is... conventionally identifiable."*

But we live in a physical world, and individuals still matter. Official actions betray this more than anything else. When a populist movement built on frustration over decades of misrule began having electoral success, they created a legend that the backlash was irrational and the fault of one Donald Trump, building him into a figure of colossal art, a super-Hitler. It became cliché that he was the embodiment of all evil and needed to be stopped "at all costs." By late last year, mainstream press organizations were saying legal means had failed, and more or less openly [calling for](#) a truly final solution to the Trump problem.

Now he's been shot, in an incident that's left two dead. We don't exactly know why yet. We barely know the "who," as [stories](#) about slain 20-year-old suspect **Thomas Matthew Crooks** are citing investigations into "whether the shooter had accomplices," as NBC [put it](#). *New York Times* analysts say the gunman [fired eight shots](#). That's a lot of rage, and even if we don't know its direct source, it can't have been much lower than what was already in the air around Trump. He and his supporters have been dehumanized as part of an induced collective madness that's a bigger crime than the coverup of Biden's incapacity.

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