

Panel Convinced Bounty Induced Ray to Kill King

But He Reportedly Never Received the \$50,000

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 16 — After all the witnesses have been heard and all the evidence has been analyzed, the House Select Committee on Assassinations is expected to conclude that James Earl Ray killed the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for money, according to numerous sources who are close to the panel's investigation.

Specifically, these sources say, the money amounted to \$50,000 that Mr. Ray never collected from a right-wing St. Louis businessman who wanted the civil rights leader slain.

And the committee is expected to decide that the Federal Bureau of Investigation botched the case, apparently ignoring the possibility of conspiracy and concentrating on the identification and apprehension of a fugitive. In the process, valuable time and evidence were lost, important figures were not interviewed and information was disregarded.

\$50,000 Offer Well-Known

Interviews with committee members, witnesses and Congressional staff officials indicate that, even though the committee is expected to continue building a public record through hearings that will last through mid-December, its investigation is virtually complete, allowing it to arrive at those conclusions.

The presence of a standing \$50,000 offer was well-known in the St. Louis area in 1967 and 1968 and was probably reported to the Federal authorities before Dr. King's murder, according to the committee's investigation and to a separate investigation by The New York Times.

The two investigations have produced the following evidence of how the lives of two men crossed, with political assassination apparently the result:

On July 13, 1967, about three months after Mr. Ray escaped from the Missouri State Penitentiary, committee investigators believe that he and two men robbed a bank in Alton, Ill., and took \$27,000. One of the investigators, Edward Evans, testified yesterday that the two confederates are believed to have been Mr. Ray's brothers.

Mr. Ray's split of the proceeds and the money he accumulated through odd jobs

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and other robberies he has publicly acknowledged would have been sufficient to finance his activities from the time he left prison until he was captured at London's Heathrow Airport on June 8, 1968, two months after the King assassination.

From the prison escape on April 23, 1967, until the bank robbery on July 13, Mr. Ray adhered pretty much to a lifestyle of rooming-house beds and beanery meals with stints as a dishwasher and food-server.

The day after the bank robbery, however, he turned up in Montreal, signed a six-month lease on an apartment, bought \$250 worth of new clothes and vacationed at a fashionable Canadian ski resort.

He later traveled to Mexico and California but reverted to his old pattern, spending an average of \$3 a day for food and \$4 a day for lodging.

While Mr. Ray was on the run, a prominent patent attorney in St. Louis was looking for someone to assassinate Dr. King, according to a witness interviewed by the committee. A former St. Louis auto parts dealer named Russell G. Byers said he was approached sometime in late 1966 or early 1967 by a business associate, John R. Kauffmann, who invited him to a meeting with the patent attorney, John H. Sutherland.

Mr. Sutherland, a member of the conservative Southern States Industrial Council and a leader of the racist White Citizen's Council of St. Louis, told Mr. Byers that a group of businessmen would pay \$50,000 for the murder of Dr. King, according to Mr. Byers.

Mr. Byers said he declined the offer. The other two men are now dead.

Ray Bar Was Gathering Place

Both Mr. Kauffmann and Mr. Sutherland were members of the American Independent Party and were active supporters of Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace in his bid for the Presidency.

Coincidentally, a Wallace campaign office in St. Louis in 1968 was located in a house across the street from a tavern operated by Mr. Ray's brother, John. The license was held by Mr. Ray's sister, Mr. Carole Pepper, from November 1967 to December 1968.

The Ray brothers, Jerry and John, were avid Wallace supporters, and the tavern became virtually a Wallace Headquarters annex, filled with buttons, bumper stickers, posters and pictures.

The tavern, named the Grapevine in reference to the prison underground, had sleeping rooms upstairs. Men with criminal records joined Wallace campaign workers at the bar to talk about politics.

Committee interviews disclosed that Mr. Kauffmann was often there and that the \$50,000 offer for the murder of Dr. King was almost as much a fixture of the bar as the picture of Clydesdale horses

representing the Anheuser-Busch brewery a few blocks away; a patron down on his luck might be told in jest that he should see John Kauffmann and make a deal.

Tavern Not Financial Success

The upstairs roomers and the campaign workers were not enough to make the tavern a financial success. In early 1968, the committee believes, money gained in the Alton bank robbery began to run low and there was some casting about for a new source of funds.

James Earl Ray has said that he was in California in March 1968 when he received a letter from the man he has identified as a "blond Latin, Raoul" instructing him to go to New Orleans. Mr. Ray says he called Raoul from Los Angeles and discussed where he should go and what he should do.

The committee investigators believe that the telephone conversation was with someone in St. Louis, not Raoul in New Orleans. But telephone records of toll calls between Mr. Ray and members of his family, at numbers associated with their homes, the tavern or Wallace headquarters, were kept only for a few years, and the F.B.I. did not seek them until too late.

The committee also believes that, from the time James Earl Ray received the letter or telephone call in California, he was in pursuit of Dr. King, stalking him to Selma, Ala.; Atlanta, and, finally, Memphis.

No Evidence Money Collected

After the murder, Mr. Ray fled to Canada, then to London, to Portugal and back to London. By the time he was arrested, he was so short of funds, the committee has determined, that he risked robbing a bank in London for \$144. The committee cites the act as being an indication that Mr. Ray did not receive the assassination bounty.

There is no evidence that anyone else collected, either.

When it became known that the F.B.I. had a counterintelligence program to harass the enemies of its late director, J. Edgar Hoover, many black leaders and bureau critics suspected that the bureau had been involved in a conspiracy to assassinate Dr. King.

The committee is expected to report that the bureau's role in the assassination was limited to its poorly handled investigation and to the way Mr. Hoover's feelings about Dr. King and the civil rights movement generally influenced the attitudes of such groups as the Southern States Industrial Council and the White Citizen's Council, who quoted liberally and published widely the F.B.I. director's derogatory remarks.

Sources familiar with the history of the bounty offer contend that the bureau knew of its existence shortly after it had been made to Mr. Byers. It was too commonly known among the convicts who frequented the Grapevine Tavern, they

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say, for the F.B.I. not to have heard about it in 1967 and 1968. There is no indication that the bureau investigated the offer.

In 1973, an informant told the F.B.I. about the offer to Mr. Byers, but the agent in the St. Louis field office who prepared the report on the allegation failed to forward it to agents working on the King case, and it came to light only this year. Had it been disseminated properly at the time it was written, investigators say, Mr. Kauffmann at least could have been interviewed about his alleged role. Mr. Sutherland died in 1970, Mr. Kauffmann in 1974.

The assassinations committee plans to meet tomorrow to examine the F.B.I.'s attitude toward Dr. King.