2. Motive

James Earl Ray, born 1928, was raised under difficult circumstances. His parents were poor, uneducated and generally resided in areas surrounded by criminal activity. Ray did not achieve a high school education, nor did he attend any vocational institution.* After enlisting in the army in 1946, Ray did not meet the military's standards and was discharged in 1948 for lack of adaptability. (HQ 44-38861-3333, 3987).

Thus, at the age of twenty-one, he had a very limited education, was not trained or skilled at any particular job, and was a reject of the military establishment. Thereafter, he proceeded to participate in and be apprehended for a number of criminal actions for which he would be incarcerated for fourteen of the next eighteen years until his escape from the Missouri State Penitentiary in April 1967. Ray's criminal activities included robbery, forgery and burglary (HQ 44-38861-4143). He was not known to have been involved in crimes where victims or witnesses were physically harmed.

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*FBI files disclosed that James Earl Ray has an IQ of 105 (HQ 44-38861-3503).

In March 1968, James Earl Ray was forty years old and was never known to have had a serious relationship with a man or woman during his adult life. Although he was about to commit a very infamous crime of assassination, neither his childhood, his military years nor his adult life of crime and imprisonment signaled such action. His criminal activities were not those of a hired or self-accomplished premeditated murderer. Why then would James Earl Ray murder Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.?

An analysis of Ray's prison records and interviews with his prison inmates reveals some probative facts with respect to a motive. For example, in 1955 Ray was incarcerated in the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas, for forgery of post office money orders. On September 12, 1957, Ray was approved for the honor farm at Leavenworth, but was never transferred there because he refused to live in the integrated dormitory at the farm (HQ 44-38861-1678). Thus, he was supposedly willing to sacrifice this benefit and its accompanying privileges to avoid association with black prisoners.

An inmate with Ray at Missouri State Penitentiary for approximately three years, stated that Ray hated Negroes. He further stated that Ray had said that all the Negro prisoners inside the penitentiary should

be killed. He also responded that on several occasions Ray had said he would kill Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., if the price were right. In 1966, there was a riot at the penitentiary. Three blacks were killed. The inmate would not state whether Ray had participated in the killings. He did say that, if Ray had not, he would definitely know who had killed the prisoners. He also said that he would not be surprised if he acted without being paid for the killing. It should be noted that another prisoner who was a chef at MSP and Ray's boss for six years, stated that this inmate was a good friend of Ray and he also hated Negroes. (HQ 44-38861-4443).

A second inmate with Ray at the Missouri State Penitentiary from 1960 until 1965, claimed that he recalls that Ray was glad when President Kennedy was killed and stated "that is one nigger-loving S.O.B that got shot". The prisoner also advised that Ray disliked Negroes. During the time period when King was leading demonstrations and marches Ray would become aggravated and upset when reading this information in newspapers to the point that he would curse King and the Negroes. He further stated he had heard prison rumors that Ray was supposed to have killed three black prisoners at the penitentiary. Finally, he related

that in 1963 Ray made the remark that he was going to get Martin Luther King when he got out of prison. (HQ 44-38861-2678, 2791).

A third inmate at MSP from 1962 until 1965, described Ray as a "lone wolf" who never trusted anyone. He stated that Ray was a racist and was heard many times discussing his dislike of Negroes. Another prisoner became acquainted with Ray in 1965 and said that Ray commented if he ever got out of jail he was going to make himself a "bunch of money," and Ray further said a "Businessmen's Association" had offered $100,000 for killing Martin Luther King. This prisoner said that Ray did not know what the "Businessmen's Association" was, but he intended to find out. (HQ 44-38861-4143).

A cellmate with Ray in 1955 at Kansas City who later served prison time with Ray at Leavenworth, Kansas, was also incarcerated with Ray at MSP. He stated that during the period when President Kennedy was assassinated the movements of Dr. Martin Luther King became the topic of conversation at the penitentiary. Many prisoners heard that businessmen had raised a considerable amount of money, about one million dollars, as a bounty on King's head. He further stated that Ray mentioned a dozen times that had he known about the bounty on John F. Kennedy's head and had he been free he would have collected it; and, if he

got out in time and King were still alive, he would get the bounty on King (HQ 44-38861-4143). A prisoner who was at MSP from 1958 through 1965 stated Ray did not like Negroes and was capable of killing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (HQ 44-38861-4143).

Ray's psychological background is also a very important avenue of review. As a result of a voluntary psychiatric examination in 1966, Ray was described as having a sociopathic personality, antisocial type with anxiety and depressive features (HQ 44-38861-3505). In 1954, a prison sociologist stated that Ray's delinquencies seem due to impulsive behavior, especially when drinking (HQ 44-38861-3335). These characteristics and comments about Ray support the opinion of psychologist Dr. Mark Freeman. While Ray was in Los Angeles he was a patient of Dr. Freeman. Dr. Freeman believes that Ray was potentially capable of assassination, was a self-motivated person who could act alone, and likely fantasized on being someone important.

There were two matters involving Ray and blacks while outside prison which shed some light on whether his hatred of blacks and need for importance and profit could have motivated him to murder. While in Mexico in the fall

of 1967, Ray associated with a Mexican woman, Irma Morales, in the City of Puerto Vallarta. Morales admitted spending considerable time with him and recalls an incident that took place on Sunday, October 29th. She and Ray were seated at a table in a bar and were drinking when four blacks and several white persons arrived and were seated at another table. She stated that Ray kept goading the blacks for some reason. Thereafter, Ray left his table to go to his car, and when he returned he asked her to feel his pocket. Morales did and felt a pistol in his pocket. Ray stated to Morales that he wanted to kill the blacks. He then continued to be insulting and when the blacks left he stated he wanted to go after them. Morales, however, told him it was time for the police to arrive to check the establishment and Ray stated he wanted nothing to do with the police, thereby terminating the incident (HQ 44-38861-2073).

A second incident took place during Ray's stay in Los Angeles. James E. Morrison, a bartender at the Rabbit's Foot Club there, identified Ray as a frequent customer. Morrison said that on one occasion Ray became engaged in a political discussion with him regarding Robert Kennedy and George Wallace. Ray became rather incensed and vehemently supported Wallace. On another occasion, Ray had had a

discussion with Pat Goodsell, a frequent female customer, concerning blacks and the civil rights movement. Ray became very involved and began dragging Goodsell towards the door saying, "I'll drop you off in Watts and we'll see how you like it there" (HQ 44-38861-3557). Ray then supposedly went outside and had to fight two persons, one being black (Huie, pp. 96-98).

Thus, it seems clear that Ray openly displayed a strong racist attitude towards blacks. While in prison, Ray stated he would kill Dr. King if given the opportunity and Ray was prepared to threaten or attack black persons in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, with a weapon for apparently a racial reason. These events and occurrences leading to the assassination of Dr. King and the assassination itself certainly do not illustrate a single, conclusive motive. Yet, Ray's apparent hatred for the civil rights movement, his possible yearning for recognition, and a desire for a potential quick profit may have, as a whole, provided sufficient impetus for him to act, and to act alone.

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