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The MOUNTAIN EAGLE

King assassination looks suspect

By WAYNE CHASTAIN JR.
Pacific News Service

MEMPHIS — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. may have been the victim of "security stripping," a technique used by intelligence agencies to expose a victim to assassination by removing his protection—involving the Memphis police and possibly a federal intelligence agency.

This is the theory that convinced the House of Representatives to create a special 12-member committee to probe both the 1968 King murder and the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The Black Caucus in the House, acting on new information in the King case, was responsible for breaking a stalemate and pushing

the investigation through, according to several appointees to the committee.

The new information was given the Black Caucus by two investigators: Mark Lane, author of the best-selling book on the JFK assassination, *Rush to Judgment*, and Abby Mann, an Academy Award-winning screenwriter and author of *Judgment in Nuremberg*.

They and Newsday reporter Les Payne found in scores of interviews with those involved in the King investigation that:

—Ed Redditt, the black Memphis police detective in charge of protecting King, was removed from his post across the street from the motel where King was shot just two hours before the slaying. Redditt told PNS he had

set up a contingency plan to seal off the area in the event of violence, but it "was never implemented."

Director of the Police Department Frank Holloman—a former FBI agent of 25 years who had worked with Director J. Edgar Hoover—told him he was being removed because a murder plot against him had been discovered. After being taken home and watched by Memphis police for two days, he was put back on duty—and never heard another word about the murder plot.

Because Holloman told him of the plot in the company of a man he identified as a Secret Service agent, Redditt assumed "that Holloman had gotten this information from the Secret Service." But that agency denies having any

record of sending an agent to the meeting.

Representatives from the FBI, military intelligence, National Guard and other agencies were there, however.

—Redditt's assistant told investigator Mark Lane that he too had left the command post opposite King's hotel before the slaying, but refused to discuss the circumstances surrounding his removal.

—An informal security force of four members of a local black militant group, including one undercover Memphis police agent, was also relieved from duty just before the murder—by someone in the King entourage. Stationed with arms on the same floor as King, they were already down-

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Mysteries of King assassination still unfold

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starts when the shooting took place.

The only two black firemen assigned to the fire station across from King's hotel—Redditt's command post—were also "stripped away."

Both were temporarily transferred to other stations the night before the murder. One, Floyd Newsum, told Lane that the deputy chief of the Fire Department told him the transfer order had come from the Police Department.

According to Redditt, "The FBI never talked to me about this even though I told my story to anyone willing to answer."

Newsum says he has never been questioned by a law enforcement agency about his removal either.

Arthur Murtagh, a former FBI agent in Atlanta, has stated that agents in the Atlanta office "literally jumped for joy" when they learned King had been assassinated. He said the FBI intelligence squad in Atlanta—King's home town—was assigned "to somehow or other get King, or bring him down, break him or destroy him."

After the murder, Lane says, the same Atlanta intelligence squad was assigned by Hoover to head the investigation. "My superiors, both in the Atlanta bureau and Washington," Murtagh told PNS, "washed out leads suggesting a right-wing conspiracy."

Had a more thorough investigation been conducted by the FBI, I believe links would have been established between the King assassination and the Kennedy murders—both those of JFK and RFK," he added.

AGENTS PROVOCAEUR

In an interview with PNS, Redditt pointed to another area he thought should be investigated. He says he learned after the assassination that the Memphis police had heavily infiltrated a black militant organization called the Invaders that was directly responsible for King's return to Memphis.

Newsday's Les Payne has reported that police and FBI informants may have played a part in the violence. The Invaders had organized the disruption of a massive Memphis march led by King a week earlier,

launching a riot that killed one, injured scores and led to 238 arrests. After the violence apparently intended by the militant group to discredit King, the non-violent leader vowed to return to prove he could still lead a peaceful demonstration.

"Dr. King would never have returned to Memphis if the violence had not happened," according to the Rev. Jesse Jackson, a key King aide. "We never intended to get bogged down in Memphis."

Newsday has reported that, according to a former leader of the Invaders, a Memphis policeman who had infiltrated the group "was one of the most provocative members of the Invaders," very active in planning confrontations.

That undercover agent, according to both Newsday and Redditt, was one of the four Invaders in the informal security force for King, created by an agreement between King's staff and the Invaders on his return trip to Memphis.

He left the police department shortly after that," Redditt told PNS, "and the word was that he went to Washington, D.C. Then a couple of years after the King slaying I ran face to face with him in downtown Memphis. He was wearing a disguise."

Redditt says he stopped him. At first, the man pretended he was someone else, but finally acknowledged he was the man Redditt thought he was.

"He acted very mysterious, saying that he was now with the Central Intelligence Agency, and begged me not to blow his cover," according to Redditt.

PAST CHALLENGES

The congressional decision to probe the King murder follows years of efforts to puncture the official version of how he was killed. Just a day after pleading guilty, the alleged assassin James Earl Ray tried to reverse his

plea to not guilty, arguing that he had been tricked into pleading guilty by his lawyer to escape the death penalty.

In 1975, Ray told PNS, "I was set up and sucked in." He charged that his orders to drive to Memphis—because they came three days before King publicly announced he would return there—"could only have come from either someone in King's own camp or some high Justice Department official having access to information gained from wiretaps on King's telephones in Atlanta."

Testimony in federal court in a hearing on Ray's motion for a new trial also raised questions about the official version of events. Ballistics expert Dr. Herbert Lynn MacDonnell, professor of criminology at Elmira College in New York, testified that Ray's rifle could not have been used to fire the fatal shot.

And Ted Ghoramley, who was deputy sheriff of the county when King was killed, gave testimony indicating that the key piece of evidence against Ray—a bundle of his belongings the state said was left by Ray at the rooming house as he fled the scene—was actually placed where it was found before the assassination.

The State of Tennessee has in fact never produced an eyewitness linking Ray with the rooming house from which they contend the shot was fired, according to his former lawyers.

(Wayne Chastain is a veteran newspaper reporter who while writing for the Memphis Press-Scimitar was one of the first reporters on the scene after Dr. Martin Luther King was shot. He has now investigated the King murder for over eight years, becoming in 1973 the first reporter from a major metropolitan daily to obtain an interview with convicted King assassin James Earl Ray.)



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