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Sirhan Bjt 500

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LOS ANGELES AP - A psychiatrist says there is a usual Sirhan Bishara Sirhan and a dissociated Sirhan. They are both sick.

The usual Sirhan, he said, was quite harmless—one of hundreds of thousands of paranoid schizophrenics in the United States. The dissociated one killed Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

The distinction was drawn at Sirhan's murder trial Wednesday by Dr. Bernard L. Diamond, a University of California psychiatrist who has been instrumental in developing the defense of diminished responsibility. That concept, Sirhan's lawyers hope, will persuade the jury to return a lesser verdict than first-degree murder and thus spare Sirhan from the gas chamber.

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Paranoid schizophrenics are no danger to anyone but themselves, Diamond said. In Sirhan's case, Diamond maintained under stiff and sometimes acrimonious cross-examination, "it was a combination of dissociative state superimposed over the paranoid schizophrenic state that caused him to kill Sen. Kennedy."

A dissociative state as defined by the psychiatrist is a trance. Sirhan, sitting tieless and coatless at the defense table—perhaps the only man comfortable in the small, hot courtroom—appeared unconcerned while Diamond said in a dozen different ways that he is nearly mad. But Sirhan reacted sharply when co-prosecutor David N. Fitts suggested he is a liar.

At one point Sirhan slapped his hand down on the table and cursed. Another time court officials moved to his side and quietly told him to simmer down.

But it was the sparring match between Fitts and Diamond—occasionally with defense attorneys and even Judge Herbert V. Walker joining in—that characterized the cross-examination of the defense's star psychiatric witness.

"You know what I'm talking about, don't quibble with me!" Fitts exploded once. Another time, he said, "Doctor, you're dodging me."

Diamond, who rarely faced Fitts while answering but looked at the jury with a constant smile, told the co-prosecutor variously:

"Don't put words in my mouth ... I don't answer that, it's irrelevant ... I cannot allow you to distort what I say ... I disapprove of hypothetical questions and I refuse to answer any."

A number of times Judge Walker directed him to answer; at other times the judge told him to confine the answer to the question.

Diamond had called Sirhan an unknowing assassin, programmed like a computer through self-hypnosis to kill Kennedy. He said Sirhan was in a dissociative state—in a trance and in the grips of amnesia—when he wrote death threats against the senator in his diaries and when he killed him.

"Sirhan was afraid if someone saw the notebooks they would see him as mentally ill as he was and lock him up in an insane asylum," Diamond said.

"If that's the way he felt, why did he not destroy those pages?" asked Fitts.

"Because he's mentally ill," the psychiatrist said.

Didn't the usual Sirhan look at the notebooks occasionally?

"The usual Sirhan was a sick Sirhan," Diamond said.

"He has chronic delusions. It is precisely the usual Sirhan who acts so illogically."

Diamond said if he had examined Sirhan two days before the fatal shooting on June 5 last year, he would have recommended that the young Jordanian Arab be committed to a mental institution.

"He hadn't killed Sen. Kennedy yet," said Fitts.

"I would have been alarmed at the notebooks," Diamond replied.

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