

# THE ASSASSINATION OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY

## Is Bobby's Killer Still Loose?

Shortly after midnight on June 5, 1968, Senator Robert F. Kennedy climbed the stage of the Embassy Room in the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles to claim victory in the crucial California primary. He had beaten Senator Eugene McCarthy convincingly and was brimming with confidence as he flashed the V sign and exhorted, "On to Chicago! And let's win there!" Then he headed for a press headquarters set up in an adjacent room. Most of the reporters were convinced that the magic Kennedy name and the rising tide of antiwar sentiment would sweep him over Richard Nixon into the White House.

Due to the crush of supporters in the Embassy Room, Kennedy detoured through a pantry after leaving the stage. Suddenly a short, swarthy young man jumped into his path and be-

gan firing a pistol. RFK threw up his hands as if to protect his face, then fell backward onto the floor, his arms askew. Aides pounced upon the assailant, who managed to get off several more shots before being subdued.

We—the authors of this article—listened to the news bulletins with disbelief. Turner had campaigned for Congress in San Francisco in the same Democratic primary, with Christian as his manager, on a platform of reopening the John F. Kennedy case. (We lost in a tight race.) The final line of our campaign brochure was now horrifyingly prescient: "To do less not only is indecent but might cost us the life of a future President of John Kennedy's instincts."

The timing was almost surreal, coming at the moment that

### Report by William W. Turner & John G. Christian

The authors of this investigative report collaborated on *The Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy: A Searching Look at the Conspiracy and Cover-up, 1968-1978* (Random House, \$12.95), the product

of ten years of research into the RFK murder. At press time there is speculation that a new legal inquiry will be conducted as a result of the work done by Turner and Christian.

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Robert Kennedy figured to become President—and thus in a position to command a tough new investigation into his brother's murder. RFK had never really believed that Lee Harvey Oswald had acted alone. In the wake of Dallas he had instructed Daniel P. Moynihan, a trusted member of the Kennedy inner circle (and now junior senator from New York), to mount a private inquiry into whether or not Jimmy Hoffa was involved or the Secret Service bought off. No evidence of either was found. In the ensuing years RFK kept posted on such developments as Jim Garrison's probe in New Orleans. He was, associates confided, biding his time until he controlled the Justice Department. In 1978, RFK's biographer—Dr. Arthur Schlesinger—confirmed these suspicions.

But the circumstances of RFK's own shooting hardly lent substance to the notion of a conspiracy. The suspect, an unemployed Palestinian immigrant named Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, had fired in full view of scores of persons in the pantry, and it seemed a classic "smoking gun" case. Speculation quickly spread that Sirhan was a free-lance Arab terrorist out to take revenge on Kennedy for his support of Israel.

No outsider knew that this simple scenario was discredited almost immediately when Los Angeles County Coroner Dr. Thomas T. Noguchi conducted his autopsy. Noguchi found that RFK had been struck by three shots, all entering from the rear. The fatal bullet had entered behind the right ear and coursed upward into his brain. Powder burns indicated it had been fired point-blank from a distance of no more than one to three inches. But witnesses agreed that Sirhan had not gotten closer than two to three feet to Kennedy from the front. Sirhan could not have fired the fatal shot.

Upon testifying behind closed doors to the grand jury that indicted Sirhan, Noguchi was approached by an assistant DA who suggested that he had really meant one to three feet, not inches. But Noguchi wouldn't budge. When he subsequently attempted to hold the coroner's inquest usually called for in cases of suspicious death, the District Attorney's Office and the Los Angeles Police Department denied him access to the ballistics evidence.

With a systematic cover-up under way, the press was left to publish laments about the random violence afflicting American society and follow Sirhan's progress through the criminal-justice system. It was not until four weeks after RFK's assassination that we got our first strong whiff that the hapless

suspect in an isolation cell had not single-handedly altered the course of history. It came with a phone call from prominent San Francisco attorney George T. Davis, who had been our honorary campaign chairman.

Davis could barely suppress his excitement. A longtime client had bumped into Sirhan on election eve, and as a result the client had received calls warning him to keep quiet. "The Los Angeles authorities won't provide protection," Davis said. "They've taken the position there's no conspiracy, so there's no real threat to my client's life." Davis wanted Turner, with his FBI experience, to size up the story, and Christian, as an ex-ABC newsmen, to break it in the press to minimize the danger.

The client turned out to be a self-ordained preacher named Jerry Owen, who billed himself as "The Walking Bible" because of his ability to quote 31,173 verses of the Scriptures. A bulky, ham-fisted man, in the 1930s he had been a sparring partner of heavyweight champion Max Baer and a Hollywood bit actor before a flash of inspiration sent him on the evangelical trail. Owen lived in Orange County, south of Los Angeles, where he traded horses as a sideline to his ministry.

As Turner's tape recorder rolled, Owen told an intricate tale of picking up Sirhan and a companion hitchhiking the day before the California primary election. Sirhan talked about working at a race track and being in the market for a lead pony. The preacher offered to sell him a palomino for \$300. Sirhan had Owen stop at the rear entrance to the Ambassador Hotel so he could "see a friend in the kitchen." Others entered the negotiations: the hitchhiking companion, a third man and a woman. The upshot was that the preacher was to deliver the horse to the Ambassador's rear entrance the following night at 11. Sirhan would have the money then. (Four crisp \$100 bills were found in his pocket after his arrest.)

However, Owen said he couldn't be there because he had an out-of-town preaching engagement. The next day he recognized Sirhan on television and went straight to the LAPD "like a good citizen." He felt that he nearly had been duped into being a getaway driver.

The story reeked of conspiracy, of course; but was it true? Davis finally prodded the LAPD into sending up two top investigators attached to Special Unit Senator (SUS), the elite squad created for the RFK case. They were Lieutenant Manuel Pena, a veteran detective who controlled the thrust of the investigation, and Sergeant Enrique Hernandez, a polygraph operator. We

later learned that both had served tours of duty with the CIA in Latin America.

Pena and Hernandez grilled Owen, trying to get him to admit the palomino-purchase story was false. They gave him a polygraph test and told lawyer Davis that his client "blew the box" (failed). Owen was just trying to grab some cheap publicity, they said. With that the LAPD closed the book on "The Walking Bible."

Although his story was patently flawed, Owen nonetheless seemed genuinely frightened. We suspected that he had, in fact, known Sirhan but in some way other than he claimed. The publicity motive made no sense. The only news dispatch that had gone out before the LAPD clamped a muzzle on the preacher referred to him as "Mr. X"—at his insistence. The only thing certain was that Owen uncharacteristically didn't want his name in the papers—at least not in connection with the RFK assassination.

Since, in our opinion, the LAPD had defaulted, we began our own inquiry. We learned that the roving preacher had been in brushes with the law from coast to coast. We discovered that the church where he supposedly preached on primary night was closed. [*Editor's Note: Under oath in a court case, Owen insisted that investigators had checked the wrong Calvary Church.*] We were informed by one of his closest colleagues, the Reverend Jonothan Perkins [associated with Gerald L. K. Smith's anti-Semitic Christian Nationalist Crusade] that Owen had been in Los Angeles with a horse and trailer on primary day, saying he was waiting to complete a sale.

"You mean he was supposed to meet Sirhan at the Ambassador the night of the election?" Christian asked Perkins.

"Oh, yes, the night Kennedy was shot," Perkins confirmed.

In early 1969, Sirhan Sirhan was convicted of first-degree murder in one of the quietest major trials ever. Neither side even hinted at conspiracy. The prosecution's case was damningly simple: Sirhan had been caught in the act, and premeditation was evident from the hand-scrawled entries in his notebooks, such as "Robert F. Kennedy must be assassinated before 5 June '68." The defense tried to spare him the death penalty by proving "diminished capacity"—insanity. Its star witness was Dr. Bernard Diamond, a well-regarded psychiatrist, who testified that Sirhan was so susceptible to hypnosis that he could be made to climb the bars of his cell like a monkey. Diamond proposed

(continued on page 48)

## RFK ASSASSINATION

(continued from page 36)

that Sirhan was in a self-induced trance when he shot Kennedy, and noted that the defendant was "subject to bizarre, dissociated trances, in some of which he programmed himself to be the instrument of assassination."

Despite the tranquillity inside the courtroom, rumors of conspiracy had swirled around the case from the start. At the end of the trial District Attorney Evelle J. Younger felt compelled to issue a statement that all allegations of a plot had been "investigated in depth" and "discredited." But Younger apparently was insecure with his own conclusion, for he overreacted when challenged. When KHJ radio newsman Art Kevin went on the air with a series of "unanswered questions," including the Jerry Owen angle and the polka-dot-dress-girl mystery, Younger was so incensed that he lifted Kevin's press privileges. (The DA backed down when KHJ management threatened to make a public issue of it.)

Younger and the LAPD had had a devil of a time trying to bury the polka-dot-dress girl, who had materialized within minutes of the shooting while a young RFK supporter named Sandy Serrano was being interviewed on the NBC television network. As a hushed throng milled about the scene, Serrano told how she was sitting on the stairs of an emergency exit to escape the stifling heat of the Embassy Room when a young woman with a "funny nose" and wearing a dress with polka dots brushed past her and slipped through the door. She was accompanied by two short, swarthy young men. A short time later, after hearing what sounded like automobile backfires, the same woman and one of the men scurried back down the stairs shouting, "We shot him! We shot him! We killed Kennedy!" The missing man, Serrano would say later, was a dead ringer for Sirhan.

Vincent DiPierro, a waiter who had been in the pantry when the shooting broke out, gave police a statement that dovetailed with Serrano's. DiPierro said he noticed Sirhan lurking by a tray stacker only because "there was a very good-looking girl next to him." They appeared to be together. She had an odd nose and wore a "kind of lousy" polka-dot dress. "Together they were both smiling," DiPierro related. "As he got down, he was smiling. In fact, the minute the first two shots were fired, he still had a very sick-looking smile on his face."

The polka-dot-dress girl haunted Lieutenant Manuel Pena of Special

Unit Senator. As Chief of Detectives Robert A. Houghton later recounted: "Manny Pena knew that as long as Miss Serrano stuck to her story, no amount of independent evidence would, in itself, serve to dispel the polka-dot-dress-girl fever, which had by now, in the press and public mind, reached a high point on the thermometer of intrigue."

So Serrano was singled out for special SUS treatment. As Houghton told it, Pena asked Sergeant Enrique Hernandez what he was doing for dinner that night, and suggested he might like to take Sandra Serrano out for an SUS-bought dinner."

When dining and dining failed to produce the desired results, Hernandez took Serrano down to police headquarters and put her on the polygraph. The burly detective demanded to know when her "pack of mistruths" had gotten out of hand. In the intimidating surroundings the young lady was soon whipped. Sobbing, she conceded that she had heard other witnesses talking at Rampart Station after the shooting, and "maybe that's what I'm supposed to have seen."

Serrano was conceding the impossible, since she had described the incident on television *before* she and other witnesses were bundled off to Rampart. But the SUS wrote her off, and now only Vincent DiPierro remained. It was important not to shred the waiter's credibility, however, because he was scheduled to testify at Sirhan's trial. Hernandez broached the possibility of mistaken identity, and in fact had someone in mind. She was a pretty coed named Valerie Schulte, who had presented herself to the police on just that possibility. Apart from the polka-dot dress, however, Schulte's overall description didn't match Serrano's at all: She had been hobbled by an ankle-to-waist cast at the assassination scene. But DiPierro went along with the identification. "There was so much confusion that night," he told Hernandez.

With that, Chief Houghton declared, "SUS closed the vexing case of the polka-dot-dress girl." But it has not stayed closed. FBI documents released in 1976 reveal that no fewer than four additional witnesses spotted Sirhan with a girl of that description inside the hotel. In addition, LAPD Sergeant Paul Sharaga, who drove the first patrol car to respond to the shooting and who set up a command post in the hotel's parking lot, recently divulged how her existence was suppressed even within the LAPD.

Sharaga, who is now retired, recounted that as soon as he wheeled into the lot an older couple ran up to him.

"They related that they were outside one of the doors to the Embassy Room," he said, "when a young couple in their early 20s came rushing out. This couple seemed to be in a state of glee, shouting, 'We shot him! We shot him! We killed him!'" Sharaga immediately radioed an all-points bulletin for two suspects, but he was soon approached by LAPD Inspector John Powers, who insisted, "We don't want to make a federal case out of it. We've got the suspect in custody." Powers then canceled the APB himself.

The sergeant wrote up a detailed report on the incident and personally delivered it to the SUS. Two weeks later, when he looked for the file copies at Rampart Station, they were missing. "I inquired from SUS if there was some reason why they came to Rampart and disposed of the copies," Sharaga said, "and their attitude was that they didn't even know what I was talking about."

Shortly after Sirhan's trial we finally got a break on the Jerry Owen angle. On New Year's Eve 1968, Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies had arrested 17-year-old John Chris Weatherly on auto-theft charges. Weatherly tried to bargain by supplying a tip on the RFK assassination. According to the deputies' report, the youth had been told by an Orange County stables owner named Bill Powers and another cowboy that a preacher and Sirhan Sirhan had borrowed Powers's pickup truck "to take a horse to Los Angeles for sale the day of the Kennedy murder; that when the preacher returned, Sirhan was not with him, but he still had the horse, said he couldn't sell it in L.A."

The report quoted Weatherly as saying the preacher was hostile to Kennedy because if the war was stopped, "the Vietnamese would come to this country via Honolulu or Hawaii, and God would get angry and cause a tidal wave."

The Sheriff's Department dispatched this explosive report to the SUS, which interrogated Weatherly and did a follow-up investigation. But the SUS handled it like a military secret, and not a word about it leaked during Sirhan's trial. The report came into our possession through sheer luck, when the SUS inadvertently stuck it in with an unclassified document.

Bill Powers was a cowboy straight out of a Marlboro ad: rawboned, laconic—and thoroughly believable. He told us that he operated Wild Bill's Stables, not far from Owen's home, and that the preacher often bought bundles of hay for his horses. The preacher had also bought an old pickup truck from him, but, being short of cash, owed \$300 on

(continued on page 102)

## RFK ASSASSINATION

(continued from page 48)

it. One day Owen drove up to the stables in a luxurious Lincoln Continental and pulled out a fat roll of \$1,000 bills. "I'll pay you for that truck," Owen said, peeling off one of the bills.

Powers pegged this memorable incident as on or about June 3, 1968—the day before the primary. Owen was in an expansive mood, Powers said, and introduced him to two passengers in the Continental: a huge black man who talked about his days as a boxer, as well as a dark young man in the backseat who said nothing. A few days later, when he saw Sirhan's picture in the papers, Powers thought he recognized

him as the backseat passenger.

Christian contacted Manuel "Chick" Gutierrez and Dudley Varney, the two SUS detectives who had questioned Weatherly. At first they were evasive, then derisive. "You understand cowboys?" Varney asked. "Well, they're a breed all to themselves. They talk their own language; they have their own humor. The humor will throw you. You can't understand 'em. They're wild!"

Since the LAPD was obviously stonewalling, Christian decided to put on a bit of heat by briefing ace KHJ-TV newscaster Baxter Ward. Ward interviewed Weatherly and was so impressed with his sincerity that he aired the story. But first he carefully paraphrased the script and altered names, places and events to protect Weatherly. The newsman hoped, he said afterward, that the bombshell account would trigger an official review of the RFK case.

A few days after the broadcast, Weatherly pulled into the driveway of his home in the early-morning hours when a shot from a high-powered rifle smashed through a window and narrowly missed his head. Nobody thought *that* was just wild cowboy humor.

One morning in August 1971, criminalist William W. Harper noticed a nondescript car tagging along behind him as he drove away from his Pasadena home. He made several random turns, but the car followed. He accelerated, and the pursuer gave chase. Just as Harper hit a dip in the road, he heard a muffled explosion and the slap of a bullet striking metal. If the dip hadn't flung the car's rear end into the air, the bullet might have smashed through the rear windshield and into his head instead of harmlessly denting the car's bumper.

Harper, the father of the "second gun" theory in the RFK case, was scheduled to testify the following day before a grand jury exploring the handling—or mishandling—of pertinent firearms evidence.

An expert who had testified at more than 300 trials around the country, Harper had acquired a healthy skepticism about the work of the LAPD's crime-lab chief, DeWayne Wolfer. As a public service, he habitually restudied Wolfer's findings in major cases, and in late 1970, after Sirhan's appeals had been exhausted, he gained access to two relatively unmutated bullets that Wolfer had testified were fired from Sirhan's gun "to the exclusion of all other weapons in the world." The bullets, removed from Kennedy and injured newsman William Weisel, should have had the same distinctive markings if they had been fired from the

same gun. But Harper concluded that he could "find no individual characteristics in common between these two bullets."

The news stunned Los Angeles officialdom. Tough-talking Police Chief Edward M. Davis and DA Joseph P. Busch, Evelle Younger's handpicked successor, announced that they would look into the matter. One of the first things their investigators did was question Thane Eugene Cesar, an armed security guard who had been at Kennedy's elbow when the shooting erupted. A Lockheed Aircraft employee—he worked with its CIA-controlled U-2 spy-plane facility—Cesar was moonlighting for a private firm hired by the Ambassador for crowd control. The LAPD had removed themselves under suspicious circumstances.

Minutes after the shooting, witness Donald Schulman, a stringer for CBS News, had gone on the air and tersely recounted: "A Caucasian gentleman stepped out and fired three times; the security guard hit Kennedy all three times." A moment later he explained: "The man who stepped out fired three times at Kennedy, hit him all three times, and the security guard then fired back . . . hitting him [Sirhan] too."

"Did you ever fire a shot?" the investigators asked Cesar.

"No," he replied. He said he had carried a .38 that night, but he made a slip. Cesar remarked that after the assassination he might also have shown another gun, his .22-caliber revolver (the same caliber as the bullets that hit Kennedy and Weisel), to a policeman, but earlier he had claimed to have sold the weapon three months before. The investigators picked up on this contradiction, but as the transcript clearly shows, their primary concern was whether or not any outsiders knew about it.

We did, and we traced the man who had bought the gun in question to his retirement home in Arkansas. He was Jim Yoder, who had worked with Cesar at Lockheed. Yoder said that Cesar had given him a receipt for the .22 revolver dated September 6, 1968—three months *after* the assassination. Yes, Yoder confirmed, the LAPD had called him, and he had given them the same information. The gun? It had been taken in a burglary at about the same time as the call from the police.

In the meantime, DA Busch was pitching a grand jury, although his target was not Cesar but rather the "second gun" theorists themselves. Busch intimated that someone in the County Clerk's Office, where the evidence had been stored, had allowed "unauthorized persons" to "tamper with" the bullets, and that was why they didn't match.

Busch's fall guy was to be Christian, who two years earlier had merely looked at Sirhan's notebooks and other printed documents. The DA's investigators confronted Christian with the exhibit-request slips, but Christian noticed that several exhibit numbers had been added in a different hand. He emphatically pronounced them a "crude forgery."

The shabby frame-up fell apart when William Harper, unintimidated by the potshot taken at him, stuck to his findings, and Busch shied away from producing the supposedly "tampered-with" bullets for the grand jury to inspect.

But the "second gun" issue remained in limbo until 1974, after newsman Baxter Ward was elected a Los Angeles County supervisor. Ward, who had been shaken by Weatherly's close call, held a public hearing on the ballistics evidence. In his first open testimony Coroner Noguchi revealed how RFK had been shot in execution style. And two independent experts, New York criminalistics professor Herbert MacDonnell and California state crime-lab veteran Lowell Bradford, concurred with Harper that the Kennedy and Weisel bullets "could not be identified as coming from the same gun."

The Ward hearing predictably was boycotted by the Los Angeles establishment. DeWayne Wolfer refused to appear, on orders of Chief Ed Davis, and DA Busch declined on grounds that the hearing was an "improper forum." However, it did prompt a civil suit by one of the victims in the pantry, union official Paul Shrader, who sought to know if persons other than Sirhan were responsible for his wounds. Over the DA's strenuous objections, presiding Superior Court Judge Robert A. Wenke ordered a panel of experts to re-fire Sirhan's gun and compare the test bullets with those recovered from the victims.

Unfortunately, .22-caliber bullets are much less susceptible to positive conclusions than larger-caliber slugs, which perhaps is why Mafia hit men have favored them in recent years. The panel could only say that the questioned bullets came from the same model gun as Sirhan's, rather than his particular weapon.

Its report led off with a confusing statement: There was "no substantive or demonstrable evidence to indicate that more than one gun was used." The press jumped the gun by interpreting this to mean that only Sirhan's gun had been fired. "PANEL SAYS ONLY ONE GUN," a typical headline read.

At this point, one of Shrader's lawyers, Vincent Bugliosi, reduced the complex issue to simple arithmetic. Bugliosi, the

famed prosecutor of the Manson family and author of *Helter Skelter* (and recently *Til Death Do Us Part*), noted how the LAPD had accounted for eight bullets, the capacity of Sirhan's revolver: Seven were recovered from victims at nearby hospitals, and the eighth had been lost in the ceiling innerspace. Bugliosi remembered an AP news photo taken after the shooting showing two policemen inspecting a hole in a doorjamb just outside the pantry. A ninth bullet?

Bugliosi made the rounds of the precinct stations and learned that the policemen in the photo were Sergeants Robert Rozzi and Charles Wright. Rozzi gave Bugliosi a signed statement in which he said the object in the hole "appeared to be a small-caliber bullet." Over the phone Wright was positive that it was a bullet, but before Bugliosi could get his statement in writing, LAPD brass stepped in and told Wright to say nothing.

The lawyer then obtained statements from Coroner Noguchi and hotel personnel that they had observed what appeared to be two bullet holes in the center post to the pantry's swinging doors. This raised the count to 11; yet the LAPD quickly contended that these holes were actually dents caused by serving carts. Bugliosi soon discovered that the carts were two feet too short and had no protrusions whatsoever.

The LAPD's sad invention suffered the fate it deserved when, in late 1976, an FBI agent approached Bugliosi while the former L.A. prosecutor was on a speaking tour. College police-science professor William A. Bailey said that on June 5, 1968, he had been assigned to head a three-man team of FBI agents to carefully examine the pantry (which he called "the preparation room"). Bailey verified FBI photos released in March 1976. One of them showed two circled holes in the center post. "I (and several other agents) noted at least two (2) small-caliber bullet holes in the center post of the two doors leading from the preparation room," he declared in a signed statement. "There was no question in any of our minds as to the fact that they were bullet holes and were not caused by food carts. . . ."

Other FBI photos show two additional circled holes in the wall to the left of the doors, most likely caused by bullets numbers 12 and 13, and two more that ran the total to 15. Bugliosi told the press, "The time has come for us to start looking for the members of the firing squad that night."

In the summer of 1975 a seemingly humdrum civil trial began in Department 32 of the Los Angeles Superior

Court. The plaintiff was Jerry Owen, who five years before had sued KCOP-TV for breach of contract and defamation of character after it had canceled his new program *The Walking Bible*. Cancellation came after Christian, seeking the source of the large amounts of money Owen was spending on the show, called the station's attention to the preacher's curious background. Management panicked and threw Owen off the air, whereupon he filed suit.

When the case finally came to trial, Owen had no idea that the RFK issue would be raised. At our urging, KCOP eventually retained Bugliosi, who years before had become intrigued with our investigative file, to put on an affirmative defense—that is, prove that Owen was involved in the RFK assassination.

Bugliosi tried to subpoena John Chris Weatherly and another witness at Wild Bill's Stables, but they skipped in apparent fear for their lives. Yet Bugliosi did persuade a balky Bill Powers to take the stand. The cowboy testified about the preacher's arrival at the stables shortly before the election in a newly acquired Lincoln Continental, about Owen's flashing of a thick roll of \$1,000 bills and about the diminutive man in the backseat who he thought was Sirhan.

If Owen was stunned by Powers's appearance, we were equally amazed by a character witness of Owen's, from Miami. Her name was Gail Aiken, and during her years in Los Angeles she had been one of Owen's most devoted followers. She was also the older sister of Arthur Bremer. In May 1972, Bremer gunned down Governor George C. Wallace as he campaigned in Maryland for the presidency. Polls then indicated that if Wallace ran in November as an independent, he could siphon off enough votes from Richard Nixon to pull any Democratic candidate dead-even.

"Do you know Arthur Bremer's sister?" Bugliosi asked Owen on cross-examination. The preacher seemed startled that the relationship was known. He hemmed and hawed, then grudgingly conceded that he knew Gail Aiken. Not surprisingly, Aiken was spirited back to Miami before she could testify.

The trial reached its climax when Owen's attorney tried to rebut Powers's identification of Sirhan. He hastily produced Jackie Gray, a mulatto son of ex-boxer Johnny Gray (who had been a passenger in the Continental) to say that it had been he (Jackie) in the backseat. But Bugliosi elicited from young Gray that he was only 13 at the time—Sirhan was 23—and that his only visit to the stables had been several months earlier.

In 1978 we learned from Jackie Gray's sister, Brenda, that Owen had dyed her brother's sandy-colored hair jet-black—to try to match that of Sirhan—just before the boy's court appearance.

Things continued to backfire for Owen. Jackie Gray was obviously of limited mentality, but it also was clear that in his simplicity he was incapable of guile. Bugliosi began gentle questioning. Yes, Jackie Gray said, his father had frequently mentioned Sirhan. "He told you that he knows Sirhan very well, is that correct?" Bugliosi asked. Yes, Gray replied.

"Where did he tell you he first met him?"

Without hesitation Gray answered, "Through Mr. Owen."

Owen's attorney shot to his feet, frantically trying to impeach his own witness. But Judge Jack A. Crickard orally tested Gray and found him competent. "Did you hear Reverend Owen talk about Sirhan many times?" Bugliosi continued. Yes, Gray said, Owen mentioned buying Sirhan clothes and giving him money. It seemed a strange relationship indeed. Bugliosi then flashed onto something he had seen in our files—the possibility that Sirhan was a real-life Manchurian Candidate.

Richard Condon's chilling novel of that name was based on Russian and CIA experimentation in hypnoprogramming a subject to kill, carried out during the Korean War. There was, in fact, an authentic case history: In Denmark in 1952 an ex-convict named Bjorn Nielsen hypnoprogrammed a pliable associate to rob banks and to shoot anyone who resisted. To override his colleague's reluctance to kill, Nielsen implanted the notion that the money was to be used for the high moral purpose of unifying Scandinavia. When the man was finally captured, he could remember nothing. Nielsen had induced an amnesia block. It took a prison psychiatrist 19 months to unlock his mind and unmask Nielsen.

When Sirhan arrived at San Quentin, he was examined by the prison's psychological-testing chief, Dr. Eduard Simson-Kallas. By virtue of his European training, Simson-Kallas was well-aware of the criminal potential of hypnosis. The more he probed Sirhan's mind, the more he became convinced that Sirhan had been hypnoprogrammed to shoot Robert Kennedy as an enemy of the Palestinian people. The doctor began deprogramming procedures, but was cut off by prison authorities.

"If I had been allowed to spend as much time with him as necessary, I

would have found out something," the doctor told us.

This was what Bugliosi had in mind when he asked Jackie Gray, "Did you ever hear your father or Reverend Owen say anything about Sirhan being in a trance?"

Gray responded: "This is in a room to himself [sic], in a room that he always been in, in a room that some of the things he is doing is wrong."

Bugliosi recalled that at Sirhan's trial there had been professional testimony that the incriminating passages in his notebooks—such as "RFK must die!"—had been written in a trance.

"Did you ever hear them say that sometimes Sirhan would do things and not know that he did them?" Bugliosi asked.

"Right," Jackie Gray replied matter-of-factly.

Judge Crickard was plainly annoyed that far-reaching criminal questions had been raised in a civil forum. (He awarded Owen an amount barely sufficient to pay lawyers' fees.) Inadvertently, the jurist was right: The reinvestigation of RFK's assassination belongs in the hands of a special prosecutor and criminal grand jury.

And one of the most fertile areas to be probed concerns the late Dr. William Joseph Bryan, Jr., a medical hypnotist who immodestly characterized himself as "probably the leading expert in the world." During the Korean War, Bryan was, in his words, "Chief of all medical survival training for the United States Air Force, which meant the brainwashing section." Also, he reportedly served as a consultant to the CIA in its experiments with mind control and behavior modification. Bryan became so recognized in the field of hypnoprogramming that he was enlisted as a technical adviser (medical hypnosis) for the film version of *The Manchurian Candidate*.

In the early '60s he set up practice on Hollywood's Sunset Strip and formed the American Institute of Hypnosis, which staged touring symposiums on such topics as "Successful Treatments of Sexual Disorders." He once told a magazine interviewer, "One way of getting to know people is through [sexual] intercourse," a theory he applied too diligently. In 1969 the California Board of Medical Examiners found him guilty of unprofessional conduct for sexually molesting four female patients who submitted under hypnosis.

Paradoxically, Bryan (like Jerry Owen) was a Bible-thumping fundamentalist. He also claimed to be a descendant of William Jennings Bryan,

who during the celebrated "Scopes monkey trial" in the 1920s had opposed the teaching of evolution. Dr. Bryan frequently was a fire-and-brimstone preacher at fundamentalist churches throughout Southern California.

What initially focused our attention on Bryan was an entry in Sirhan's notebooks that read, "God help me... Please help. Salvo Di Di Salvo Die S Salvo." The jumble was characteristic of a trance condition, but the reference was clearly to Albeŕ Di Salvo, the notorious Boston Strangler. Bryan, who was often called into baffling cases by police agencies (especially the LAPD), had cracked the Boston Strangler case through hypnosis. It was his tour de force, and he was constantly bragging about it.

In 1972, Sirhan informed us that the name Di Salvo meant absolutely nothing to him—he said he didn't even know about the Boston Strangler. That is when Dr. Herbert Spiegel, a prominent New York authority on hypnosis, provided us with a clue to the strange diary entry. Anything mentioned in the presence of a subject under hypnosis is automatically etched in his mind, Spiegel said, especially if it comes from the hypnotist. And it might flow out at any time, either verbally or in "automatic writing."

Had the egotistical Dr. Bryan hypnotized Sirhan? After Bryan's sudden death in 1977 in Las Vegas, two Beverly Hills call girls who knew him intimately volunteered information. The girls, who called themselves Diana and Janice, said they had been "servicing" Bryan about twice a month over a four-year period. Bryan confided to them that he was not only a CIA agent but was also deeply involved in top-secret projects. When he told about crawling over rooftops at night in Europe, however, the girls were a bit skeptical: "We couldn't see Doc doing that kind of thing—not all 300 pounds of him," Janice laughed.

During the last year of his life Bryan grew progressively more depressed. His girlfriend had run off with another man, the girls said, and they boosted the doctor's ego by urging him to talk about all the famous people he had hypnotized. Bryan boasted of deprogramming Di Salvo, then mentioned hypnotizing Sirhan Sirhan. However, the girls erroneously assumed that he had hypnotized Sirhan *after* the assassination, because he had told them many times that he had worked with the LAPD on big murder cases.

Janice thought that Bryan had also

(continued on page 121)

## RFK ASSASSINATION

(continued from page 104)

named James Earl Ray (who stayed in a Hollywood hotel in the weeks prior to the Martin Luther King assassination). Diana said she was "absolutely positive" that Bryan also mentioned the man convicted of that killing.

Ultimately, the role of Dr. Bryan points up the need for a special prosecutor to actually delve into the battery of unanswered questions surrounding the death of Robert F. Kennedy. For example, what was the actual nature of Jerry Owen's association with Sirhan? Who was the girl in the polka-dot dress?—was she the equivalent of the Queen of Hearts in *The Manchurian Candidate*, there to trigger Sirhan's trance?

Sirhan's gun held only eight shots. Who fired the rest—including the fatal shots? What about security guard Thane Cesar? What are the connections between the RFK assassination and other political and quasipolitical killings perpetrated in America during the past 15 years?

As the police inspector in Eric Ambler's classic *A Coffin for Dimitrios* admonishes, "The important thing to know about assassinations is not who fired the gun, but who paid for the bullets." 