Key Evidence in James Earl Ray Case

.c The Associated Press

Evidence that James Earl Ray killed Martin Luther King, and Ray's explanations:

-He pleaded guilty in 1969, avoiding the possibility of the death penalty, and the plea has been upheld in state and federal courts eight times. Ray's answer: He was coerced into making the plea.

-Ray, a fugitive from a Missouri prison, came to Memphis on April 3, 1968, the day before the killing, and rented a motel room using an assumed name. Several hours before the murder, he used another assumed name to rent a room at a flophouse near the Lorraine Motel, where King was staying. Ray's answer: He was in Memphis to meet with a gunrunner named Raoul and rented rooms at his direction.

-Ray bought a .30-06 hunting rifle in Alabama and brought it to Memphis. It was found a few hundred feet from the murder scene with his fingerprints on it. It was the type of gun used to kill King, though ballistics tests were not conclusive. Authorities say the shot came from the flophouse where Ray was staying. Ray's answer:
He brought the gun as part of Raoul's gunrunning operation. He gave the rifle to Raoul at the rooming house shortly before the shooting and then went out to run some errands.

-A small radio with Ray's former inmate number from the Missouri prison was found with the rifle and a bundle authorities say he dropped while fleeing. Ray's answer: The rifle and other items were left outside the flophouse to frame him.

-Another rooming house resident told police he saw Ray in a hallway seconds after the shooting. Ray's answer: The witness was too drunk to identify anyone.

-Ray fled Memphis after the shooting and wasn't found until two months later, in England. Ray's answer: He fled in his white 1966 Ford Mustang when he tried to return to the rooming house but found police swarming into the area. He heard on the radio that police were looking for a man driving a white Mustang.

—

Additional questions about Ray, including whether he may have been part of a conspiracy to kill King, cited by others:

-The U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations concluded in 1978 that Ray killed King, perhaps in hopes of collecting a $50,000 bounty offered by a group of racial bigots in St. Louis. The committee said Ray may have stalked King in Selma, Ala., and Atlanta prior to coming to Memphis.

-Conspiracy theorists have long argued that Ray could not have fled the country and avoided authorities for as long as he did unless he had help. In 1992 book, "Who Killed Martin Luther King?" Ray tells of his flight to Canada and then England with a brief trip to Portugal. He describes how he got fake identification and a passport but does not mention getting help from anyone who knew what he was up to.

AP-NY-04-23-98 1403EDT

Copyright 1998 The Associated Press. The information contained in the AP news report may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or otherwise distributed without the prior written authority of The Associated Press. All active hyperlinks have been inserted by AOL.