

Memorandum

TO : SAC, (44-1987)

DATE: March 25, 1969

FROM : SA WILLIAM H. LAWRENCE

SUBJECT: MURKIN

Reference is made to article on page 12, Memphis Press Scimitar, a local newspaper, issued on Saturday, March 22, 1969 captioned "Thompson's Confidential File on Ray Turned Over to FBI" written by Press Scimitar staff writer ROY HAMILTON. This article stated that the Memphis attorney (RUSSELL H. THOMPSON) whose confidential file on the JAMES EARL RAY case has attracted national attention disclosed today that he has turned over all of his information to the FBI saying his findings indicate the possibility of a conspiracy in the murder of Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING but he declined to make his evidence public.

The article stated that THOMPSON was back in Memphis after spending four days in New York where he made a report on his investigation to the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund as well as to the FBI; that THOMPSON investigated the KING murder after being consulted by RAY's first attorney, ARTHUR J. HANES, before RAY fired HANES and hired PERCY FOREMAN last November.

HAMILTON's story stated that when asked if he had information previously unknown to Federal authorities, THOMPSON replied, "I believe I did. At least they seemed surprised at some of the things I had". THOMPSON added, however, that it would be "erroneous" to conclude that he had definite proof of a conspiracy. He was further quoted as stating, "Looking at it in a totally objective way, I know it would be extremely difficult to mold some of my information into the form of evidence which could be introduced into a court of law. I prefer to reserve my opinion and my judgment until this information can be properly checked and the credibility of various informants properly evaluated". THOMPSON was further reported as saying he did not know at this time what the NAACP Legal Defense Fund planned to do but the article said there had been reports that the organization may call for a new government investigation.

- ① - 44-1987
- 1 - 170-866 (RUSSELL X. THOMPSON)

WHL:jlg
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On Sunday, March 23, 1969, RUSSELL X. THOMPSON who has known the writer for several years called writer at home, stated that he was at home and not at his office; that he was somewhat concerned that the newspaper reporters had stretched out of proportion comments which he had made concerning his turning his files over to the FBI. He pointed out that he had not formerly turned over any written files to the FBI; recalled that back in April he furnished information to SA WILLIAM H. LAWRENCE as well as to Inspector N. E. ZACHARY, then head of the Homicide Division, Memphis, Tennessee Police Department, concerning the so-called "blond Latin" whose name he was not then privileged to disclose who claimed to have information concerning the killing of KING. This information has since been set forth in detail in airtel leads to Denver and New Orleans and has been resolved as not having any bearing on information of evidence with regard to the killing of Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

THOMPSON stated that he was in New York on March 17 - 18, 1969 to discuss his knowledge of the JAMES EARL RAY case with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, also known as NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, which has, in recent years, hired him to represent various Negroes in connection with criminal and civil rights matters in the Memphis, Tennessee, area.

He stated that he has turned over all of his information to them; that the bulk of his information has to do with the visit to his office in early April 1968 of the so-called "blond Latin" and also the information furnished by Fayette County, Tennessee male Negro, JOHN MC FERRIN, a Negro merchant who originally gained notoreity by furnishing information concerning his alleged overhearing a produce dealer in Memphis making a telephone call with regard to the alleged shooting of KING.

THOMPSON recalled that someone in the NAACP Legal Aid Office at New York called the FBI in New York on or about March 17, inviting that office to send a representative to confer and receive information from THOMPSON, but the New York office declined, stating that it did not want to send a representative to a private conference. Later on Tuesday, March 18, 1969, he, THOMPSON, while staying in New York, called the New York office, talked to an Agent whose identity he did not recall, at which time he offered to turn over all information in his possession concerning possible relation to the JAMES EARL RAY case and the KING killing to the FBI at New York. The Agent told him that since he was not familiar with all the ramifications

of the case it would be better if THOMPSON were to turn this over to the Memphis FBI office which would be more conversant with the case.

THOMPSON stated that he had originally told ROY B. HAMILTON that the FBI knew everything that he knew both directly and indirectly concerning the KING killing, but because of his being so emphatic in his statement he wants to resolve this with the FBI.

He reiterated that the only talk he has thus far had with the FBI was the April 1968 interview wherein he furnished information to SA WILLIAM H. LAWRENCE and Inspector ZACHERY, mentioned above.

He stated that he is now privileged to give the name of the so-called "blond Latin". He gave the name TONY BENEVITIA (phonetic) stating that he was not sure of the spelling because he did not have his file with him at home. He said this was the one who had originally contacted him in April 1968. He had since learned from discussions with FRANK HOLLOMAN, Director, Fire and Police, Inspector ZACHERY, and with Shelby County Attorney General PHIL CANALE, that the same blond Latin had given his story to some ministers, that it had been checked out in detail, and that there had been nothing substantial developed to indicate that this so-called blond Latin had any knowledge concerning the killing of MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

He stated further that PHIL CANALE has told him that the information originally furnished by JOHN MC FERRIN concerning the so-called produce dealer has been checked out and found to have no basis in fact.

He stated that in talking to PHIL CANALE concerning the so-called Latin, he told CANALE that this Latin had claimed that he was going to Brownsville, Tennessee, to see the then head of the Ku Klux Klan in Tennessee (V. DOYL ELLINGTON). CANALE stated this had been checked out and no information had been developed to the Brownsville angle to tie in with the killing of KING.

THOMPSON stated that the only other information which he possessed was the fact that he had checked out various inconsistencies on the part of scheduled state witnesses who would have testified had the trial transpired.

THOMPSON stated that he would be in Marianna, Arkansas, in connection with a robbery trial on Monday and Tuesday, March 24 and 25, and would be back in his office March 26 and would be happy to go over with any representative or representatives of the FBI all of the information which he possesses in order to be absolutely sure that all information has been turned over to the FBI.

THOMPSON volunteered with regard to newspaper speculation that JAMES BEVEL, Southern Christian Leadership Conference representative from Philadelphia, might put on a mock trial concerning the JAMES EARL RAY case in Memphis; that He has received no information in connection with this, he volunteered that he is a member of the NAACP in Memphis, will attend the last general membership meeting of the month on March 30, 1969, and that if any information comes to his attention indicating that there will be any demonstrations or activity concerning the RAY case that he will immediately volunteer information to this office.

With regard to the information concerning TONY BENEVITA, THOMPSON stated that he had furnished this information to ARTHUR HANES, to the Memphis Police Department, to PHIL CANALE of the Shelby County Attorney General's Office, to RENFRO HAYES, a private investigator who did some work on the RAY case, and stated that he understands but cannot prove that HAYES has since furnished this information to either "Time" magazine or to "Life" magazine in a recent trip to New York.

He stated that also CHARLES EDMUNDSON, a veteran reporter at Commercial Appeal newspaper has received this same information but thus far has not seen fit to publish it.

This memorandum is being submitted for information in order to clarify writer's conversation with RUSSELL X. THOMPSON.