

August 2, 1975

Mayor Maynard Jackson
City Hall
Atlanta, Georgia 30300

CERTIFIED -
ADDRESSEE ONLY

Dear Mayor Jackson:

When your Commissioner of Public Safety made his ill-considered statement about the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King several weeks ago, I was, despite a long and disappointing personal experience with Black abdication, shocked. That, however, was nothing to the reaction justified by the conduct of your subordinates thereafter. From what your Keystone Cops call an investigation to the most recent statement by Mr. Eaves.

You have all made spectacles of yourselves beginning, tragically, with Dick Gregory, who has a remarkable incapacity for learning about hot irons.

If there is less excuse for Gregory than for the rest of you, there is no excuse for any of this irresponsibility and the laceration of the souls of so many.

In any investigation, serious-minded investigators begin with the best sources of information.

How any of your police could not know that there was an investigation for the defense of James Earl Ray I cannot understand. They did know Ray has lawyers. So, in a lasting tribute to the spirit of Mack Sennett, they avoided the only one of Ray's lawyers who is and has been active on the case, the one who is well-known to the press as having done all the legal work, and the investigator.

I am the investigator. Dick Gregory knows this well.

And if everyone who was in SCLC's Atlanta office five years didn't tell any of your police this, it was only from personal embarrassment over their own copping out. Before undertaking this role in the defense - which may be the only way of forcing a real effort at solving the awful crime - I wrote the only book on the King assassination not in support of the official mythology. I can't count the number of copies that went to SCLC, including one directed personally to Rev. Andrew Young, to whom Mr. Eaves now says he is sending the results of your so-called investigation.

Without exception, all were silent.

Congressman John Conyers is the only member of the Black caucus who would even talk to me. I gave him books for each member. In five years, not one has even acknowledged receipt, a common courtesy. I offered to go to Washington at any time this caucus would care to talk to me about what I'd learned in preparing to write the book. In all these years, they haven't found time even to decline, another common courtesy. None of those I tried to see would see me.

The names of those Black men who refused to be involved in even a conversation would make a blue book of Black America.

There is but one real exception, the literary agent, Ron Hobbs, a fine, sensitive, concerned human being. He soon learned he was hitting his head against two walls, white on one side and black on the other. Not one of these prominent Blacks he represents gave a damn about the killing of "the black Messiah."

Aside from Ron, the only Black with any of the attributes we commonly call manhood was a woman, Flo Kennedy. She, too, found nothing but frustration. But she tried.

If you ever want an oral history for a Black university on the tender concern ~~for~~ Black leadership, especially his former close associates, felt for Dr. King when he was killed, I'll provide an object lesson for Black youth of the future. But don't consider Howard University. There was no member of its law faculty who would take the time to represent me in a suit for the evidence the FBI was suppressing.

If this happens - and I don't expect it - you'll probably send a white interviewer. The only writer who ever interviewed me for any Black publication was a white man Sepia sent down from New York.

The Johnson Publishing Company wouldn't even talk to me. None in the Washington office when I phoned there and unless she lied, which from her tears I do not believe, not Mr. Johnson himself when Maria Cole phoned him.

The performance of the first Black administration of Dr. King's home town is worse than this cowardly record. It made a spectacle of itself and the terrible crime. As Dick Gregory refused to heed warnings in his counterproductive campaign that helped make the Rockefeller Report another whitewash, so did not one of you learn the bitter lesson of that debacle. Having just had a sickening proof of what he had brought to pass, you all, without thinking, jumped into the same snake pit.

I take this time not for denunciation, not to express bitterness. These would be futilities. Rather do I hope that you, personally, and those upon whom you can draw and who will speak to you (I'm a honky so none respond to me), will learn from this and will want to begin acting like men and like concerned human beings, people who have hearts and souls as well as personal ambitions.

You thought enough about the possibilities of our system to enter politics and to run for mayor. There today is only one way anyone can do anything about the King assassination and that is by making the system do its work the way it should be done. This means by helping the in-court defense of James Earl Ray, a man who could not have and did not shoot Dr. King.'

There are many ways in which there can be effective Black help, all of which by themselves will have meaning as part of Black history. If you are willing to assume some leadership in this - and it will take very little time - I can make other suggestions. I begin with one:

Help me collect more evidence.

If I have enough to exculpate Ray before any honest and impartial jury, that is not enough and there can be more. You can be the instrument for collecting it.

The first way is to get each of those who were in Dr. King's party together so I can first interview on tape each individually without even meeting him first. After that, there should be a taped discussion of what each remembers and what that might trigger in the recall of others. These people know facts the meanings of which they do not know.

The second way is to collect other evidence the nature and means of which I will tell you if we get to that point.

Because I want only fact and truth, I would not want to discuss in advance anything I would ask of any of these people, and I would want each, after he is interviewed, not to discuss it with any others until after all the individual interviews are completed.

If these people will not take the time to gather when they can do this, a less desirable alternative is individual interviews. However, I do believe that a general conversation after the interviews might be productive.

Should you be willing, I will later have other suggestions. One is that someone find a young and vigorous Black lawyer to be present at all these interviews, one with the willingness to continue with any aspect of the work.

If your police came across anything besides the Byron Watson stuff, which I looked into years ago, I would welcome an opportunity to go over it. They may well have information that means nothing to them but can be significant. They cannot have conducted any real investigation of the crime in this short time. But they can have picked up some worthwhile information.

In the most recent of my many suits for suppressed evidence in the JFK assassination, the FBI found it expedient to certify to the court that I know more about that crime ~~than~~ anyone in the FBI. I would encourage you to believe that this is true of the King assassination. I do not encourage you - I assure you - that in the course of my investigation I have come across leads to the actual conspiracy. I am without support of any kind or any regular income so I cannot offer to fly to Atlanta. But I can meet with you any time you may have to be in Washington, which is but an hour from here. Or, you will be welcome here, where I can inform you more fully.

There is another side to this I believe you should know.

All authorities from J. Edgar Hoover down knew they were framing Ray. They also knew the case might at any time come apart very publicly, in court. So they also have a backstop position: Blacks did it. I have developed some of what they will use as the next frame-up/whitewash.

Jim Lesar and I are going to defend Ray as best we can, we believe ultimately with success. At that point, without support, my participation will have to end. The past decade has been ruinous to me, and I will not be able to undertake a Black defense.

So what I am offering you is a chance to really do something about the King assassination and at the same time a chance to help make impossible another miscarriage of justice that will have Black victims.

I do think, too, that this is an opportunity for Black leadership people to give disenchanted Black youth cause for having confidence in them. I hope you will accept it.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg