

King Slaying

FBI Tells of Ray's Flight, Robberies

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Washington

The FBI concluded James Earl Ray financed his global escape from Memphis, Tenn., after killing Martin Luther King through a series of petty robberies and was not bankrolled by co-conspirators, FBI files disclosed yesterday.

Internal FBI documents, amassed in the largest manhunt in history, disclosed Ray was planning a flight to South Africa or Rhodesia a few days before his arrest by Scotland Yard at London's Heathrow Airport on June 8, 1968, two months after King was slain on a motel balcony in Memphis.

The FBI reports — made available under the Freedom of Information Act — also showed a strong streak of racism and pro-Nazi feelings may have led Ray to assassinate the man who most symbolized black refusal to accept anything but equal status in America.

Just a few weeks before King's murder, Ray and a companion, Charles Stein, drove from Los Angeles to New Orleans and back. In the course of that trip, Ray gave vent to his racial feelings.

"If Negroes want to be free, they should go North or West," Stein quoted Ray. "If they stay in the South, they should be willing to be slaves."

An uncle of Ray told agents Ray may have been influenced against blacks and Jews by "pro-Nazis" in a Quincy, Ill., tannery where he worked as a youth and by his Army service in Germany where, the uncle said, Ray's "attitude crystalized." He was discharged from the Army for "ineptness and lack of adaptability."

Ray first pleaded innocent, but stunned the court when his case came to trial March 10, 1969, by changing his plea to guilty. He was sentenced to 99 years.

Upon his guilty plea, Ray told Judge W. Preston Battle he could "not accept" the statements of the prosecutor and his lawyer that he had acted alone, without aid from any co-conspirator.

Ever since, there has been speculation that Ray, a drifter who had spent most his life in jail, had been bankrolled by forces eager to

silence King, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and a figure of worldwide respect.

As recently as June 27, 1974, however, the FBI files showed, the bureau concluded it could find "nothing to indicate that Ray ever received any large sum of money from anyone, and what we know of his living habits both before and after the murder would indicate that he lived on a very limited amount of money.

"We do not know the source of even the smallest amount of money possessed by Ray, but since we know him to have robbed a bank in England after fleeing to that country, it is a reasonable presumption that Ray committed robberies in the United States during the time he was a fugitive," the FBI said.

The more than 40,000 pages of FBI reports carried other hints of where Ray obtained money to pay \$1995 for a Mustang to make his escape from Memphis; \$134.95 for the Remington rifle and \$74.60 for telescopic sight he used to kill King; and the funds to reach Canada, and to pay for his round trip plane ticket to London.

There were indications Ray was heavily involved in drug traffic in prison for four years prior to the slaying — one prisoner said he "mainlined" amphetamines and barbiturates; and there was testimony from another convict who said Ray "cheated fellow prisoners in crooked poker games."

Another inmate said Ray had "unknown outside sources of income to support a \$35-\$45 a week dope habit as well as \$15-\$20 a week other expenditures" in prison.

After he escaped, he spent money on dance lessons, visited a Los Angeles hypnotist, and had the tip of his nose reconstructed by a plastic surgeon. He paid for dance lessons in Los Angeles with a large roll of bills.

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