



Department of Justice

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FACT SHEET: INVESTIGATION OF RECENT ALLEGATIONS RELATED TO THE ASSASSINATION OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

The Department of Justice has completed its investigation of two recent allegations related to the April 4, 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These separate allegations emanate from Loyd Jowers, a recently deceased Memphis tavern owner, and Donald Wilson, a former FBI agent. In connection with this inquiry, we also considered the evidence presented during last year's state civil trial of King v. Jowers, which included various claims that government agencies, as well as two African American ministers associated with Dr. King, conspired to kill him. We found that the Jowers and Wilson allegations are not credible and that none of the additional allegations made in King v. Jowers warrant further investigation.

We conducted nearly a year and a half of original investigation, interviewing more than 200 witnesses. We also reviewed all available materials from four prior official investigations; documents and information provided by private parties who have conducted their own investigations; relevant pleadings, discovery materials, and hearing transcripts from post-conviction and civil litigation related to the assassination, including evidence from King v. Jowers; and hundreds of media articles and several pertinent books.

Jowers' Allegations

In 1993, 25 years after the murder, Jowers claimed that he participated in a conspiracy to kill Dr. King, along with an alleged Mafia figure, Memphis police officers, and a man named Raoul. According to Jowers, one of the conspirators shot Dr. King from behind his tavern.

Since his initial televised confession in 1993, Jowers has given numerous significantly inconsistent statements about the assassination. He has on occasion disavowed his claims. The only time Jowers testified under oath about his allegations, he refused to adopt them. In those statements in which he has claimed participation in a conspiracy, Jowers has contradicted himself on virtually every key contention, including: the identity of the alleged assassin; his own role in the plot; the role of others; and what happened to the murder weapon.

We also found no credible evidence to support any aspect of Jowers' varied claims. Instead, we found significant physical evidence and witness accounts to contradict important aspects of his allegations. For instance, immediately after the assassination investigators searched for, but did not find, a trail of footprints in the muddy ground behind Jowers' tavern. This important fact contradicts Jowers' claim that the assassin shot from that location, brought the rifle to him at the tavern's back door, and then escaped crossing the same ground.

Jowers' conduct also undermines his credibility. It was not until 1993, during a meeting with the producer of a televised mock trial of James Earl Ray, that Jowers first publicly disclosed the alleged plot's details. He has since sought publicity for his story and yet refused to cooperate with government investigations. Even though he repeatedly confessed publicly without immunity from prosecution, he refused to speak to us without immunity. When we agreed to

consider his immunity demand, he declined to provide a proffer of his account, a standard prerequisite before an immunity grant, particularly where contradictory statements exist.

Jowers' conflicting claims are unsubstantiated and contradicted. Consequently, we do not believe that Jowers, or those he accuses, participated in the assassination of Dr. King.

Wilson's Allegations

Wilson alleged in 1998 that shortly after the assassination, while working as an FBI agent, he took papers from the abandoned car of James Earl Ray, the career criminal who pled guilty to murdering Dr. King. Wilson claims he concealed them for 30 years. Two of the papers contained references to a "Raul" and figures associated with the assassination of President Kennedy. According to Wilson, someone who later worked in the White House subsequently stole other papers he took from Ray's car, including one with an FBI office telephone number.

Wilson has made several contradictory statements about the documents and his discovery of them and otherwise behaved in a duplicitous manner. Most significantly, six months after telling the Atlanta District Attorney, the King family, and their attorney, Dr. Pepper, that he found four documents in Ray's car, Wilson advised us of an alleged, previously undisclosed fifth document with the telephone number of the FBI office where he had worked. In addition, while publicly claiming he wanted a full government investigation, Wilson refused for six months to relinquish any documents until the execution of a search warrant was imminent. He also refused to provide information that he claimed could lead to recovery of the other documents purportedly stolen from him. Finally, Wilson inexplicably cut off all contact with us once we offered the immunity from prosecution he had requested.

We also found nothing to substantiate any of Wilson's varied claims about his discovery of the documents. At the same time, we found significant evidence to contradict key aspects of his accounts. For example, photographs and expert opinion establish that the passenger-side door of Ray's car was locked when the FBI was at the scene, not ajar and unlocked, as Wilson claims.

Although we were unable to determine the true origin of the Wilson documents, important aspects of his account make it implausible and scientific analysis of the documents suggests they are not what they purport to be. For instance, it is highly improbable that a page torn from a 1963 Dallas telephone directory linking the King and Kennedy assassinations would have been in Ray's car in 1968, would have contained Jack Ruby's telephone number (disconnected five years earlier when Ray was in prison), or would have fortuitously fallen out when Wilson allegedly opened the door. In addition, we found no credible evidence linking Ray to Ruby or connecting the two assassinations. Finally, scientific testing of the torn telephone page suggests that another handwritten notation in its margin was written to create the false impressions that Ray had "Raul's" telephone number and the King and Kennedy assassinations were connected.

The possibility that the documents actually came from Ray's car is even more remote since Ray himself claimed not to remember them. It is also implausible that Wilson, who allegedly joined the FBI because of his concern for civil rights, would have chosen to tamper with Ray's car, confiscate evidence, and potentially compromise the search for Dr. King's murderer. Wilson's claim that he concealed information potentially implicating the FBI for 20

years after he terminated his career as an agent and then again when he made his initial public disclosure in 1998 is also particularly suspicious in light of his professed disdain for the FBI.

Wilson's inconsistent statements, his conduct, and the evidence refuting his claims all demonstrate that his implausible account is not worthy of belief. Accordingly, we have concluded that the Wilson documents do not constitute evidence relevant to the assassination.

Other Considerations

The name Raoul, or Raul, is central to both the Jowers and the Wilson allegations, as well as to James Earl Ray's claims of innocence. Jowers contends that he conspired with Raoul and two of the Wilson documents bear the handwritten name "Raul." Moreover, Ray, soon after pleading guilty, claimed that someone he knew only as Raoul lured him to Memphis and framed him by leaving a rifle with his fingerprints at the crime scene.

The weight of the evidence establishes that Raoul is merely Ray's creation. Ray repeatedly gave self-serving, contradictory accounts about Raoul and their activities. We found no reliable evidence to support Ray's claims. We also determined that a man recently identified by Ray and Jowers as Raoul—a man from New York named Raul—could not have been the man they claim was involved in the assassination. The New York Raul could not speak English and was living and working in New York at the times he was allegedly with Ray and Jowers.

More than 30 years after the crime, there still is no reliable information suggesting Raoul's last name, location, appearance, friends, family, or other identifying characteristics or credible sightings of him. The total lack of evidence as to Raoul's existence is significant since Ray claimed that he was repeatedly with Raoul in various places and many of Ray's other associations unrelated to the assassination have been verified. At the same time, vigorous searches for Raoul by Ray's defenders and official investigations have failed to find him. Our review of years of speculation about Raoul and numerous different false accusations about his identity present a convincing case that no Raoul was involved in a conspiracy to kill Dr. King.

We generally confined our investigation to the Jowers and the Wilson allegations and logical investigative leads suggested by them, such as the existence of Raoul. We did evaluate other allegations, however, including claims from the trial of King v. Jowers that government agencies, as well as African American ministers associated with Dr. King, conspired to kill him. Where warranted, we conducted limited additional investigation.

King v. Jowers, a civil law suit brought in a Tennessee court by the King family against Loyd Jowers, concluded in December 1999. The jury adopted a verdict offered by the parties finding that Jowers and "others, including government agencies" participated in a conspiracy to kill Dr. King. The trial featured only some of the information considered by our investigation and none of the facts that undermine the credibility of Jowers' allegations. Thus, it did not change our assessment of those allegations.

The trial also featured hearsay evidence claiming the existence of various alleged government-directed conspiracies. It included a deposition of an unidentified person alleging that President Johnson and Vice President Humphrey initiated the assassination plot and notes recording an unnamed source's account that his military surveillance team photographed the

murder. Witness testimony and writings related several other secondhand or thirdhand accounts of unrelated and, in some cases, contradictory conspiracy claims. We evaluated these allegations and because one of them presented a claim that military personnel actually witnessed the assassination, we conducted limited investigation.

Significantly, no eyewitness testimony or tangible evidence supported any of the government-directed conspiracy allegations. The only relevant, non-hearsay eyewitness accounts presented at trial suggested nothing more than the possibility that Dr. King, like other civil rights activists, was regrettably under surveillance around the time of the assassination. However, we found nothing to indicate that surveillance at any time had any connection to the assassination.

Critical analysis of the hearsay allegations, particularly in light of significant information not introduced at the trial, also demonstrates that none of the claims are credible. We found no reliable evidence to corroborate the various allegations — including the contention that military personnel witnessed the murder — and other facts to contradict them. For instance, we learned that a journalist, who was not identified at trial and did not testify, wrote the notes relating an unnamed source's claim that his military surveillance team photographed the assassination. When we interviewed him, the journalist said that he did not credit the source or his story. Additionally, we found nothing to substantiate the story and information to contradict it.

Finally, we considered the testimony in King v. Jowers offering observations and hearsay accounts to support Dr. Pepper's contention that two African American ministers associated with Dr. King were part of a plot to kill him. We found nothing to substantiate that claim and significant information not introduced at the trial to contradict it.

Consequently, there is insufficient substantiation of any of the various allegations advanced during King v. Jowers to warrant further investigation.

Conclusions

Questions and speculation may always surround the assassination of Dr. King and other national tragedies. This investigation of these most recent allegations, as well as several exhaustive previous official investigations, found no reliable evidence that Dr. King was killed by conspirators who framed James Earl Ray. Nor have any of the conspiracy theories advanced in the last 30 years, including the Jowers and Wilson allegations, survived critical examination.

We will conduct no further investigation of the Jowers allegations, the Wilson allegations, or any other allegations related to the assassination unless and until reliable substantiating facts are presented. At this time, we are aware of no information to warrant any further investigation of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.