

INVESTIGATIONS:

A Theory Disarmed

Who killed Robert F. Kennedy? Six and a half years ago, Sirhan B. Sirhan was convicted as the lone assassin, but doubters have long argued that a second gun—and a second gunman—may have been involved. After four years of wrangling, the proponents of that theory finally forced a court hearing in Los Angeles. But after ten days of tests—during which Sirhan's gun was refired—a panel of seven ballistics experts reported last week there was "no substantive or demonstrable evidence" to suggest that another gun had been used.

The official report was not entirely conclusive; the examiners found that the barrel of Sirhan's .22 revolver was so fouled by lead deposits that the bullets taken from Kennedy and three wounded bystanders could not be positively matched to the gun. But the bullets were in good enough condition for the experts to be almost certain that they had been fired from the same pistol. Since second-gun supporters had maintained that the bullets came from different guns, the panel's findings effectively disarmed most of the theory's adherents.

A few, such as former Congressman Allard K. Lowenstein, promised to keep the issue alive, but their quest would clearly be a lonely one. Sirhan's lawyer resigned himself to the panel's findings, and Paul Schrade, an ex-union official who was wounded in the shooting, dropped his legal efforts to reopen the case. "We've gone as far as we can go," he said. "We have a decision that for all practical purposes should be accepted."

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