

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

Ray Wears Many Faces In Author's Portrait

By RICHARD LENTZ
Portrait of a murderer, sketched in a motel room last night: James Earl Ray — psychotic, inept but with a catlike instinct for landing on his feet, a racist and political extremist, a loser who in a twisted way found success.

"Ray's life really began when he killed Martin Luther King," said author Gerold Frank. "Every history book will have to mention his name."

Mr. Frank talked with reporters for more than two hours at the Holiday Inn-Rivermont on the first leg of a national tour to plug his book on the slaying in Memphis of Dr. King, "An American Death."

The inevitable question concerned conspiracy. "No hand came out of the darkness to

help him (Ray)," said Mr. Frank.

Ray's hatred of blacks and his right-wing extremism are the "best-kept secrets of the case," said the author.

"Ray had an almost obsessive hatred of blacks," he said. "When he was in Leavenworth (prison) he had a chance to go to a halfway house where he'd get great privileges. He turned it down because it was integrated."

John Jay Hooker Sr. was suggested by Texas attorney Percy Foreman as the lawyer who should defend Ray in Tennessee courts but Ray refused because John Jay Hooker Jr. got the majority of black votes when he ran for governor of Tennessee, said Mr. Frank.

"Ray pretended not to be political. He was convinced if Wallace was elected (in the

1968 presidential campaign) that Wallace would pardon him."

But political extremism and racism aren't the only motives, said Mr. Frank. Ray came from a tragedy-ridden family almost dismantled by society and circumstances. "Ray had a score to settle with society as far as he could see. And here was King, a black man and a Noble Prize winner . . ."

A \$50 reward was placed on

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

PAGE 35

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Ray after his escape from a Missouri prison and he had nothing to lose by killing the civil rights leader, said Mr. Frank.

"He knew if he was caught just having an ice cream cone he'd go back to prison for the rest of his life anyway. If he killed King, he'd go back as one of the Ten Most Wanted, one of the elite. Now, at Brushy Mountain (state prison), he's a celebrity, he has his own radio and TV. He's now in the only society he'd made it in."

And Ray told one of his brothers that he's "no worse off in the Tennessee prison than he was ... at Missouri State Prison," said Mr. Frank.

Conspiracy theories have been fueled by the well-documented series of Ray's failures at crime, the writer indicated. "We only know about his failures. We underestimate him."



Gerold Frank
—Staff Photo

Ray exhibited "ineptness, but (also) a jungle (animal)-like ability to land on his feet," he said.