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Sirhan
LOS ANGELES AP - The state Supreme Court has taken under consideration a motion to reduce Sirhan B. Sirhan's first-degree murder conviction in the slaying of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy to second-degree murder or manslaughter.

Attorney Luke McKissack argued the motion before the court here Friday, stressing the issue of pretrial publicity.

He said a newspaper account of plea bargaining between defense and prosecution attorneys was published before the jury was sequestered for the four-month trial and could have prejudiced jurors.

Attorneys for both sides agreed to a life sentence if Sirhan would plead guilty to first-degree murder but Superior Court Judge Herbert V. Walker, now retired, rejected the deal, saying the question of penalty was in the hands of jurors.

The jury sentenced Sirhan to the gas chamber in April 1969 and he was held on San Quentin prison's death row until the state Supreme Court decided recently to abolish the death penalty.

Deputy Atty. Gen. Ronald George argued that Sirhan's death sentence was stayed when the high court ruled capital punishment unconstitutional.

"This political assassin has already been spared his life, though his mark on history can never be erased," George said.

"I ask this court to affirm the judgment and write the final chapter in Sirhan's inexhaustible quest for reversal."

Kennedy was shot in the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles on June 5, 1968, shortly after winning California's Democratic presidential primary. He died 25 hours later in a nearby hospital.

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