

Report on King Inquiry Unlikely to End Suspicions

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 21—The report by Justice Department investigators that reviewed the Federal Bureau of Investigation's inquiry into the murder of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. should dampen, but is not likely to end, suspicions that James Earl Ray, the convicted murderer, was only one member of a larger conspiracy.

The investigators never set out to prove or disprove all the various conspiracy theories that have sprung up in the nine years since Dr. King's death, Justice Department officials have stressed, but only to establish whether the bureau might somehow have been implicated in the killing, and whether its investigation of the murder had been "thorough and honest."

After an eight-month investigation that took it to more than a dozen cities, included a review of more than 200,000 documents, and involved interviews with about 40 persons (but not Mr. Ray himself, because he refused to be interviewed), the investigators concluded that the bureau's investigation had been thorough and professional, and that the best evidence was that Mr. Ray had acted alone.

Investigators Suspicions Reported

The conclusions were considered particularly significant within the department because, according to Justice Department sources, most if not all of the investigators had begun their investigation with a belief that it was likely that there had been a conspiracy that involved others, besides Mr. Ray.

But even before the report was released to the public, Attorney General Griffin B. Bell warned that it would not answer all the questions about the murder, and that although it concluded that there was no credible evidence of a conspiracy, a reader "could still wonder if there happened to be a conspiracy."

Two reasons for this are rooted in a major question not answered by the bureau's investigation, and in the lack of trust that many Americans now have in government.

The major question is just where and how Mr. Ray obtained the money he needed to travel extensively and make expensive purchases in the time between his escape from prison in April 1967 and his arrest at London Airport on June 8, 1968, two months after the shooting of Dr. King.

Ray Traveled and Spent

Mr. Ray is known to have visited Acapulco, Mexico; Birmingham, Ala.; Los Angeles; Montreal; Chicago; New Orleans, and Atlanta during this period, and to have purchased a car, expensive camera equipment and several hundred dollars' worth of dancing lessons.

The bureau has been able to account for only \$664.34 in earned income during this period, all of it from money earned as a dishwasher and cook's helper at the Indian Trail Restaurant in Winnetka, Ill.

The bureau has theorized that Mr. Ray most likely supported himself by robberies or burglaries. The Justice Department investigation concedes that "Ray's background does lend credence to this theory," but also concludes that the sources of funds remains a mystery.

This, plus the fact that Mr. Ray was an uneducated, unskilled, military reject with few if any known friends, has caused some F.B.I. agents to argue privately that it is likely he had some help. "He moved too far, too fast" in the aftermath of the shooting of Dr. King, one of them said recently. Such opinions will probably help keep the conspiracy theory alive.

Young Expresses Skepticism

The second reason that the theory is likely to survive, the skepticism that many Americans have in this post-Watergate climate, was articulated last Friday by Andrew Young, the United States's chief delegate to the United Nations and a man who, as an aide to Dr. King, was himself the subject of extensive Federal surveillance in the 1960's.

Mr. Young said that he hoped the House of Representatives would proceed with its own investigation because he doubted that the public would fully accept the

conclusions of a Justice Department investigation of one of its own agencies.

And already one charge of cover-up has been made. Mr. Ray's lawyer, Robert J. Livingston of Memphis, was quoted over the weekend as charging that the Justice Department was attempting to whitewash the matter, in order to head off the planned investigation of the assassination by the House committee.

The report was assembled by a group of lawyer-investigators headed by Michael E. Shaheen Jr. The lawyers were selected, Justice Department officials insist, because they were considered independent and because they had not had a close working relationship with the bureau in the past.

"We acknowledge," the report said, "that proof of the negative, i.e., proof that others were not involved, is here as elusive and difficult as it has universally been in criminal law. But the sum of all the evidence of Ray's guilt points to him so exclusively that it most effectively makes the point that no one else was involved."

How readily the public accepts this conclusion will not be known for some time. The House committee was scheduled to meet today to debate the future of its own investigation into Dr. King's death, but the session was postponed because of the reported illness of its chairman, Representative Henry B. Gonzalez, Democrat of Texas.

Because of a growing opposition in the House to the need for such an inquiry, the Justice Department conclusions are certain to be a part of that debate, when it resumes.

Report raises new questions in King assassination case

By LES PAYNE
© Newsday

The recent Justice Department report on the assassination of Martin Luther King has raised new questions about the case and intensified the call for an investigation by a body independent of federal law enforcement officials.

Members of the House committee investigating King's death say that the Justice report shows no signs of any real investigation of the murder or of the possibility that James Earl Ray was part of a conspiracy. The House Select Committee on Assassinations, which is investigating the murders of President Kennedy and King, is in disarray following heated confrontation between the committee's chairman, Rep. Henry Gonzalez, D-Tex., and the chief counsel, former Philadelphia prosecutor Richard Sprague.

THE 200-PAGE report of the Justice task force reaches no conclusion about a possible conspiracy in the death of King. Former Atty. Gen. Edward Levi told the task force to determine whether the FBI's surveillance of King influenced its investigation and whether the bureau's action had any "adverse effect on Dr. King." The report concluded that the bureau had conducted a "thorough investigation," although its "harassment of Dr. King and efforts to drive him out of the civil rights movement were found to have been clearly improper."

Some members of the committee consider the report irrelevant to the

circumstances of the King murder. "There is nothing in the Justice Department report which bears significantly on the evidence of the case which points toward a conspiracy," said Walter Fauntroy, Democratic delegate from the District of Columbia and chairman of the House subcommittee investigating King's slaying. "The information that we have already developed clearly shows that the assassination of Martin Luther King could not have been committed by a single individual."

Critical to the events on the day of the assassination was the withdrawal of all security elements which protected King. Besides the black detective, Ed Redditt, the four-man security team provided by the invaders (a youth group penetrated by the FBI) was withdrawn and, according to the

Justice report, a special four-man Memphis security detail was withdrawn the day before the assassination.

The defense argues that a conspiracy was involved in the assassination. This suspicion has not been laid to rest by the Justice Department report. Prior to its release, Atty. Gen. Griffin B. Bell cautioned that the report left important questions unanswered, including the possibility of a conspiracy.

"THIS REPORT is fashioned in terms of assessing the job . . . that the FBI did," Bell said. "It's not designed to reach a conclusion of (a conspiracy). If you read the report you could lean to either side of it. You could say that there's no evidence of a conspiracy but you could still wonder . . . if there happened to be a conspiracy."

This week Bell returned to the question of Ray's finances and seemed to renew the question of conspiracy. He said that he or a top aide should question Ray about the source of money he used to escape.



MARTIN LUTHER KING

harassed by FBI.
St. Pete Times 3/3/77



JAMES EARL RAY

... who paid for escape?