

Book World 1/10/69 25/95

Who Really Shot RFK?

THE KILLING OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY
An Investigation of Motive, Means and Opportunity

By Dan E. Moldea
Norton. 342 pp. \$27.50

By **Godfrey Hodgson**

IF CLEOPATRA'S NOSE had been shorter, said Blaise Pascal, the face of the earth would have been changed. On June 4, 1968, Sen. Robert Kennedy won the California primary and became a very probable favorite to win the Democratic presidential nomination. If that had happened, who knows whether he would have defeated Richard Nixon, as his older brother had: In any case, the history of the world certainly would have been different.

Instead, as he was hustled through a kitchen pantry in the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles after a victory rally with his campaign workers, Robert Kennedy encountered a young Palestinian Christian called Sirhan Bishara Sirhan and was shot to death.

As it happens, I was in that crowd, a few feet away from the senator, on my way to a promised interview with Kennedy for the London Sunday Times. I have an indelible memory of the grief and confusion of that moment. At the same time, by morning, even if some reporters had been misled by the red herring of a suspect (quickly eliminated by the Los Angeles police department) known as "the girl in the polka dot dress," there was no serious doubt: Sirhan, who later confessed, killed Robert Kennedy. On April 17, 1969, he was convicted of murder. He is still in custody in California, having served 26 years of a life sentence.

By 1968, however, five years after President John F. Kennedy's murder in Dallas, it was impossible for anyone to think about the death of a



UPI PHOTOS

Sen. Robert F. Kennedy soon after he was shot by Sirhan Sirhan (inset)

Kennedy except in terms of doubt and conspiracy. And sure enough, by 1971 there were demands for the case to be reopened. In 1975 Paul Schrade, a friend of Robert Kennedy who had been shot at his side in the hotel pantry, filed suit against the Los Angeles police to release the full files of its investigation.

The skeptics focused on Thane Eugene Cesar, a part-time security guard who had been walking a pace behind the senator and had drawn his gun. They focused on the fact that, while Sirhan emptied eight chambers of his eight-shot revolver, a good deal of evidence (reliable or otherwise) suggested that more than eight bullets had been found at the crime site. Finally, there was much eyewitness evidence that Sirhan's gun was never closer than a couple of feet from Kennedy, and in front of him, whereas Kennedy