

*A Lie Too Big to Fail: The Real History of the Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy*  
Lisa Pease  
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## A Lie on Every Page

*By Mel Ayton*

“As long as there are people who think I didn’t do it, I’ll never admit anything.”

Sirhan Sirhan, during an interview

with journalist Dan Moldea

Since the publication of [\*The Forgotten Terrorist\*](#) in 2007, Sirhan Sirhan has continued to claim he is innocent of the murder of Robert F. Kennedy. Another shooter was actually responsible, Sirhan asserts, adding, in contradiction, that he has no memory of the event. He was a “hypnotized assassin” and therefore not responsible.

Sirhan’s defenders chime in that he was not in a position to shoot Kennedy in the head, and thus a second assassin in the pantry must have been culpable. They also say an audio tape recording of the shooting “proves” there was a second gunman.

During these same 12 years, the US media have carefully followed Sirhan’s efforts to persuade the courts and the California Parole Board he should be released, after 51 years of confinement. These news stories, with very few exceptions, have re-propagated the tall tales of conspiracy advocates. One recurring refrain is that of purported “assassination witnesses” who disavow their original testimonies and now support the notion that Kennedy was killed by someone other than Sirhan. It goes without saying that vital evidence to the contrary is always omitted during the breathless presentation of such bogus revelations.[\[1\]](#)

There is no doubt the Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD) investigation of the assassination was less than optimal. Some possible leads were not exhausted, some evidence was handled incorrectly, and the all-important ballistics investigation was not one for the textbooks.

Yet the same could be said of nearly every major criminal investigation. The likelihood of human error is compounded in high-profile crimes because of the vast amounts of paperwork and physical evidence that must be processed. Anomalies are perhaps the major reason why conspiracy advocates have been able to plant doubt in the minds of the American public, by representing simple or inadvertent mistakes as conspiratorial shenanigans.[\[2\]](#)

Conspiracy advocates have promoted a false history of the RFK assassination (the same as their JFK brethren do) by deliberately skewing evidence in the case to suit their agenda. And unfortunately, in too many cases they have been aided and abetted by gullible journalists who do not know their way around the mountains of evidence collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the LAPD. The media is thereby complicit in leaving the public confused.

These are the six central myths about the Robert Kennedy assassination that have been concocted by conspiracy theorists and given credence by a too-credulous mainstream press:

- Sirhan was never in a position to fire the fatal shot that killed Senator Kennedy in the kitchen pantry of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles on the night of 4/5th June 1968. Conspiracists posit that a security guard positioned behind the senator fired the fatal shot.
- An audio recording of the shooting allegedly recorded 13 or 14 shots being fired in the pantry. If so, this proves there was a second gunman since Sirhan's revolver held only eight bullets.
- Sirhan was a hypnotized assassin, programmed to kill. He was also programmed to forget who hypnotized him and the circumstances of the shooting.
- Sirhan's amnesia about the assassination is genuine.
- Sirhan was aided by a "girl in a polka-dot dress," who was seen with Sirhan in the days before the assassination.
- Sirhan was not interested in politics and therefore had no motive to commit political murder.

The most recent incarnation of these fables appears in *A Lie Too Big to Fail*, by Lisa Pease. The theories in her book relentlessly recycle just about every fabrication and falsehood conspiracists have managed to dredge up in the five decades since the 1968 assassination, inserting them into public discourse.

Until recently Pease had been a marginalized conspiracy author deservedly ignored by the mainstream media and published by the likes of Feral House. In February 2019, however, that changed when *The Washington Post* touted her findings. Shortly afterwards, Pease's book was featured on a morning television news show in Los Angeles on the KTLA channel. KTLA is not just another LA television station. It began broadcasting in 1947, and for decades was an authoritative source of local news, viz., it was the first station to broadcast the infamous Rodney King tape. The station assiduously covered the 1968 Kennedy assassination with many reporters who were local legends and had great sources inside the LAPD. To feature Pease was to diss KTLA's own contemporary reporting of the assassination.

The *Post* article was written by Tom Jackman, a reporter who had previously written a series of articles to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Robert Kennedy's assassination, one

more credulous about a conspiracy than the next. One can find more ludicrous articles about the assassinations of the 1960s. But normally they are found in the *National Enquirer*, while Jackman's recitations of crackpot theories appear in, of all things, the storied *Washington Post*.<sup>[3]</sup>

The lede “fake news” in Jackman's account was Pease's allegation that Robert Maheu, an aide to business magnate Howard Hughes, was responsible for Robert Kennedy's murder, and that Maheu was acting, moreover, on behalf of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The allegation rests almost entirely on an unproven if not improvable accusation made by another former Hughes aide named John H. Meier in 2015—in other words, long after everyone concerned was dead and could sue Meier for libel. The *Post* deceptively published a stiff denial of the allegation by Maheu's son, Maheu himself having died in 2008. Missing from Jackman's reporting, however, was some crucial context, namely that Meier has been labeled a “conman,” “multi-million dollar fraudster,” and “liar” according to a reputable journalist and other authors who have dealt with him previously.<sup>[4]</sup>

Nor does Jackman provide much context to Pease and her irrational speculations. She believes the US government was responsible for the 9/11 attacks, and that the CIA/government was responsible for the JFK, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinations prior to knocking off RFK—and for good measure, was probably guilty of the attempted assassination of George Wallace and John Lennon's murder 12 years later.

Pease's book is chock full of speculation from beginning to end, “what ifs” she doesn't even pretend to have answers to. An outstanding example of her methodology concerns the lack of evidence that another cheap revolver was present in the pantry. There are reasons another murder weapon wouldn't have been seen, she asserts, “. . . [W]hat if the gun was in . . . a rolled-up poster? . . . What if the gun were hidden under a busboy's towel? . . . hidden in a pocket? fired from within a purse . . . what if the gun was disguised in another object?”<sup>[5]</sup>

*A Lie Too Big to Fail* creates mysteries where none exist, defaming innocent bystanders in the process. It is nothing more than an army of paranoid speculations moving over the landscape in support of a pre-determined theory: the CIA did it.

### Myth No. 1: Sirhan Was Not Close Enough to Fire the Fatal Shot

It comes as no surprise when Lisa Pease puts front and center the most enduring myth of the RFK assassination, repeated *ad nauseam* by other conspiracy writers and documentary makers. Pease writes, “No credible witness ever placed Sirhan close enough to get his gun muzzle within an inch of Kennedy's head.” This falsehood is the allegation that Sirhan was always at least three feet away from the senator and thus not in a position to fire the point-blank fatal shot to RFK's head. The allegation is voiced by virtually everyone who writes about a purported conspiracy.<sup>[6]</sup>

A most recent proponent of this view is Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., who expressed it during a 2018 interview with *The Washington Post*. “It's not only that nobody saw that,” he said. “The people that were closest to [Sirhan], the people that disarmed him all said he never got near my father.”<sup>[7]</sup>

In their never-ending quest to introduce mystery where no mystery exists, conspiracists omit vital statements made by eyewitnesses who were very close to Kennedy when he was shot.

As eyewitness Vincent DiPierro told *The Washington Post's* Ronald Kessler in 1974, it is true that Sirhan was standing about three feet in front and slightly to the right of Kennedy. But a moment before Sirhan whipped out his handgun, Kennedy turned to his left to greet some busboys. Then, while in the act of firing, Sirhan also lunged forward, bringing the muzzle of his Iver Johnson revolver to within inches of Kennedy's head. "It would be impossible for there to be a second gun," DiPierro told Kessler. "I saw the first shot. Kennedy fell at my feet. His blood splattered on me. I had a clear view of Kennedy and Sirhan."[\[8\]](#)

Decades later, DiPierro's memory had not diminished. During a 2018 radio interview, DiPierro said, "I saw the gun come from the right side of my eye and [Sirhan's arm] was outstretched . . . . We always talk about the upward trajectory . . . well, Sirhan was shorter than Robert and he was also stretched out so that his arm was an extended version going in an upward trajectory . . . . There was nobody between Robert, Sirhan, and me . . . . The first shot was directly to his head . . . I got sprayed with the bullet to his head . . . There was a pause because Robert's hands went up to his head . . . the third bullet hit the top of his jacket . . . and the fourth shot went through my shirt . . . I didn't get hit . . . A lot of people said there were more than eight shots. Well, there was a lot of popping, a lot of banging. I only saw seven shots come out of the gun. There were eight."[\[9\]](#)

Long ago, DiPierro's testimony was essentially corroborated by several witnesses, including the wife of the late writer George Plimpton, Freddy Plimpton. She told the FBI in 1968 that she "saw an arm go up towards Senator Kennedy's head, but did not see a gun, heard shots and it was obvious to her that Senator Kennedy had been shot. . . . She saw Sirhan very clearly. She saw his arm up toward Senator Kennedy's head."[\[10\]](#)

Not content with ignoring testimony that contradicts a conspiracy, Pease also grievously distorts the observations of witnesses who were at the scene, such as Don Schulman, who described what he saw to two TV crews shortly after the assassination. Although Pease admits to Schulman's confusion about the shooting she nevertheless believes his initial and confused account that a security guard had shot Kennedy (Schulman: "(I) saw a man pull out a gun . . . and shoot three times....I saw all three shots hit the senator . . . I also saw the security men pull out their weapons . . . the security guards fired back.) However, Schulman later retracted and clarified this account, explaining that when he made it initially he was "tremendously confused." In his corrected account, Schulman said he meant to tell reporters that, "Kennedy had been hit three times, he had seen an arm fire, he had seen the security guards with guns, but he had never seen a security guard fire and hit Robert Kennedy."[\[11\]](#)

Contrary to Pease's beliefs, the real evidence in this case is clear: as Sirhan approached the senator with an outstretched arm and gun in hand, Kennedy turned his head to the left in a defensive stance. RFK's right arm rose and his body was bending in a downwards motion at the time he was shot in the head. The arc of the gun was following Kennedy's head as the senator stooped to avoid his assailant.

### Myth No. 2: The Pruszyński Tape Recording

Pease accepts, without reservation, the claims made by an audio engineer that a tape recording of the sounds of the shooting – the Pruszyński tape – contained the sounds of 13 or 14 shots. The tape recording was released in the late 1980s with a batch of documents and other evidence that were part of the LAPD investigation into the shooting. The recording was made by a Polish journalist, Stanislaw Pruszyński, who accidentally left his tape recorder running when the shots were fired.

Conspiracy advocates, including Pease, cite the subsequent research conducted by an audio engineer named Philip Van Praag, who concluded 13 or 14 shots could be identified on the tape.

At the same time Van Praag was researching the audio tape I enlisted the assistance of two acoustics experts, Dr. Philip Harrison and Dr. Peter French of [J P French Associates](#), based in York, England. Dr. Harrison conducted the tests and his work was verified by Dr. French. Harrison was able to identify seven impulse sounds (which are characterized by a sharp onset and rapid decay) that corresponded to Sirhan's gun being fired to the exclusion of another weapon (the seven impulses all exhibited similar characteristics). An eighth shot could not be clearly identified on the spectrogram made from the tape recording; this sound appeared to be masked by other noise, including loud screams.

Harrison's conclusions were confirmed by a trio of Americans who have spent decades examining the scientific aspects of the JFK assassination. Steve Barber, Michael O'Dell, and Chad Zimmerman all examined independently a digital version of the master tape. They concurred with Dr. Harrison's conclusion that the tape captured the sound of no more than eight gunshots.<sup>[12]</sup>

Clearly unable to understand Philip Harrison's acoustics research, Pease has, for years, misinterpreted his report. In her latest comment Pease wrote, "The expert found seven shot sounds and 'three possible locations' for the 'eighth shot.' To any reasonable, honest person, that means Ayton's expert found ten possible shot sounds—two more than Sirhan's gun could have fired."<sup>[13]</sup>

Harrison objects to this characterization of his research, and maintains he has not altered his firm belief that, "no more than eight shots" can be found on the tape. Harrison wrote, "I haven't heard or seen anything since the work I previously did that would make me change my mind as to it being eight shots or less."<sup>[14]</sup>

Despite the controversy over the Pruszyński tape it is counterintuitive to assume 13 or 14 shots were fired when every pantry witness who ventured a guess at the number of shots, with the exception of three, put the number at eight or less. When RFK was assassinated, approximately 77 people were caught up in the mayhem that followed the shooting. Kitchen utensils were being knocked over, doors were banging, balloons were bursting and people were shouting and screaming. Of the pantry witnesses who volunteered a guess about how many shots were fired, 35 put the number at anywhere between three and seven. A few witnesses claimed there were more than eight shots. The remainder did not comment on the number of shots but characterized them in such terms as "a number of shots," "a series of firecrackers," "several shots," or a "number of shots fired in rapid succession."<sup>[15]</sup>

At the time of the assassination and afterwards no witness said they heard anywhere near 13 or 14 shots. A very small number changed their minds after talking to conspiracy-minded authors, however. Among these witnesses was Nina Rhodes-Hughes, who told CNN reporter Brad Johnson in 2011 there were more than a dozen shots fired. Yet, according to her 1968 FBI interview conducted in 1968, she heard “eight distinct shots.” Rhodes-Hughes explains this discrepancy away by claiming her 1968 statement was falsified by the FBI.<sup>[16]</sup>

### Myth No. 3: The Hypnotized Assassin

Like conspiracy theorists before her, Pease believes that Sirhan was a hypnotized assassin programmed to forget. She takes Sirhan at his word that he cannot remember anything after drinking coffee with a girl at the Ambassador Hotel—until he became aware of being choked as he was being subdued by Kennedy’s bodyguards in the kitchen pantry.

Falling further down the rabbit hole Pease argues that a hypnotized Sirhan served as a distraction in front of Kennedy, firing blanks and drawing the crowd’s attention, while the actual shooters shot Kennedy from behind and escaped. She cites a number of witnesses who thought the sounds of the shooting sounded as though they came from a cap gun emitting shredded paper which fluttered through the air. This is the totality of her proof that Sirhan did not fire real bullets.

Pease cites hypnotists Bjorn Nielsen and Derren Brown as evidence that hypnotized assassins can be created.

Nielsen purportedly hypnotized Palle Hardrup to commit murder in 1951. But on 5 August 1972, Palle Hardrup gave an interview to Soren Petersen of the Danish tabloid newspaper *B.T.* He admitted he had not been hypnotized into committing the murders. Presaging Sirhan’s imaginative defense in 1968, Hardrup told the *B.T.* journalist that when the police had suggested that hypnotism had caused the crimes, he realized he “might get off the hook” if he agreed.<sup>[17]</sup>

Pease also naively alleges a show business hypnotist, Derren Brown, had successfully “programmed” a “Manchurian Candidate–style” assassin during one of his television shows. The entertainer himself, however, has scorned these claims. In 2018 Brown said, “The more bewildered we are, the more susceptible we become . . . I’m quite open about how the whole thing I do happens in inverted commas, so not to believe everything you see or hear. It’s a form of entertainment. Some of it’s real and some of it isn’t. Hopefully, part of the fun is trying to unpick that.”<sup>[18]</sup>

Pease also accepts without reservation the conclusions of Dr. Daniel Brown, who has asserted that Sirhan “did not act under his own volition and knowledge at the time of the assassination and is not responsible for actions coerced and/or carried out by others.” According to Brown, Sirhan was a “true ‘Manchurian Candidate,’ hypno-programmed into carrying out a violent political act without knowing it.”<sup>[19]</sup>

Brown is a proponent of “recovered memory syndrome” which postulates that some patients who have suffered trauma in their lives have, over the years, suppressed memories of it—and yet it is possible to revive these memories through proper treatment. The existence of repressed memory recovery has not been accepted by mainstream psychology, including by the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Britain, the British Psychological Society, and the American

Psychological Association. According to the latter, it is not possible to distinguish repressed memories from false ones without corroborating evidence. Some experts in the field of human memory believe that no credible scientific support exists for the notions of repressed/recovered memories. The mechanism(s) by which both of these phenomena happen are not well understood.[\[20\]](#)

Many conspiracy advocates believe the CIA used hypnosis to control Sirhan and then programmed him to forget. The agency, however, had long before abandoned the idea that it was possible to turn men into puppets. CIA scientists were also never able to produce “total amnesia” in a subject, and a CIA scientist named Morse Allen came to the conclusion there were too many variables in hypnosis for it to be a reliable tool for such a sensitive activity. The Israeli Mossad came to the same conclusion. Their officers once attempted to hypnotize a Palestinian into killing Yassir Arafat but the plot failed when they discovered that hypnosis failed to create the desired results.[\[21\]](#)

It seems clear Sirhan himself was the original propagator of this fantasy. There is compelling evidence that Sirhan used his knowledge of Perry Smith, a real-life murderer portrayed in Truman Capote’s 1965 book, *In Cold Blood*, to promote the fable that he, too, had been in a hypnotic state when he shot RFK. Sirhan, an avid reader, identified and felt great empathy with Smith, according to author Robert Blair Kaiser. Smith had bouts of “shivering,” “amnesia,” and “trance-like states, and like him, Sirhan engaged in “mirror-gazing” and fell into “trances.”[\[22\]](#)

The hypnotized assassin theory is fundamentally flawed because a robotic assassin can never be a guaranteed success. A hypnotist can plant a suggestion in the subject’s mind and ask him to forget that suggestion, but there is no fool-proof 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?

It should come no surprise, then, that California courts have roundly rejected Brown’s “hypnotized assassin” theory.[\[23\]](#)

### Myth No. 4: Sirhan’s “Amnesia”

Pease devotes a entire chapter of her book to the illusion that Sirhan’s behavior on the night of the assassination indicated he had been hypnotized to act as a patsy, shooting blanks as a cover for the real assassins, and then programmed to forget.

Many leading hypnosis experts are skeptical of criminals who use the amnesia defense. One expert has written, “Amnesia is easily feigned and difficult to disprove in criminal cases . . . . [I]n 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.”[\[24\]](#)

There is ample evidence showing Sirhan’s amnesia defense is bogus. Readers do not need to take a course in psychiatry and “repressed memory” to judge whether or not Sirhan has been lying when he says he cannot remember shooting Robert Kennedy.

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. Still, the first demonstrable lie about his memory lapse occurred when he said he could not remember writing in his notebooks, "RFK Must Die." It was clear to American Civil Liberties Union lawyer A. L. Wirin, who visited the accused assassin in jail shortly after the shooting, that Sirhan in fact remembered his notebooks contained incriminating evidence. The morning after the assassination, Sirhan asked Wirin to tell his mother to "tidy up his room," which Wirin interpreted as asking his mother to get rid of the notebooks that proved premeditation.[\[25\]](#)

In a subsequent conversation with Robert Blair Kaiser, Sirhan's amnesiac defense crumbled again 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."[\[26\]](#)

Sirhan's explanation of having no memory of the shooting was also in direct contradiction to documentary evidence compiled by Michael McCowan, another Sirhan defense investigator during the 1969 trial. In 1995, Dan Moldea reported that Sirhan told McCowan of the moment when his eyes met Kennedy's just before he shot him. Shocked by what Sirhan had just admitted, McCowan asked, "Then why, Sirhan, didn't you shoot him between the eyes?" With no hesitation and no apparent remorse, Sirhan replied, "Because that son of a bitch turned his head at the last second."[\[27\]](#)

In 2011 McCowan produced a manuscript of notes Sirhan made in his own hand. This new evidence effectively destroyed the amnesia defense Sirhan continually raised at his parole hearings. The historically-important manuscript shows, clearly and vividly, that Sirhan did in fact remember the events of 4/5 June 1968, directly refuting his defense that he suffered from amnesia and/or was hypnotized and then programmed to not remember. Though he perhaps drank too much that night, the behavior described in this manuscript was controlled and intentional.[\[28\]](#)

### Myth No. 5: The "Girl in the Polka-dot Dress"

Conspiracy-minded authors have long promoted the notion that Sirhan's "handler" that evening was a young woman wearing a polka-dot dress. The myth has been repeated for decades despite compelling evidence to the contrary that emerged, indicating that San Serrano, the "star witness" for the polka-dot story, simply heard outraged expressions of distress at the assassination of yet another Kennedy or, alternatively, embellished her story. The polka-dot girl story is, essentially, a red herring. The LAPD had no choice but to investigate the story lest the police be accused of a cover-up. Unfortunately that decision gave the story unwarranted credence.

Evidence in the FBI files confirms that even if Serrano was telling the truth about her encounter—hearing the exclamation "We shot him!" right after the assassination—this statement amounted to nothing more than an innocent cry of anguish. Serrano's well-publicized story is a glaring example of how easily twisted words can often distort the truth.

The words Serrano heard do not necessarily suggest co-conspirators acted in concert with Sirhan. According to the FBI's interview of eyewitness, Albert Victor Ellis, who also heard a

female voice state, "We shot him," Ellis immediately assumed this person collectively meant "the American people" when she said "we." Ellis then went out into the lobby of the Ambassador Hotel, according to the FBI, where numerous people were milling around, and heard others say something to the same effect, viz., that "We shot him" meant people in general were the cause of Senator Kennedy being shot.[\[29\]](#)

Similarly, Laurie Gail Porter, the daughter of California State Senatorial candidate Shelley Porter, was in the Embassy Room during RFK's victory speech. After hearing the shots from about 50 feet away, according to her FBI interview, she heard her friend Robin Casden shout, "We shot him." Porter in fact recalled "several people shouted 'We shot him' and she attributed the exclamation to the hysterical nature of the situation." For that matter, even Serrano herself admitted to police officers that the polka-dot girl's outcry could have meant that "we the people" assassinated Kennedy.[\[30\]](#)

Putting aside the interpretation of the overheard exclamation, RFK assassination investigators also discovered many flaws in Serrano's story. On 8 June 1968 FBI agents questioned her parents, Manuel and Amparo Serrano, who said their daughter had not said anything about a girl in a polka-dot dress claiming responsibility for the assassination. When asked later why she did not mention the polka-dot girl to her mother, Serrano explained that she had always had trouble talking to her mother.[\[31\]](#)

Other aspects of Serrano's story were also challenged by two government workers, deputy district attorney John J. Ambrose and fire department captain Cecil R. Lynch.

Deputy DA Ambrose had been approached by Serrano shortly after the shooting. He told FBI investigators a few days after the assassination that Serrano said she had been, ". . . *walking down the hall* [emphasis added] when a man and woman approached her from the opposite direction. Both were walking and the girl stated 'We just shot him.' Serrano then inquired what the girl meant by this and the girl stated, 'We just shot Senator Kennedy.'" Serrano later changed her story to say she had been *sitting on the stairs of a fire escape* [emphasis added] when the couple said they had shot Kennedy.[\[32\]](#)

Serrano's later account was also contradicted by Lynch, the fire department captain, who had been on duty at the Ambassador checking fire escapes and exits. He had inspected the stairs Serrano claimed she had been sitting on. He said no one was on the stairs at the time she indicated.[\[33\]](#)

Additionally, an FBI agent took Serrano to the Embassy Ballroom and told her, "On television, with [NBC correspondent] Sandy Vanocur, you didn't say anything about seeing a girl and two men going up the fire stairs. You only said you saw a girl and a man coming down. And later you told the police you saw two men and a girl going up together and one of them was Sirhan Sirhan. That was the most significant thing you had to tell the police and yet you didn't say anything about this in your first interview, your interview on television." Serrano said "I can't explain why."[\[34\]](#)

The lack of veracity in Serrano's polka-dot girl story did not prevent Pease from repeating it and adding further mystery by claiming the polka-dot girl had met Sirhan at a shooting range the day before the assassination. The range master, Everett Buckner, had originally told police that a "blonde" woman at the range had spoken to Sirhan and said, "God damn you, you son of a bitch. Get out of here or they will recognize us."[\[35\]](#)

The “blonde girl” was Claudia Williams; she was a barmaid in the San Gabriel Valley with a husband and two children. Police tracked her down and interviewed her. She said Sirhan had simply shown her how to use her new gun. Police then confronted Buckner with her story and he retracted it saying he heard a woman say something to Sirhan but he didn’t know what it was.[\[36\]](#)

Pease attempts to prove that Williams was not the woman who allegedly spoke to Sirhan in order to bolster Buckner’s original story. Her attempts to promote the idea, however, that Buckner was correct all along fail. Witness statements by Henry Carreon, Ronald and Claudia Williams, David Montellano, and Charles Kendall are in sync with the times police said Sirhan spent at the gun range and that he was there at the same time as the Williamses.[\[37\]](#)

### Myth No. 6: The Non-Political Sirhan

Pease’s attempts to portray Sirhan as a mild-mannered, non-violent, and apolitical individual destroys what’s left of her credibility. She quotes six acquaintances of Sirhan’s—including his gas-station boss, Jack Davies, a co-worker at the station, Sidney McDaniel, and his landscape-gardener boss, William Beveridge—all of whom characterize Sirhan as non-violent, polite, and mild-mannered. The same selective and sentimentalized characterization could be applied to just about every assassin in American history.

Her description of Sirhan is risible. The author willfully ignores the statements made by many Sirhan family friends and work colleagues who painted a completely different picture of the assassin. These witnesses unequivocally describe Sirhan as a “highly political” person.

Amongst the many descriptions of Sirhan by those who knew him well include those of his brothers Munir, Sharif, and Adel, friends Walter Crowe, William A. Spaniard, Lou Shelby, William Divale and John and Patricia Strathmann, as well as his former boss John Weidner and a former teacher, assistant professor of anthropology Lowell J. Bean. They all agreed that Sirhan was quick-tempered, hated Jews and was intense and emotional whenever he discussed the Arab-Israeli conflict. They all agreed he was vehemently critical of American foreign policy regarding Israel.

His brother Munir said Sirhan was “stubborn” and had “tantrums.” Sirhan was anti-Semitic in his political views and also espoused a belief in violent action as a political tool. He admired the Black Panthers and the Black Muslims and wanted to join their organizations. According to his brother Munir, Sirhan attended the Black Muslim Temple in central Los Angeles until he was told he could not join the organization because he was not black. He did, however, purchase some Black Muslim literature.[\[38\]](#)

William A. Spaniard, a twenty-four-year-old Pasadena friend of Sirhan’s, said the young Palestinian was “a taciturn individual.” Fellow students at Pasadena College concurred—sort of. They characterized Sirhan as not only “taciturn” but also “surly,” “hard to get to know,” and “withdrawn and alone.” One of his professors saw Sirhan and another student have an argument that “almost became a fist fight.” He said Sirhan had “an almost uncontrollable temper.”[\[39\]](#)

As a young adult, Sirhan sought meaning by embracing anti-Semitism, anti-Americanism, and Palestinian nationalism. Sirhan’s parents taught him the Jews were “evil,”

“stole their home,” and they also taught him to hate, despise, and fear Jews. As a part-time gardener Sirhan came to hate the Jews whose gardens he tended. He referred to them as “f . . . Jews” and “goddamn Zionists.”[\[40\]](#)

Sirhan’s brother Adel said his brother became angry with television reports of the Arab-Israeli conflict and would, “walk across the room with a sour face very fast and get away.” Another brother, Sharif, told Egyptian journalist Mahmoud Abel-Hadi that, following the broadcast of an RFK pro-Israel speech on television, “he [Sirhan] left the room putting his hands on his ears and almost weeping.”[\[41\]](#)

Walter Crowe, who had known Sirhan from the time they were teenagers said Sirhan was virulently anti-Semitic and also espoused a belief in violent action as a political tool. Crowe said Mary Sirhan propagated these views to Sirhan.[\[42\]](#)

Crowe believed *al-Fatah*’s terrorist acts were justified and that Palestinian terrorists had gained the respect of the Arab world. He said Sirhan spoke of “total commitment” to the Palestinian cause and took a left-wing position on issues such as racism and the Vietnam War. However, Crowe said, Sirhan was a “reactionary” when it came to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Crowe believed that Sirhan saw himself as a “committed revolutionary” willing to undertake “revolutionary action.” Sirhan was for “violence whenever, as long as it’s needed.” Later Crowe came to feel guilt about the part he may have played in putting ideas of terrorist acts into Sirhan’s head and reinforcing Sirhan’s resolve to commit a violent political act.[\[43\]](#)

Lou Shelby was Adel’s boss and the owner of the Fez Supper Club in Hollywood. He knew the Sirhan family intimately and described Sirhan as “intensely nationalistic with regard to his Arab identity.” According to Shelby, “We had a really big argument on Middle East politics . . . we switched back and forth between Arabic and English. Sirhan’s outlook was completely Arab nationalist—the Arabs were in the right and had made no mistakes. I tried to reason with him and to point out that one could be in the right but still make mistakes. But he was adamant. According to him, America was to blame for the Arabs’ misfortunes—because of the power of Zionism in this country. The only Arab leader he really admired was Nasser and he thought Nasser’s policies were right. The Arabs had to build themselves up and fight Israel—that was the only way.”[\[44\]](#)

John and Patricia Strathmann had been “good friends” with Sirhan since high school. According to John, Sirhan was an admirer of Hitler, especially his treatment of the Jews, and was impressed with Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and the Nazi leader’s “hypnotic control over people.” John also said Sirhan became “intense” and “mad” about the Arab/Israeli Six Day War just a year earlier. Sirhan’s friend Elsie Boyko said Sirhan had always been intense and emotional whenever he discussed the Arab-Israeli conflict and was critical of American foreign policy regarding Israel.[\[45\]](#)

Sirhan discussed politics, religion, and philosophy with his boss, John Weidner, a committed Christian. Weidner was honored by Israel for his heroism in saving more than 1,000 people from the Nazis. Sirhan worked for Weidner from September 1967 to March 1968. It was Sirhan’s touchiness, arrogance, feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, and resentment of authority that caused friction between the employer and employee. Weidner described Sirhan as “a hot-tempered man” with “fantasies.” “He had strong patriotic feelings for his country [Palestine],” Weidner said.[\[46\]](#)

Weidner also confirmed that Sirhan “hated Jews . . . because of their power and their material wealth . . . they had taken his country from his people who were now refugees.”[\[47\]](#)

The notion that Sirhan never held any animus towards Robert Kennedy is entirely without foundation as Sirhan’s friends and Sirhan himself revealed. According to one of his lawyers at the trial, “[Sirhan] was disturbed that both his mother and his brothers did not see Senator Kennedy as the same destructive and malevolent and dangerous person as Sirhan perceived him to be; and I gather that he and his family, his mother and brothers, had some arguments about this.”[\[48\]](#)

Sirhan thought RFK would be, “like his brother the president, and help the Arabs but, “Hell, he f . . . up. That’s all he did. . . . He asked for it. He should have been smarter than that. You know, the Arabs had emotions. He knew how they felt about it. But, hell, he didn’t have to come out right at the f . . . time when the Arab-Israeli war erupted.”[\[49\]](#)

Sirhan also expressed hatred for Robert Kennedy to John Shear, an assistant to trainer Gordon Bowsher at the Santa Anita Racetrack. Shear recalled that the newly hired Sirhan heard a co-worker read aloud a newspaper account of Robert Kennedy recommending the allocation of arms to Israel. “Sol just went crazy,” Shear said. “He was normally very quiet, but he just went into a rage when he heard the story.”[\[50\]](#)

### No Decency

Lisa Pease adheres closely to the conspiracists’ playbook: admit to none of the available, credible evidence while spewing uncorroborated speculation as fact, all in the service of fingering a preferred and predetermined culprit.

To help persuade readers of an immense conspiracy, the reputations of innocent people are besmirched, yet that is of no consequence. Thane Eugene Cesar was an armed security guard in the pantry caught up in the mayhem of the shooting as he stood behind RFK. In Pease’s hands, though, Cesar was likely the assassin hired by Maheu and the CIA because he also allegedly worked for Hughes Aircraft, including in the 1970s. That seems awfully tiny compensation for a supposedly successful assassin: Good job Thane, and here’s some more security guard work for you.[\[51\]](#)

Pease isn’t the first to make unfounded allegations about Cesar, of course, in keeping with the derivative nature of and recyclables in her book. Still, her treatment is so noxious one is reminded of the Boston lawyer Joseph N. Welch, who spontaneously confronted Senator Joseph McCarthy with these words, “Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?”

Pease has none, of that there is no doubt. What is truly disconcerting though is that her ridiculous book and bullying tactics have won her an undeserved hearing in *The Washington Post* and on KTLA in Los Angeles. That is nothing short of astonishing.

The University of Nebraska Press/Potomac Books will publish a new edition of Mel Ayton's [\*The Forgotten Terrorist: Sirhan Sirhan and the Assassination of Robert F Kennedy\*](#) in May. It features a foreword by Harvard Law professor emeritus Alan Dershowitz.

[1] Mel Ayton, "[RFK Assassination: New Revelations from the FBI's 'Kensalt' Files](#)," *HNN*, 23 May 2008; Ayton, "[It's Good to See the Mainstream Media Debunking Conspiracy Claims, But Where Were They Years Ago When RFK's Death Became Fodder for Nutty Stories?](#)" *HNN*, 17 September 2017; Ayton, "[Who Killed RFK? Sirhan Sirhan Did It](#)." *HNN*, 4 June 2018.

[2] Most of the anomalies in the collation and collection of the evidence in the case, particularly with regard to the ballistics evidence and alleged evidence that extra bullets had been discovered in the pantry door frames, were cleared up by Dan E. Moldea in his highly acclaimed book, *The Killing of Robert F. Kennedy: An Investigation of Motive, Means, and Opportunity* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995). See also [Moldea.com](#) on the 50th anniversary of Senator Kennedy's murder.

[3] Tom Jackman, "[CIA May Have Used Contractor Who Inspired 'Mission: Impossible' to Kill RFK, New Book Alleges](#)," *Washington Post*, 9 February 2019. Earlier, Jackman wrote credulous, conspiracy-themed articles about the assassination, including one about RFK Jr.'s assassination theories. See Jackman, "[The Assassination of Bobby Kennedy: Was Sirhan Sirhan Hypnotized to be the Fall Guy?](#)" *Washington Post*, 4 June 2018; Jackman, "[Who Killed Bobby Kennedy? His Son RFK Jr. Doesn't Believe It Was Sirhan Sirhan](#)," *Washington Post*, 5 June 2018; Jackman, "[Did L.A. Police and Prosecutors Bungle the Bobby Kennedy Assassination Probe?](#)" *Washington Post*, 5 June 2018. Before these articles appeared Jackman interviewed me for an hour over the telephone, and I patiently explained to him the context for each issue raised by conspiracy theorists. Very little of what I told him was included in the articles.

Pease cites two additional sources, besides Meier, to support the allegation that Maheu was involved in the assassination. Both corroborations amount to hearsay three times removed.

[4] See Charles Roberts, *Tax-Haven Tales: Kooks, Crooks, and Con Men in the Offshore World* (Laissez Faire Books, 2012). Roberts's characterization of Meier is seconded and corroborated by an investigative journalist for *Maclean's*, a leading Canadian magazine, and two authors, Sally Denton and Roger Morris in *The Money and the Power: The Making of Las Vegas and Its Hold on America, 1947-2000* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

[5] Pease, *Lie Too Big to Fail*, 285

[6] *Ibid.*, 140.

- [7] Jackman, "[Who Killed Bobby Kennedy?](#)" *Washington Post*.
- [8] Ron Kessler, "[Expert Discounts RFK 2d-Gun Theory](#)," *Washington Post*, 19 December 1974.
- [9] Frank Buckley, "[Vincent DiPierro, RFK Assassination Witness](#)," KTLA Television, Los Angeles, 3 January 2018.
- [10] FBI interview of Mrs. Freddy Plimpton, 1 July 1968, Kensalt Files.
- [11] Thomas F. Kranz, "[Robert F. Kennedy Assassination: Report to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Independent Investigation](#)," Section, 2, 3: Conspiracy Theories, Analysis, Investigation, Recommendations, 5.

Additionally, one witness disputes whether Schulman was even in the pantry at the time of the shooting. See Robert Blair Kaiser, "*R.F.K. Must Die!*": *Chasing the Mystery of the Robert Kennedy Assassination* (New York: Overlook Press, 2008), 361.

[12] [Michael O'Dell](#) was a technical adviser to the National Academy of Sciences's so-called "Ramsey Panel," which investigated the JFK acoustics evidence. O'Dell believes Van Praag's conclusions that 13 or 14 gunshots can be identified on the audio tape cannot be accepted as "scientific proof." O'Dell maintains that Van Praag's methods, by his own admission, are untested and unverified, and that Van Praag erroneously assumes that every sound that might be a gunshot actually is. Lastly, Van Praag has resisted allowing other analysts to review or test his results and methods. Reproducibility, of course, is a fundamental feature of any scientific finding. "At this point," O'Dell wrote, "it would be completely improper for anyone to accept Van Praag's claims as meaningful science or as proof of multiple guns used in the RFK shooting." Michael O'Dell, "Review of Philip van Praag's Declaration Regarding the Pruszynski Tape," 20 November 2011; O'Dell email to author, 28 May 2018.

O'Dell's criticisms of Van Praag's research are seconded by Steve Barber in "[The Robert F. Kennedy Assassination: The Acoustics Evidence](#)," *HNN*, 25 March 2007.

- [13] Pease, *Lie Too Big to Fail*, 502.
- [14] Philip Harrison email to author, 31 May 2018.
- [15] Ayton, "[RFK Assassination](#)," *HNN*, 23 May 2008.
- [16] Mel Ayton, "[CNN's Conspiracy Bias in the Robert F. Kennedy Assassination](#)," *HNN*, 7 May 2012.
- [17] Dominic Streatfeild, *Brainwash: The Secret History Of Mind Control* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007), 177.

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[18] Cole Moreton, "[Magic? It Can Make You Go Mad](#)," *The Mail on Sunday*, 11 March 2018, 7.

[19] Jackman, "[The Assassination of Bobby Kennedy](#)," *Washington Post*, 4 June 2018.

[20] Kathy Pezdek, Kimberly Finger, and Danelle Hodge, "Planting False Childhood Memories: The Role of Event Plausibility," *Psychological Science*, Vol. 8, No. 6, November 1997, 437-441; S. Porter et al., "Memory for Murder: A Psychological Perspective on Dissociative Amnesia in Legal Contexts," *International Journal of Law & Psychiatry*, 2001 Jan-Feb: Vol. 24, No. 1, 23-42.

[21] John Marks, *The Search for the "Manchurian Candidate": The CIA and Mind Control* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); Ronen Bergman, *Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations* (New York: Random House, 2018), 120.

[22] Robert Blair Kaiser, "*R.F.K. Must Die!*": *A History of the Robert Kennedy Assassination and Its Aftermath* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970), 514.

[23] "[Report and Recommendations of Magistrate Judge Andrew J. Wistrich](#)," 28 December 2012.

[24] Alan J. Parkin, *Memory and Amnesia: An Introduction* (London: Psychology Press, 1997), 175.

[25] Kaiser, "*R.F.K. Must Die!*", 94.

[26] *Ibid.*, 518

[27] Dan E. Moldea, *The Killing of Robert F. Kennedy: An Investigation of Motive, Means, and Opportunity* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 326.

[28] "[Handwritten Notes by Robert F. Kennedy Assassin Sirhan Sirhan Shed New Light on Killer](#)," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 2011.

[29] FBI interview of Albert Victor Ellis, 20 June 1968, Kensalt Files.

[30] FBI interview of Laurie Gail Porter, 14 June 1968, Kensalt Files.

[31] Kaiser, "*R.F.K. Must Die!*", 125.

[32] FBI interview of John J. Ambrose, 10 June 1968, Kensalt Files.

[33] Robert A. Houghton, *Special Unit Senator: The Investigation of the Assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy* (New York: Random House 1970), 123.

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- [34] Kaiser, “*R.F.K. Must Die!*”, 125.
- [35] Pease, *Lie Too Big to Fail*, 119.
- [36] Kaiser, “*R.F.K. Must Die!*”, 156.
- [37] Houghton, *Special Unit Senator*, 114, 115, 208.
- [38] Kaiser, “*R.F.K. Must Die!*”, 214.
- [39] Godfrey Jansen, *Why Robert Kennedy Was Killed: The Story of Two Victims* (New York: The Third Press, 1970), 121-123; FBI Airtel to LA (56-156) from SAC (62-5481), 21 June 1968, Kensalt Files.
- [40] Mel Ayton, [\*The Forgotten Terrorist: Sirhan Sirhan and the Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy\*](#) (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2019), 49-71.
- [41] Kaiser, “*R.F.K. Must Die!*”, 214.
- [42] Houghton, *Special Unit Senator*, 165.
- [43] Kaiser, “*R.F.K. Must Die!*”, 254.
- [44] Jansen, *Why Robert Kennedy Was Killed*, 138-139.
- [45] Houghton, *Special Unit Senator*, 231-232.
- [46] Jansen, *Why Robert Kennedy Was Killed*, 134.
- [47] “[Merchant Played Hero Role In War](#),” Los Angeles *Daily Mirror*, 23 June 1957.
- [48] Jansen, *Why Robert Kennedy Was Killed*, 195.
- [49] Kaiser, “*R.F.K. Must Die!*”, 270.
- [50] Larry Bortstein, “Guard Has a Leg Up on Opening Day,” *Orange County Register*, 24 December 2006.
- [51] Pease, *Lie Too Big to Fail*, 7 11 16-17, 37-38, 213-221, 272-276, 306, 311-315, 339, 345-346, 493-498.