

1968

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NANA-LOMAX-KING

(NATIONAL)

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DRAGGING FEET?

FBI CAN'T KEEP STORIES STRAIGHT
IN INVESTIGATION OF KING'S MURDER

PRECEDE: IS THE FBI BUNGLING THE INVESTIGATION OF CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.? IT WOULD APPEAR SO FROM THIS, THE FOURTH IN A SERIES BY FAMED NEGRO REPORTER LOUIS LOMAX, NOW RETRACING THE STEPS OF JAMES EARL RAY ON HIS JOURNEYS WITH HOLLYWOOD SONGWRITER CHARLES STEIN FROM LOS ANGELES TO NEW ORLEANS. THE FBI HAS BEEN FORCED TO ADMIT THAT FINGERPRINTS, CIRCULATED AS THOSE OF RAY, WERE IN FACT OF SOMEONE ELSE. THIS IS BUT ONE OF A SERIES OF CONTRADICTIONS AND CONFUSIONS EMANATING FROM THE FEDERAL AGENCY.

BY LOUIS LOMAX

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SAN ANTONIO, TEX., APRIL 29 (NANA)--AN FBI SEARCH OF THE 1966 WHITE MUSTANG DRIVEN BY JAMES EARL RAY, ALIAS STARVO GALT, AND THE ALLEGED SLAYER OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., UNEARTHED GREEN STAMPS THAT WERE ISSUED AS A RESULT OF A PURCHASE AT A BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA GAS STATION IN MID-FEBRUARY OF 1968. THIS REPORTER LEARNED OF THE GREEN STAMPS WHILE HERE IN SAN ANTONIO AND WAS ABLE TO CONFIRM THE ITEM BY TELEPHONE. THE BIRMINGHAM GAS STATION OWNER SAID THE STAMPS WERE ISSUED AT HIS STATION, AND HE ALSO IDENTIFIED A PICTURE OF RAY AS THAT OF THE MAN INVOLVED IN THE TRANSACTION. THE STATION OWNER RECALLS THE TRANSACTION BECAUSE THE WHITE MUSTANG HAD A CLUTCH PROBLEM.

FBI REPORTS CONSISTENTLY PLACE RAY IN LOS ANGELES AS A STUDENT AT DANCING AND BARTENDING SCHOOLS AT THE TIME OF THE GAS STATION TRANSACTION. HOWEVER, THESE REPORTS ARE BOLDLY CHALLENGED BY THE STATEMENT OF THE BIRMINGHAM GAS STATION OWNER. THIS IS BUT ONE OF A SERIES OF DISTURBING CONTRADICTIONS AND APPARENT "FBI" DISTORTIONS OF FACTS DISCOVERED DURING THIS REPORTER'S FOUR-DAY RETRACING OF RAY'S DECEMBER, 1967 AUTOMOBILE TRIP FROM LOS ANGELES TO NEW ORLEANS. RAY MADE THE TRIP ON DEC. 15 WITH THE HOLLYWOOD SONGWRITER CHARLES STEIN AS A DRIVING COMPANION. STEIN IS MAKING THE DRIVE OVER THE SAME ROUTE WITH THIS REPORTER.

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THE FBI REPORTS INDICATE THAT CIGARETTE AND ASHES WERE FOUND IN THE ASH TRAY AND ON THE FLOOR OF THE WHITE MUSTANG WHEN IT WAS RECOVERED IN ATLANTA, GA. I HAVE BEEN ON THE ROAD WITH STEIN, RAY'S DECEMBER DRIVING COMPANION FOR TWO DAYS AND HE DISTINCTLY RECALLS THAT RAY DID NOT SMOKE.

THE FBI REPORTS INDICATE THAT RAY WAS IN LOS ANGELES UNTIL MARCH 27TH; HE IS REPORTED TO HAVE BOUGHT THE FATAL WEAPON IN BIRMINGHAM, ALA., ON MARCH 30TH. THIS REPORTER DISCLOSED LAST WEEK THAT RAY DELIVERED A PACKAGE TO THE NEW ORLEANS FAMILY OF ONE OF HIS HOLLYWOOD GIRL FRIENDS DURING HIS LAST WEEK THERE. THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS, THEN, IS CLEARLY IMPOSSIBLE. THE FBI INTERVIEWED THE FAMILY FOLLOWING MY DISCLOSURE OF THE INCIDENT AND CONFIRMED THAT RAY HAD DELIVERED THE PACKAGE. THE TRIP FROM LOS ANGELES TO BIRMINGHAM VIA NEW ORLEANS IS IN EXCESS OF 2,500 MILES. RAY COULD NOT HAVE DRIVEN THAT ROUTE, PARTICULARLY IN A MUSTANG IN THE SHORT PERIOD BETWEEN MARCH 27TH AND MARCH 30TH. THERE IS AN OUTSIDE CHANCE THAT THE TRIP COULD HAVE BEEN ACCOMPLISHED IF RAY HAD A DRIVING COMPANION AS HE DID IN DECEMBER. THERE HAVE BEEN NO INDICATIONS THAT HE DID HAVE A COMPANION.

--CONTRADICTIONS--

THESE CONTRADICTIONS AND CONFUSIONS ARE COMPOUNDED BY OTHERS THAT HAVE OCCURED DURING THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE SLAYING OF DR. KING. THE FBI ISSUED A REPORT THAT RAY HAD TAKEN DANCING LESSONS IN NEW ORLEANS DURING A TIME THE AGENCY'S OTHER REPORTS AND RECORDS SHOWED THAT RAY WAS IN PRISON.

THE FBI HAS BEEN FORCED TO ADMIT THAT THE FINGERPRINTS, CIRCULATED DURING THE EARLY DAYS OF THE MANHUNT WERE NOT THOSE OF RAY. THE BLAME FOR THIS, ACCORDING TO THE FBI, MUST BE ASSUMED BY THE WARDEN OF THE MISSOURI STATE PENITENTIARY. THE WARDEN, THE FBI CLAIMED, ISSUED MISTAKEN FINGERPRINTS ON RAY WHEN THE CONVICT ESCAPED FROM PRISON IN APRIL, 1967. THIS MEANS TWO THINGS: (1) HAD RAY BEEN ARRESTED AFTER HIS ESCAPE FROM PRISON; HE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN HELD BY THE LOCAL ARRESTING OFFICERS AS A FUGITIVE; (2) HAD RAY BEEN ARRESTED IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE SLAYING OF DR. KING THE MISTAKEN FINGERPRINTS WOULD HAVE CONFUSED THE INVESTIGATION AND POSSIBLY WOULD HAVE LED TO HIS RELEASE.

THE SIGNIFICANT FACT IS THAT THE GEORGIA BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (CAPS G, B, I) HAD MISTAKEN FINGERPRINTS OF RAY UP UNTIL LAST WEDNESDAY. HAD RAY BEEN ARRESTED IN ATLANTA; THEN, ON THE DAY HE PARKED THE WHITE MUSTANG, THE GEORGIA AUTHORITIES WOULD HAVE BEEN ATTEMPTING TO IDENTIFY HIM BY MATCHING HIS FINGERPRINTS AGAINST A SET OF PRINTS THAT BELONGED TO SOMEBODY ELSE.

(MORE)

THEN THERE ARE THE CREDIBLE OMISSIONS THAT WERE DISCOVERED DURING THIS REPORTERS TRIP BACK INTO THE LIFE AND ACTIVITIES OF RAY. APPARENTLY IT NEVER OCCURED TO THE FBI TO RETRACE RAY'S TRIP WITH STEIN AS THIS REPORTER IS DOING IN SEARCH OF THE PHONE BOOTH FROM WHICH RAY MADE HASTY CALLS TO SOMEONE IN NEW ORLEANS. APPARENTLY IT ALSO DID NOT OCCUR TO THE FBI TO INVESTIGATE THE POSSIBILITY THAT RAY WAS IN TELEPHONE CONTACT WITH NEW ORLEANS WHILE HE WAS STILL IN LOS ANGELES. THIS REPORTER LOCATED THE PHONE BOOTH USED BY RAY IN THE LOBBY OF THE ST. FRANCIS HOTEL LAST WEDNESDAY. THE WALLS OF THE BOOTH WERE COVERED WITH GRAFFITI. ONE LINE READ "DOWN WITH MEXICANS; NIGGERS, AND MARTIN LUTHER COON."

--FATAL OVERSIGHT--

THE MOST FATAL OVERSIGHT WAS THE FBI'S FAILURE TO UNCOVER THE CONSOLE TELEVISION SET RAY GAVE TO A HOLLYWOOD GIRL FRIEND IN RETURN FOR HER PORTABLE. THE SWAP OCCURED AROUND VALENTINE'S DAY--FEBRUARY 14--AND RAY TOLD THE GIRL HE WAS LEAVING TOWN. THIS REPORTER FOUND BOTH THE GIRL FRIEND AND THE TELEVISION SET. THE BACK OF THE TELEVISION SET CONTAINED HANDWRITING BELIEVED TO BE THAT OF RAY AND CAN BE MATCHED AGAINST THE GRAFFITI ON THE WALLS OF THE TELEPHONE BOOTH.

A CLEAR READING OF THIS MAKES IT ALL BUT CERTAIN THAT RAY TOOK THREE TRIPS TO NEW ORLEANS BETWEEN DEC. 15 AND THE END OF MARCH. THERE WAS THE TRIP OF DEC. 15 WHICH STEIN AND I ARE NOW RETRACING; THERE WAS A SECOND TRIP THAT BEGAN ON VALENTINE'S DAY. FINALLY THERE WAS THE TRIP THAT BEGAN A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE END OF MARCH AND CULMINATED IN THE DEATH OF DR. KING.

THE VALENTINE'S DAY TRIP EXPLAINS THE GREEN STAMP TRANSACTION IN THE MIDDLE OF FEBRUARY. IT ALSO EXPLAINS THE MYSTERIOUS PHONE CALL TO THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES REQUESTING THAT A DUPLICATE OF "GALT'S" DRIVERS LICENSE BE SENT TO A BIRMINGHAM BOARDING HOUSE. THE LICENSE WAS MAILED ON MARCH 1, THE DAY BEFORE RAY IS ALLEGED TO HAVE GRADUATED FROM A LOS ANGELES DANCING SCHOOL. IT IS CLEAR THAT RAY "DROPPED OUT" FROM THE SCHOOL FOR SEVERAL DAYS TO MAKE THE SECOND TRIP.

THE ONE UNASSAILABLE FACT IS THAT RAY DID MAKE THESE TRIPS. AND THAT HE WAS IN TELEPHONE CONTACT WITH SOMEONE IN NEW ORLEANS. RAY TOLD STEIN THAT HIS CONTACT WAS AN IMPORTANT PERSON, A CONTRACTOR AND BUILDER. THE KEY, THEN, LIES IN LOCATING THE PHONE BOOTH ALONG THE HIGHWAY FROM WHICH THESE CALLS WERE MADE. TELEPHONE COMPANY OFFICIALS BELIEVE THEY CAN TRACE THE CALLS IF THE BOOTH CAN BE LOCATED.

CHARLES STEIN REMEMBERS GRAPHICALLY THE GAS STATION FROM WHICH THE CALLS WERE MADE. WE ARE NOW IN THE GENERAL AREA OF THE STATION. OUR HOPE IS TO LOCATE THESE PHONE BOOTHS BEFORE COMPLETING THE JOURNEY.