

Melanson's latest findings enlighten

By Kim Fonteneau

He was jailed for stealing typewriters and shot in the foot by a policeman after robbing a cabbie out of \$11. He was apprehended in a grocery store after stealing \$120 from a clerk and failing to "scout out" an exit. How could the same inept man who spent most of his life in jail for foiled robbery attempts have killed a prominent civil rights leader and eluded police in the "greatest manhunt in law enforcement history?"

According to Dr. Philip Melanson, an SMU Political Science professor and author of the soon to be published book The Murkin Conspiracy-A Re-investigation of the Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., James Earl Ray received help from conspirators unnamed in the original investigation. Melanson also charges that the Congressional Investigation Commission of 1978 was "tragically inept."

The 1978 investigation concluded that Ray acted on a \$50,000 bounty offer given by a St. Louis trio. The trio was made up of one "low life criminal, a stock broker who had been convicted of drug dealing" and was led by a "wealthy, racist, St. Louis businessman who was fond of playing civil war dress-up," said Melanson in his lecture on March 31 concerning King's death. The leader was known to sit, clad in full civil war uniform, and "through a haze of bourbon and branch water would talk about the importance of killing Dr. King," he said.

According to his own extensive research extending three years and including 60 interviews, 12 more than were conducted in 1978, Melanson concluded that Ray had "more sophisticated" help that could have been provided by the St. Louis trio. The help from the unnamed conspirators gave Ray a cover identity, aliases,

funds, a network "international in scope" and "may have had access to security files," said Melanson.

Ray's past criminal record shows that he used various aliases, but nine months before the April 4, 1968 assassination, Ray began to call himself Eric S. Galt, said Melanson. The day before the assassination, Ray registered in a Memphis hotel as Eric S Galt. The day of the killing, Ray took a room in a boarding house across the street from the Lorraine Motel, where King would later speak, under the assumed name of John Willard.

After the murder, Ray fled to Toronto and took two other aliases, Paul Bridgeman and George Raymond Sneed. Melanson noted, the last four aliases Ray chose were not the family composites and prison associates he used in the past, but actually names of "upstanding Canadian citizens...pillars of the community," said Melanson. The names Ray allegedly made up belonged to men who physically resembled Ray. According to Melanson, Ray's fellow conspirators carefully chose the aliases he would use to further distance Ray from authorities.

Melanson is further convinced that Ray had sophisticated help because on two separate occasions, two men, identified only as the "Fat Man and the Slight Man" attempted to reach Ray in his Toronto rooms. Each man carried an envelope bearing Ray's alias at the time. Although the "Slight Man" was unable to reach Ray, the "Fat Man" located him and give him the envelope which Melanson believes contained money for plane tickets to London. The tickets were waiting for Ray to exit the country, but he only got them one and a half hours after receiving the mysterious envelope.

According to Ray's landlord in Toronto, Ray usually refused calls and

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took meals outside his door, but upon hearing a man was waiting with an envelope, he went to personally receive it, said Melanson. A man wanted for murder and who was normally paranoid would be hesitant to meet an unidentified visitor, said Melanson, explaining why he felt Ray was expecting the "Fat Man."

In the original investigation of the assassination, the story of the "men with the envelopes" was explained by the Toronto Police. The Police said the "Fat Man" was "returning a lost letter to Ray. It was found in a phone booth." Neither man was summoned for further questioning.

The Congressional Committee decided that Ray's "expenditures (including car, rifle and tickets) exceeded his resources by seven times over," said Melanson. Ray insists the money came from a mystery man named Raoul, who Congress as well as Melanson believe doesn't exist.

Melanson said he was surprised to find that in FBI, CIA and military files, Dr. King's political activities were viewed

"with something that approaches paranoia." He was believed to be "influenced by the Communists," he said, and the creator of "massive civil unrest in the U.S." The anti-Communist paranoia "could have spawned violence against him (Dr. King) just as racial hatred could have spawned violence against Dr. King," said Melanson.

F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover "hated Dr. King," said Melanson. "It was a mixture of racism and anti-Communist paranoia." Hoover attempted, through his agency ties, to disrupt King's demonstrations. It was "an undeclared domestic war that the FBI had on King and his organization," he said.

Melanson believes that through a "competent official re-investigation" using "subpoena power," the conspirators could be found. We "need to find out who these people are," he said.]

After the publication of his book, Melanson hopes new interest in the case will develop and the search for the truth will intensify.