

Mr. Pollak

September 17, 1968.
JMF:svh

J. Harold Flannery

James Earl Ray, Subject;
Martin Luther King, Jr., Victim.
Conspiracy Against Rights
CIVIL RIGHTS

I

I interviewed Bill Sartor in connection with the captioned matter for about four hours on August 22, 1968. He had been identified to me in June by Jesse Epps as a reporter who had been inquiring into the possible existence of a conspiracy to assassinate Dr. King. At Mr. Epps' request I met Sartor then briefly, and he gave me bits and pieces of information and rumors about the killing that he had accumulated to that point. His interest had been aroused, he said, by the firm conviction among many Negroes in Memphis that there was a conspiracy possibly involving some members of the Memphis Police Department. My conversation with him in June is set out in part II, below.

Sartor lives at 1242 Kirk Circle in Greenville, Mississippi (phone 335-3272), with his wife and one or two children. He is a contract writer for Time, Inc., and he has covered Memphis, particularly racial matters, since before the Sanitation Workers strike. He appears to be known and trusted by those Negro leaders in Memphis with whom I have talked (Epps, Trotter, Rev. Jackson, Rev. Bell, etc.), and he says that he is close to the (former) Mayor Ingram faction of the white community. I attach a copy of his latest piece on Memphis which appeared in the August 16, 1968, issue of Time.

I can not evaluate Sartor's reliability or that of his sources, but he is a "low key" fellow who is not apparently irrational or fanciful. He says he

approached the allegations of a conspiracy with skepticism (which I doubt), but that he is now largely persuaded there was one. He declines (for the moment) to identify his sources, with three unimportant exceptions, beyond saying that they include four or five petty racketeers in Memphis, New Orleans, and elsewhere and one well placed protege of Carlos Marcellos in New Orleans.

He comes to us, he says, primarily to assist in ascertaining the truth, but also with the expectation or hope that we will feed investigative results back to him. If that is not possible, he would like to be given the story first or, failing that, no later than anyone else. He has been spending most of his time on this since the assassination, but can not go much farther because some his sources have begun to ask for the kind of money or protection that he is unable to provide.

Charlie Stein, a petty racketeer connected with organized crime, contacted James Earl Ray in Los Angeles and told him that there were people in New Orleans whom he ought to talk to. Whether Stein happened upon Ray or sought him out knowing that he needed money and was an escaped prisoner is not known, but Ray was told that the people he ought to talk to would help him with money and his fugitive status.

Ray's contacts in New Orleans were with Mafia-Cosa Nostra representatives who referred him to Frank Leberto (or ~~Liberto~~), a Memphis racketeer and lieutenant of Carlos Marcellos, the Southern Mafia chieftan in New Orleans. Leberto owns or works at the Scott Street Produce Market where John Ferron, of Somerville allegedly overheard a man speaking on the telephone say, on or about the day of the assassination: "Shoot him on the balcony, shoot him anywhere; and go to New Orleans for your money, don't come back here."

According to Sartor's informants, the Cosa Nostra agreed to "broker" or to arrange the assassination, for an amount somewhat in excess of three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000), after they were contacted in the Northeast (New Jersey or Pennsylvania), by representatives of "Forever White", an elite organization of wealthy

segregationists with officers or subgroups in seven Southern states. The Mafia's (which Sartor used interchangeably with Cosa Nostra throughout the interview) interest was less the money than the investment-type opportunity presented, i.e., to get in a position to extract (or extort) governmental or other favors from some well placed Southern white persons, including the KKK and White Citizens Councils. Quitman, Mississippi, was said by Sartor to be a possible base of "Forever White's" operations.

Claude Cockrell, allegedly a Memphis segregationist, extortionist, narcotics pusher, and petty racketeer, may have been a contact between the Mafia and "Forever White." In any event, he is thought to have gone to Miami, Florida, between April 14 and 24, 1968, where he may have picked up money to be delivered to Philadelphia or New Jersey. Cockrell also may have been instrumental in getting Ray out of Memphis after the assassination either by truck (according to Sartor's New Orleans informants) or in Cockrell's private plane, which is said to use a private landing strip at Millington and which is piloted by one Joe Schafer.

According to Sartor, Joe Cacaceci (ph.) and Larry Mann (aka. Larry Manning and Larry Ann), two professional killers, are also involved. Joe Cacaceci allegedly met James Earl Ray at a Lion Service Station in Memphis the day of or the night before the shooting. Larry Mann has been saying that he works for Frank Lebarto and is responsible for "getting" James Earl Ray. According to one of Sartor's New Orleans informants, James Earl Ray was seen at, or stayed at, the Pontotoc Hotel in Memphis approximately three days before the shooting.

The original plan was that Ray would be arrested immediately after the shooting, tried, and acquitted. There was a change, however, perhaps as late as an hour before the shooting, due to a mix-up involving the money. Either the Mafia wanted Ray at large until the balance of the price was paid or, more likely, says Sartor, the money was still in the North and the shares of those in

Memphis (Leberto and others) had not been paid, and it was they who wanted Ray at large as a lever on higher-ups in the rackets.

In any event, Sartor's informants claim that Ray's escape from Memphis was engineered with the connivance of several Memphis police officers who knew of the plot. After the money problem was resolved, Ray deliberately permitted himself to be arrested in London with the understanding that he will be acquitted in Memphis. However, another story has it that he will be killed in a holocaust which will endanger a large number of lives.

Two aspects of the foregoing information persuade Sartor of its accuracy. First, he has received identical fragments of information independently from different sources. Secondly, several of his sources in Memphis and New Orleans have told him that agents of Bureau and non-Bureau Justice Department representatives, including a man named (FRU) Voight, have interviewed them about the assassination.

Sartor took me to meet Pat Lyons who, according to Sartor, is a petty gambler with sources of information close to Frank Leberto. In my presence, Lyons repeated to Sartor that, according to "Ernie" (Lyons did not give a last name), Ray met Joe Cacaceci at a Lion Service Station on the night before or the day of the shooting. Lyons expressed concern for the safety of his wife and children; I did not comment or ask him any questions. He also said that the "talk" was that Ray would be acquitted.

Sartor says that his informants will probably be willing to talk to us, but that they will ask for money, immunity, or protection or all three. Because Sartor wants us to contact his principal informants through him, he declined to identify any contacts except Lyons, Rev. Carl Basinger and Memphis policeman E. L. Redditt, below.

An additional, apparently unrelated, piece of information furnished by Sartor was that a little Negro

boy allegedly heard a shot and saw a man jump up from the bushes behind the rooming house (below the window area from which the shot is thought to have been fired) and run off. According to Sartor, the little boy has been identified and interviewed by Bureau agents and the Memphis Police Department.

II

During our first conversation, on June 12, 1968, Sartor gave me the following fragments of allegations and information:

1. Shortly after the killing, a bartender overheard some Memphis policemen say that there had been a "slip-up," and that the assassination was originally scheduled to take place after the march for which Dr. King had returned to Memphis. When I asked Sartor about this in August, he said that one of his New Orleans informants had also referred to a similar change in plans.

2. A minister, identified by Sartor in August as Rev. Carl ~~Basinger~~, 1617 E. Moreland, Memphis, was advised by a ranking officer in the Memphis Police Department (captain or above) not to go near Dr. King because something was going to happen to him.

3. According to former Mayor Ingram (although my notes are not clear as to whether Sartor got this directly from him), a civilian was seen lying in the back of a police car immediately after the shooting, and near Mulberry or Huling he got out of the police car, into another car, and was driven away. Sartor had nothing further on this in August.

4. John McFerren, the Negro civil rights activist from Somerville, Tennessee, overheard part of a telephone conversation at the Scott Street Produce Market in which the speaker allegedly made the comments noted above. Shortly thereafter, McFerren was visited,

for no apparent reason, by a man named Powers from New Orleans. Sartor had nothing further on this in August.

5. An unidentified Negro policeman was moved from his assignment at the Fire Station (and Police Tactical Unit Station) at about 5:00 p.m. on the day of the assassination. According to Sartor, the Dispatcher told the policeman to move two or three times during the afternoon, but he did not do so until explicitly advised to that effect by a superior. In August, Sartor identified the policeman as E. E. Redditt and said that Redditt had broken off an interview with Sartor after starting to discuss his move from the station.

6. Two Negro firemen were moved from the station a day or two before the shooting. One of them has reportedly told friends that, two or three days before Dr. King was shot, a telescope or binoculars were set up on a tripod in the fire station and focused on the Lorraine Motel balcony. In August, Sartor said that one fireman left the Department or was suspended shortly after the shooting, and that he has been unable to locate either of them. He did not have their names.

7. Memphis Chief of Detectives, W. P. Houston, called the Lorraine Motel in the early afternoon of April 4 and spoke to a maid named Delores (LNU). He inquired about stationing detectives there, and the maid said that the manager would call back. He did not; nor did Houston. Sartor says that former Mayor Ingram provided this information.

Sartor was unable during either interview to relate the foregoing allegations to his conspiracy theory, but he says that some of it, and other information possessed by former Mayor Ingram concerning corruption in the Police Department, suggest that a number of officers may have known of or participated in the conspiracy--because they were bribed or feared exposure.

I told Sartor that I would report his information to my superiors.