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A New Look at RFK's Assassination

BY BILL WALLACE

Items of current popularity among young people are "magic eye" books: volumes filled with highly detailed, stereoscopic pictures that show one image to the casual observer but reveal a second, unexpected one to the viewer who stares at it long enough.

To investigative reporter Dan Moldea, the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy is a sort of "magic eye" murder case. In "The Killing of Robert F. Kennedy," Moldea lays out a detailed picture of a murder conspiracy concealed by inept investigators, then deftly turns the image inside out in what can only be described as literary sleight of hand.

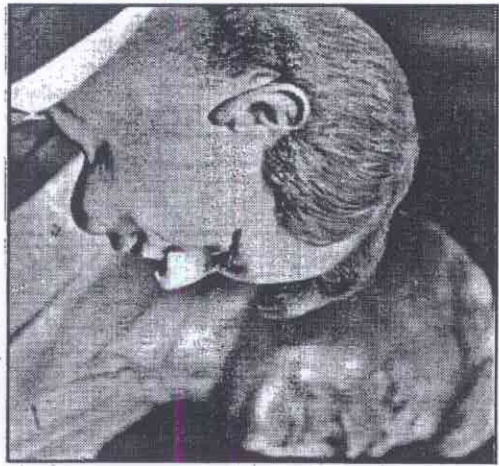
The book comes to a disconcertingly surprising conclusion because Moldea has structured it like a mystery novel and does not reveal his personal views about the crime until the very end.

Gunned Down

Kennedy, a U.S. senator representing New York, was gunned down in Los Angeles Ambassador Hotel on the night of his victory in the 1968 California presidential primary election — a victory that at the time appeared likely to put him on the road to the White House.

Sirhan Sirhan, a Jordanian immigrant with a checkered past, was wrestled down at the scene and easily convicted of murdering the popular Democratic candidate.

The case against Sirhan seemed open and shut. The physical evidence against him was overwhelming, and Sirhan was convicted and sentenced to death. The sentence was commuted after the California Supreme Court ruled against the state's death penalty. Sirhan is incarcerated at Corcoran State Prison.



BY UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

Senator Robert Kennedy visited a bust of President John F. Kennedy in 1965

The Killing of Robert F. Kennedy

By Dan E. Moldea
W.W. Norton, 342 pages, \$27.50

After the conviction, researchers began to turn up apparent flaws in the prosecution's case: As Moldea points out, critical evidence was mishandled, contaminated or lost by the police, including photographs of the crime scene that were discarded. Perhaps most important, investigators never reconciled the point-blank wound that killed Kennedy with Sirhan's firing position as described by eyewitnesses.

BOOKS

Because of these discrepancies a number of conspiracy theories emerged. Moldea examines the evidence supporting them at length and concludes that what appear to be discrepancies flow not from contradictory facts but from an inaccurate prosecution theory of the crime. He provides a new hypothesis that loosely incorporates the existing evidence — and that does not require a conspiracy, second assassin or any of the other trappings associated with alternative explanations of the crime.

'Acted Alone'

As Moldea concludes: "Sirhan Bishara Sirhan consciously murdered Robert Kennedy, and he acted alone."

In one respect, Moldea's book is an act of courage. Over the years, he has become associated with the second-gunner theory of the RFK assassination and has written at some length about the possibility of a conspiracy. Yet, confronted with the totality of the evidence, he was willing and able to reach a completely different conclusion about what really happened.

Many writers would have simply abandoned the project when they discovered that their fundamental views about a subject they had researched for years were wrong. That Moldea did not is greatly to his credit. His book will serve future historians well.

Bill Wallace is on the staff of The Chronicle.

