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BOOKS AND AUTHORS Book Rejects Multiple-Gunman
Theories in Bobby Kennedy Assassination
Eds: CORRECTS gunmen to gunman in 4th graf, "What makes
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BOOKS AND AUTHORS Logo

By JOHN DIAMOND
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Robert F. Kennedy was murdered by a lone gunman acting out his own frustrations rather than following someone else's, according to a new book on the 1968 assassination.

In "The Killing of Robert F. Kennedy," author Dan Moldea rejects multiple-gunman theories and dismisses assertions that the convicted assassin, Sirhan Sirhan, had been hypnotized or programmed to commit the crime. "Sirhan Bishara Sirhan consciously and knowingly murdered Senator Robert Kennedy, and he acted alone," Moldea concludes. Other students of the assassination dispute Moldea's findings, saying he lacks the evidence to back up his conclusions.

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What makes the book notable is that Moldea, an investigative reporter who has been working on the RFK case since the mid-1980s, rejects his own earlier suspicion that the assassination was a conspiracy by more than one gunman

The assassination took place shortly after midnight on June 5, 1968, in the pantry of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, moments after a speech celebrating the New York senator's victory in the California presidential primary.

Witnesses saw Sirhan fire the first shot. In the melee that followed, Sirhan continued to fire while several people grabbed him; three shots hit Kennedy, including the fatal wound to his head behind his right ear; a fourth shot passed through the shoulder pad of his jacket; five others were wounded; Kennedy died a day after the shooting.

Sirhan was convicted and is serving a life prison term in California. In 1992, a Los Angeles County grand jury declined to open a new investigation.

Among the author's findings:

--"Sirhan stalked Sen. Kennedy for days prior to the murder and went to the Ambassador Hotel for the sole purpose of killing him." Sirhan practiced rapid-firing his revolver at a shooting range the day of the assassination. He "guessed right" in assuming Kennedy would exit the hotel through the pantry and was aided by "nonexistent security."

--The assassin's motive was neither political nor the result of a conspiracy. Rather, Sirhan, a 24-year-old who lived with his mother and was down to his last \$400, ``decided to make his mark, even if it was by committing a terrible and violent act.''

--The panicked crowd in the pantry unwittingly thrust Kennedy toward his assassin in the moments after the first shot was fired.

--FBI special agent William Bailey was wrong in his conclusion that two apparent bullet holes in a pantry doorframe contained .22 caliber slugs. The author agrees with Los Angeles Police Department Officer DeWayne Wolfer who concluded they were not bullet holes.

--LAPD investigators ruined valuable evidence by repeatedly test-firing Sirhan's gun. The first bullets fired matched bullets found in the victims but the repeated firing -- done apparently to gain souvenirs -- changed the markings the gun left on the bullets.

--After Sirhan's trial, police investigators destroyed the door frame containing the bullet holes and lost X-ray analysis taken of the frame.

--Thane Eugene Cesar, a security guard who had worked for conservative candidate George Wallace and who pulled out his pistol in the hotel pantry, passed a lie detector test in which he denied shooting Kennedy or accidentally firing his gun.

--Sirhan has made statements in prison that contradict his assertion that he has no memory of the shooting. In one he spoke of looking directly into Kennedy's eyes before opening fire.

--The only pictures taken during the shooting, snapped by a high school student, may have been discarded by the LAPD.

Some assassination researchers disagree with Moldea.

``He does a good job of relating the facts and evidence,''' said Paul Schrade, a United Auto Workers official who was wounded in the shooting. But he added,

``He doesn't have the evidence to close the case.''' Schrade, who still has bullet fragments in his forehead, said Moldea relies on ``incompetent'' police investigators instead of a seasoned FBI agent in concluding that the extra bullet holes in the pantry wall weren't bullet holes after all.

Robert Kaiser, author of the 1970 book ``RFK Must Die!'' whose title refers to Sirhan's scribblings prior to the assassination, contends that Sirhan had been brainwashed by an unknown third party into shooting Kennedy.

``It's an outlandish theory but it's the only theory that I was able to produce that could explain everything I saw,''' Kaiser says. He compares the dozens of interviews he conducted with Sirhan in 1968 and 1969

with the handful that Moldea had with Sirhan years later.

And Philip Melanson, a political science professor at the University of Massachusetts, said Moldea is stretching when he dismisses the conclusions reached by several investigators that there were more than eight shots fired the night of the assassination. Melanson is the author of "The Robert Kennedy Assassination: Conspiracy and Coverup."

"The Killing of Robert F. Kennedy: An Investigation of Motive, Means and Opportunity." W.W. Norton & Co.
End Adv Friday PM June 9