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Others Planned Dr. King's Murder, Convict James Earl Ray Contends

By WAYNE CHASTAIN JR.
Pacific News Service

MEMPHIS
THE 1968 MURDER of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was at least partly planned within the Department of Justice or the Rev. Dr. King's own camp, James Earl Ray, who was convicted for the murder, charged in an exclusive interview with Pacific News Service.

"I got my moving orders to go to Memphis on March 28 (1968) in Birmingham, Alabama," Ray said at Tennessee State Prison in Nashville. "I was told to drive no more than three hours a day and not to arrive in Memphis before April 3. At that time those orders could only have come from either someone in King's camp or some high Justice Department official having access to information gained from wire taps on King's telephones in Atlanta."

The Rev. Dr. King did not disclose to the world until April 1 — three days after Ray had left Birmingham headed for Memphis — that he planned to return to Memphis April 3 to lead another protest march by striking sanitation workers there.

"By then (April 1)," Ray said, "I was already halfway to Memphis. I can name a motel I stayed at near Columbus, Mississippi. The next day I drove north and stayed at the Desoto Motel near the Mississippi-Tennessee line (only 10 miles from Memphis city limit) instead of going on to Memphis,

because I was carrying out my orders to the letter."

The next day, Ray drove to Memphis. He registered at the Rebel Motel and spent the night of April 3 there. He contends that the next afternoon he met at a Memphis tavern with a man named Raoul, who had given him his orders in Birmingham. Afterward, Ray asserts, a "federal agent of some kind" followed him from the tavern. At 6:01 that evening — April 4, 1968 — the Rev. Dr. King was killed by a sniper as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. However, the Federal Bureau of Investigation contends that Ray's itinerary was considerably different.

Instead of driving toward Memphis March 28, the FBI says, Ray left Birmingham for Atlanta, Ga. Ray spent the next three days in his Atlanta rooming house, the FBI says, then left for Memphis April 1 after hearing on the radio that Dr. King was going there.

Ray arrived in Memphis April 3, the FBI says, checked into a rooming house April 4 and shot Dr. King from a back room window. Then, the FBI says, Ray eluded police and drove back to Atlanta the next day, where he abandoned his car and took a bus for Canada.

RAY NOW SAVES: "They had to make up that trip to Atlanta between March 28 and April 1. The truth is that I did not go back to Atlanta after buying the rifle in Birmingham on March 28. I did not even go back to Atlanta on the day after the assassination."

Ray has been reticent about where he went and with whom he dealt from the time Dr. King was killed until Ray was captured two months later at London's Heathrow Airport.

He says now, however: "If I lose my appeal in Cincinnati (before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit) I'll go to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1976. If I lose there,

I'm going to tell all — everything I know about people and events leading up to and after King's murder in Memphis."

After revelations about some tactics used by the FBI and its late director, J. Edgar Hoover, against Dr. King, Attorney General Edward H. Levi has ordered a review of the FBI's investigation of the King murder.

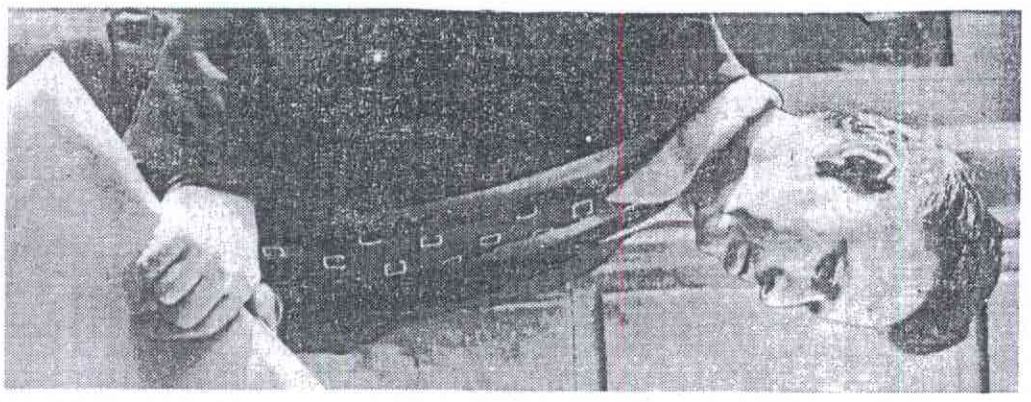
Earlier charges by a retired FBI agent, Arthur Murtagh, had sparked congressional and Justice Department interest in an alleged FBI smear campaign against Dr. King. Murtagh has testified recently before House and Senate intelligence committees.

"My superiors — both in the Atlanta bureau and Washington — washed out leads suggesting a right-wing conspiracy," Murtagh told Pacific News Service in a telephone interview from Constable, N. Y., where he is now a practicing lawyer. "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," Murtagh said.

In a letter to Robert I. Livingston, one of Ray's attorneys, Murtagh wrote: "The bureau was not administratively structured so as to permit intensive investigation of espionage activity from the right. All assumptions were made from the vantage point that the enemy was always on the left."

Murtagh said he had worked many years in the Atlanta, Ga., bureau, where he headed a labyrinthian underground of black informers. "The intelligence I was receiving indicated there were no black subversives in Dr. King's entourage or the top leadership of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference," Murtagh said.

"The phantom subversives, of course, created the raison d'être for Hoover's electronic surveillance of King, and provided Hoover with a reason for ordering the wire taps after convicting the then Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy, that there was indeed Communist penetration of the top, SCLC echelons."



James Earl Ray

"I was carrying out my orders"

Today, Ray is serving a 99-year sentence for Dr. King's murder. In March 1969, less than a year after Dr. King was killed, Ray pleaded guilty—but in equivocal language—to Dr. King's murder at a one-day trial in Memphis before the late Judge Preston Battle. In return for the guilty plea, Ray was spared a possible death sentence.

Less than 24 hours later, after Ray had been transferred to Tennessee State Prison in Nashville, he attempted to reverse his guilty plea in a letter to Battle. Ray said he did not shoot and kill Dr. King and had been coerced and tricked into the guilty plea by his then attorney, Percy Foreman of Houston.

Although Ray had pleaded guilty at the March hearing, he interrupted his attorney, Foreman, when Foreman said to the court, "there had been no conspiracy behind Dr. King's death."

Today, Ray contends he had no knowledge of a conspiracy to kill Dr. King when he went to Memphis April 3, 1968. He thought he was going to meet two other men and participate in a gun-to-dope smuggling operation.

"I was set up and sucked in," Ray argues. "I brought the rifle that was found on the sidewalk after Dr. King's murder, but I did not fire it at Dr. King, nor anyone else. In fact I was several blocks away from the scene when King was shot."

His attorneys have filed a long brief asking for a new trial, contending that the rifle and other items found on the sidewalk were part of a plot to frame Ray.