

'I achieved in a day what it took Kennedy all his life to do'

RFK must be

to be disappointed

at 22

disposed

disposed of

disposed

disposed of properly

Robert Fitzgerald

It is a day must have died

die die die die die die

die die die die die die



Sirhan Sirhan at the time of his arrest, Los Angeles, June 5, 1968, and a page from his diary.

'R.F.K.

Arabs in 1967—he shot and killed Kennedy. Some of the other jottings in his notebook are: "Long live Communism. . . . I firmly support the communist cause and its people. . . . American capitalism will fall and give way to the worker's dictatorship."

These facts, together with Sirhan's courtroom testimony, suggest another theory of the assassination. According to it, Sirhan killed Kennedy because Sirhan was a patriotic Palestinian Arab and Kennedy had promised to send planes to Israel. Further, Sirhan killed Kennedy because Sirhan was poor and unimportant, while Kennedy was rich and immensely important. Sirhan articulated this view succinctly when he said to Kaiser: "They can gas me. But I am famous. I achieved in a day what it took Kennedy all his life to do."

Much of the Sirhan trial was—and its aftermath continues to be—a series of confrontations between these two contending theories of the assassination: Sirhan tried to enhance his importance by attributing great significance to his momentous act; whereas Diamond and Kaiser (and many others) tried to diminish Sirhan's importance by robbing his murderous act of all significance.

Diamond's following statement is illustrative: "He claims to be ready to die in the gas chamber for the glory of the Arab people. However, I see Sirhan as small and helpless, pitifully ill, with a demented, psychotic rage, out of control of his own consciousness and his own actions, subject to bizarre, dissociated trances in some of which he programmed himself to be the instrument of assassination, and then, in an almost accidentally induced twilight state, he actually executed the crime, knowing next to nothing as to what was happening.

One of the psychologists for the defense supported this with the following expert opinion: "This is not the performance of a healthy Arab but

tion. "But the story of why he killed—which he propounded at the trial—didn't make any sense," writes Robert

sination: ". . . that Sirhan had—by his automatic writing—programmed himself exactly like a computer is

Dear Mr. Kaiser,

Preoccupation with my own writing and the reading of proofs have delayed this letter. At the time your book appeared in condensation, I tried to get in touch with you through Art Kevin and by phone messages to your agent and Dutton. My purpose was to offer materials you might use in your appearances and might also find of other interest. I presume none of these messages reached you.

At the time of the RKK killing, I felt and still feel much as you seem to. This is in my own writing of that period and I said it in countless appearances. My belief is that somehow Sirhan was turned on, not unlike the Manchurian Candidate bit, possibly with a mechanism similar to The Billikin Courier.

I hope to read your book soon. From the condensation, I'm favorably impressed by it and your attitude and approach. From it I also have the impression that you are interested in being able to find leads to Arab extremist activity in the LA area and in more on the Duarte play. I can help with both. Those who helped Duarte did exactly the same thing when JFK was killed. I have about 15 pages of once-secret official evidence on that and much on their subsequent activity and connections. If you are again in this area (about an hour from Washington), you are welcome to examine what I have.

Your are also quite right on "Special Unit Senator". Without being named, I am in it - but not at all as represented. I did not approach the LAPD special unit. They approached me, through Kevin. It was Jack Cochran. I hope you also caught some of the errors and omissions it contains.

Good luck.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

12/25/70

disposed
disposed properly
Robert Fitzgerald
Kennedy must soon die
All die die die die die
die die die die die

Sirhan Sirhan at the time of his arrest, Los Angeles, June 5, 1968, and a page from his diary.

'R. F. K.

Must Die!

A History of the Robert Kennedy Assassination and its Aftermath.

By Robert Blair Kaiser.

634 pp. New York:

E. P. Dutton & Co. \$9.95.

By THOMAS S. SZASZ

The basic facts about the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy—such as the killer's identity and weapon, his behavior immediately before and after the crime, and many other circumstances surrounding the murder—were clearly established soon after the tragedy. All that remained open to speculation was why Sirhan did it. Sirhan himself offered an explanation.

Dr. Szasz is professor of psychiatry at the State University of New York and author of "The Manufacture of Madness."

tion. "But the story of why he killed—
—which he propounded at the trial—
didn't make any sense," writes Robert
Blair Kaiser. "This is a book that
tries to make sense of it."

Kaiser—a freelance writer who had
access to Sirhan and contributed part
of his book earnings to his defense—is
a conscientious and competent
reporter. His book is a valuable store-
house of information, even though
many of the events described in it
have been reported before. His effort
to explain why Sirhan killed Kennedy
will be judged successful or not ac-
cording to the reader's view of the
psychiatric approach to the theory
and therapy of criminal behavior.

For Kaiser is a true believer in the
psychiatric ideology, and proud of it.
"My reporter's dream was complete,"
he writes in the preface, "when Dr.
Bernard L. Diamond, the chief psy-
chiatrist for the defense, turned to
me as the chief repository of knowl-
edge about the case and began taking
me into Sirhan's cell with him for
his analysis of Sirhan under hyp-
nosis." And Kaiser uncritically ac-
cepts Diamond's theory of the assas-

sination: "... that Sirhan had—by
his automatic writing—"programed
himself exactly like a computer is
programed by its magnetic tape. . . .
for the coming assassination." But
this sounds like a rather obvious cor-
ollary to any ascertainable fact. In-
stead it subtly induces the reader to regard
Sirhan as a nonhuman object (like a
computer), and those who so view
him (including the reader himself)
as compassionate students of the hu-
man mind.

In sentence, theories are constructed
to fit facts; in courtroom psychiatry,
"facts" are constructed to fit theories.
It is absurd, therefore, to judge Sir-
han's act without carefully consider-
ing the following nonpsychiatric
facts. Sirhan is a man, not a com-
puter. Some time early in 1968 he
bought a gun and then purchased
special, hollow-nosed shells for it, to
enhance its lethality.

On May 18 he wrote in his note-
book: "R.F.K. must die." On June 4
he practiced firing his weapon at a
gun range. That night, at 12:15 A.M.
—on June 5, the first anniversary of
the humiliating Israeli defeat of the

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nothing as to what was happening.

One of the psychologists for the de-
fense supported this with the follow-
ing expert opinion: "This is not the
performance of a healthy Arab but
of a very sick, young American."
Sirhan, a creature, never entered
psychiatric testimony introduced into
his trial when he began to realize
what the "doctors" were really up to,
he begged them to leave him alone,
to let him plead guilty. "He didn't
want any more doctors bugging him,"
relates Kaiser. "He'd rather go to the
gas chamber than have anyone —
around" with his mind."

But neither "his" psychiatrists, nor
"his" lawyers, nor the judge allowed
him to go unpsychiatrized and plead
guilty. (James Earl Ray was allowed
to do both.) And why not? Everyone
had his own reasons. This was Dia-
mond's: "I've fought too long against
capital punishment. I've devoted all
my life fighting against it. I'm not
gonna lose the battle on account of
you [Sirhan]."

Russell Parsons, one of the defense
attorneys, had another reason: "Do
we execute sick people in California?"
he thundered in his summation. "If
we do we (Continued on Page 74)

R.F.K. Must Die

Continued from Page 8

are only following Hitler, who believed in killing the lame, the halt, and the sick. This man is sick. He doesn't know right from wrong."

There was, finally, still another explanation offered for the assassination: the theory of collective guilt and collective madness. Arthur Schlesinger declared (on June 6, but before he knew that the assassin was not an American): "What sort of people are we, we Americans? The answer is that we are today the most frightening people on this planet." The Times reported that "even more widespread than suspicions of conspiracy] were suggestions that the shootings... reflected some basic American sickness." Time magazine phrased it this way: "Many saw the unleashing of a dark latent psychosis in the national character."

Is this, then, what our psychiatric theorizing comes to: That, because Kennedy was killed, we are all guilty? That, because Sirhan killed him, we are all mad? And that, if we execute the killer, we are all Nazis?

I think it's time to go back to first principles. "Man does not live by bread alone," said Jesus. Because he has a soul as well as a body, man must have spiritual as well as bodily sustenance. Hence it is that man has an insatiable appetite for meaning and significance. People will thus often believe, and sometimes do, anything—no matter how absurd or abortive—so long as the belief or act renders them and their lives more interesting and more important.

One of the tragic features of our age is that it is a time of rising expectations and declining opportunities. Killing a prominent person is one of the few remaining ways for life's extras to become stars, if only for a night! Being then sentenced to death for it guarantees a success de scandale. Abolishing this penalty would thus make crime, especially political crime, somewhat less glamorous. It would also help us avoid the kind of bargain Sirhan has forced upon us by his willingness to trade his life for Kennedy's: We are damned if we accept his offer and execute him; but if we reject it and don't execute him, we are damned a thousandfold more.

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