

SMU expert criticizes handling of RFK assassination evidence

DARTMOUTH — A Southeastern Massachusetts University professor yesterday criticized the Los Angeles Police Department for what he said was sloppy handling of evidence in the 1986 assassination of Robert F. Kennedy.

Missing or destroyed records leave many questions — including the possibility of conspiracy — in the slaying, declared Philip H. Melanson.

Melanson, a political science professor, was instrumental in helping SMU recently acquire a sizable collection of documents and other materials from the assassination investigation.

Speaking at a campus conference, Melanson said the Los Angeles police failed to tape-record interviews with important witnesses who had information dealing with the possibility of conspiracy.

"I conclude that they failed to meet the standards of a professional investigation, or, they destroyed re-

ords" that should have been preserved, he said.

Melanson said police have no recordings of statements by witnesses with information about a woman, a possible accomplice, seen with convicted assassin Sirhan Sirhan.

Nor, he said, is there a recording of an interview with Paul Schrade, who was wounded during the shooting and whose "estimated position at the time of the shooting is absolutely vital to the question of whether two guns were fired."

The police "either failed to generate that kind of record or they generated it but lost or destroyed it," Melanson said.

Melanson said he saw a pattern in that most unrecorded interviews concerned questions of conspiracy. While he has yet to examine all the records in the SMU collection, Melanson said, "after seeing all the files, and some questions still remain, I can't dismiss the possibility of conspiracy."

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