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TV News and Views

Ray Interview Disappointing

AFTER LAST NIGHT'S brief interview with James Earl Ray, shown mid-way through CBS' "Who's Who" on Channel 3, Dan Rather concluded that "for the time being, at least, James Earl Ray is either unwilling or unable to shed any new light" on the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Perhaps Rather was right, perhaps not. From the heavily edited interview shown on CBS, viewers have no way of judging. The questions we heard Rather ask



were relatively unproductive, but the questions left unasked were disturbing.

Here, for the first time since the death of Dr. King on April 4, 1968, Ray was before a television camera — presumably with something to say. Instead of letting him — urging him, pressing him — to say it, the disappointing interview seemed to distract him from telling his story.

Ray told Rather that he had not shot Dr. King, that he was not in the rooming house when the fatal shot was fired and that he believed, in a judicial proceeding now, that he could prove it. For some reason Rather did not pursue this thread of the story.

Rather said Ray had told him his reason for coming to Memphis was to meet the mysterious Raoul "in conjunction with some kind of gun running deal," Ray believed. For some reason Rather did not pursue that thread of the story either; instead, he asked him to describe Raoul, the alleged "Latin" contact whose description has been given numerous times.

Ray said he'd taken a tire to a service station to be fixed, but that he had been unable to get it fixed. For some reason, Rather didn't ask him whether the tire was a spare, if he ever got it repaired or

where or when. He didn't ask him if that tire was on his car when he drove out of Memphis. He didn't ask him when he returned to the boarding house across from the Lorraine Motel. He didn't ask him if he ever saw Raoul or anyone else. He did not ask why, if he was innocent, he left Memphis.

If, indeed, Ray had been at a service station and not at the boarding house when the shot was fired, one can only wonder what his reaction was, and what he found in his room, when he returned to the boarding house. One can only wonder how soon he left. One has to wonder, because last night's interview did not provide — or seek — the answers.

Ray contended that he would not be hired as a "hit man," because, "I don't have the constitution for it; that may not be a virtue and may be a handicap." He also declined to describe himself as a racist, but said, "If I tried to say I'd been a humanitarian 24 hours a day, that would obviously be a lie."

Ray said he wasn't interested in having "an ex parte conversation" with Attorney General Griffin Bell or appearing before a secret congressional committee, "where the staffs leak information, as happened with the Church committee." He wants his day in court or, at least, a public congressional hearing. "Not necessarily on television," he said, "but public, so it would be part of the public record." He claimed again that he pleaded guilty in court because he felt he could not rely on his attorney, Percy Foreman.

The conversation was unsatisfying and disturbingly short on "new light." It was sandwiched between reports on the L.L. Bean store's mail order business and a feature on the King Tut exhibition. Both the Bean and Tut features were perceptive, reflective, informative; the interview with Ray was none of those things.

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