

4-7-69 *renewed*

Test Case

In the trial of Sirhan Sirhan there are two defendants. The first, of course, is the 25-year-old Jordanian immigrant accused of murdering Sen. Robert Kennedy. The second is the clinical psychologist and his ability to diagnose diseases of the mind. To save Sirhan's life, defense lawyers hope to prove that the youth was unable to "maturely and meaningfully" understand the nature of his crime during that violent moment last June in the pantry of the Ambassador Hotel. "The medical testimony," says chief defense lawyer Grant Cooper, "is the guts of our case."

In presenting the arcana of psychological measurement before a jury of laymen, defense lawyers for Sirhan assumed a formidable task. At best, psychological testing is as much an art as a science, and even experts disagree about

of his colleague. Both psychologists concluded that Sirhan is definitely psychotic, showing traits of both schizophrenia and paranoia.

To arrive at their diagnosis, Schorr and Richardson gave Sirhan five standard psychological tests. The first was the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, an IQ test that can also be used to detect psychotic tendencies. The Wechsler measures vocabulary, general knowledge, mathematical ability and other, nonverbal, skills. Test subjects, for example, are asked to examine pictures, such as a door without a knob, and detect the items that are missing. In this part of the Wechsler, Sirhan regressed to infantile behavior, and Schorr said he "fragmented" under conditions of stress.

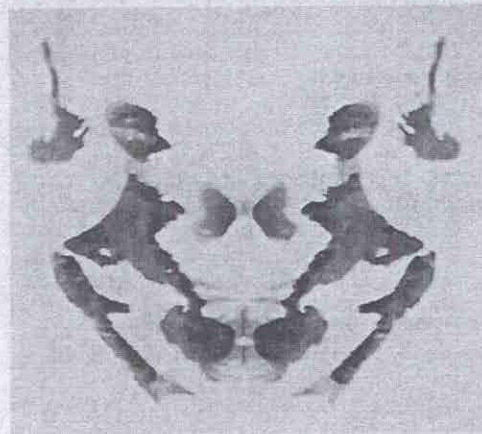
A second "objective" test for studying Sirhan's psyche was the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. The MMPI is a series of 551 statements requiring

chologist are of paramount importance."

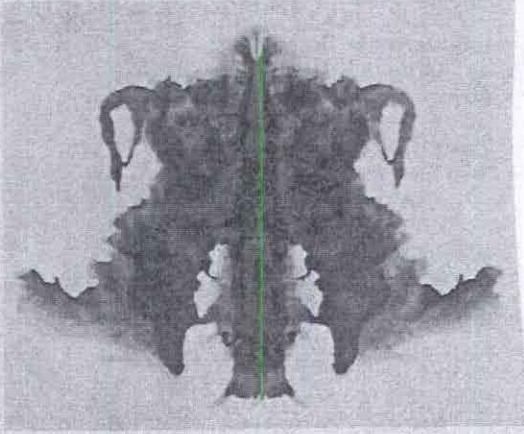
The MMPI and Wechsler tests seem crude because they are objective tests requiring simple "right" answers. For this reason, Sirhan's defense experts placed most emphasis on the results of "projective" tests, which purportedly provide a deeper insight into a subject's mind because they require him to draw upon his imagination and experience. Of these, the most familiar one used on Sirhan was the Rorschach "ink-blot" test.

Forms: In the Rorschach, the subject is shown ten cards and asked what the blots suggest. Most people, for example, will see a butterfly in one card; the same card seen as a hawk diving on a bird or two men fighting might suggest an aggressive personality. The number of different forms a subject sees in each card is as important to the test as the actual descriptions.

Sirhan's Rorschach responses, according to the two defense psychologists pointed to paranoia, schizophrenia—both. Hostility and aggression were evi-



Los Angeles Times Photo



Using the Rorschach in the psychological defense of Sirhan: The 'Watusi' blot and the 'charging monster' blot

their findings. "The personality cannot be measured quantitatively like body temperature," notes a New York psychiatrist, "and there is no standard of a 'normal' personality."

Psychotic: Two key defense witnesses were Drs. Martin M. Schorr and O. Roderick Richardson, both of whom subjected Sirhan to a battery of psychological tests. Unfortunately, Schorr also provided the defense with its first serious setback; the 45-year-old clinical psychologist, who practices in San Diego, was forced under cross-examination to admit that he had taken passages from "Casebook of a Crime Psychiatrist" by Dr. James Brussel of New York to add color to his own description of Sirhan's personality. The admission, together with the fact that Schorr had volunteered to enter the case for the defense, gave prosecution attorneys reason to question his expert conclusions and professional detachment. However, the integrity of Dr. Richardson, a former clinical tester for the California Youth Authority, has not been challenged by the prosecution lawyers—and his findings support those

true or false answers. The way a subject answers groups of questions—or avoids them—is supposed to divulge abnormal tendencies including hypochondria ("I frequently have bad headaches"), depression ("I am worried about something all the time"), and schizophrenia ("Sometimes my soul leaves my body"). Schorr based his conclusion that Sirhan was paranoid partly on the fact that he avoided responding to such statements as "I have not lived the right kind of life," "The top of my head is tender," and "I like to know important people because it makes me feel important."

Limitations: The MMPI, which has been widely used in hospitals, is open to serious criticism. Some psychologists consider that some of the test statements present an oversimplified picture of the personality. A desire to be a soldier, for instance, is equated with masculinity. Moreover, some statements can be misinterpreted. "Because of the test's limitations," notes Dr. Robert Holt, co-director of New York University's Research Center for Mental Health, "the judgment and interpretive ability of the psy-

dent, they said, from the animal forms that Sirhan said he saw—"a monster charging at me," "scarred seals," and "a crushed frog." The tendency to see figures at the top of ink blots, according to Richardson, indicated the grandiose "flight to the heights" of paranoid thinking. Schorr even detected pathology in an apparently innocent description of "two Watusi" on one of the cards. Watusi, Schorr testified, are black, and a tendency to stress blackness suggested depression and homicidal and suicidal impulses.

The prosecution argued that some of the supposedly pathological images that Sirhan saw in the ink blots could be explained by common sense. Sirhan's references to blood, and body parts, prosecuting attorney David Fitts argued, might simply reflect the youth's avowed interest in biology. "If the only meaning I could find is that he wants to be a doctor," snapped Richardson, "my colleagues would tell me to turn in my blots."

Another clinical psychologist called by the defense, Dr. George DeVos, admitted under cross-examination that the Rorschach may not clearly separate the nor-