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Return
to HW

editorials

Reopen The King Case

Though there has been an enormous amount of energy and talent devoted to showing that President Kennedy was the victim of a conspiracy and, to a lesser extent, that his brother Robert was too, the assassination which *prima facie* invites the strongest suspicion that the killer did not act alone is that of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Substantive unanswered questions notwithstanding, no serious effort to get to the bottom of the killing had been undertaken until last month, when Attorney General Edward H. Levi said two Justice Department lawyers would review the FBI's files on the assassination.

Even that tentative step was not prompted by a recognition that the official account is implausible, but by disclosures that the FBI systematically harassed the civil rights leader with the intent of discrediting and neutralizing him.

If evidence of some conspiracy exists, however, it quite obviously is not going to be found in the files of an agency that at the time of the Rev. Dr. King's murder was seeking to destroy him and which today, seven and a half years later, would naturally be expected to have a vested interest in seeing that the crime remains as it was portrayed — the act of a lone gunman motivated by intense racist feelings that cannot be located in his background.

Given what is known about James Earl Ray before the death of the Rev. Dr. King in Memphis in April 1968, a good deal of ingenuousness is required to believe that he had no accomplices. A high school dropout,

drifter and incompetent stick-up man, Ray disappeared from the Missouri penitentiary in 1967 and claimed to have spent the greater part of the ensuing year as a smuggler, living well if not sumptuously in the Los Angeles area most of the time.

Why would he abandon this life, drive to Memphis and kill the civil rights leader? How did he know that the Rev. Dr. King would change motels (in response to an FBI-inspired criticism that he was staying at an expensive, white-owned motel)? How did he locate the ideal spot for a sniper shot at the Rev. Dr. King? How did he manage to travel to five countries before being caught in London? If he was cunning enough to have done all those things on his own, how is it that he was stupid enough to leave fingerprints on the murder weapon and in the getaway car? Why did he quickly plead guilty, foreclosing a trial at which his story and evidence against him could have been brought out?

These questions, and others, stand by themselves as sufficient reason to reopen the case. And when the FBI's documented efforts to get the Rev. Dr. King and the late FBI director's refusal to co-operate in an earlier plan to re-investigate the murder are added, reopening becomes essential. Without a comprehensive investigation that fully resolves the serious doubts that James Earl Ray acted alone, the public will be left with the entirely reasonable conclusion that the Rev. Dr. King was the victim of an organized plot to kill him and that the participants — save one — got away with it.