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# EBONY

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For First Time  
On Love, AIDS  
And Marriage**

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**What Is The Best American  
City For Blacks?**

## WHO KILLED KING AND JFK?

**EBONY INTERVIEW  
With  
Rep. Louis Stokes,  
Chairman of Select  
Committee on  
Assassinations**



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WITH

# Rep. LOUIS STOKES

## Chairman, Select Committee on Assassinations

*Congressman denounces JFK movie fantasy of Black involvement in assassination and calls for investigation of King murder conspiracy*

By Charles Whitaker

THE assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.—on November 22, 1963, and April 4, 1968, respectively—were two of the most wrenching experiences to rattle the national consciousness in the past half century. Both events still evoke strong, emotional responses from large segments of the American public, particularly in the very vocal sector where there remains a firm belief that the murders were not, as some official investigations have maintained, the solitary acts of lone gunmen, but were orchestrated and/or covered up by forces in or close to the U.S. government.

Director Oliver Stone's controversial new movie, *JFK*, which suggests that the president's assassination was plotted

by a cabal of government conspirators, has raised anew the question of who killed Kennedy and King.

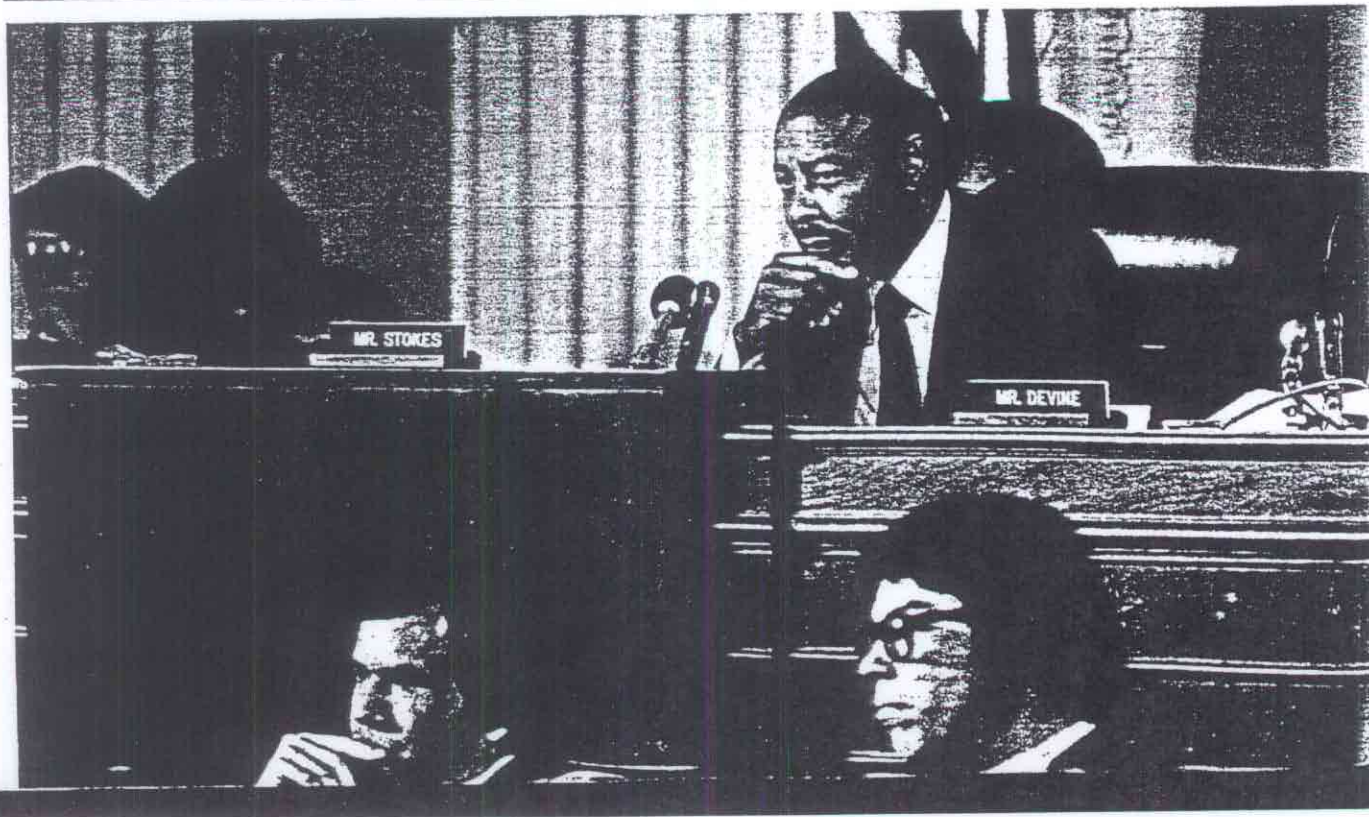
It has also cast an international spotlight once again on Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, who from March 1977 to January 1979 served as chairman of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, which investigated the myriad rumors of FBI and CIA involvement in both the Kennedy and King slayings.

As chairman of the House Select Committee, and as the first Black to head a congressional investigating committee with national scope, Stokes took center stage in the dramatic, \$5 million probe, during which investigators were dispatched across the country to collect and examine every available scrap of evi-

dence relating to the murders. The 848 boxes of evidentiary material generated by the committee were sealed, by order of the House of Representatives, in the National Archives until the year 2029.

Stokes, like many others, now believes it is time to allow the American public access to the files in an effort to put to rest feelings that the United States government conspired to kill King and Kennedy.

He has drafted a resolution for joint House and Senate approval that would make large portions of the files available for public scrutiny. As he was putting the finishing touches on the resolution, he sat down in his Washington offices with Senior Staff Editor Charles Whitaker to discuss the historic role of his



committee, its findings and the continued development of new theories about who killed JFK and Martin Luther King.

**EBONY:** Oliver Stone's movie, *JFK*, has renewed interest in the Kennedy and, to some extent, the King assassinations. Have you seen the movie? And what do you think of the debate it has sparked?

**STOKES:** I've seen the movie. And I felt that the photography was good, and that the acting, in some cases, was superb. But the facts are so skewed in the movie, and the resort to fiction is so unreal, that I can't relate it to anything I have investigated.

**EBONY:** Would you say that Stone's depiction of a Black man as a member of the "murder team" that, in his version of the events, kills the president is an example of the kind of fictionalization you're talking about?

**STOKES:** Absolutely. To me it was noticeable and unconscionable, the inclusion of a Black man who was supposedly part of the "murder team." Nowhere, absolutely nowhere, has there ever been a hint, not even a whisper, that a Black person was involved in the assassination of the president. But that's the kind of thing you have in this movie.

**EBONY:** Essentially, your committee concluded that there was a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy, but that it probably involved members of organized crime, not the government. Would you elaborate?

**STOKES:** Our findings with reference to organized crime was that organized crime as an entity didn't participate in the assassination of the president. How-

ever, we were unable to preclude the possibility of individual members of organized crime having participated. And in that respect, we zeroed in on three individuals in particular.

There was a man who was an associate of Jimmy Hoffa, who testified against Hoffa in his trial down in Tennessee. We

had information from him that he and Hoffa did, in fact, discuss the planning of an assassination conspiracy against Bobby Kennedy. We also had information that another organized crime figure had told an individual that Kennedy is going to be hit.

In this case, and in others, we found

**CIVIL RIGHTS - CONSPIRACY  
INTERSTATE FLIGHT - ROBBERY**

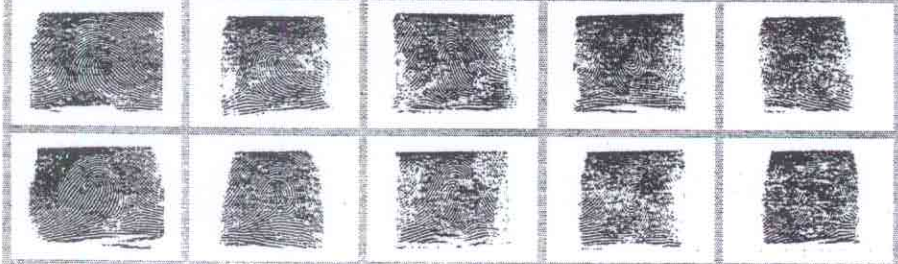
**WANTED BY FBI**

**JAMES EARL RAY**


FBI No. 465,942 G  
15 M 9 U 000 12  
M 4 W 101

ALIASES: Eric Starvo Galt, W. C. Herrin, Harvey Lawmyer, James McBride, James O'Conner, James Walton, James Walyon, John Willard, "Jim"

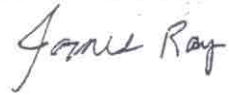
I. O. 4182  
1-20-68



Photographs taken 1950



Photograph taken 1954  
(eyes drawn by artist)



**DESCRIPTION**  
AGE: 40, born March 16, 1928, Alton, Illinois  
HEIGHT: 5' 11" EYES: blue  
WEIGHT: 163 to 174 pounds COMPLEXION: medium  
BUILD: medium RACE: white  
HAIR: brown, possibly cut short NATIONALITY: American  
OCCUPATIONS: barber, color matcher, janitor  
SCARS AND MARKS: small scar on center of forehead and small scar on palm of right hand  
REMARKS: noticeably protruding left ear; reportedly is a lone wolf; allegedly attended dance instruction school; has reportedly completed course in bartending

**CRIMINAL RECORD**  
Ray has been convicted of burglary, robbery, forging U. S. Postal Money Orders, armed robbery, and operating motor vehicle without owner's consent.

**CAUTION**  
RAY IS SOUGHT IN CONNECTION WITH A MURDER WHEREIN THE VICTIM WAS SHOT. CONSIDER ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.

A Federal warrant was issued on April 17, 1968, at Birmingham, Alabama, charging Ray as Eric Starvo Galt with conspiring to interfere with a Constitutional right of a citizen (Title 18, U. S. Code, Section 241). A Federal warrant was also issued on July 20, 1967, at Jefferson City, Missouri, charging Ray with Interstate Flight to Avoid Confinement for the crime of Robbery (Title 18, U. S. Code, Section 1073).

**IF YOU HAVE INFORMATION CONCERNING THIS PERSON, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FBI OFFICE. TELEPHONE NUMBERS AND ADDRESSES OF ALL FBI OFFICES LISTED ON BACK.**

Identification Order 4182  
April 20, 1968

Director  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Washington, D. C. 20535

Presiding over deliberations of the assassination committee (far left), Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, gives wholehearted attention to testimony of a witness. At left, peering through sight of Oswald gun, he conducts first-hand investigation at Dallas Book Depository. "Wanted posters" (above) were distributed after James Earl Ray fled to England.





King murder weapon is examined by Walter Fauntroy, the former D.C. delegate who was a member of the committee, as Chairman Stokes and Rep. Robert W. Egar look on.

### REP. LOUIS STOKES *Continued*

some very interesting associations. We were able, for example, to tie Jack Ruby [the gunman who killed Oswald in a Dallas police station two days after Oswald was arrested for killing the president], to associations with several individuals affiliated with the underworld.

And, in the FBI files there are conversations, obtained through wire taps, with references to Bobby and Jack [Kennedy] in which people are talking about assassinating them. There is one instance that we cite in the report where in one of the conversations a member of organized crime is talking to another member of organized crime and he suggests that Attorney General Kennedy should be murdered. In the course of the conversation, he says, "Somebody's got to get rid of that [obscenity]."

And so you could infer from conversations of involvement of those individuals. But we had no direct evidence of their having participated in the assassination of the president.

**EBONY:** But you must admit that there are some circumstances surrounding the Kennedy assassination that seem quite extraordinary and have led to many of the conspiracy theories. For example, many people find it difficult to believe that one bullet could have struck and killed the president and also wounded Texas Gov. John Connolly, who was riding in the open limousine with President Kennedy.

**STOKES:** The "magic bullet" theories. Well we had nine top forensic pathologists from across the country, who oper-

ated as a panel, who looked at all the ballistic evidence and they came out saying that those bullets did exactly what the Warren Commission said they did.

**EBONY:** But your committee did find fault with many of the conclusions of the Warren Commission.

**STOKES:** One of the first things we found out was that the Warren Commission never pursued a conspiracy investigation. They started out with the theory that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone gunman and proceeded from that viewpoint. So their investigation was deficient from the start.

Also, the conclusions they came out with could not be accurate because the CIA had withheld information from them.

**EBONY:** Similarly, your committee concluded that while James Earl Ray was probably the lone assassin of Dr. King, there are indications that he was part of a conspiracy, too. On what exactly did you base those conclusions?

**STOKES:** At the time that we were constituted to investigate the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we had new allegations that a Black police officer in Memphis had been on security detail for Dr. King and that he was pulled off security as part of a conspiracy to strip Dr. King of his protection in order to facilitate the assassination.

With that theory out there, it gave credence to the possibility of the FBI being involved in the [assassination]. Also, with information having just come out at the time about J. Edgar Hoover's electronic surveillance of Dr. King, it

gave greater weight to the statements of those persons who were alleging involvement of the FBI.

There also were allegations that two Black firemen also had been pulled off their jobs. In all, we investigated, I think, close to 50 rumors about offers to kill Dr. King around the country. But we found no evidence to support rumors of FBI involvement in the assassination.

**EBONY:** Then what was the conspiracy?

**STOKES:** We concluded that there was the probability of a conspiracy based upon information we obtained about an offer that came out of St. Louis.

An FBI informant told an agent to whom he reported that there was a White businessman, John Kauffmann, and a lawyer, John Sutherland, in St. Louis who had offered him [the informant] \$50,000 to kill Dr. King. The FBI agent to whom this was reported made a record of it and then misfiled his report. So it laid around for years until we began our investigation. By that time, both of these men were dead. But we did conclude that Ray had actually killed Dr. King pursuant to his theory that he was going to be able to get hold of the money. He had learned of this offer through his ties in the Missouri State Penitentiary.

**EBONY:** Who else may have been involved?

**STOKES:** The committee received official testimony which suggested that Ray's two brothers were involved in the conspiracy and that there was significant criminal association between he and his brothers during the pre-assassination period. The committee could not substantiate this theory but we forwarded this evidence to the Justice Department for possible action.

And the evidence clearly showed that Ray was in the boarding house and the bathroom from which the shots that killed Dr. King were fired.

**EBONY:** You have, in the past, been reluctant to call for the opening of your committee's sealed files. Now, partly as a result of the attention that Oliver Stone's movie is getting, you have called for opening the files. Did the sensation caused by the movie prompt you change of heart?

**STOKES:** There have been a couple of instances prior to now where members of the House have filed resolutions calling for release of the sealed files which were developed during the course of our committee's investigation. On both of those occasions, I took the position that the files should remain sealed. I took that position as a result of my consulta-

## REP. LOUIS STOKES *Continued*

tion with both Prof. Robert Blakey, who was chief counsel and director of our committee, and Steve Ross, who is the House counsel. Both of them saw difficulty in our being able to properly sort through the files, which are now in the National Archives, in order to properly protect any records which should not be placed in the public domain.

**EBONY:** What records are those?

**STOKES:** Let me give you an idea of what is there. Firstly, we have personnel records of persons we hired, persons we fired, reasons we fired them and so forth. These records have nothing to do with the assassination of the president and, therefore, ought to remain in the files. There are, in the King case in particular, some names of confidential informants, persons to whom we promised confidentiality in return for their testimony. We have put their testimony in the public domain, but feel that their names should continue to be anonymous. And that is for the protection of these persons. There are some classified documents there that we received from the CIA. Our arrangement with the CIA was that we could by mutual agreement declassify these documents, but we had no authority to unilaterally declassify them.

Then there are the autopsy photographs, which we decided not to release into the public domain because they would offend the sensibilities of persons in the [King and Kennedy] families.

And then, of course, there are the investigative files we generated. A lot of those files contain raw data [unsubstantiated testimony], the release of which would tend to defame innocent persons.

And since there is no one at this juncture to sort through those materials—the committee is out of existence and I have no legal function as it relates to a former committee—we have always taken the position that these records should not be released until the 50-year period is up. But it is important for people to understand that our committee didn't seal the unreleased records; the House of Representatives did, by virtue of a House rule that provided that committee records that are not released publicly, should be sealed for a prescribed number of years.

**EBONY:** But you understand that by sealing the records you give the impression that the government is hiding something from the American public.

**STOKES:** Well that's true, and what is actually happening now is that there are accusations that those records contain conspiratorial information that has been

concealed from the American people—and that is a dangerous situation that just cannot be tolerated.

The purpose of sealing the records was not to conceal them or to conceal the facts from the American people. The purpose of the investigation was to bring out all relevant facts and to keep innocent people from being harmed by unsubstantiated reports.

Now the interesting thing about the movie is that many of the questions it raised about the Warren Commission and its investigation were all investigated by our committee 13 years ago. We published our findings in 27 volumes of information and evidentiary material. We held 36 days of evidentiary hearings on national television and made recommendations to the House for legislative action in the two assassinations.

But people didn't read our report. Consequently, when they see this movie, which fictionalizes the facts and creates the impression that my committee sealed our files, I deem it important for the American people to know that our committee did not in any way cover up anything.

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**“Nowhere, absolutely nowhere, has there ever been a hint, not even a whisper, that a Black person was involved in the assassination of [President Kennedy]. But that's the kind of thing you have in this movie.”**

—Rep. Louis Stokes

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**EBONY:** What about your previous concerns about sensitive or classified material?

**STOKES:** I think it is important, if we are to allay all the fears and concerns the American people have about these assassinations, to release all of the files and records. The simple release of the records of the House Select Committee on Assassinations will not stop the rumors and theories. The CIA files, the FBI files and the Secret Service files should be released so that there are no questions about anything, particularly since allegations are that the CIA, FBI and Secret Service were all involved in the assassination of the president.

Obviously, I don't think who we hired or who we fired has anything to do with the assassination and their release should be restricted. And in terms of the autopsy photographs of the president, some restrictions should be put into effect so that they are only released to qualified medical personnel.

I just don't think the tabloids should be able to print those types of photographs of the president. But with regard to the other classified records—except those pertaining to individuals who were promised anonymity (we have to protect human life)—those records should be declassified.

**EBONY:** Do you think that releasing all of the records will put an end, once and for all, to the conspiracy theories?

**STOKES:** In my opinion, assassination theories will continue to revolve around these assassinations as they have around several other significant assassinations in American history. The assassination of President Lincoln comes to mind. I have received a new book about conspiratorial theories around the assassination of President Lincoln. So nothing is going to stop it. Even the release of all this material will never stop it. People are just fascinated by assassinations.

**EBONY:** But, to sum up, you believe today, based on your investigation and other information, that Lee Harvey Oswald killed Kennedy and that he was probably involved in a conspiracy with people who were not brought to justice?

**STOKES:** Yes.

**EBONY:** What about James Earl Ray and Dr. King? Did he pull the trigger and did he act alone?

**STOKES:** I support the conclusion of my committee which is that James Earl Ray killed Dr. King.

**EBONY:** And so there is a real possibility that people who planned or participated in the King and Kennedy assassinations are still walking the streets of America?

**STOKES:** While not a probability that they are all alive, there is the possibility.

**EBONY:** I believe you sent the full committee report to the Justice Department with recommendations for further investigation and possible prosecution.

**STOKES:** Yes. However, other than additional analysis of the acoustical data, they have never pursued further investigation of any of our investigative leads.

**EBONY:** Do you still believe that the Justice Department should review your data on the King and Kennedy assassinations with the view of possible prosecution of people who are still alive?

**STOKES:** Yes.