

John Warnock Hinckley, Jr. Biography

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Biography

A would-be presidential assassin, John Hinckley was a prime example for critics of criminal justice system leniency when he was found not guilty by reason of insanity for his attempt on the life of President Ronald Reagan in 1981. Hinckley was born in 1955, the son of a prosperous oilman in Ardmore, Oklahoma. Despite a privileged background, Hinckley was a loner by the time he got to high school and left home in 1976 to make his fortune as a songwriter. While drifting from town to town, he became obsessed with the movie *Taxi Driver* and one of its stars, Jodie Foster. In the movie, a man played by Robert De Niro attempts to assassinate a senator to impress Foster's character.

Hinckley was arrested in 1979 for possession of firearms at the Nashville airport after following President Jimmy Carter to a campaign stop. He was under psychiatric care for a brief period then began to stalk Foster all over the country. Determined to get her attention, on March 30, 1981, Hinckley fired six bullets at Reagan, hitting him, a police officer, a secret service agent, and presidential press secretary James Brady. He was immediately arrested.

Hinckley's 1982 trial ended with a not guilty by reason of insanity verdict, sparking nationwide outrage. Several states passed legislation limiting use of the insanity verdict after this case. Hinckley was confined to St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C. after his trial.

Recent Updates

November 26, 2003: After four days of testimony, a federal hearing to determine whether Hinckley's mental condition was improved enough to permit him unsupervised visits with his parents concluded without a ruling. He maintained his mental health has improved since he tried to kill United States President Ronald Reagan in 1981 to prove his devotion to actress Jodie Foster. **Source:** *New York Times*, www.nytimes.com, December 1, 2003.

October 2004: Hinckley has requested a court ruling that would allow five-day, unsupervised visits with his parents at their Virginia home. **Source:** CNN.com, <http://www.cnn.com/2004/LAW/10/20/hinckley.request.ap/index.html>, October 20, 2004.

November 24, 2004: Hinckley's request to have extended visits at his parents' Virginia home was denied by a federal judge. **Source:** CNN.com, www.cnn.com, November 24, 2004.