

Great 1/21/76

The Death of Dr. King: CBS' 'Compelling' Quest

By John Carmody

The third in CBS' four-part series on "The American Assassins" tonight examines the circumstances of the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968.

The documentary, at 10:30 p.m. on Channel 9 (delayed for the conclusion of a Washington Bullets game), makes a powerful case for an "outside investigation" of both the circumstances

Preview

and motives surrounding the King assassination.

It removes itself, as best it can, from the strong emotions surrounding the case by making a clinical, dispassionate presentation of the facts.

The hour is not "entertaining" or exciting television. It is compelling journalism wrapped in the cold power of a well-constructed courtroom argument.

As correspondent Dan Rather points out tonight, the King case differed in several respects from the others—that of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy and the attempt on George Wallace—discussed in the CBS series.

King's assassin, James Earl Ray, is the only one of the accused assassins to plead guilty, though he has withdrawn the plea. Thus his is the only case still before the courts. Ray seems the least politically motivated of all the accused assassins in the four cases.

Most importantly, says Rather, unlike the John Kennedy assassination, the King case "never came under the same constant, searching scrutiny" —until mid-November 1975, when the Senate Intelligence Committee revealed the FBI

had actually sent in 1964, what seemed to be a cruel, even unbelievable invitation to Dr. King to commit suicide.

That kind of harrassment and the moving circumstances of Dr. King's last hours in Memphis—his strike leadership and his last, prophetic speech on April 3—are never far from the viewer's mind tonight as the program examines the forensic and chronological evidence surrounding the murder.

The on-the-scene investigation ticking off the main points of evidence in the case against Ray seems to prove the evidence was largely circumstantial.

Yet Ray did manage a clever escape from Memphis, one that took him to Canada, England, Portugal and back to London, where he finally was arrested, months later. That journey, plausible and yet oddly mysterious, still lingers in the background of the King case, as does the lack of motivation for the killing itself.

During the CBS probe, says Rather, they learned of several suspected plotting groups, including "unnamed money interests," white racists, black militants, communists, the CIA—even the Quebec Liberation Front.

That, of course, is the heart of the mystery in the death of Dr. King. Ray's contention that his confession of guilt was not free and voluntary will be settled in the courts.

But what of the forces behind Ray or someone not yet identified? That is the baffling questions that this hour could not possibly answer, but which nags the American public. According to a CBS poll taken in conjunction with this series, 80 per cent of those polled thought Ray "was involved with others; that is, that there was a conspiracy." This program seems to prove there are abundant legal reasons to reopen the case and either still or confirm such widely-held suspicions.