

Case brief u.s v. hinkley

Law



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Case Brief U. S Vs Hinkley Facts On March 30, 1981, a man d John W. Hinckley Junior shot the then US President Ronald Reagan in an attempt to assassinate him. During the process, he hit and wounded four people who were present on the scene: President Reagan, the Presidential Press Secretary, a Secret Service Agent and a Metropolitan Police Officer. Hickley was immediately arrested and subsequently faced trial for prosecution in the Legal Court of the Columbia district of the USA. Hinckley’s lawyers argued that he was suffering from schizophrenia and his actions were a result of his impaired mind. The defense attorneys also presented medical evidence in the Court which supported their claim. On July 21, 1982, the jury acquitted Hinckley of his crime by accepting that he was suffering from insanity. The district court ordered him to be removed to St. Elizabeths Hospital for treatment of his mental condition till the time that he ceased to be a threat to himself and the community. (United States Vs Hinckley, n. d)

Legal questions

The legislation governing “ insanity” in the District of Columbia stated that a person accused of committing a crime could not be held responsible for his actions if, during the time of commission of the act, the accused suffering from a mental disease or illness “ lacks substantial capacity to know the wrongfulness of his conduct or to conform his conduct to the requirements of law”. It was evident that, there was a sound legislation in the Columbia district to prevent the legal system from prosecuting mentally unstable persons who had accidentally trespassed the law. Therefore, the main legal question which had to be ascertained in this case was whether John Hinckley was really mentally sick when he had attempted to assassinate President Reagan. The verdict of the case depended on this crucial finding. (Fuller, <https://assignbuster.com/case-brief-us-v-hinkley/>)

1982, p1)

Court decision and rationale

During the process of trial, Hinckley's defense lawyers argued that he was suffering from schizophrenia: a mental impairment which compels the patients to assume different characteristics during their interactions in society. In most cases, the patient while functioning as a specific individual is completely unaware of his identity as another individual which he has assumed unknowingly. The attorneys further declared that Hinckley was obsessed with an American feature film named "Taxi Driver" and his actions on that fateful day were significantly influenced by the events in the movie. The film portrays how the protagonist undertakes an attempt to assassinate the President of his national country. Hinckley's lawyers argued following the example of the film's character, Hinckley had tried to enact the same events in his life. The lawyer's also presented the results of a CAT scan of the Hinckley's brain which revealed the features as found in a schizophrenic person's brain. Based on these evidence, the jury of the District Court accepted that Hinckley was suffering from mental insanity and did not find him guilty of his crime (United States Vs Hinckley, n. d).

Significance

The significance of the cases arises from the fact that it involved the US President and got a lot of attention from media and even common civilian. On the other hand Hinckley's mental condition could not be ignored if judged neutrally or if the victim is considered to be a commoner.

Conclusion

There have been serious debates on whether the decision of the District Court of Columbia was justified or not. Undertaking an attempt to

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assassinate a person as important as the US President is a serious offence and a person found guilty of such a crime should never be let off. However, evidence does point to the fact that John Hinckley was a mentally unstable person and his actions had been influenced by things, not relevant to the case. In such a situation, the decision of the District Court seems justified.

Sources

1. Fuller, Vincent. J (1982), United States Vs John Hinckley Junior, retrieved on December 7, 2011 from <http://llr.lls.edu/volumes/v33-issue2/fuller.pdf>
2. United States v. Hinckley, a recent successful use of the insanity defense, retrieved on December 7, 2010 from <http://www.law.cornell.edu/background/insane/hinckley.html>