

Ray-Acted-Alone Report Fails To Erase Nagging Suspicions

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WASHINGTON — Nine years ago, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., spiritual leader of the civil rights movement, was gunned down in Memphis.

Escaped convict James Earl Ray was named for the murder.

Yet nagging suspicions persisted that he may have been hired by others. The public doubt finally forced a Justice Department task force to review the case. It concluded that Ray "was the assassin and that he acted alone."

House investigators, however, have challenged the Justice Department's findings. In a confidential, 16-page analysis they point out significant inconsistencies and omissions in the task force report.

They note that the task force had a "multitude of leads" to pursue, yet interviewed only 30 people.

"Thirty interviews could hardly scratch the surface," declares the analysis. "A detective investigating a com-

The Pittsburgh Press
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Wednesday, April 6, 1977

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mon street crime may very likely conduct more interviews.

The House investigators don't pretend they have solved the case. But they have set forth their clues in a

fascinating report stamped "Sensitive." Here are the highlights, in chronological order.

✓ While Ray was serving time in the Missouri state penitentiary, he told

cellmates he would kill King. "If the price was right." Ray also was quoted as saying he intended to seek out a "businessman's association" which allegedly had offered \$100,000 for King's murder.

✓ On April 23, 1967, Ray escaped from the prison by hiding in a large bread box which was loaded on a bakery truck. The congressional investigators are trying to learn "whether anyone aided Ray in his escape and whether this assistance was connected" to the King assassination.

The escapee had immediate access to false identities. He posed alternately as Eric Galt, Ramon George Sneyd, Paul Bridgeman and John Willard.

"These aliases correspond to the names of real men, all of whom lived close to one another in suburban Toronto," say the investigators.

"In addition, three of the four bear physical resemblances to Ray." Galt, even had scars in the same places as Ray, the forehead and right palm."

✓ For the next year, Ray "traveled across the United States, lived in more than a dozen cities and traveled in four foreign countries. . . . A conservative estimate of his total expense would be at least \$7,000. Ray himself estimates he spent at least \$9,500."

Those who did business with him recall "he often paid for items with new \$20 bills." The House Assassinations Committee "intends to investigate the sources of Ray's funds."

✓ Ray opened a safety deposit box in a Birmingham, Ala., bank in August, 1967, and closed it four months later.

Bank records show the box was closed by someone living in Baton Rouge, La. Yet Ray was living in Los Angeles at the time.

The committee, therefore, is investigating "who in Baton Rouge aided Ray by closing that safety deposit box."

✓ The committee has received unverified reports that Ray was in touch with the Beverly Hills office of Litton Industries in California. While he was posing as Eric Galt, he also listed as his previous employer a Pascagoula, Miss., shipbuilding company owned by Litton Industries.

✓ The late William Sartor, a journalist, alleged that organized crime figures had accepted a \$300,000 contract on King's life from a right-wing racist group. According to Sartor, Ray got in touch with these men in New Orleans. The committee is seeking "all evidentiary materials that might support or refute Sartor's report."

✓ A witness had told investigators he overheard a telephone conversation on the afternoon of the King assassination. "Frank Liberto, a person with al-

leged organized crime connections, said: 'Shoot the bastard. Do it this afternoon. Shoot him, even if you have to do it on the balcony, just do it.'"

✓ The committee has received "independent corroborations" of a possible Liberto link. A witness told of a Birmingham gun shop owner who, before the assassination, pointed to a rifle and said: "This is the gun that is going to kill Martin Luther King."

Later the witness saw the gun shop owner "in the company of Ray and Liberto." The secret report describes Liberto as "a target of the committee's investigation."

The Memphis police set up a surveillance post in a firehouse overlooking the motel where King spent his last hours.

Curiously, two black firemen, Norvell Wallace and Floyd Newsum, were withdrawn from the post. Then a black policeman, Edward Redditt, was called off the surveillance. The committee "has begun to investigate these incidents."

✓ Ray fled to Toronto after the assassination. He applied for Canadian birth certificates under the names of Paul Bridgman and Ramon George Sneyd. He finally obtained a birth certificate and passport in Sneyd's name.

The House investigators are check-



A KING CONSPIRACY? — James Earl Ray, being led from cellblock at Tennessee State Prison, has been pushing for a new trial in the slaying of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A Justice Department report concludes Ray acted alone, but House investigators are continuing their probe.

ing "the procedures used by Ray in securing these documents."

The House investigators are also chasing down a number of other leads. They are undeterred by the cold water that the Justice Department tried to throw on their investigation.