

= Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy =

The assassination of Robert Francis " Bobby " Kennedy , a United States Senator and brother of assassinated President John Fitzgerald " Jack " Kennedy , took place shortly after midnight on June 5 , 1968 , in Los Angeles , California , during the campaign season for the 1968 presidential election .

After winning the California and South Dakota primary elections for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States , Kennedy was fatally shot as he walked through the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel and died in the Good Samaritan Hospital twenty @-@ six hours later . Sirhan Sirhan , a 24 @-@ year @-@ old Palestinian / Jordanian immigrant , was convicted of Kennedy 's murder and is serving a life sentence for the crime . The shooting was recorded on audio tape by a freelance newspaper reporter , and the aftermath was captured on film .

Kennedy 's body lay in repose at St. Patrick 's Cathedral in New York for two days before a funeral Mass was held on June 8 . His body was interred near his brother John at Arlington National Cemetery . His death prompted the protection of presidential candidates by the United States Secret Service . Hubert Humphrey later went on to win the Democratic nomination for the presidency , but ultimately lost the election to Republican Richard Nixon .

As with his brother John 's death , Kennedy 's assassination and the circumstances surrounding it have spawned a variety of conspiracy theories . Kennedy remains one of only two sitting United States Senators to be assassinated , the other being Huey Long .

= = Background = =

Kennedy visited the British Mandate of Palestine in 1948 and wrote dispatches at the time for the Boston Post about his trip and the effect it had on him when he was twenty @-@ two years old . During his stay , he wrote that he grew to admire the Jewish inhabitants of the area . As a Senator , he later became a strong supporter and advocate for Israel .

Kennedy was United States Attorney General from January 1961 until September 3 , 1964 , when he resigned to run for election to the United States Senate . He took office as Senator from New York on January 3 , 1965 .

The run up to the 1968 presidential election saw the incumbent president , Lyndon B. Johnson , serving during a period of social unrest . There were riots in the major cities despite Johnson 's attempts to introduce anti @-@ poverty and anti @-@ discrimination legislation , and there was significant opposition to the ongoing military action in Vietnam .

The assassination of Martin Luther King , Jr. on April 4 , 1968 led to further riots across the US . Kennedy entered the race for the Democratic Party 's nomination for president on March 16 , 1968 ? four days after Senator Eugene McCarthy received a large percentage of the vote in the New Hampshire primary against the incumbent President (42 % to Johnson 's 49 %) . Two weeks later , a demoralized Johnson announced he was no longer seeking re @-@ election . One month later , Vice President Hubert Humphrey announced he would seek the presidency . Humphrey did not participate in any primaries but he did obtain the support of many Democratic Party delegates . Following the California primary , Kennedy was in second place with 393 delegates compared to Humphrey 's 561 and McCarthy 's 258 .

= = Assassination = =

The 1968 presidential primary elections in California were held on Tuesday , June 4 . The statewide results gave Kennedy 46 % and McCarthy 42 % . Four hours after the polls closed in California , Kennedy claimed victory in the state 's Democratic presidential primary . He spoke by phone with South Dakota Senator George McGovern . At approximately 12 : 10 a.m. PDT on June 5 , he addressed his campaign supporters in the Ambassador Hotel 's Embassy Room ballroom , in the Mid @-@ Wilshire district of Los Angeles . At the time , the government provided Secret Service protection for incumbent presidents but not for presidential candidates . Kennedy 's only security

was provided by former FBI agent William Barry and two unofficial bodyguards , former professional athletes . During the campaign , Kennedy had welcomed contact with the public , and people had often tried to touch him in their excitement .

Kennedy had planned to walk through the ballroom when he had finished speaking , on his way to another gathering of supporters elsewhere in the hotel . However , with deadlines fast approaching , reporters wanted a press conference . Campaign aide Fred Dutton decided that Kennedy would forgo the second gathering and instead go through the hotel 's kitchen and pantry area behind the ballroom to the press area . Kennedy finished speaking and started to exit when William Barry stopped him and said , " No , it 's been changed . We 're going this way . " Barry and Dutton began clearing a way for Kennedy to go left through swinging doors to the kitchen corridor , but Kennedy , hemmed in by the crowd , followed maître d 'hôtel Karl Uecker through a back exit .

Uecker led Kennedy through the kitchen area , holding Kennedy 's right wrist but frequently releasing it as Kennedy shook hands with those he encountered . Uecker and Kennedy started down a passageway narrowed by an ice machine against the right wall and a steam table to the left . Kennedy turned to his left and shook hands with busboy Juan Romero just as Sirhan Sirhan stepped down from a low tray @-@ stacker beside the ice machine , rushed past Uecker , and repeatedly fired what was later identified as a .22 caliber Iver @-@ Johnson Cadet revolver .

After Kennedy had fallen to the floor , Agent Barry saw Sirhan holding a gun and hit him twice in the face while others , including maîtres d ' Uecker and Edward Minasian , writer George Plimpton , Olympic gold medal decathlete Rafer Johnson and former professional football player Rosey Grier of the Los Angeles Rams , forced Sirhan against the steam table and disarmed him as he continued firing his gun in random directions . Five other people were also wounded : William Weisel of ABC News , Paul Schrade of the United Auto Workers union , Democratic Party activist Elizabeth Evans , Ira Goldstein of the Continental News Service and Kennedy campaign volunteer Irwin Stroll .

After a minute , Sirhan wrestled free and grabbed the revolver again , but he had already fired all the bullets and was subdued . Barry went to Kennedy and laid his jacket under the candidate 's head , later recalling : " I knew immediately it was a .22 , a small caliber , so I hoped it wouldn 't be so bad , but then I saw the hole in the Senator 's head , and I knew " . Reporters and photographers rushed into the area from both directions , contributing to the confusion and chaos . As Kennedy lay wounded , Juan Romero cradled the senator 's head and placed a rosary in his hand . Kennedy asked Romero , " Is everybody OK ? " and Romero responded , " Yes , everybody 's OK . " Kennedy then turned away from Romero and said , " Everything 's going to be OK . " Captured by Life photographer Bill Eppridge and Boris Yaro of the Los Angeles Times , this moment became the iconic image of the assassination . There was some initial confusion in who was shot , one witness believing that the primary victim was Kennedy 's campaign manager , Stephen Edward Smith . This was quickly realized to be untrue .

Kennedy 's wife Ethel stood outside the crush of people at the scene , seeking help . She was soon led to her husband and knelt beside him . He turned his head and seemed to recognize her . Smith promptly appeared on television and calmly asked for a doctor . After several minutes , medical attendants arrived and lifted Kennedy onto a stretcher , prompting him to whisper , " Don 't lift me ... " which were to become his last words . He lost consciousness shortly thereafter . Kennedy was taken a mile away to Central Receiving Hospital , where he arrived near death . One doctor slapped his face , calling , " Bob , Bob " , while another doctor manually massaged Kennedy 's heart . After obtaining a good heartbeat , doctors handed a stethoscope to Ethel so she could hear her husband 's heart beating , much to her relief .

After about 30 minutes , Kennedy was transferred several blocks to the Hospital of the Good Samaritan for surgery . A gymnasium near the hospital was set up as temporary headquarters for the press and news media to receive updates on the senator 's condition . Surgery began at 3 : 12 a.m. PDT and lasted three hours and 40 minutes . Ten and a half hours later , at 5 : 30 p.m. PDT on Wednesday , spokesman Frank Mankiewicz announced that Kennedy 's doctors were " concerned over his continuing failure to show improvement " ; his condition remained " extremely critical as to life " .

Kennedy had been shot three times . One bullet , fired at a range of about 1 inch (2 @. @ 5 cm) ,

entered behind his right ear , dispersing fragments throughout his brain . The other two entered at the rear of his right armpit ; one exited from his chest and the other lodged in the back of his neck . Despite extensive neurosurgery at the Good Samaritan Hospital to remove the bullet and bone fragments from his brain , Kennedy died at 1 : 44 A.M. PDT on June 6 , nearly 26 hours after the shooting .

After receiving word of Senator Kennedy 's death , his spokesman Frank Mankiewicz left the hospital and walked to the gymnasium where the press and news media were set up for continuous updates on the situation . At 2 : 00 AM PDT on June 6 , Mankiewicz approached the podium , took a few moments to compose himself and made the official announcement :

I have , uh , a short I have a short announcement to read , which I will read , uh at this time . Senator Robert Francis Kennedy died at 1 : 44 AM today , June 6 , 1968 . With Senator Kennedy at the time of his death were his wife Ethel , his sisters Mrs. Stephen Smith , Mrs. Patricia Lawford , his brother @-@ in @-@ law Mr. Stephen Smith , and his sister @-@ in @-@ law Mrs. John F. Kennedy . He was 42 years old . Thank you .

= = Perpetrator = =

Sirhan Sirhan was a Palestinian Arab with Jordanian citizenship , born in Jerusalem , who held strongly anti @-@ Zionist beliefs . A diary found during a search of Sirhan 's home stated for the entry on May 19 : " My determination to eliminate RFK is becoming more and more of an unshakable obsession . RFK must die . RFK must be killed . Robert F. Kennedy must be assassinated Robert F. Kennedy must be assassinated before 5 June 68 . " It has been suggested that the date of the assassination is significant , because it was the first anniversary of the start of the Six Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbors . When Sirhan was booked by police , they found in his pocket a newspaper article that discussed Kennedy 's support for Israel , and at his trial , Sirhan testified that he began to hate Kennedy after learning of this support . In 1989 , he told David Frost : " My only connection with Robert Kennedy was his sole support of Israel and his deliberate attempt to send those 50 bombers to Israel to obviously do harm to the Palestinians " . Some scholars believe the assassination was one of the first major incidents of political violence in the United States stemming from the Arab ? Israeli conflict in the Middle East .

The interpretation that he was mostly motivated by Middle Eastern politics has been criticized as an oversimplification that ignores Sirhan 's deeper psychological problems . During his trial , Sirhan 's lawyers attempted to use a defense of diminished responsibility , while their client tried to confess to the crime and change his plea to guilty on several occasions . Sirhan testified that he had killed Kennedy " with 20 years of malice aforethought " . The judge did not accept this confession and it was later withdrawn .

Sirhan pleaded guilty on April 17 , 1969 , and six days later , he was sentenced to death . The sentence was commuted to life in prison in 1972 after the California Supreme Court , in its decision in California v. Anderson , invalidated all pending death sentences imposed in California prior to 1972 . Since that time , Sirhan has been denied parole fifteen times and is currently confined at the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility in southern San Diego County . Sirhan 's lawyers have claimed that he was framed , and Sirhan claims to have no memory of his crime .

= = Media coverage = =

As the shooting took place , ABC News was signing off from its electoral broadcast , while the CBS broadcast was already over . It was not until 21 minutes after the shots that CBS 's coverage of the shooting would begin . The reporters who had been present to report on Kennedy 's win in the primary ended up crowding into the kitchen where he had been shot and the immediate aftermath was captured only by audio recording and cameras that had no live transmission capability . ABC was able to show scant live footage from the kitchen after Kennedy had been transported but unlike CBS and NBC , all of ABC 's coverage from the Ambassador was in black and white . CBS and NBC shot footage in the kitchen of the shooting 's aftermath on color film , which could not be broadcast

until it was developed two hours after the incident .

Reporter Andrew West of KRKD , a Mutual Broadcasting System radio affiliate in Los Angeles , captured on audio tape the sounds of the immediate aftermath of the shooting but not the actual shooting itself . Using his reel @-@ to @-@ reel tape recorder and attached microphone , West had just recorded the senator 's victory speech . With the audio still rolling , West asked the Senator the following question :

Andrew West : " Senator , how are you going to counter Mr. Humphrey and his backgrounding you as far as the delegate votes go ? "

Senator Kennedy : " It just goes back to the struggle for it . "

After this brief exchange , West turned off his tape recorder and followed Kennedy and his entourage to the kitchen pantry . Just a few minutes later , seconds after Kennedy was shot , West turned his recorder on again and started reporting the sudden developments

Andrew West : " Senator Kennedy has been shot ! Senator Kennedy has been shot ; is that possible ? Is that possible ? It 's is it possible , ladies and gentlemen ? It is possible , he has not only Senator Kennedy , oh my God . Senator Kennedy has been shot , and another man , a Kennedy campaign manager , and possibly shot in the head . "

Several seconds later , West gave an on @-@ the @-@ spot account of the struggle with Sirhan in the hotel kitchen pantry , shouting at Rafer Johnson to " Get the gun , Rafer , get the gun ! " and telling others to " get a hold of [Sirhan 's] thumb and break it , if you have to ! Get his thumb ! Hold him , hold him ! We don 't want another Oswald ! "

Over the following week , NBC devoted 55 hours to the shooting and aftermath , ABC 43 , and CBS 42 , with all three networks preempting their regular coverage and advertisements to cover the story .

= = Conspiracy theories = =

As with the 1963 assassination of his brother , President John F. Kennedy , Robert Kennedy 's death has been the subject of widespread analysis . Some individuals involved in the original investigation and some researchers have suggested alternative scenarios for the crime , or have argued that there are serious problems with the official case .

= = = CIA involvement theory = = =

In November 2006 , the BBC 's Newsnight program presented research by filmmaker Shane O 'Sullivan alleging that several CIA officers were present on the night of the assassination . Three men who appear in films and photographs from the night of the assassination were positively identified by former colleagues and associates as former senior CIA officers who had worked together in 1963 at JMWAVE , the CIA 's main anti @-@ Castro station based in Miami . They were JMWAVE Chief of Operations David Morales , Chief of Maritime Operations Gordon Campbell and Chief of Psychological Warfare Operations George Joannides .

The program featured an interview with Morales 's former attorney Robert Walton , who quoted him as having said , " I was in Dallas when we got the son of a bitch and I was in Los Angeles when we got the little bastard . " O 'Sullivan reported that the CIA declined to comment on the officers in question . It was also alleged that Morales was known for his deep anger toward the Kennedys for what he saw as their betrayal during the Bay of Pigs Invasion .

= = = Second gunman theory = = =

The location of Kennedy 's wounds suggested that his assailant had stood behind him , but some witnesses said that Sirhan faced west as Kennedy moved through the pantry facing east . This has led to the suggestion that a second gunman actually fired the fatal shot , a possibility supported by coroner Thomas Noguchi who stated that the fatal shot was behind Kennedy 's right ear and had been fired at a distance of approximately one inch . Other witnesses , though , said that as Sirhan

approached , Kennedy was turning to his left shaking hands , facing north and so exposing his right side . During a re @-@ examination of the case in 1975 , the Los Angeles Superior Court ordered expert examination of the possibility of a second gun having been used , and the conclusion of the experts was that there was little or no evidence to support this theory . As recently as 2008 , eyewitness John Pilger asserted his belief that there must have been a second gunman .

In 2007 , analysis of an audio tape recording of the shooting made by freelance reporter Stanislaw Pruszyński appeared to indicate , according to forensic expert Philip Van Praag , that thirteen shots were fired , even though Sirhan 's gun held only eight rounds . Van Praag states that the recording also reveals at least two cases where the timing between shots was shorter than physically possible . The presence of more than eight shots on the tape was corroborated by forensic audio specialists Wes Dooley and Paul Pegas of Audio Engineering Associates in Pasadena , California , forensic audio and ballistics expert Eddy B. Brixen in Copenhagen , Denmark , and audio specialist Phil Spencer Whitehead of the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta , Georgia . Some other acoustic experts , however , have stated that no more than eight shots were recorded on the audio tape .

On February 22 , 2012 , Sirhan 's lawyers , William Pepper and Laurie Dusek , filed a court brief in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles claiming that a second gunman fired the shots that killed Kennedy . It was the fourth and final in a series of federal briefs filed under the writ of habeas corpus by Pepper and Dusek beginning in October 2010 . A ruling is now pending in the Sirhan federal case .

= = Aftermath and legacy = =

= = = Memorial = = =

Following the autopsy on June 6 , Kennedy 's body was returned to New York City , where he lay in repose at St. Patrick 's Cathedral , viewed by thousands , until a funeral mass on the morning of June 8 .

Kennedy 's younger brother , Edward Moore " Ted " Kennedy , eulogized him with the words :

My brother need not be idealized , or enlarged in death beyond what he was in life ; to be remembered simply as a good and decent man , who saw wrong and tried to right it , saw suffering and tried to heal it , saw war and tried to stop it . Those of us who loved him and who take him to his rest today , pray that what he was to us and what he wished for others will some day come to pass for all the world . As he said many times , in many parts of this nation , to those he touched and who sought to touch him : " Some men see things as they are and say why . I dream things that never were and say why not . "

Immediately following the mass , Kennedy 's body was transported by a slow @-@ moving train to Washington , D.C. , and thousands of mourners lined the tracks and stations , paying their respects as the train passed by .

On the way to the cemetery , the funeral procession passed through Resurrection City , a shantytown protest set up as part of the Poor People 's Campaign . The procession stopped in front of the Lincoln Memorial , where residents of Resurrection City joined the group and sang " The Battle Hymn of the Republic " .

Kennedy was buried near his older brother John , in Arlington National Cemetery , in the first burial ever to take place there at night ; the second was the burial of his younger brother Ted .

After Kennedy 's assassination , Congress altered the Secret Service 's mandate to include protection for presidential candidates . The remaining candidates were immediately protected under an executive order issued by Lyndon Johnson , putting a strain on the poorly resourced Secret Service .

= = = 1968 election = = =

At the time of his death , Kennedy was substantially behind Humphrey in convention delegate

support , but many believe that Kennedy would have ultimately secured the nomination following his victory in the California primary . Only thirteen states held primaries that year , meaning that most delegates at the Democratic convention could choose a candidate based on their personal preference . Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger , Jr . , and others have argued that Kennedy 's broad appeal and charisma would have been sufficiently convincing at the 1968 Democratic National Convention to give him the nomination . Historian Michael Beschloss believed , however , that Kennedy would not have secured the nomination . Humphrey , after a National Convention in Chicago marred by violence in the streets , was far behind in opinion polls but gained ground . He ultimately lost the general election to Republican Richard Nixon by the narrow popular vote margin of 43 @. @ 4 % to 42 @. @ 7 % . Nixon won by a more decisive 301 @- @ 191 margin in the electoral vote .

= = = Cultural and societal impact = = =

Kennedy 's assassination was a blow to the optimism for a brighter future that his campaign brought for many Americans who lived through the turbulent 1960s . Juan Romero , the busboy who shook hands with Kennedy right before he was shot , later said , " It made me realize that no matter how much hope you have it can be taken away in a second . "

Jack Newfield , a reporter that had been traveling with the campaign , expressed his feelings on the effect of the assassination , closing his memoir on Kennedy with :

Now I realized what makes our generation unique , what defines us apart from those who came before the hopeful winter of 1961 , and those who came after the murderous spring of 1968 . We are the first generation that learned from experience , in our innocent twenties , that things were not really getting better , that we shall not overcome . We felt , by the time we reached thirty , that we had already glimpsed the most compassionate leaders our nation could produce , and they had all been assassinated . And from this time forward , things would get worse : our best political leaders were part of memory now , not hope .

The stone was at the bottom of the hill and we were all alone .

= = Artifacts , museums and locations today = =

After the failed campaign of preservationists to preserve the Ambassador Hotel where Kennedy was shot , the hotel was demolished in 2005 ? 2006 , with the last section of the Ambassador falling in January 2006 , leaving only the annex that housed the hotel entrance , a shopping arcade , the coffee shop , and the historic Cocoanut Grove , all of which were promised to be preserved in some manner . From 2006 to 2010 , six new schools were built on the site and named the Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools . Plans to re @- @ create the pantry in the area of the school complex and create a museum , dedicated to Kennedy 's assassination , fell through after commission chairman Cruz Reynoso , a former state Supreme Court justice , said in court , " We didn 't want to celebrate the death . We wanted to celebrate his life , particularly his ideals . "

The handcuffs that were used by now @- @ retired police officer Arturo Placecia to arrest Sirhan Sirhan are now part of the collection of the upcoming National Law Enforcement Museum in Washington , D.C . .

The blood @- @ stained suit coat , shorts , shirt , belt , tie and socks which Kennedy wore when he was shot are now in the possession of the Los Angeles County District Attorney . Controversy arose in 2010 when Kennedy 's clothing was transported to the California Homicide Investigators Association conference in Las Vegas , where they were included in a temporary public display of never @- @ before @- @ seen artifacts from famous crime scenes , related to prolific serial killers and infamous murders , such as the Black Dahlia murder and the murder of Hollywood actress Sharon Tate . The items and Kennedy 's clothing were subsequently removed from the exhibit and returned to the LAPD vault , with the LAPD apologizing to the Kennedy family .

Until 1987 , the LAPD retained the original files , reports , transcripts , fragments of the bullets that struck Kennedy and the four other bystanders in the kitchen pantry , the .22 caliber Iver @- @

Johnson handgun used by Sirhan , Kennedy 's blood @-@ stained clothes , and numerous other artifacts related to the assassination . In 1987 , the LAPD donated the entire evidence collection (except for Kennedy 's clothes which remain in possession of the LAPD) to the California State Archives in Sacramento for permanent preservation . The collection remains in the California State Archives .

The Robert F. Kennedy Assassination Archives at Southeastern Massachusetts University also contain a large collection of materials on the Robert Kennedy assassination . Included among these records are files donated by several writers and researchers and materials purchased from the National Archives and Records Administration @-@ Pacific Southwest Region , the Los Angeles County District Attorney 's office , and the FBI . Another source of information on the case is the Assassination Archives and Research Center . The Center maintains an extensive collection of government documents , interviews , unpublished manuscripts , photographs , audio tapes , and secondary works .

Some items - such as the bullet @-@ pocked ceiling tiles - were removed long ago and intentionally destroyed by the LAPD and not used in Sirhan 's trial . A large number of the photographs of the pantry area and the tapes of the recorded interviews with individuals who were present during the assassination suffered a similar fate . Conspiracy theorists today believe that the destroyed evidence was vital as it proved that Sirhan Sirhan may have had an accomplice and there has been a cover @-@ up , similar to the assassination of John Kennedy , Robert Kennedy 's brother . Furnishings from the defunct Ambassador Hotel , ranging from bedroom furniture to silver champagne buckets , were auctioned off over the years until the hotel 's demolition .