

Part 3/11/68 *The Story of Sirhan Sirhan*

The testimony and the actions of Sirhan Sirhan, viewed from afar, present a confusing picture. Is he an impulsive young man, full of hatred and bitterness, who got drunk on June 4 and just happened to wander into that back hall of the Ambassador Hotel? Or is he an angry, deliberate killer to whom life means nothing and a cause means everything who went out that day to sharpen his shooting eye and then lay in wait for Robert F. Kennedy? These are the key questions that the 12 persons who are sitting in judgment of him must answer before they reach a verdict.

This trial—in reality, this public disrobing of the soul and mind of Sirhan Sirhan—is unlike most murder trials. There is no question about who pulled the trigger on that terrible night in Los Angeles. The only question is whether it was the deliberate act of a sane man, the impulsive and unpremeditated act of a sane man, or the unaccountable action of an insane one.

This is the toughest kind of question for a jury to decide, and it is one that cannot be answered fully by those of us who know of the trial only through news accounts, limited by their very nature to extracts and summaries and incapable of reproducing the impact of personal confrontation. If the shooting of Mr. Kennedy was, as Mr. Sirhan claims,

an unplanned product of an enraged and alcohol-deadened mind, the jury may be justified in returning a verdict of less than first-degree murder for which the penalty could be life imprisonment. If the shooting was the product of a mind out of control, as Sirhan's attorneys will probably attempt to prove, the jury may be justified in finding him not guilty by reason of insanity.

Mr. Sirhan himself has presented us with a confusing analysis of his own mind. Part of him would like the world to believe that this was a political killing, done on behalf of Arabs everywhere as a demonstration of anti-Semitism, and that Sirhan Sirhan should be a hero to those who hate the Jews. Part of Sirhan does not want this to happen, simply because it would mean his death. Thus we have the picture of a man who admits killing Robert Kennedy, shouts one day that he is ready to die for it, protests any revelation of his private thoughts that might raise doubts about his mental stability, and announces on a later day that he cannot be proud of the deed for he does not remember doing it, although he is not sorry it was done.

The manner in which the jury sorts out this complex of emotions, contradictions and tragic facts will be of intense interest to the country, for the judicial system as well as a baffling human being is on trial.

Ruby?