

RFK Slaying Is Reenacted By Hypnosis

By George Lardner

Washington Post Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES, March 8—Sirhan Bishara Sirhan sat at the visitors' table in his windowless cell at the Hall of Justice last Sunday and stared at the shiny quarter held before his eyes.

Dr. Bernard L. Diamond, the chief defense psychiatrist at Sirhan's murder trial downstairs, counted. "One. Two. Three. Four. Five."

That's all it took, according to one who attended the session. For hypnotists, the 24-year-old immigrant is evidently an easy mark. Sirhan, it is said, can even hypnotize himself.

In a trance now, Sirhan proceeded to assassinate Sen. Robert F. Kennedy once again. The skinny, dark-eyed Arab rested his arm on the table and pulled the trigger of the imaginary gun in his hand, twitching his index finger precisely eight times.

See SIRHAN, A4, Col. 1

SIRHAN, From A1

He acted it out largely in silence though Sirhan has reportedly told his advisers in previous hypnotic sessions of crying out "Kennedy, you son of a bitch!" just as he fired the first fatal shot.

It is not clear why he didn't blurt it out again this time. In any event, his counsellors insist, Sirhan can remember nothing of the shooting without being put under hypnosis.

The prosecution will contend that, at best, he has banished the assassination from his mind in a fit of "retrograde amnesia." It also suspects that he may be lying.

In cross-examining Sirhan on the witness stand this past week, chief deputy district attorney Lynn D. Compton tossed one barb after another at the blanks in the defendant's memory about anything that might be incriminating.

Can't Recall Talks.

Claiming that he was still in a daze, Sirhan insisted that he couldn't even recall much of his conversations with police officers after his arrest last June 5.

Police accounts of those interviews, on the other hand, suggest that Sirhan had all his wits about him. He refused to give his name, invoked his right to silence, and bantered with officers about the stock market, a court case in the news, and even "how much it costs to have a baby these days."

Even then, Sirhan swears, he didn't realize that he had shot Kennedy.

"Didn't you wonder why you were there (in custody)?" Compton asked Sirhan incredulously at one point, in the week's dizzy rush of testimony.

"Mr. Jordan (one of the police detectives) was too friendly, sir," Sirhan declared. "Nothing was said about the case. I wasn't myself, sir."

Suspense Builds Up.

It all adds up to an amazing defense that has turned what might have seemed an open-and-shut case into a murder trial full of drama and tension.

Sirhan, who once toyed with the thought of applying for membership in the Black Muslims, took his oath last Monday by clenching his fist in a Black-Power-style salute and stepped down without acknowledging a single, independent recollection of the assassination.

Chief defense counsel Grant

B. Cooper says he didn't believe Sirhan's incredible story the first time he heard it himself. But the suave, silver-haired attorney professes confidence that Sirhan's jurors will become convinced of it.

Testimony to come

What he has said of the killing under hypnosis will unfold in the courtroom this week as the defense calls its psychiatrists and psychologists to the stand.

"So far as Sirhan's concerned, it would be hearsay," Cooper said in explaining why the defendant himself did not recount it. "The doctors can testify to it because it's part of the medical history. That gives us an exception to the hearsay rule."

Sirhan might have been induced, by post-hypnotic suggestion, to remember the shooting without its being hearsay, Cooper acknowledged. But he asserted that the idea of producing such testimony simply didn't occur to the defense.