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Sirhan's Sentence Cut to Life

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The California Supreme Court yesterday upheld the first-degree murder conviction of Sirhan Bishara Sirhan in the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy but modified his sentence to life imprisonment.

The modification of sentence complied with the court's ruling earlier this year which abolished capital punishment in California.

Attorneys for Sirhan, an Arab immigrant, had asked for a new trial on the ground that an illegal search led to his conviction and sentencing. Sirhan was originally sentenced to death in the gas chamber.

The state court's decision denying a new trial was unanimous. One justice, Marshal F. McComb, dissented on the reduction of sentence to life imprisonment.

Kennedy (Dem-N.Y.), was shot June 5, 1968, just after winning the state's Democratic presidential primary.

The court issued a 75-page opinion rejecting all appeals which have been filed by Sirhan's attorneys since his conviction and imprisonment in 1969.

The slight, dark-haired Sirhan, now 28, was convicted in April 1969 of murder and five counts of assault to commit murder in the Kennedy shooting.

Kennedy was shot moments after he claimed victory in the 1968 California presidential primary.

Sirhan's attorneys, who filed a 700-page appeal plus supplements, claimed that authorities improperly searched Sirhan's bedroom and personal belongings. They said Sirhan's brother didn't have the legal power to grant permission for the search, undertaken while Sirhan was in custody.

Associated Press