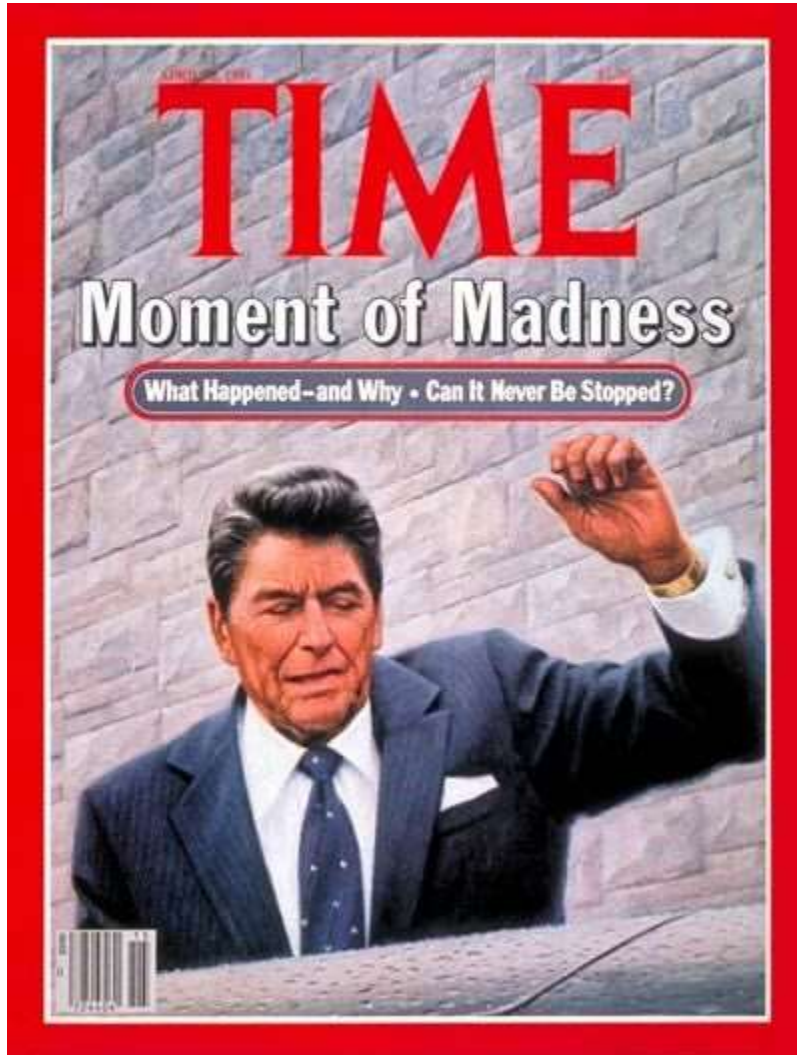


Read President Reagan's Best Jokes About Being Shot



The April 13, 1981, cover of TIME

TIME

By [Lily Rothman](#)

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When President Ronald Reagan was shot on this day, March 30, in 1981, it was anything but funny. The assassination attempt by John W. Hinckley Jr. required the President to undergo surgery and seriously wounded three others.

But Reagan knew it was also important to convey to the country that he was going to be OK. And — before he was told that others had been injured — he knew that humor could get that message across, perhaps better than any other official reassurance. According to TIME's coverage of the assassination attempt, the very first thing he said to the First Lady when she

arrived at the hospital was, “Honey, I forgot to duck,” a reference to a one-liner used by boxer Jack Dempsey.

The magazine compiled this list of his best reactions to the shooting and his own injuries:

- > To surgeons, as he entered the operating room: “Please tell me you’re Republicans.”
- > In a written note, upon coming out of anesthesia in the recovery room (paraphrasing Comedian W.C. Fields): “All in all, I’d rather be in Philadelphia.”
- > In another note, recalling a Winston Churchill observation: “There’s no more exhilarating feeling than being shot at without result.”
- > In a third note: “Send me to L.A., where I can see the air I’m breathing.”
- > In yet another note written while surrounded by medical staff: “If I had this much attention in Hollywood, I’d have stayed there.”
- > Complimented by a doctor for being a good patient: “I have to be. My father-in-law is a doctor.”
- > To an attentive nurse: “Does Nancy know about us?”
- > To a nurse who told him to “keep up the good work” of his recovery: “You mean this may happen several more times?”
- > To Daughter Maureen: The attempted assassination “ruined one of my best suits.”
- > Greeting White House aides the morning after surgery: “Hi, fellas. I knew it would be too much to hope that we could skip a staff meeting.”
- > When told by Aide Lyn Nofziger that the Government was running normally: “What makes you think I’d be happy about that?”

And TIME wasn’t Reagan’s only admirer on the humor front: That year’s Oscars took place the following day, and host Johnny Carson joked that he wanted to call in the President to help punch up the script.