

MANHUNTS:

Hot and Cold

All last week, in an air of very nearly leakproof secrecy, the FBI dogged the trail of Martin Luther King Jr.'s suspected assassin, James Earl Ray, alias Eric Starvo Galt. The colder the spoor seemed to run, and the tighter the official silence surrounding the manhunt, the hotter waxed the imaginations of amateur sleuths around the country.

Not since a posse of Oswaldologists went to work on the John Kennedy murder case had there been such a proliferation of blurry clues, vagrant sightings and jerry-built conspiracy theories. The Mexican police arrested a U.S. tourist who looked like Galt/Ray to them but not to

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the FBI. Newsmen discovered a fascinating set of graffiti ("Mexicans + Niggers! and Martin Luther Coon") in a be-doodled Los Angeles phone booth said to have been frequented by "Galt." A Georgia jailbird who knew Ray in a Missouri prison remembered him vowing to collect a rumored million-dollar bounty placed on King's head by a "K-K business association"—a bit of penitentiary gossip that instantly set off speculation about the suspect's free-spending ways on the outside. Another set of tales flowed from a rumored meeting between Galt and a New Orleans industrialist last December. And there was a Memphis mystery witness who told of overhearing a heated telephone conversation: "You can shoot the sonofabitch on the balcony . . ." The FBI seemed unimpressed.

Loner: Indeed, the deeper the investigation dug into Ray's seamy case history as an Army washout and a four-time loser, the more informed spectators came to see him as a bitter, racist loner who might well have killed King on his own. No significant evidence "goes beyond the single actor," said Attorney General Ramsey Clark late last week. The money? That, by one leading theory, could have been the stashed-away loot of a life of crime. And the Federal conspiracy charge against Galt/Ray? The FBI may have lodged it simply to establish Federal jurisdiction and thus permit G-men to take charge. There was some chagrin in Washington last week about the bullishness of early predictions that Galt/Ray would be quickly caught. But the conviction remained that—however cold the trail might seem—the FBI would in the end get its man.