

CDNPM39

ATTENTION: BOOK EDITORS
FOR RELEASE SUNDAY

BY HOKE MORRIS
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AN AMERICAN DEATH: THE TRUE STORY OF THE ASSASSINATION OF
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. BY GEROLD FRANK, DOUBLEDAY, \$10.

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(UNDATED)---THE 1960S WERE THE DECADE OF THE RIOTS, THE
DECADE OF THE ASSASSINS. WASHINGTON, CHICAGO, WATTS, THE
DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION, KING, TWO KENNEDYS, MEDGAR EVERS,
THREE CIVIL RIGHTS WORKERS IN PHILADELPHIA, MISS., AND
UNCOUNTED OTHERS ELSEWHERE IN THE SOUTH (AND THE HEAT AND
THE BLOOD OF VIETNAM). WAS THERE EVER SUCH A DREARY, DEADLY
DECADE? IF THERE WAS, WHO WANTED IT? WHO WANTED THE '60S?

YET IT WAS ALSO THE DECADE OF GREAT AND LASTING PROGRESS.
THE BLACKS MARCHED, PROTESTED, SAT IN, AND WON MOST OF THEIR
LEGAL BATTLES FOR CIVIL RIGHTS. THE PROPER COURT JUDGMENTS
WERE RENDERED, THE NEEDED LAWS WERE PASSED, TO MAKE THEM
LEGALLY SECURE IN THEIR FULL AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP. THAT THIS
WAS A LEGAL VICTORY AND NOT A COMPLETE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND
CULTURAL VICTORY REMAINS PAINFULLY CLEAR, BUT AT LEAST
THEY GOT THE LAWS THAT MADE THEIR FUTURE STRUGGLES EASIER AND
MORE CERTAIN OF VICTORY. BUT NOT WITHOUT A PRICE.

PART OF THAT PRICE WAS THE LIFE OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
DR. KING WAS MURDERED IN MEMPHIS ON APRIL 4, 1968. ON THE
FOLLOWING JUNE A MAN WHO HAD USED A NUMBER OF NAMES BUT
WHOSE REAL NAME TURNED OUT TO BE JAMES EARL RAY WAS ARRESTED
AT A LONDON AIRPORT ON THE CHARGE THAT HE HAD COMMITTED
THE CRIME. RAY HAD SHOT DR. KING AND ESCAPED UNDETECTED FROM
MEMPHIS, ALIVE AND TEEMING WITH POLICE, AND THEN HAD ESCAPED
FROM THE UNITED STATES AND FROM CANADA. COULD HE HAVE DONE SO --
COULD HE HAVE PLANNED AND EXECUTED THE MURDER AND THEN GOT
AWAY NOT ONLY FROM THE SCENE BUT FROM THE COUNTRY --
WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF OTHER PERSONS? WAS THERE A "CONSPIRACY"
TO ASSASSINATE DR. KING?

GEROLD FRANK, PREVIOUSLY THE COLLABORATOR WITH
CELEBRITIES IN THEIR MEMOIRS AND THE BIOGRAPHER OF THE BOSTON
STRANGLER, HAS TURNED HIS CONSIDERABLE TALENTS AND ENERGIES
AS A REPORTER LOOSE UPON THAT QUESTION AND HAS PRODUCED A
BOOK THAT SHOULD, BUT PROBABLY WILL NOT, SATISFY THE MOST
SKEPTICAL, THE MOST RABID DEVOTEE OF THE CONSPIRACY
THEORY OF HISTORY. IT IS FRANK'S CONCLUSION -- BASED ON
OVERWHELMING EVIDENCE -- THAT RAY ACTED ALONE, THAT THERE
WAS NO CONSPIRACY.

THIS IS A FULL-DRESS INVESTIGATION. IT EXPLORES DR.
KING'S HISTORY IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, AND RAY'S
IN THE PRISONS OF THE LAND, AND IT MOVES WITH NOVELISTIC
TENSION TOWARD THAT DREADEFUL AND FATAL CROSSING OF THE TWO PATHS
IN MEMPHIS FOUR YEARS AGO. IT MAKES A GOOD STORY -- A STORY
OF CRIME AND ITS DETECTION, OF PUNISHMENT AND ITS PROCESSES.

THE UNMISTAKABLE VERDICT -- THAT RAY AND RAY ALONE WAS
RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MURDER THAT SET THE COUNTRY ON FIRE
-- WAS RENDERED AS A CONSEQUENCE OF SOME OF THE BEST POLICE WORK
I HAVE EVER SEEN PUT INTO A BOOK. A PAIR OF PLIERS WAS TRACED
TO BIRMINGHAM, A PAIR OF Pliers WAS TRACED TO
IDENTIFICATION ON A WINDOWSILL -- ALL WERE TRACED AND

ANALYZED AND IDENTIFIED AND SET IN THEIR PROPER PLACES
AMONG THE LINKS IN THE CHAIN OF EVIDENCE.

IF THERE IS A HERO OF THIS BOOK, IT IS A
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IF THERE IS A HERO OF THIS BOOK, IT IS A
POLICEMAN -- A COLLECTIVE POLICEMAN REPRESENTING ALL THE
POLICE INVOLVED, FROM THE MEMPHIS PATROLMAN AND THE SHELBY
COUNTY DEPUTY TO THE DIRECTOR OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF
INVESTIGATION. THEIR WORK ON THE KING MURDER SEEMS SENSATIONAL,
AND YET ONE SENSES THAT IT WAS IN A WAY ROUTINE. THEY GO
THROUGH THIS SORT OF THING ALL THE TIME. THERE CAN BE NO
DOUBT THAT THE FBI HAS NO EQUAL IN THE INVESTIGATION OF
CRIME AND THE DETECTION AND APPREHENSION OF CRIMINALS. MORE
THE PITY, THEN, THAT THE FBI DIRECTOR, J. EDGAR HOOVER, HAS
SEEM FIT TO DISSEMINATE SLANDEROUS INFORMATION
GAINED THROUGH ILLEGAL WIRE-TAPPING, ABOUT DR. KING.

BUT FOR THE MOMENT HE AND THE COPS ARE THE HERO.

THEN WHO IS THE VILLAIN?

THE QUICK, OBVIOUS ANSWER IS JAMES EARL RAY, BUT IT
IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH. IT LEAVES TOO MUCH UNEXPLAINED, TOO
MUCH UNMOTIVATED. THE REAL VILLAIN, FRANK MAKES CLEAR,
WITHOUT SAYING SO WAS AMERICAN SOCIETY -- THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

AMERICA WAS BORN IN VIOLENCE -- IN THE CONQUERING OF THE
NATIVES AND THE WILDERNESS, IN REVOLUTION. THE HISTORY OF
AMERICA'S TREATMENT OF THE INDIANS AND OTHER MINORITIES IS AS
DREARY AND BLOODY AS THE 1960S WERE. AND THE
INSTITUTION OF SLAVERY BURNED THE BRAND OF HAM UPON THE BROW
OF MILLIONS OF INNOCENTS. THE GUN WAS EVER AT HAND,
UNCONTROLLED, AND IS STILL SO.

MORE SPECIFICALLY, RAY GREW UP "IN A BROKEN HOME WITH A
DRUNKEN MOTHER, AN ABSENT FATHER, A RETARDED BROTHER,
A SISTER WHO WAS TO BE COMMITTED TO MENTAL INSTITUTIONS --
THE FATHER AN EX-CON, HIS UNCLE, EARL, -, 3/-CON,
JERRY AND JOHN, HIS BROTHERS, EX-CONS" -- ON A STREET IN QUINCY,
ILL., "NOTORIOUS FOR ITS POPULATION OF GAMBLERS, PIMPS,
PROSTITUTES, THIEVES AND DOPE-PEDDLERS." FURTHERMORE,
"IT WAS NOT NECESSARY FOR ANYONE TO APPROACH RAY AND FORMALLY
OFFER HIM A LARGE SUM OF MONEY TO KILL KING. THE URGENCY
TO STRIKE AT KING AND ALL HE STOOD FOR CAME OUT OF THE VERY
ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH RAY GREW UP AND LIVED, PARTICULARLY
IN HIS YEARS IN PRISON WHERE WHITES WERE BITTERLY HOSTILE
TOWARD BLACKS; IT CAME FROM THE KNOWLEDGE THAT SOMEWHERE
IN THE LAND THERE MUST BE THOSE WHO WOULD 'TAKE GOOD CARE'
OF HIM IF HE RID THE WORLD OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.; AND
PARTICULARLY FROM THE RUMOR OF THE MILLION-DOLLAR
BOUNTY WAITING THE MAN WHO WOULD DO THIS."

MEMBERS OF RAY'S FAMILY RAN WITH ARMED RACISTS OF THE
SOUTH. THEY WERE ALL SUPPORTERS OF GEORGE WALLACE. RAY
HIMSELF EXPECTED WITH GOOD REASON TO BE
ACCLAIMED THE HERO. THAT HE WAS NOT -- NOT AT LEAST OVERTLY
BY THE SO-CALLED BETTER PEOPLE -- ATTESTS TO THE NATION'S
SICKNESS OF VIOLENCE AND BLOOD. BETWEEN DR. KING'S MURDER AND
RAY'S ARREST THERE OCCURRED THE MURDER OF ROBERT KENNEDY.
THERE HAD BEEN JUST TOO MUCH OF KILLING, PERHAPS EVEN FOR THE BLOODTHIRST
WHY THEN DID THE PROSECUTION AGREE TO A PLEA OF GUILTY AND

A SENTENCE OF 99 YEARS? IT WAS THE CUSTOM IN TENNESSEE TO OFFER KILLERS THAT ALTERNATIVE TO TRIAL FOR THEIR LIVES. OTHERS HAD BEEN GIVEN THE CHOICE IN JUSTICE -- UNDER THE DEMANDS OF EQUAL TREATMENT -- RAY HAD TO GET IT TOO. HEHEHEEM

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MOKE NORRIS, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC INFORMATION FOR THE CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY, IS A SOUTHERN-BORN NOVELIST, SHORT STORY WRITER AND CRITIC.

ENDIT NORRIS
FOR RELEASE SUNDAY.

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