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BOOK CASTS DOUBT ON JUSTICE IN U.S.

Raises Questions on Trials of Shaw, Ray and Sirhan

WASHINGTON, Aug. 14 (UPI) —Three reporters who covered the trials of men charged in the assassinations of President Kennedy, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy have concluded that "American justice works accidentally, if at all."

"The courts are now basically constructed to serve the legal profession, not the people," a book, "A Search for Justice," declares. Each of the reporters, who covered the trials for The Nashville Tennessean, wrote a section of the book. It was edited by John Siegenthaler, the newspaper's editor, who also wrote its conclusions.

Mr. Siegenthaler was an administrative assistant to Robert Kennedy when Mr. Kennedy was Attorney General.

The three reporters are James Squires, now a special assignment reporter for The Tennessean; Frank Ritter, now the paper's city editor, and John Hemphill, now an assistant news editor in the Washington Bureau of The New York Times.

Mr. Ritter covered the trial of Clay Shaw, who was accused of conspiracy to kill the President; Mr. Squires the trial of James Earl Ray for Dr. King's murder, and Mr. Hemphill the trial of Sirhan Bishara Sirhan for the assassination of Robert Kennedy.

Reach Same Conclusion

Afterward, Mr. Siegenthaler writes, the three reporters "each independently reached the conclusion that American justice works accidentally, if at all."

"None of them felt he would have much confidence in his own chance to get a fair verdict were he to be put on trial in those same courts, before the same judges," Mr. Siegenthaler writes.

The authors conclude that Mr. Shaw should never have been tried; that no attempt was made to determine the truth after Ray pleaded guilty in return for a 99-year prison sentence, and that Sirhan's sanity trial was a mockery.

They found the judicial system so lacking long-overdue reform "that the administration of justice is in serious trouble and often, on a day-to-day basis, may actually be more inclined to thwart justice.

"The organized bar, perhaps aware that the courts are imperfect," Mr. Siegenthaler writes, "has seized on imperfections in the press and has directed its major 'reform' attention to the 'free press vs. fair trial' question."

Mr. Shaw, a New Orleans businessman, was acquitted after a sensational trial highlighted by charges made outside the courtroom by the New Orleans District Attorney, Jim Garrison. The District Attorney was admonished by the bar despite complaints that he had conducted a circus with unreliable, discredited witnesses. The authors conclude that Mr. Shaw "should never have been tried."

Unanswered Question

In the case of Ray, the journalists came away convinced that, despite his guilty plea, on which he received a 99-year prison sentence, the overriding question of a possible conspiracy in the April 4, 1968, murder of Dr. King was never answered.

"The administration of justice succeed in punishing a guilty man," Mr. Siegenthaler writes. "But it made no pretense of initiating a search for truth or putting down what very well may have been a lie by Ray."

Sirhan shot Robert Kennedy in los Angeles a few minutes past midnight June 5, 1968, in full view of many witnesses. He was convicted of murder and was sentenced to die in the gas chamber.

With his sanity the only issue, the authors contend that the prolonged, million-dollar trial resulted only in "a sentence more severe than one which could have been negotiated before a jury was seated to try the case."

They contend that permitting the tenuous findings of psychiatrists and psychologists to be subjected "to the sort of badgering cross-examination that comes from the hostile adversary environment of a criminal trial, may rob the cause of justice."