

FAMILY

HOME

KING'S KILLER

By **CHRISTOPHER SULLIVAN**

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — James Earl Ray will awaken on Monday's Martin Luther King Jr. holiday in his cell, a concrete cube with no bars and a 4-inch-wide glass slit for a window. Then, he'll go to work.

Behind 12-foot razor wire fences at the Riverbend Maximum Security Institution, the man serving 99 years as King's assassin will resume his quest to prove he is innocent, a claim he repeats in a new autobiography and in a prison interview.

He's speaking the truth, is his refrain, and the truth can set him free.

■ Ray gives few specifics..... G6

While once he escaped from prison by hiding in a bread truck, Ray now combs the prison law library for a legal way out. He's filed a string of lawsuits seeking investigative documents to build his case for a trial and is shopping for a judge who will order one.

Once in court, he vows to prove he was a dupe of a mysterious middleman named "Raoul" in one of the most spectacular murder conspiracies of the century.

Ray's new book, "Who Killed Martin Luther King?", makes a case that his original guilty plea was coerced and that he was never anything more than "a two-bit career criminal."

"Why," he writes, "if official

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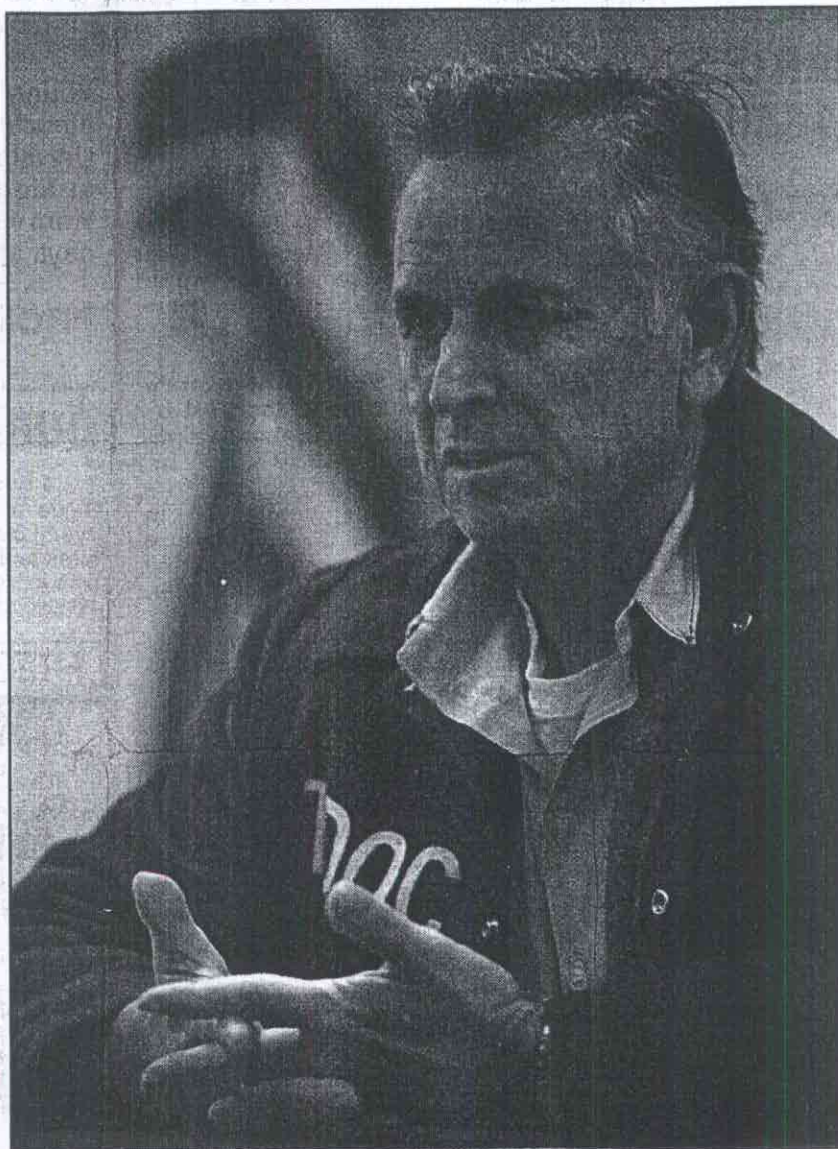
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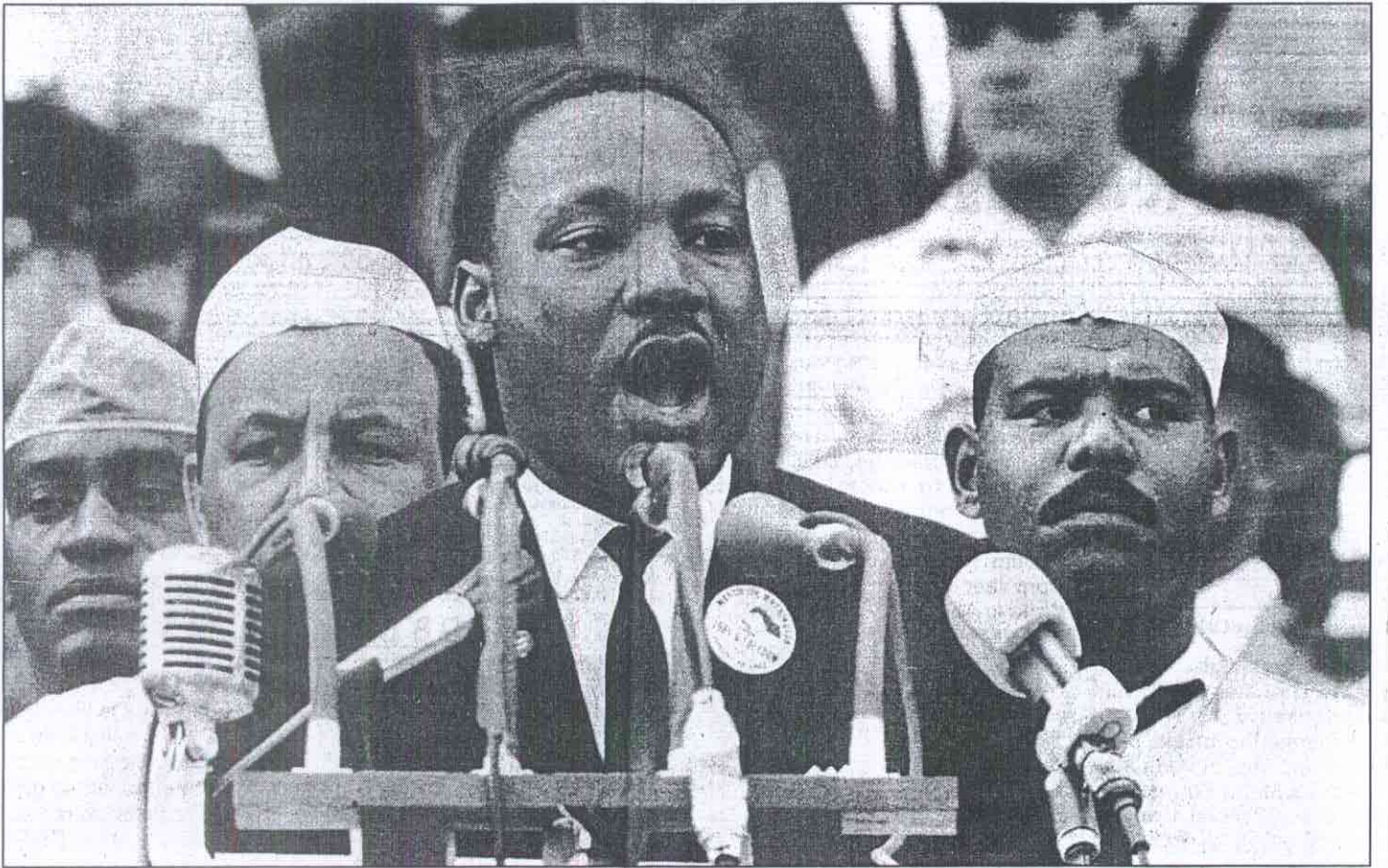
TRAVEL

OUT, AGAIN

James Earl Ray, King's assassin, combs the prison law library daily for a legal way out. Once in court, he vows to prove he was the dupe of a mysterious middleman named "Raoul" in one of the most spectacular murder conspiracies of the century. The Rev. Jesse Jackson supports a new trial for Ray.

King giving his 1963 "I have a dream" speech (below); Ray in his Tennessee prison (right).





UPI photo

King assassin still says he's innocent

James Earl Ray suggests other links
to killing but coy about naming names

By CHRISTOPHER SULLIVAN
Associated Press

The question is posed in capital letters on the book's cover: Who killed Martin Luther King? But what is James Earl Ray's answer?

The book's 285 pages only hint at answers: Meyer Lansky and others in organized crime? Shadowy individuals at the other end of Louisiana phone numbers he was given by "Raoul"? Officials of the FBI?

Many who have interviewed Ray — including those who believe his claim of innocence — sense that he's hiding some of what he knows.

Harold Weisberg, a writer and former congressional investigator who has amassed an 80,000-page private archive of King investigation documents, said he once asked Ray, while helping him pre-

Melanson believes Ray was helped by several people before and after the assassination.

pare for a hearing, who his handlers had been.

"He said, 'I won't get out by putting somebody else in,'" Weisberg recalled.

Philip Melanson believes Ray was helped by several people before and after the assassination, but was kept at arm's length by the principal conspirators.

"He could have been recruited by people who were on the fringe," said Melanson, who teaches political science at Southeastern Massachusetts University. "I don't know that he was entrusted with enough information ... that he could provide specifics that would solve the case."

At the prison, Ray was coy in his responses to some questions posed by The Associated Press — about the sources of aliases that turned out to belong to real peo-

ple he didn't know, for example, or about new evidence he might present at trial:

"I really don't know."

"I don't know what I should tell you."

He was asked if he was revealing only enough to tantalize the public and get back into court, but not enough to endanger himself by giving away conspirators' identities.

"No, I don't think there's any-

thing to that," said Ray, whose sandy hair is graying but who appears fit at 63. "This case is 23 years old. The only problems I've had were at Brushy Mountain prison," where he was stabbed by inmates in 1981.

Among the things he does discuss is his guilty plea. He entered it, he says, only after being subjected to solitary confinement for months in a cell with constant surveillance by closed-circuit TV cameras and bright lights kept on 24 hours a day.

Compounding this "midnight sunstroke," as he calls it, were threats that his brother and father could be prosecuted if he did not cooperate, he says. He denies that avoiding the death penalty was his motive for the plea.

He goes into long-standing charges that his lawyers compromised his defense — "crowbarred me into a guilty plea" — in order to participate in lucrative publishing contracts for articles and books about the case. And he attempts to discredit witnesses used against him.

Whether or not his book holds significant revelations, Ray says, "I think the main thing now is that a lot of people are starting to demand a new trial — Jesse Jackson and people like that."

Besides Jackson, at least two groups in Washington are lobbying for the sealed files to be opened.

"I can say to a moral certainty that there is nothing in the records that would in any manner exculpate his [Ray's] complicity," Stokes responded by phone from his Capitol office. "There's nothing in those files that would change the course of American history."

Ray scoffs, "You're supposed to trust politicians? That's like me saying, 'Trust me.'"

"Hell, look at the records! They've got the same evidence today as they had 20-some years ago."

A television commentator Ray heard recently spoke of the lingering doubts about whether Lee Harvey Oswald alone killed President Kennedy: "If Oswald had just lived," he said, "they'd have had a trial and it would have cleared this all up, and the American people would have been satisfied."

"Well, in my case, I'm still living," Ray said. "This could have been solved years ago. Still could be. I have serious doubts that it will."

America is so firmly convinced that I pulled the trigger of the rifle that killed Martin Luther King, is there so much reluctance to allow me to have a trial and fully air the evidence?"

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s untiring travels to the flash points of the civil rights movement won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 — and in early April 1968 took him to Memphis, where sanitation workers, most of them black, were striking for better pay and an end to discrimination.

He stirred a crowd with a speech that's memorized by children now, declaring, "I've been to the mountaintop. . . . I'm not fearing any man." After spending much of April 4 planning yet another demonstration, he prepared for dinner, then stepped onto his balcony at the Lorraine Motel.

As King stood alone there at 6:01 p.m., a single rifle shot struck him in the head. "It's all over," an aide cried, moments later.

Investigators tracing aliases and

following leads across continents arrested James Earl Ray in London in June. Within a year of the assassination, on March 10, 1969, Ray pleaded guilty to King's killing.

In his new book, Ray calls the court proceeding a sham, but this sentiment is not new. He registered it before he left the courtroom.

Then-U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark had said immediately after the shooting that a lone assassin killed King; there was no evidence of a conspiracy. But even as he pleaded guilty, Ray told the judge: "The only thing that I have to say is that I can't agree with Mr. Clark."

There was a conspiracy, concluded the House Select Committee on Assassinations nine years later. In 1978, its report based on a two-year investigation said Ray shot King, but that a St. Louis-based conspiracy of racial bigots was behind the killing.

Ray complains that the committee cut short his testimony and misrepresented what he said.

Rep. Louis Stokes, who chaired the panel, denies that, saying Ray's book fails "to clear up all the inconsistencies that I developed during my cross-examination of him."

Stokes, D-Ohio, defends the investigation as exhaustive, despite challenges to its conclusion.

"Highly speculative," says Philip Melanson, an archivist and researcher who has studied the King case for years.

The committee also concluded that no federal, state or local agency was involved in King's killing — exonerating the FBI, whose campaign of attempting to discredit King was well-documented.

"I have always believed that the government was part of a conspiracy, either directly or indirectly, to assassinate him," says the Rev. Jesse Jackson.

The comment by Jackson, who was among those with King when he died, comes in a foreword to Ray's book, written at the publisher's request.

Jackson adds: "No thoughtful person, after reviewing the evidence, can believe that this one man, James Earl Ray — who had bungled virtually everything he had ever tried, including criminal activity — acting alone, killed Martin Luther King."

Ray, Jackson says, "may or may not have been part of the conspiracy. . . . Where I do agree with James Earl Ray is that he deserves a full and fair trial, and the American people deserve to know the truth."

Jackson also endorses Ray's call for a federal special prosecutor and the unsealing of committee investigative records that are closed to the public until the year 2029.