

The JFK and RFK Assassinations and the "Manchurian Candidate" Theory

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Left to Right: cover of [Richard Condon's 1959 novel](#) (1960 Signet edition); poster from the [original film](#) (1962); poster from [film remake](#) (2004).

The assassins of the Kennedy brothers acted in cold blood, not under mind control.

by [Mel Ayton](#)

To coincide with the 40th anniversary of Senator Robert F. Kennedy's assassination this year, conspiracists have once again raised the possibility that RFK's assassin, Sirhan Sirhan, had been hypnotized to murder Senator Kennedy. And other writers have used the RFK assassination anniversary as a vehicle to promote their Lee Harvey Oswald "Mind Control" theories.

In a 2007 documentary *RFK Must Die* and a recent National Geographic Channel documentary, *CIA - Secret Experiments (2008)*, a number of conspiracy advocates alleged Sirhan was a Manchurian Candidate-type assassin –an unwitting tool of faceless conspirators in the CIA and the military-industrial complex. The conspiracy writers say the same conspirators who were responsible for JFK's death had plotted RFK's murder to stop him from enquiring into the death of his brother when he became president. (1)

Some conspiracy writers have also alleged Lee Harvey Oswald had been manipulated by mind-control experts to carry out the assassination of JFK. Jerry Leonard, Lincoln Lawrence and Kenn Thomas believe that Oswald's bizarre behavior was remarkably consistent with that of an unwitting "hypno-programmed spy." They also believe that Oswald's alleged links to the CIA and the further allegation that George de Mohrenschildt was Oswald's "handler" or "controller" were proof enough that Oswald had been

brainwashed to kill President Kennedy. Dick Russell also alleged Oswald had been a hypnotized assassin in his book, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, an account of Russell's investigation into the subject of Richard Case Nagell. Nagell stated that during the summer of 1963 he had discovered that Oswald was "undergoing hypnotherapy" from JFK conspirator David Ferrie. The story however, had originated with a notorious fabricator, Jack Martin, who later admitted the story was false. (2)

The only plausible JFK "Manchurian candidate-type" theory comes from Ion Mahai Pacepa, head of Romania's secret security agency before defecting to the U.S. in 1978. In his book, Pacepa maintains that Khrushchev plotted the assassination, only to have a change of heart, but Soviet agents were unable to deprogram Oswald. Pacepa also claims that Carousel Club owner Jack Ruby was working as an intelligence agent for the Cuban DGI. However, there are fundamental flaws to Pacepa's story. KGB officers who had an interest in Oswald when he was in the Soviet Union have testified that the KGB found him to be unstable and untrustworthy. It is therefore extremely unlikely the Soviets would have wanted to employ someone of Oswald's caliber.

Additionally, Pacepa is on shaky ground when he alleges that Ruby acted at the behest of the Cuban regime, and was later poisoned in order to silence him. That allegation, of course, would have to take into account the implausible notion that Ruby's doctor was part of the conspiracy. Furthermore, Ruby died from a pulmonary embolism and cancer of the lungs and brain more than three years after he murdered Oswald, raising the question of why would an apparently all-powerful intelligence agency wait that long? If Ruby had wanted to spill the beans he had plenty of opportunity. As it turned out the only conspiracy Ruby complained about was a conspiracy to "kill the Jews," a product of his mental illness.

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Pacepa offers no convincing Soviet motive for the assassination. Furthermore, as Vincent Bugliosi said in his examination of the allegations that the Soviet Union planned and carried out the assassination, "Russia had absolutely nothing to gain but much to lose in killing Kennedy." And, according to the State Department and counterintelligence officers who debriefed Pacepa, changes to his defection story cast doubt on his veracity.

(3)

There is nothing in Oswald's background that could remotely infer he was hypnotically controlled by the CIA despite the speculative accounts by some JFK assassination writers. But there were tantalizing hints in the RFK assassination case that would lead conspiracists to build a case (albeit, a flimsy one) for CIA involvement in creating a robotic patsy, including Sirhan's strange behavior before and after he was arrested, the presence of a mysterious girl in a polka dot dress and the purported presence of CIA agents at the Ambassador Hotel the night Robert Kennedy was assassinated.

However, a close examination of the RFK case that renders the JFK and RFK mind-control hypotheses specious.

RFK assassination conspiracy writers are supported by two hypnosis experts, Dr. Milton Kline and Dr. Herbert Spiegel, who agreed that Sirhan was hypnotized by others. Kline said, "It [hypno-programming assassins] cannot be done consistently, but it can be done." Spiegel believed, "It is by no means simple, but under the right circumstances it is definitely attainable.....Sirhan, being an outstanding hypnotic subject, was probably programmed through hypnosis to shoot Senator Kennedy and to experience a genuine amnesia of the shooting."(4)

Amongst the "evidence" the conspiracy writers assembled to prove Sirhan had been a hypnotized assassin were:

- Sirhan allegedly suffered memory loss. His last memory before he shot RFK was of leaving the Ambassador Hotel, walking to his car, found himself too drunk to drive, and returned to the hotel for some coffee around 11 p.m.
- Not one person who was present in the Ambassador Hotel that night reported that Sirhan had been "drunk."
- Sirhan wore a "stupid" or "sickly" smile while he was firing his gun. Vincent DiPierro said what most stood out in his mind was Sirhan's "...stupid smile. A very sickly-looking smile."
- Mary Grohs, a teletype operator, remembered Sirhan standing and staring at the teletype machine in the Ambassador Hotel's Colonial Room in the hours before the assassination. Grohs said, "I'll never forget his eyes. . . . He just kept staring."
- Sirhan showed incredible strength when he was being subdued following his shooting spree.
- Sirhan's eyes were enormously "peaceful," and he showed complete concentration on what he was doing.
- Arresting officer Arthur Placencia examined Sirhan and concluded the suspect was "definitely under the influence of something."
- Sirhan remained silent about his identity when he was questioned by police officers following his arrest.
- Sirhan was unemotional and had complete self-possession.
- Sirhan got the "chills" following his arrest and exhibited similar symptoms at the end of his hypnosis sessions with Dr. Bernard Diamond. Diamond had been brought into the case to examine Sirhan before the trial.
- According to family and friends Sirhan's personality had changed after his fall from the horse at the racetrack where he worked. Some conspiracists speculated that one of the doctors who treated Sirhan could have identified him as a potential hypnosis subject for conspirators.
- Sirhan's notebook entries showed certain phrases repeated over and over again, a sign of "automatic writing," which occurs when a subject is hypnotized. After his arrest Sirhan said he could not remember what he had written in his notebooks.

Most conspiracy writers also believe that a notorious hypnotist, Dr. William Joseph Bryan Jr., hypnotized Sirhan to commit the assassination. Bryan was famous for having hypnotized the Boston Strangler, Albert DeSalvo, and claimed to have discovered DeSalvo's motive under hypnosis. Bryan also claimed he had worked for the CIA and bragged to two prostitutes that he had hypnotized Sirhan to kill Kennedy. (5)

The Truths of Hypnosis

A number of myths about hypnosis have led most conspiracy writers to make grossly speculative conclusions about Sirhan Sirhan's purported hypnotic state.

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No one really knows how hypnosis works, and scientists, including psychiatrists and psychologists, disagree about not only a definition but also how and why people react when in a trance. They do agree, however, that something unusual happens when a subject is put into a hypnotic state. Most psychologists agree that hypnotic techniques give the hypnotist access to the subconscious and have value as a therapeutic technique in the treatment of mental disorders.(6)

However, the notion that a hypnotist has control over a subject is, essentially, a myth. A 1979 study by Coe and Ryken indicated that hypnosis is no more bothersome to subjects than other activities such as taking a college exam and the subject retains the ultimate decision to comply with or refuse the suggestion.(7)

Although hypnosis is a highly controversial subject and leading experts differ in their opinions and research, the academic scientific community has reached the consensus that the popular press has misled the public regarding the nature of hypnosis. Countless movies and books have populated the idea that a human subject can be controlled. Hypnosis expert Robert Baker claims that what we call "hypnosis" is actually a form of learned social behavior. The hypnotist and subject learn what is expected of them and reinforce each other's behavior with their performances. The hypnotist provides the suggestions, and the subject responds to the suggestions. The rest of the behavior—the hypnotist's repetitious sounds and the subject's trance—are simply window-dressing, part of the drama that makes hypnosis intriguing. Strip away these dramas, Baker argues, and what is left is psyched-up states of suggestibility. (8)

According to psychologist Dr. Graham Wagstaff, ". . . hypnotic subjects do not lose consciousness, control of their behavior, or their normal scruples..... the recent definition of hypnosis provided by the American Psychological Association clearly rejects the notion of the hypnotic automaton.... in a further recent survey of 10 experts on forensic hypnosis conducted by Vingoe (1995), all rejected the view that, 'during hypnosis the control a person normally has over him or herself is in the hands of the hypnotist.'" Wagstaff quoted a similar view expressed by the editors of the contributors to what is probably the most important academic volume on hypnosis to be published this decade, *Theories of Hypnosis*, edited by Lynn and Rhue, who concluded, "Since the 'golden age'

of hypnotism (the 1880's and 1890's), the view of the hypnotized subject as a passive automaton under the sway of a powerful hypnotist has faded in popularity. In fact, this rather extreme position is not endorsed by any of the theorists whose ideas are represented in this book."(9)

Despite the overwhelming evidence that points to the impossibility that a person can be made to commit murder under hypnosis conspiracists continue to insist there is evidence that such a crime had been committed in the past. In their RFK assassination books conspiracy advocates Philip Melanson, Jon Christian and Lisa Pease, and most recently James DiEugenio and Robert Blair Kaiser, reference Bjorn Nielsen who purportedly hypnotized Palle Hardrup to commit murder in 1951. They used this case as a proven example of how someone can hypnotize another to commit murder. What these conspiracists do not do, however, is inform their readers that Hardrup confessed to making everything up in 1972 in an interview with Soren Petersen of the Danish newspaper *BT*. (10)

Conspiracists also fail to inform their readers that shortly before he died Dr. Joseph Bryan, Sirhan's alleged hypnotist, confessed to Hollywood reporter Greg Roberts that the Sirhan story was untrue. (11) Bryan's credibility was further damaged when it was discovered he had a history of bragging, consorted with prostitutes, and used unethical practices, including having sexual relationships with some of his patients. One associate described him as a "sexual pervert." (12)

The CIA and Hypnotism

Conspiracy theorists suggest that the CIA successfully developed drugs and mind-control techniques to manipulate their Cold War adversaries or to get unwitting persons to do their bidding. Many conspiracists also believe the CIA used these techniques to control Sirhan and then program him to forget. (13)

David Rhodes, a long-serving MKULTRA official, said, "Creating a Manchurian Candidate is a total psychological impossibility...."

However, the Agency abandoned the idea that it was possible to turn men into puppets. (14) CIA scientists were also never able to produce "total amnesia" in a subject. The record shows that the CIA made two attempts to produce a "Manchurian Candidate Assassin." The first involved a hypnotist hired by the agency to hypnotize a suspected Mexican double agent. The hypnotist's job was to coax the subject to murder a Soviet KGB agent.

Eventually, the hypnotist, code-named "Mindbender," decided the idea was unrealistic and decided not to continue. The second attempt occurred in 1966 when the CIA hired a hypnotist to coax a Cuban exile to return to his homeland and assassinate Fidel Castro. The hypnotist tried to coerce three subjects into committing the act — all attempts failed. (15)

According to an ARTICHOKE and MKULTRA operative, "All experiments beyond a certain point always failed because the subject jerked himself back for some reason or the subject got amnesiac or catatonic" and the agency's methods occasionally turned the subjects into vegetables who could not do anything, especially the agency's bidding. A former MKULTRA official told author John Marks that a foolproof way of triggering amnesia could not be found. "You had to accept," he said, "that when

someone is caught, they're going to tell some things." (16) David Rhodes, a long-serving MKULTRA official, said, "Creating a Manchurian Candidate is a total psychological impossibility...." (17)

Conspiracy advocates frequently cite experiments conducted by CIA scientist Morse Allen, who they allege was successful in programming an assassin. Allen hypnotized his secretary, who had a fear and loathing of guns, to pick up a pistol and shoot another secretary. The gun, of course, was unloaded. After Allen brought the secretary out of the trance, she had no memory of what she had done.

Those who promoted this experiment as proof of programmed assassins failed to mention that Allen did not give much credibility to it. Allen believed that he had simply convinced an impressionable young woman volunteer to accept orders from a legitimate authority figure to carry out an order she likely knew would not end in tragedy. (18) Allen also believed there were too many variables in hypnosis for it to be a reliable weapon. And all the participants in such trials knew they were involved in a scientific experiment. An authority figure was always present to remind the subject or some part of the subject's mind that it was only an experiment. The CIA's ARTICHOKE team concluded that it could not effectively hypnotize a subject even though Allen thought it could be possible. (19)

Following years of research into the subject of possible CIA mind-controlled assassin programs, author John Marks concluded that, "[MKULTRA officials] were not interested in a programmed assassin because they knew in general it would not work and, specifically that they could not exert total control. The CIA had concluded that there were more reliable ways 'to kill people.'" (20) CIA agent William Buckley, who acted as liaison between the CIA and Ewan Cameron, an MKULTRA psychiatrist who was conducting experiments into the use of hypnosis to build a robotic assassin, said "MK-ULTRA had become a big, bad, black game which men like [CIA Dr.] Gottlieb and Cameron and others like them played because they wanted to believe. Not actually believe, but wanted to." (21) Gottlieb confessed to Buckley, "Nothing worked for me so why should it work for anyone else?" (22)

A leading hypnosis expert, Dr Steve Lynn of Binghamton University, concurs. Lynn believes that a "...trigger [mechanism] that would move someone into a hypnotic state where they would commit murder.... would [not] really work. "You do not relinquish your will. You do not become a dupe, a patsy or a mindless automaton despite some public beliefs that this may be the case." (23)

Sirhan's 'Hypnotic State'

For decades conspiracists have used the robotic assassin theory to get Sirhan off the hook. As recently as May 2008 Sirhan's new attorney, William Pepper, a supporter of Martin Luther King assassination and 9/11 conspiracy theories, reiterated that allegation stating, "Sirhan was hypno-programmed." Pepper provided no real evidence to support his conclusions. Pepper simply offered up Sirhan's loss of memory as proof enough. (24)

Shane O'Sullivan in his DVD documentary "[RFK Must Die](#)" alleges that CIA agents may have been at the Ambassador Hotel the night RFK was assassinated and acted as Sirhan's controllers. That story was successfully debunked not long after the BBC aired it in November 2006. (25)

What the conspiracy writers omit to tell their readers is the overwhelming and conclusive evidence presented during the 1969 trial and afterwards which revealed how Sirhan was fully aware of everything around him on the night he killed Robert Kennedy and that no credible evidence has ever been discovered that would indicate Sirhan's actions were the product of a hypnotized mind.

The "Manchurian Candidate"

thesis is explored in this video clip.

During interviews with police officers following his arrest, Sirhan never once asked why he had been arrested. If he had indeed been hypnotized and then came out of the trance in the early hours of June 5, his most logical first question would have been, "Why have I been arrested?" Sirhan was also fully alert when he was given a police caution that he need not say anything until he sought legal assistance. He refused to give police officers any details about himself, including his name and address.

In fact, Sirhan played with his interrogators at the police station. The unremorseful assassin kept his identity secret because the arresting officers "...might lose interest in the mystery." (26) He told arresting officers, he wanted to wait "...until I could see what the hell's going on."(27)

Police tapes further confirm that Sirhan was "alert and evasive" on the night he was arrested, and this observation was confirmed by all police officers present during Sirhan's questioning. The doctor at the county jail who examined Sirhan immediately following his arrest also testified to his subject's alertness. He said the suspect was "...self-satisfied, smug and unremorseful." (28)

Conspiracy advocates, most recently Robert Blair Kaiser in his re-written book about the RFK assassination *RFK Must Die (2008)*, point to Sirhan's staring at a teletype machine as evidence that he was hypnotized. Yet Sirhan frequently became strangely fascinated by things around him which provoked him into staring at people or objects. Sirhan told his police interrogators, "Everything . . . life itself is a challenge. . . . When you watch a barber, sir, I just stand and watch that barber for hours. I . . . from the time I'm watching him I want to be nothing but a barber. You know, if I'm watching a dentist, boy, he fascinates me, and I want to be him. I was talking to [LAPD officer] Frank here a while ago. The way he talked, you know . . . I was very fascinated and, you know, I was sort of superimposing myself in his position for . . . temporarily." (29) And, according to Sirhan's mother, her son often experienced trance-like states as a boy growing up in Jerusalem.

Sirhan's defenders believe the assassin's great physical strength when he was apprehended proves he was in some sort of disassociated state. But friends have testified that Sirhan, although short and slight of build, was very strong despite his size. Conspiracists also claim Sirhan's calm and peaceful state at the time he was apprehended proves he had been in a hypnotic state. However, as FBI profiler John Douglas discovered, Sirhan's calmness was not at all unusual behavior for an assassin. With reference to Mark Chapman, who stalked and then murdered John Lennon, Douglas wrote, "[Chapman's unusually calm state] squares with the emotions of so many others. . . . Once they decide on their course of action, stress and conflict are lifted." (31) And, of course, Sirhan was under the influence of the calming effect of alcohol. It has long been established that alcohol greatly reduces inhibitions and often produces a glassy-eyed stare effect as well as, in some people, a trance-like, calm look.

Conspiracists allege a controller, probably a 'girl in the polka-dot dress' (see <http://hnn.us/articles/38496.html> and <http://hnn.us/articles/50532.html>), manipulated

Sirhan in the Ambassador Hotel, yet they do not explain how, during the weeks preceding the assassination, Sirhan was able to be hypnotized along the lines laid down by their hypnosis experts. These experts believe Sirhan could have become a hypno-programmed assassin only if he was isolated for a considerable amount of time and subjected to brainwashing techniques. According to Dr. Herbert Spiegel, who supports the notion that Sirhan was hypnotized at the time of the assassination, "[It could happen if he were] subject to proper programming under control conditions, and subject to some degree of supervision."⁽³²⁾ The person many conspiracists say hypnotized Sirhan, Dr. William Bryan Jr., also believed the conditioning of the subject would take time and effort before it was successful. In a 1974 broadcast two years before he died, Bryan said, "I am an expert in the use of hypnosis in criminal law, I sure as hell am. You have to have the person locked up physically, to have control over them; you have to use a certain amount of physical torture . . . and there is also the use of long-term hypnotic suggestion . . . probably drugs . . . whatever . . . and so on. . . . Under these situations where you have all this going for you, like in a prison camp and so on, yes, you can brainwash a person to do just about anything." (33)

However, in Sirhan's case, these brainwashing conditions are unlikely to have been met. Sirhan's movements in the year prior to the assassination leave no unaccountable missing period when the assassin could have been hypnotized and/or indoctrinated along the lines established by the conspiracists' mind-control "experts." Furthermore, family and friends have never indicated Sirhan had ever been under the influence of drugs.

In the year prior to the assassination, waitress Marilyn Hunt had seen Sirhan frequently in Pasadena's Hi-Life Bar. Sirhan also was seen in Shap's Bar during this time, placing illegal bets. In July 1967 Sirhan filed a disability complaint for workmen's compensation. Between July and September 1967, Sirhan's mother and brother Munir said Sirhan often went to the Pasadena Library. Library records confirm he borrowed books during this period. Sirhan's mother said her son "...stayed at home for over a year [sic] with no job" from October 1966 to September 1967. Also during this period, Sirhan, by his mother's account, often drove her to work. On September 9, 1967, Sirhan began work at John Weidner's health food store. Weidner reported no long periods of absence up to the time Sirhan left his employ in March 1968.

Sirhan discussed Martin Luther King Jr.'s murder with Alvin Clark, a Pasadena garbage collector some days after April 4, 1968. This leaves only eight weeks unaccounted for before Kennedy was murdered. During most of that eight-week period, Sirhan was reported to be in Pasadena. Sirhan's friend, Walter Crowe, said he met Sirhan in Pasadena on the night of May 2, 1968, when they discussed politics. The last time he saw Sirhan was on the Pasadena College campus on May 23, 1968. Crowe said he was in a Denny's restaurant when Sirhan entered with a group of friends. Michael Haggarty, a former school friend of Sirhan's, said he last saw him on May 23, when they discussed Israel. ⁽³⁴⁾ This leaves only a two-week period unaccounted for. In his conversations with Robert Blair Kaiser, Sirhan referred to local newspaper and local radio reports throughout May. Besides, Sirhan was living at 696 East Howard Street, Pasadena. Family and friends have never suggested he was missing during this period.

Some conspiracy advocates have referred to an FBI report of an interview with a neighbor of the Sirhans who said Mary Sirhan had told her Sirhan had been missing for some length of time. Mary Sirhan had never told this to her sons or her son's lawyers and it is likely the neighbor was confused with an incident in which Sirhan lived in his boss's trailer after an altercation with one of his brothers.

The hypnotized assassin theory is also fundamentally flawed. A robotic assassin can never be a guaranteed success; it is an erratic tool. A hypnotist can plant a suggestion in the subject's mind and ask him to forget that suggestion, but there is no foolproof way of preventing another hypnotist from coming along and recovering the memory. How could plotters, for example, be sure that a captured Sirhan would continue to forget about the people who purportedly hypnotized him? How could they be certain he would not give evidence to the authorities in return for immunity? If the plotters' plan was reliant on Kennedy's security to kill Sirhan in the chaos of the shooting, it couldn't have been a very well thought-out plan. His lawyers could also have built a strong case around the paid-assassin theory, arguing against the imposition of the death penalty that was eventually handed down.

There are additional fundamental flaws in the hypnotized assassin theory. If plotters had successfully hypnotized Sirhan then they would have been equally successful in making sure he didn't do anything to bring attention to himself before the shooting. So why did Sirhan utter contempt for RFK at the Ambassador Hotel that evening to Enrique Rabago and Humphrey Cordero? (35) There would always have been the possibility these RFK supporters would report Sirhan to the authorities thus putting the plot in jeopardy. And why did conspirators allow Sirhan to use an illegal pistol for the assassination? Had Sirhan been challenged by police at any time prior to the assassination the whole conspiracy would have collapsed. Conspiracists would also have made sure he was hypnotized not to tell anyone of the purported plot yet Sirhan did exactly that when he told Alvin Clark of his intention to kill RFK. The testimony of Alvin Clark alone decisively destroys any notion of a hypnotized killer who had been programmed to forget.

Sirhan's Amnesiac State

Sirhan trial prosecutor David Fitts suggested when he cross-examined defense psychiatrist Dr. Eric Marcus, "If he [Sirhan] was suffering from retrograde amnesia [a state induced by emotional shock] he would still be asking questions of the police, like why was he there and what had he done, as if he were suffering from real [organic] amnesia, wouldn't he?" Dr. Marcus agreed, and Fitts continued, "That leaves me with the only working hypothesis—that he was malingering, doesn't it?" Dr. Marcus replied, "Yes, I guess it does." (36)

Michael McCowan was a private detective who assisted Sirhan's lawyers following the assassin's arrest. He had worked for the LAPD for 10 years while attending law school. In the period before Sirhan's trial, McCowan spoke to Sirhan about the shooting. In a response to one of McCowan's questions, Sirhan told how his eyes had met Kennedy's in the moment just before he shot him, before Kennedy had fully turned to his left to shake hands with the kitchen staff. McCowan asked Sirhan, "Then why, Sirhan, didn't you shoot him between the eyes?" Without hesitating Sirhan replied, "Because that son-of-a-bitch turned his head at the last second." This statement, not presented at Sirhan's trial, is, in itself, damning evidence that Sirhan lied when he said he did not remember shooting RFK. When Dan Moldea published part of the McCowan interview in his book, *The Killing of Robert Kennedy*, in 1995, he was attacked by Sirhan's lawyer, Lawrence Teeter, who claimed McCowan was lying. Moldea quickly had McCowan "...sign a document attesting to this statement." (37)

Sirhan's trancelike state, if it ever existed, could have been caused by his alcohol intake and his intense concentration (the result of his hypnosis self-improvement exercises) rather than any efforts by conspirators to hypnotize him.

McCowan's story is supported by an incident reported in Kaiser's book, *RFK Must Die*. During Sirhan's trial, hotel workers Jesus Perez and Martin Patrusky both said Sirhan had approached them to ask if Robert Kennedy was coming through the pantry following his speech. Sirhan had insisted he did not remember anything after he collected his gun from his car. However, after the hotel workers presented their testimonies at the trial, Sirhan told McCowan, who was seated next to him, that he had not approached either witness. When McCowan reminded Sirhan that he supposedly remembered nothing of this period before the crime, Sirhan "nodded and gulped."⁽³⁸⁾

If Sirhan was lying and remembered the assassination, then how was the hypnotic defense constructed in the first place? Sirhan claimed that his lawyers first put forward the idea that he was in a "hypnotic trance-like state" when he shot Kennedy, but some evidence suggests that Sirhan had knowledge of amnesiac states before he committed the murder. Sirhan had read Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, a book about the murders of a Kansas farmer, his wife, and two teenage children. Perry Smith and Richard Hickock committed the murders in 1959, and Capote's book about the murder, manhunt, trial, and executions of the murderers was published in 1965. Sirhan identified with the short and stocky Perry Smith. He felt great empathy for Smith. Smith, a small-stature man who suffered a deprived childhood, had bouts of shivering and trancelike states and believed in mysticism and fate. According to Capote, Perry Smith "...had many methods of passing [time] . . . among them, mirror gazing . . . every time [he saw] a mirror [he would] *go into a trance*." (Emphasis added). ⁽³⁹⁾

At the conclusion of his book Capote quoted the opinions of leading psychiatrists Drs. Joseph Satten, Karl Menninger, Irwin Rosen, and Martin Mayman about why people like Smith and Hickock committed such devastating crimes and what their mental states were during the commission of the murders. The psychiatrists attempted to assess the criminal responsibility of a number of murderers — "...murderers who seem rational, coherent and controlled and yet whose homicidal acts have a bizarre, apparently senseless qualities." In their examinations the psychiatrists found a number of similarities between the murderers, including the fact that the men they studied "...were puzzled as to why they killed their victims, who were relatively unknown to them, and in each instance the murderer appears to have lapsed into a *dream-like dissociative trance* [emphasis added] from which he awakened to suddenly discover himself assaulting the victim. . . . Two of the men reported severe disassociate trancelike states during which violent and bizarre behavior was seen, while the other two reported less severe and perhaps less well-organized, *amnesiac episodes*." (Emphasis added) ⁽⁴⁰⁾

Sirhan's trancelike state, if it ever existed, could have been caused by his alcohol intake and his intense concentration (the result of his hypnosis self-improvement exercises) rather than any efforts by conspirators to hypnotize him. Alcohol intake frequently causes amnesia, and it is possible that Sirhan's memory was impaired by the Tom Collins drinks he had earlier in the evening. Sirhan confessed he had been drunk, although arresting officers disputed this. Hans Peter Bidstrup, an electrician at the Ambassador Hotel, said he believed Sirhan was "half-drunk" around 10 p.m. on the night of the shooting. Sirhan said he was not accustomed to alcohol and became intoxicated after consuming four Tom Collins drinks. Sirhan said, "Everybody was—it was like a party—hell, what do people go to parties for? Fun—you know—celebration. So I started drinking."⁽⁴²⁾ He also stated, "I felt I was quite high in my own self, and if I got more drunk, there was nobody to take care of me."⁽⁴³⁾ Sirhan said, "I got into the car, but, hell, I couldn't drive. I was too drunk. The idea of driving in the

condition that I was in doesn't appeal to me. Then I said, 'Sober up, try to run around the block if you can, get coffee' and that's what hit me—go and get some coffee at the Ambassador. And I went down again. I don't remember taking the gun with me."(44)

If Sirhan had indeed been telling the truth about his lapse of memory then it was more likely the result of the blocking of his subconscious thoughts because they were too painful at a conscious level. Sirhan's memory lapses were similar to a person who has had a night of heavy drinking and awakes in the morning with the thought, "What did I do?" In fact, during Sirhan's interview with author Dan Moldea in the 1990s, he said the root of his amnesia might have been his alcohol intake. (45)

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Further, if Sirhan did experience memory lapse, his amnesia was not necessarily the result of hypnosis or drunkenness. In North America and Europe, criminals convicted of a violent crime—and 26 percent of men who have been convicted of manslaughter or murder—frequently claim they cannot recall the actual crime. Some studies indicate that anywhere from 25 to 65 percent of violent criminals say they do not remember committing manslaughter or murder. With regard to

actual amnesia as opposed to feigned amnesia, studies have shown that "...amnesia is not uncommon in the case of violent crime and in particular homicide where it can occur in 30–40 percent of cases. A related state is 'psychogenic amnesia' which is associated with stress."(46)

Prosecution psychiatrist Seymour Pollack's theory that Sirhan might have deliberately blocked his memory of the shooting has recently received support from research carried out by scientists at Stanford University. The Stanford study found that if people try hard enough they can forget something they do not want to remember. The study built on Freud's thesis on memory suppression, which suggested that people can be subconsciously influenced by events buried too deeply in their memory to be recalled. The Stanford University scientists found that people in an experiment were able to block certain memories when asked to do so and that scanners could identify which parts of the brain were involved. According to Professor Michael Anderson, "If you consistently expose people to a reminder of a memory that they don't want to think about and they try not to think about it, they don't remember it as well as memories where they were not presented with any reminders at all."(47)

Additionally, some research shows that intense stress can cause failure to recall anything learned in a given situation. Experts have concluded that the combination of stress hormones in the brain that occurs during intense trauma results in post-incident amnesia in which, immediately after a critical incident, the majority of information will not be remembered. The greater the trauma, the more likely a subject is to experience post-incident amnesia. Keith Ashcroft, head of the Centre for Forensic Psychopathology in Manchester, England, agrees and has concluded that "...there are certain psychological defenses which stop people remembering things, and one of those is trauma."(48) FBI profiler Russell Vorpapel also supports the notion that traumatic episodes can lead to

amnesia. He believes that forgetting "...is a way of subconsciously lying to your conscience."(49)

However, some leading experts are skeptical of criminals who use the amnesia defense. One expert, C. Cantor, believes, "Amnesia is easily feigned and difficult to disprove in criminal cases, in the 11 year experience of the author . . . no case of psychological (psychogenic) amnesia in the absence of a psychotic episode, brain tumor, or brain syndrome was ever confirmed."(50)

The most credible evidence, however, shows that Sirhan was feigning amnesia and lied when he stated he could not remember killing RFK.

Sirhan's first demonstrable lie about his memory lapse occurred when he said he could not remember writing in his notebooks, "RFK must die." But FBI handwriting analysis concluded that Sirhan had written the entries, albeit haphazardly, jumping around from page to page in the notebook, and that he had not written them when under the influence of a hypnotic trance.(51) It was also clear to ACLU lawyer Abraham Lincoln Wirin that Sirhan remembered that his notebooks contained incriminating evidence. The morning after the shooting, Sirhan had asked him to tell his mother to "tidy up his room" which Wirin interpreted as asking his mother to get rid of his notebooks which proved premeditation.

There is no doubt Sirhan had been mentally disturbed in some way when he killed Robert Kennedy. However, his mental illness was not the product of a hypnotized mind but rather the disturbance created by fanatical anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli propaganda emanating from the hatred that spewed out of the Middle East.

In a conversation with Robert Blair Kaiser, Sirhan's amnesiac defense crumbled when he told the defense investigator that he thought Lee Harvey Oswald and James Earl Ray had acted as cowards by shooting their victims from behind. Kaiser asked Sirhan if his act was less cowardly. Sirhan responded, "Hey, when you shoot a man in the back? There you go! At least Kennedy saw me." Sirhan quickly and disingenuously added, "I think, I don't know."(52) Sirhan also revealed how disingenuous he was by faking his outbursts in court during his trial. He told his brother Adel he had planned them all along, according to Kaiser's book, *RFK Must Die*.

Sirhan was also cunning and deceptive with the doctors who hypnotized him before his trial began. He was forthright with defense psychologist Dr. Bernard Diamond when he was under hypnosis, yet he refused to answer important questions when prosecution psychologist, Dr. Seymour Pollack, hypnotized him. Pollack responded to Sirhan's memory blocking by telling him, "Whenever we try to get you to talk about these things that are important, you pull away, you fall asleep. We spent a half hour trying to find out where the gun was. How could you carry the gun from your car . . . near Wilshire? How could you carry a gun from there back to the Ambassador Hotel and not know you had it"? (53)

The notion that Sirhan Sirhan (or Oswald) had been hypnotically controlled by others does not bear up under close scrutiny. There is no credible evidence that Sirhan was hypnotized by others to murder Sen. Robert F. Kennedy nor is there any credible evidence he was controlled by others during the commission of his crime. Those who believe this to be true have not understood the truths of

hypnosis, the CIA Secret experiments to create a robotic assassin or the manipulative and cunning nature of the assassin.

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NOTES

(1) *RFK Must Die*, November 2007, Director and Producer Shane O'Sullivan.

National Geographic Channel – *CIA Secret Experiments*, written, produced and directed by Tria Thalman, (2007). Broadcast 10th March 2008. Conspiracists also believe RFK was murdered because he was about to end the war in Vietnam thus he was working against the interests of the military-industrial complex.

(2) *Mind Control, Oswald & JFK: Were We Controlled?* by Lincoln Lawrence and Kenn Thomas (1997)

The Perfect Assassin: Lee Harvey Oswald, the CIA and Mind Control by Jerry Leonard (2002)

Programmed to Kill: Lee Harvey Oswald, the Soviet KGB and the Kennedy Assassination by Ion Mahai Pacepa. (2007)

The Man Who Knew Too Much by Dick Russell (2003)

<http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/nagell3.htm>

(3) *New York Times* January 3, 1988, In Short; Non-Fiction by David Binder

Pacepa does not provide hard evidence. His theories center on circumstantial evidence and he suggests that Marina Oswald was a tool of the KGB. Pacepa maintains that Khrushchev tried unsuccessfully to cancel Oswald's mission but Oswald's programming was too successful and the assassin went ahead on his own and committed the assassination. Khrushchev then had Ruby kill Oswald. This theory begs the question - why did Khrushchev not have Oswald killed before the assassination rather than after? Pacepa also has to deal with the testimony of Yuri Nosenko, an earlier defector who maintained that the KGB had minimal interest in Oswald and certainly never recruited him. Pacepa, however, maintains that although Nosenko was a genuine defector he was working in a different department of Soviet intelligence and did not really know what was going on with Oswald. Nosenko worked for the domestic wing, the VGU, rather than the foreign wing, the PGU, that would have recruited Oswald. Pacepa maintains that the PGU would not have informed the VGU that Oswald was working for them and, Pacepa states, would have gone to great lengths to conceal it.

(4) Philip Melanson, *Who Killed Robert Kennedy?* (1993), 75.

(5) Greg Roberts, *RFK Assassination Conspiracy Theory Hypnotist Found Dead in Las Vegas*, Hollywood Reporter, March 21, 1977.

(6) Robin Waterfield, *Hidden Depths: The Story of Hypnosis* (2002), xxiv.

(7) W. C. Coe and K. Ryken, *Hypnosis and Risks to Human Subjects*, *American Psychologist* 10:6 (August 1979), 23

(8) Robert Allen Baker, *They Call It Hypnosis* (1990), 23–27. State' theorists believe hypnotized subjects have entered a dissociative state and can be controlled by the hypnotist. However, it is the

non-state theorists who dominate the research community in the United States and Europe. Non-state theorists agree that the hypnotic state is less like a trance but more like imaginative involvement in a task. A hypnotized subject's abnormal behavior can be explained by normal human abilities, e.g., intense concentration, creative imagination, suggestibility, a willingness to act out inhibitions, and peer-group pressure (insofar as stage performances are concerned). Acts carried out by a hypnotized subject are the result of the subject's positive attitude, motivation, and expectancy. Non-state theorists argue that a subject's responsiveness to suggestions, like "raise an arm," "appear drowsy," etc., cannot be the result of a hypnotic trance because non-hypnotized subjects in control groups will respond to such suggestions in a similar manner.

(9) Dr. Graham Wagstaff, letter to the author with attachment, *Hypnosis and Forensic Psychology*, March 15, 2003.

(10) *Brainwash – The Secret History of Mind Control* by Dominic Streatfeild, (2006) 177

Black Op internet radio, show 376 May 29th 2008

James DiEugenio and the Palle Hardrup case. <http://www.blackopradio.com/archives2008.html>

Kaiser correctly concludes there were no extra bullets found in the pantry nor was there a second gunman firing. However, his otherwise excellent account of the assassination is marred only by his belief that Sirhan had been hypnotized by others. *RFK Must Die – Chasing the Mystery of the Robert Kennedy Assassination* (2008), p378,

(11) Greg Roberts, *RFK Assassination Conspiracy Theory Hypnotist Found Dead in Las Vegas*, Hollywood Reporter, March 21, 1977.

(12) Melanson, *Who Killed Robert Kennedy?*, 204

(13) Washington Decoded, May 11, 2008 <http://www.washingtondecoded.com/site/>

(14) Marks, *Search for the Manchurian Candidate*, 110.

Robert Todd Carroll, *Hypnosis*, The Skeptic's Dictionary, November 27, 2006, <http://skeptdic.com/hypnosis.html>. Evidence that North Korean torture, isolation, and sensory deprivation tactics were successfully used to control their captives is nonexistent. Only 22 out of 4,500 (or 0.5%) of those Americans captured by the Chinese defected. It was also unlikely "confessions" by American soldiers could be considered proof of brainwashing because soldiers had received specific instructions from their superiors to cooperate without giving away secrets if they were captured. Prisoners side with their captors because of their own low morale and the proclivities of a number of left-leaning POWs rather than because they have been effectively brainwashed. It has been argued that the U.S. government knew the communists did not have any "magical tool." but it allowed the suspicions to remain public to alert U.S. citizens to the dangers of communism.

(15) Marks, *Search for the Manchurian Candidate*, 154.

(16) Ibid 200

(17) Ibid 200

(18) Ibid 196

(19) Ibid 198.

(20) Ibid 223

(21) Gordon Thomas, *Secrets and Lies-A History of CIA Mind Control and Germ Warfare* (2007), 264

(22) Ibid 321

(23) National Geographic Channel – *CIA Secret Experiments*, written, produced and directed by Tria Thalman, (2007).

(24) <http://edition.cnn.com/video/#/video/us/2008/05/17/finighan.rfk.william.pepper.intv.cnn>

(25) <http://www.washingtondecoded.com/site/>

(26) Robert Houghton, *Special Unit Senator* (1970) 51.

(27) Robert Blair Kaiser, *RFK Must Die* (1970) 293.

(28) Kaiser 86)

(29) Houghton 52

(30) Kaiser 204

(31) John Douglas and Mark Olshaker, *The Anatomy of Motive* (1999), 240. The idea that Sirhan showed unusual strength when he was apprehended following the shooting and that this was the result of his being hypnotized does not bear up under close scrutiny. According to a friend of Sirhan's, "Sirhan was strong, of wiry build.....Sirhan engaged in the normal number of fights with other boys during their early acquaintance and Sirhan indicated he was frequently teased because he was a foreigner. Sirhan told [redacted] that at first he did not fight back when teased and would allow himself to be beaten, but later on learned how to fight and usually won his fights." (FBI Files RFK-LA-56-156-Sub X- 01-Vol. 03)

(32) *The Assassination of Robert Kennedy* by Chris Plumley (UK Channel 4) 1992

(34) Michael Haggerty California State Archives - taped interview June 19 1968 CSA - K83 - I-227

(35) Houghton 275

(36) Seigenthaler 285

(37) Dan E. Moldea, "Re: DiEugenio's 'The Curious Case of Dan Moldea,'" *Moldea.com* undated, <http://www.moldea.com/2000june3.html>.

(38) Kaiser 388.

(39) Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (1965), 13.

According to an overlooked FBI interview with one of Sirhan's co-workers at John Wiedner's health food store: "...Sirhan believed in what he called "Witchcraft." And he believed he has the power to do greater things than did others. She said he had indicated in words not now recalled, that he "could do anything that God could do." She said he seemed not to "understand our religion," however, he never explained what his religion was. She added he said, "There are lots of things you can do if you put your mind to it." Sirhan had once given her a paperback book, title and author not recalled, concerning "Witchcraft," for her to read. She said she took it home, did not read it, and brought back the book the next day. She said Sirhan had said he read by candlelight from candles on a table. She said she asked him in connection with his witchcraft what he did, would he lift tables by witchcraft. Sirhan said he did. She said she told him he could not be serious and Sirhan remarked that he was. She said he came back from lunch one day with two red candles and two blue candles apparently to read by or to use in his witchcraft." (FBI Interview with Carol Burgess, 14 June 1968)

(40) Ibid., 292 n.;

M. Cima, H. Merckelbach, H. Nijman, E. Knauer, and S. Hollnack, "I Can't Remember, Your Honor: Offenders Who Claim Amnesia," German Journal of Psychiatry, February 25, 2001, http://www.gjpsy.uni-goettingen_de/gjp-article-cima.pdf.

(42) Kaiser, *RFK Must Die*, 250.

(43) Seigenthaler, *Search for Justice*, 263.

(44) Kaiser 251.

Carol Burgess put the lie to the conspiracists' oft-stated remarks that Sirhan never drank. She said one day Sirhan came back from lunch with whiskey on his breath and made some remark that he would have to stay away from the boss that afternoon. She said she therefore assumed he drank a little. (FBI Interview with Carol Burgess, 14th June 1968.)

(45) Dan E. Moldea, "Confronting Sirhan," Moldea.com, 2000, <http://www.moldea.com/Seven-8.html>.

(46) Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, the Past* (1997), 227.

(47) *Freud Was Right: Mind Can Block Memories if They Are Too Painful*, The Independent (UK), January 9, 2004.

(48) Clint Witchalls, *Murder in Mind*, Guardian Weekly, April 15, 2004, 20.

(49) Russell Vorpapel, *Profiles in Murder: An FBI Legend Dissects Killers and Their Crimes* (1998), 142.

(50) Alan J. Parkin, *Memory and Amnesia* (1997), 175.

(51) *Sirhan's Trance*, Newsweek April 7, 1969, p31

(52) Kaiser, 518.

(53) Melanson, *The Robert F. Kennedy Assassination*, 163

(54) see [The 'Unaffiliated' Terrorist at frontpagemag.com](http://www.frontpagemag.com)

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