

# Interview

Table Hopping  
Syracuse, N.Y.

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## Who Killed Martin Luther King?

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Who killed Martin Luther King? A revealing interview with the alleged assassin - James Earl Ray.

"I have always believed that the government was part of a conspiracy, either directly, or indirectly, to assassinate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr." - Rev. Jesse Jackson.

"James Earl Ray is not guilty." - Mark Lane and Dick Gregory.

"Where there's an assassination, you have to have a lone nut, because a lone nut can kill somebody for no reason. If you admit there was a conspiracy, then you have to say the conspiracy had a reason. By having a lone nut, you don't ever have to ask that question." - Col. Fletcher Prouty, Chief of Special Operations at the Pentagon, 1960-1963. (From the A and E Documentary, "Who Killed Martin Luther King?")

"In my opinion, it had to be a conspiracy." - Martin Luther King III (Dr. King's son).

"There is no evidence that James Earl Ray ever fired a rifle in his life." - Harold Weisberg, Assassination Research (from the A and E Documentary, "Who Killed Martin Luther King?").

"I didn't kill him." - James Earl Ray.

"We concluded that James Earl Ray was in fact the person who murdered Dr. Martin Luther King. We also felt that in all probability there was a conspiracy. However, we were unable to name any conspirators." - Congressman Louis Stokes, Chairman of the House Assassinations Committee, 1976/1978 (from the A and E Documentary, "Who Killed Martin Luther King?").

"There are as many different opinions, as there are people, on who killed Martin Luther King. From day one, the alleged assassin, James Earl Ray, has proclaimed his innocence, implicating a shadowy, mysterious acquaintance, known to him only as 'Raoul.' Yet, on March 10, 1969, James Earl Ray, under pressure from his then attorney Percy Foreman, pled guilty to the crime. He was sentenced to life in prison (99



Martin Luther King

# Interview

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James Earl Ray

years). Today, James Earl Ray bides his time in the River Bend Penitentiary in Nashville, Tennessee. He's just written a book on his life titled "Who Killed Martin Luther King?" The true story by the alleged assassin." (National Press Books, Bethesda, Maryland).

We talked with James Earl Ray about the events leading up to Dr. King's assassination, his whereabouts at the time of Martin Luther King's death, and, the strange predicament he now find himself in.

**Q. Mr. Ray, what's the reaction been to this book of yours?**

**A.** Well, I haven't heard anybody criticize it except some Tennessee metropolitan newspapers. Everyone else is either neutral or favorable. I think the public is favorable to it.

**Q. What do you do every day in prison? Is there such a thing as a typical day for you?**

**A.** Well, I've been out of segregation for two months. I just get up, go to breakfast, work a half-day, and then in the evening I do more work after 9 o'clock. I got to clean up the cell block, and that's about it. Nothing very exciting about it, just daily routine.

**Q. Why were you in segregation?**

**A.** I was in six months for thinking about escaping. I don't know how they know what I'm thinking about, but anyway, you can be locked up in prison for just about anything.

**Q. So, now, you're able to mix with the other prisoners?**

**A.** Yeah, except when you're in segregation you can't. Everyone keeps separated. This prison I'm in now is about six prisons within a big prison. One cell block is about a hun-

dred people. They mix together, and I don't know if all the other cell blocks are segregated. You're just mixed in with a hundred in your cell block.

**Q. Do you ever fear for your life?**

**A.** No, I don't worry about that. Everybody's in here for serious charges, murderers, rapists, child molesters. So I don't sit around worrying about what someone else thinks.

**Q. After 23 years, don't you think that anybody involved in Dr. King's murder would have covered their tracks by now?**

**A.** Well, I really don't know. I don't think so. As I mentioned in the lawsuit, and also mentioned in a radio talk show several times, I'm also convinced based on all the evidence I read and everything that a former F.B.I. official, Number Three Man in the F.B.I. name of Cartha DeLoach. He was Number Three Man in the F.B.I. when Martin Luther King was shot. He set the murder in place. He's denied this of course. That's the way it stands right now. I don't know if you know anything about him. He was a high official in this COINTEL Program which was harassing people like King. Actually, I think their job was harassing what they call Black and White Nationalists. Kind of a counter espionage organization. Anyway, after he was involved in this, and after King was shot, he was in charge of investigating the King murder. So, he had kind of a dual role there. When they arrested me, he was intercepting my letters I had at the Memphis jail, except for three or four letters I wrote to the attorney, so I guess he was trying to find out what I knew about the crime. He was also liaison to President Johnson in

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the 1960's where he was doing various dirty tricks. I could go on and on about him. That just gives you a general idea of what type of operations he was into. After they got me in jail, he sent a memo to Hoover wanting to continue harassing Dr. King's widow and the late Rev. Ralph Abernathy. I don't know if that memo is in the book or not. I did send a copy of it to Alan Sultan (Vice President of National Press Books - Ray's publisher), and to writer Gerald Franks who covered the Martin Luther King case. Franks did publish a book later on, the prosecution version of the case.

**Q. What would it take to get this case back in court again?**

**A.** Well generally, you have to have a technicality. They're really not too interested if you're guilty or not guilty. We've had three or four technicalities. For instance, the judge in the case died three weeks after the trial. I had a motion for a new trial entered at that time. I should have gotten one automatically, but they do what they want to do here in Tennessee. The judge just ruled it didn't apply to me. Also, the jury is supposed to find you, they're supposed to sentence you and find the degree of guilt. In Tennessee they didn't do it, and I raised that issue. They said that's right, but you waited too long to raise the issue. There's nothing you can do in the State Courts right now, because three years ago Tennessee repealed the Writ of Habeas Corpus. So, you can't get no new trial in Tennessee after three years after your conviction. Of course, it's been 23 years after mine. But you still have to go through state courts before you go to Federal Court. So, there's no possibility of me getting a trial in Tennessee courts.

**So, what's the answer here? Should people write letters to their congressmen and senators demanding you get a chance to present your side of the story in a court of law?**

**A.** Well, I suppose they could complain about the Justice

A. Well, I never had no time. I never had an opportunity. I just drove him across the border twice, in Canada. Once, I guess was a dry run. In Mexico, I drove him from some place in the United States. I think that's a town called New Laredo. On the Mexican side I think it's Neuva Laredo. Anyway, I didn't have any opportunity to go looking in back of the car. I really wasn't interested in what was in back of the car in the tire. I was interested in getting money and the passport.

Q. How did you know you could trust this guy? He could've murdered you, right?

A. Well, yeah, but I was in kind of a difficult position. I needed money and a passport. I'd been involved with people like that for most of my life. I was concerned one time. I might have been shot in Mexico, when I took the stuff across in the tire, and the next day we went into interior Mexico, and we made certain transactions, changed the tire and things of that nature. As we got to the second border crossing which is about 50 kilometers inside Mexico, that's something you just have to take a chance on, if you're in bad enough need of money and a passport.

Q. You matched up a back-up number that Raoul had given you, to a Herman A. Thompson in the telephone directory. Your brother Jerry found out that one. Thompson was a police officer, in Baton Rouge, La. Is that correct?

A. Yeah, well, I traced his number down, when I was in Baton Rouge. It's kind of a back-up number. But, I don't think there's anything to that because I never did call that number. I called him once. I got a busy signal or he wasn't there or something. Then, when I did that I called New Orleans. I had the other number. I called the original number, and I was told where to go then. On the Thompson thing, come to find out he was a deputy sheriff and he didn't have any reason to be involved with the King case. So, I think that was just something that threw the police off, rather than direct them to New Orleans where the actual phone number was. I really don't understand that.

Q. So, that was pretty much a dead end?

A. I found out the name by, I think I explained it in the book. I went through the phone book and I had a little time there, and I looked through the last two numbers or something.

Q. You also found a business card in the back seat of your car that listed one Randy Rosen of Miami, Florida. Was that a dead end too?

A. That wasn't exactly a dead end. The Select Codmmittee looked into it, and he was in the same town I was, several times in 1967. This is prior to the King shooting, in 1967. The only thing I found out about him, I got some of his records, he was a drug dealer and he was also into porn. Apparently, the F.B.I. might have been using him in some way. When I escaped from Tennessee prison in 1977, Brushy Mount, he was in Knoxville at the time. Well, I didn't know it. It was a coincidence. The Select Committee had him over and was questioning him about the case. He had an attorney name of Jim Stanley. I don't know just what all he told him, but I think they've classified most of it.

Q. Where were you at the time of the assassination? You were driving in your Mustang, headed back to the place you were staying?

A. I'm not sure whether it was an intersection or they (the police) were blocking off the street. I think they were waving off cars or something. Anyway, I looked down there and saw what looked like 3 or 4 policemen, running down in that general area, of the flophouse (where Ray was staying), so instead of turning right and going back to the flophouse, I just turned left and drove out of town. I just wanted to make a phone call to find out what was going on.

Q. When you're driving your car, you hear the bulletin that Dr. King has been shot, and they're looking for someone that matches your description, what went through your mind?

A. I was in Memphis, driving kind of slowly towards the Mississippi/Tennessee line, and at first there was a report on the radio saying Martin Luther King had been shot. I guess that was about 6:15. A few minutes later, 5 minutes or so,

they said they were looking for a white man in a white Mustang. I kind of quick thought there was a possibility they were looking for me.

Q. Did you think Raoul had set you up?

A. Well, I probably did, but I don't recall. I just recall thinking get out of town. I wasn't thinking set up or anything of that nature. I really didn't know what was going on. So I wasn't a hundred percent certain they were looking for me. Based on what I heard on the radio, that was enough. I also had escaped from Missouri prison on a 20 year sentence, so even if I had been cleared on the King case, I still would've had to do the Missouri thing. So, I just left. I was going to make a phone call to this Raoul's intermediary in New Orleans. Instead of that, I just turned left, and went to Atlanta.

Q. How do you think Raoul got away?

A. According to the taxi driver name of James McGraw, about 10 minutes before the shooting took place there were two Mustangs parked in front of this flophouse. One of them was apparently mine. I moved mine out, and apparently the other one couldn't have been used in the getaway. In addition there's been information about seeing people running this way and that way. I don't know anything about that. But I think probably the two Mustangs is the most solid evidence that maybe a Mustang was used in the getaway.

Q. Where was your eventual destination? Was it Australia? Is that where you were fleeing to?

A. Well, anywhere I could get. When I escaped the first time, I went to Chicago, and worked about two months. This is in April of '67 when I escaped. I went to Canada, and intended to go to a foreign country, some English speaking country, preferably. I had problems with the passport. I wasn't thorough enough. Instead of going to a travel agent to direct me and tell me what the situation was, I just called on the phone and they said you'll need to know someone two years as a verifier. So anyway that's what really got me involved with this Raoul. Well then later on when I went to Canada after the shooting, well then I went directly to the travel agency. They explained to me I could sign a waiver explaining I was a certain person, which I did, and then I got the passport. But, I didn't have any place specific to go. I just wanted to go somewhere. A foreign country.

Q. Wouldn't it have made your case look better had you turned yourself in the minute you heard they were looking for someone matching your description?

A. I just don't like turning myself in, even if it's for a traffic ticket. I won't turn myself in. Plus, I had 20 years in Missouri. In cases like this, and I didn't know it at the time, they've got to get someone in jail for this. You read the court records, and the comments of the judge. The judge made the comment if I was acquitted the blacks would burn down the town. Plus, if I had gone to trial, all the harassment of King would've come out through F.B.I. documents. Anyway, I think if they had gotten me up there, tried me, they would have convicted me of something. I don't know what it would have been. Enough to get me in prison for quite a while.

Q. You had to know that the authorities would try for as long as it took to get you. There really was no place you could hide.

A. It would be extremely difficult for someone to commit something like that and expect to get away with it. Still in all I wouldn't turn myself in, on anything. I'm just against turning myself in. I'm not that happy about being in jail. I just woke up and said here I am.

Q. Besides your claim of innocence in your book, are you also saying that what happened to you can happen to anybody?

A. I think a lot of it depends on if you have political influence, your status and all that stuff. I didn't really intend to put a story saying, well it can happen to me, it can happen to you, so you're supposed to help me. That wasn't what I intended to put out. I just intended to put out a documented version of the case. I tried to document the book as much as I could.

Department, about all the classified records. Congressman Louis Stokes, he was the chairman of the Select Committee that investigated the King case. He classified 185 key records included in his investigation. They might complain about that. I really don't think the public has got anything to say about this. There's even been polls taken, and the public doesn't think they have any input on the political system. I think this is in the hands of the media and the politicians. I don't think the public writing letters to the editor or anything like that is going to help.

Q. You met Raoul at the Neptune Bar in Dorion, outside Montreal. Is that correct?

A. Yes.

Q. Has anyone ever gone back to that bar and questioned the employees, to see if they remember a man fitting Raoul's description?

A. Not that I know of. It's obvious the Justice Dept. went there. The Canadian Police went down and investigated. But all of these records are classified. And, also, I met this Raoul in a bar in Memphis called The Starlight Club, four or five times. What the state claims is no one's ever seen me with him, but at the same time, they turn around and classify all the records. So, it's difficult for me to counteract their arguments, you know. I can say I was there and they say I wasn't. The records that would establish it one way or another have been classified.

Q. From what you describe of Raoul in your book, he sounds like a drug smuggler. You think he was a gun runner?

A. When we first started out I thought he might have been a gun smuggler because he took some packages across in my car from Windsor, Canada to Detroit, Michigan. I noticed I think in the rear view mirror that he put these packages in the springs in the back. I just assumed it was drugs, although he might just have been testing me out to see if I was reliable.

Q. Were you ever tempted to look inside one of those packages? He put something in a tire.

*Not in  
Memphis  
Beham?  
N.O.?*