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Robert Sherrill is one I never expected to lose his critical faculties, as he does in his review of Gerald Posner's mistitled Killing the Dreamer.

Posner presents that as a book on the King assassination, which it is not, and he does that with what has become his typical lack of simple honesty. While there is much a review cannot know, Sherrill misses the fact that Posner merely assumes Ray's guilt and never addresses the crime itself. His book has no indexed mention of the autopsy, the rifle or the bullet that allegedly killed King, which do get casual mention but are never addressed as what a murder case requires, as evidence.

Posner also is not honest about his sources.

He uses, ~~etc~~ selectively, the massive FBI MURKIN file, which I made public, to Posner's knowledge, in a lengthy FOIA lawsuit, CA 75-1996, and he credits that to the generosity of the FBI ~~which~~ stonewalled that lawsuit for a decade.

Posner also uses ~~me~~ again selectively and again with a lack of honesty, the transcripts of the evidentiary hearing held in federal district court in Memphis in (about) 1973 and he credits that to the House assassins committee. Which I had to force to borrow those transcripts, a real ^{in-court} testing of evidence of the crime with cross-examination, for which I was, again to Posner's knowledge, responsible.

I conducted the successful habeas corpus investigation which resulted in those two weeks of hearings and for them ^I located and prepared the witnesses and did more. The judge concluded, literally, that "guilt or innocence ~~were~~ ^{are} not material" to what was before him at the end of those hearings. His reasoning was that the issues were the voluntariness of the plea and the effective assistance of counsel and he decided against the weight of the evidence ^{on} in both ~~essential~~ issues.

None of this evidence, and none of that of the FBI which I forced out of official secrecy is in the 450 pages of Posner's book nor is it in the six pages he pretends are on "The Assassination" and are not.

Posner spent three days, his limitation, not mine, working in my archive that to his knowledge included those FBI records he cannot even cite correctly and those transcripts for his also mistitled Case Closed. In it he thanked me for my generosity, my graciousness and my refreshing openness (he had entirely unsupervised access, as do all others, and unsupervised use of our copier) but then was compelled, as in his recent books, to seek to make something bigger of himself by padding criticisms of others, with me with a lack of honesty and

such carelessness he could not even read the phone book correctly.

To correct his rewriting of the JFK assassination to support the official version that almost nobody trusts, I wrote Case Open. In it I say he can't tell the truth even by accident and among other pointed and documented criticisms I reported his plagiarism ranged from the faulty work of a boy of 10 to ~~max~~ one side of a preparation for the annual convention of the bar association. Posner cribbed that so successfully the Philadelphia Inquirer ran an editorial praising him for it.

My point in this is not credit. At 85 that is the least of my concerns and my work stands or falls in history on its own. My point is that this is a dishonest and a petty man who has written dishonest books cleverly and is seeking to make a career of rewriting our history in accord with official preferences.

After I exposed his plagiarism he corrected that in the reprint, ^(enclosed) he also removed from ~~that~~ his thanks to me for "giving me full run" of all I had and added an Author's Note in which he proved all over again that he can't tell the truth even by accident. In it he tried to make little of me by saying that with Case Open I had finally gotten commercial publication. It was my 13th and to his knowledge what he wrote was not true. He uses an original commercial publication of one of my books in this one. While it is true that there was international reluctance to publish the first book on the Warren Commission, which got more than a hundred rejections without a single adverse editorial comment and I became a publisher to open the subject up, as that book did (and it remains in use as a college text), the first of four ^{well} reprints was of a quarter of a million copies.

This kind of intendedly dishonest writing is the last thing needed when there is so much lack of confidence in government and when there is so much distress about those crimes that turned this country and the world around.

It is unfortunate that one as sharp as Sherrill was so dulled by the effectiveness of this dishonest writing.

Harold Weisberg



While this is more than you would usually consider publishing, I add more than the enclosures for your information. Your Paul Valentine covered those Memphis hearings at which, for the only time, the actual evidence of the King assassination was tested in a court of law. He should remember some. *you might hold the stones*

What Posner has done is a midwest Tobacco Road, even that idea along with the title coming from Huie.

A, Ath
This is the ~~first~~ ^{first} book the Random House empire, which you also address in another way in this issue, has brought out each of the past five years, each in support of the official versions of our assassinations. Mailer's Oswald's Take may be close to a record-breaking bomb. And it is not the only book-publishing monopoly to do something like that. Little, Brown more recently, and it is part of the Time-Warner empire.

The actual evidence I produced for that evidentiary hearing proved, under cross-examination, that Ray could not have fired the shot. This is literally true and it is in what Posner drew on and does not mention. He of course, after his nastiness in Case Closed would not have asked me for access to my work but he did know it was mine and he did use it and he is not honest about that or about its content.

Your George Lardner and others who were at the Post are among the hundreds who can tell you that not only do they have unsupervised and free access but in recent years I have not been able to use the stairs to our basement ^{and} others still go there without me.

What is also basic in this is how can a free society that depends on the people being accurately informed function as it is supposed to with this kind of literary whoring deliberately corrupting the public mind?

Bud Fensterwald was then Ray's chief counsel. Jim Lesar (393-1921) did most of the in-court work and will confirm what I say above about the evidence and the sources. He was also my lawyer in that FOIA lawsuit and a dozen others that ^{brought} ~~brought~~ much to light. ^{Posner's} ~~Posner's~~ wife made hundreds of copies of some of those records when they were here. *Borrowed pictures, too,*

Any of your reporters who may want to examine the evidence I produced for Jim to present to the court in ^{emphasis} will be welcome and welcome to copies. I do think one of your black report ers should be assigned to do that. I'll be available for any questioning subject to the health problems I now have.

This is especially for Sherrill, to whom the opinion of our former mutual friend and great reporter Mo Waldron may mean something.

Mo covered those hearings for the Times. After a midmorning break after I had produced the evidence that destroyed the case against Ray, when I left to go to the lavatory (I was at the counsel table, Mo, with his untied tie in the front row) I felt that massive arm around me and he gritted at me, "Hal you old bastard, ain't you ashamed of yourself?" I ask him why and he said "Fuckin' up the FBI, the State of Tennessee and the county of Shelby." That was quite a compliment from Mo.

The State pulled a surprise witness on us ~~the~~ last day of the hearing and Mo, in the front row, saw the whole thing. ~~It~~ It was a Bantam vice president to testify to publishing questions coming from Huie's money and control of the lawyers. I passed Bud a note to follow me at the lunch break and when Ray left with us he saw me tell Jimmy we'd not talk that lunch break and to stay out of the counsel's room in the marshal's calls because Bud and I needed privacy. We did ^{go more and} confer and I had enough documents with me for him to ruin that Bantam vice president on cross examination.

At that break that same arm and that same gritting, "Hal, you old bastard, don't you know what overkill is?"

Mo expected us to lose in Memphis, where the judge in those days would not have survived giving Ray a trial, but he expected us to prevail before the sixth circuit.

We didn't.

what he does not say is that he spent 3 days copying records he
504 • Acknowledgments *These presents as the result of his*
own research and accomplishments. These include records
to 1963 Dallas street maps and the like. He has a fine eye for
credible sources and solid information.

From the FBI he does not believe my mean-
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Harold Weisberg was one of the earliest critics of the Warren
Report. Using the Freedom of Information Act in many lawsuits,
he has obtained thousands of government documents on the case.
He told me, "I feel that just because I fought to get these docu-
ments released, that is no reason I should not share them with
others." He allowed me full run of his basement, filled with file
cabinets, and he and his wife, Lil, graciously received both me
and my wife, Trisha, at their home for several days. His attitude
toward the sharing of information is refreshing, and although I
disagree with him about almost every aspect of the case, I thank
him for his generosity in the use of his papers and his time.

The same applies to Mary Ferrell, a retired legal secretary in
Dallas who has one of the largest private archives on the assassi-
nation. She also gave advice and allowed me to review some of her
extensive collection when I visited Dallas. Paul Hoch, in Berke-
ley, California, is the unofficial archivist for the conspiracy press.
An academic, with a thorough understanding of the documents in
the case, Hoch provided insights that helped me avoid pitfalls in
the research. Gus Russo, in Baltimore, Maryland, is a private re-
searcher who was kind to provide many telephone numbers and
addresses from his extensive database.

The Assassination Archives and Research Center (AARC) in
Washington, D.C., directed by attorney James Lesar, has all the
documentation available at the National Archives, but instead of
microfilm, everything at the AARC is in an easier format for re-
search—paper copies. There is also an extensive video and photo-
graphic library. Members have unlimited use of the center. With
annual dues of \$25 and a high-speed photocopy machine on the
premises, there is no better place for anyone interested in re-
searching the subject.

Charles Schwartz saved me after several computer crashes, as
I made the mistake of trying to learn new software while I wrote
the first draft of the manuscript. His patience in taking panicked
telephone calls at all hours of the night is greatly appreciated.
John and Catherine Martin were kind enough to allow my wife
and me to be their houseguests on our often unplanned and

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14

“My God, They Are Going to Kill Us All”

Two of the most controversial issues in the assassination are whether Oswald could fire three shots in the necessary time and if the nearly whole bullet, Warren Commission Exhibit 399, found on the stretcher at Parkland Hospital could have passed through the President, out his neck, and then caused all of Governor Connally's wounds.

The Warren Commission and the House Select Committee did the best they could with photo and computer technology as it existed in 1964 and 1978. However, scientific advances within the past five years allow significant enhancements of the Zapruder film, as well as scale re-creations using computer animation, which were unavailable to the government panels. As a result, it is now possible to settle the question of the timing of Oswald's shots and to pinpoint the moment when both Kennedy and Connally were struck with a precision previously unattainable.*

*At Dealey Plaza, more than 510 photographs that directly relate to the assassination were taken by some seventy-five photographers, but the Zapruder film is by far the most useful in determining what happened, since it records the entire period of the shooting. This chapter is based primarily on the latest computer enhancements of that film. They include one done by Dr. Michael West, a medical examiner in Mississippi, together with Johann Rush, the journalist who filmed Oswald during his Fair Play for Cuba demonstration at the New Orleans Trade Mart; and another completed by Failure Analysis Associates, a prominent firm specializing in computer

The first issue is the timing. In 1964, the FBI's test-firing of Oswald's Carcano determined that a minimum of 2.25 to 2.3 seconds was necessary between shots to operate the bolt and re-aim.¹ Since the first bullet was already in the rifle's chamber and ready to fire, that meant Oswald had to operate the bolt action twice (just as Harold Norman heard on the fifth floor). According to the Warren Commission, the fastest he could have fired all three shots was 4.5 seconds. However, that minimum time is now out of date. CBS reconstructed the shooting for a 1975 documentary. Eleven volunteer marksmen took turns firing clips of three bullets at a moving target. None of them had dry practice runs with the Carcano's bolt action, as Oswald had had almost daily while in New Orleans. Yet the times ranged from 4.1 sec-

The Failure Analysis work was an extensive undertaking for an American Bar Association (ABA) mock trial of Lee Harvey Oswald (resulting in a hung jury), held at the ABA's 1992 convention. The Failure Analysis project involved 3-D scale generations of Dealey Plaza, physical mock-ups of the presidential car, and stand-in models for the President and Governor, all to determine trajectory angles and the feasibility of one bullet causing both sets of wounds. Failure Analysis also re-created experiments with the 6.5mm ammunition, using more updated information than was available to the Warren Commission, to further test the "single-bullet theory" and the condition of the missile.

At the ABA trial, Failure Analysis presented scientific evidence for both the prosecution and defense of Oswald. The only technical breakthroughs were on the prosecution work, and they are presented in this chapter. The defense presentation was fundamentally flawed and centered on two primary arguments. The first was why Oswald did not take a supposedly better straight shot as JFK's car approached the Depository on Houston Street. Failure Analysis tried illustrating its contention by creating computer animation of Oswald's view of the car. Since Connally was sitting in front of Kennedy in the car, he would have blocked part of the assassin's view along Houston Street, and therefore the computer animation was not an accurate representation of what Oswald saw. Moreover, the Failure Analysis presentation did not take into account that ballistics experts conclude that a target coming toward and below a shooter is a more difficult shot with a telescopic sight, and that Oswald was better hidden from the view of neighboring buildings by choosing a line of fire along Elm Street. The second Failure Analysis defense argument was that a glycerin bullet could have been fired from the grassy knoll and not have exited on the left side of JFK's head. To illustrate the contention, Failure Analysis shot glycerin bullets into full, plastic, water bottles. Yet, the mock jury was never told that glycerin bullets are almost completely unstable at the distance between JFK's car and the grassy knoll. Also, Failure Analysis did not establish whether a glycerin bullet could penetrate a human skull at the Dealey Plaza distance.

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assassination are necessary time and sion Exhibit 399, could have passed caused all of Gov-

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directly relate to the ographers, but the Za- that happened, since it r is based primarily on e done by Dr. Michael Johann Rush, the jour- a demonstration at the Failure Analysis Associ- structions for lawsuits.

Author's Note

The response to the hardcover publication of this book surprised both me and my publisher, Random House. We were initially worried that the book might be lost in the publicity surrounding the publication of other books espousing convoluted theories. But we had underestimated the extent to which, after thirty years of virtually unchallenged conspiracy conjecture, the conclusion that Oswald acted alone in assassinating JFK had evolved, ironically, into the most controversial position. While the media's response was overwhelmingly positive, the reaction from the conspiracy community was the opposite—not simply negative, but often vitriolic. There was little effort to study my overall evidence and conclusions with anything that approached an open mind. Indeed, there was a concerted counterattack to discredit both the book and its author.

There were panel discussions at conspiracy conventions in Boston and Dallas and special publications focused solely on contesting the book. A conspiracy-based "research center" in Washington, D.C., issued a "media alert" about *Case Closed*. The release consisted of five pages alleging the book was misleading and flawed, but the alert misstated my arguments and distorted the evidence in the case. Harold Weisberg, one of the deans of the conspiracy press, found his first publisher (he had previously self-published six conspiracy books) to bring out a book

titled *Case Open*, a broadside attack attempting to diminish the impact of my work.

Other conspiracy buffs launched personal attacks. It was, as one journalist commented, as if overnight I had become the Salmon Rushdie of the assassination world. I was accused of treason by a buff who ran a Dallas "research center," and my wife and I were subjected to several months of harassing telephone calls and letters. At an author's luncheon, pickets protested that I was a dupe of the CIA. Faxes and letters to the media also charged I was a CIA agent, or that the CIA had written my book, or that I was part of a conscious effort to deceive the public and hide the truth. (Some critics even expanded the accusations to my first book about Nazi doctor Josef Mengele, contending that I whitewashed the Mengele investigation, when actually that book was the first to detail Mengele's entire life on the run, including his time in U.S. captivity and the Israeli and German bungling of his capture.) Television and radio producers were harassed by callers attempting to have my appearances cancelled. Some reviewers who wrote favorably about the book received intimidating calls or letters. My publisher was subjected to the same treatment, and even my editor, Bob Loomis, was publicly accused of being a CIA agent.

Although I had expected that individuals who had invested their adult lives into investigating JFK conspiracies might react angrily to a book that exposed the fallacies in their arguments, the vehemence of these personal attacks surprised me. I had mistakenly expected a debate on the issues. It took little time to discover, however, the extent to which many people who believe in a JFK conspiracy do so with almost a religious fervor and are not dissuaded by the facts.

Case Closed was probably subjected to greater scrutiny by more "critics" than any other book published in recent years. Several emendations in this book are the result of what some charged as fraudulent omissions in my discussion of various aspects of the case. Because *Case Closed* attempted to deal with all the major issues in the assassination, plus countless arguments raised by conspiracy critics in the three decades following the Warren Commission, many of these, especially those addressed in footnotes, were condensed. To fit all of my research

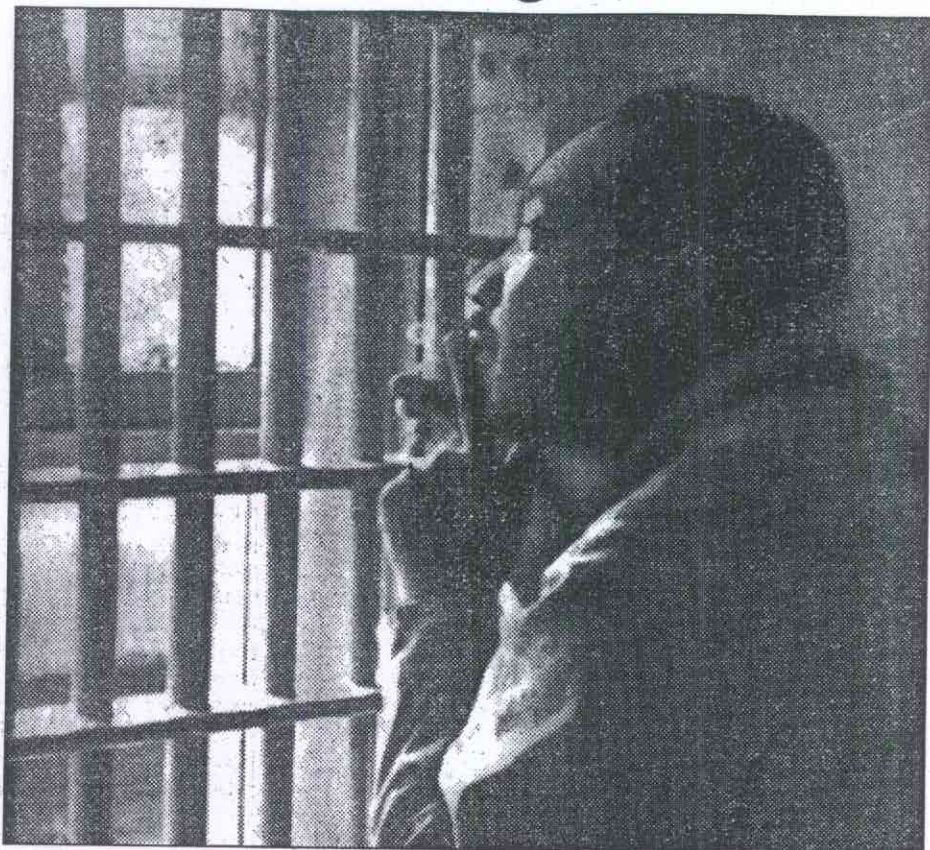
A Call to Change the World

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is best remembered for his Aug. 28, 1963 "I Have a Dream Speech," made in front of the Lincoln Memorial as more than 250,000 in attendance cheered his every utterance, sensing that they were party to one of the most spiritually triumphant and emotionally charged moments in American history. But even though the March on Washington represented the high mark of King's extraordinary oratorical career, his most lasting literary contribution to civil and human rights came four months earlier in a narrow Birmingham, Ala. jail cell.

On Good Friday 1963, the 34-year-old King found himself hunkered down alone at sunset, scrawling in the margins of newspapers and on the backs of legal papers, penning the philosophical foundation of the Civil Rights Movement around sports scores and gossip columns. Over the next eight days "Letter From Birmingham Jail," now a classic of world literature, was crafted as a response to a derogatory statement eight local white clergymen had issued in the Birmingham News denouncing King's nonviolent protest and demanding an end to the demonstrations aimed at desegregating lunch counters, restrooms and department stores. King's attorneys smuggled the letter out of jail in installments, which arrived scrap by scrap at the makeshift Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) nerve center in Room 30 at the A.G. Gaston Motel. Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker typed up King's prose fragments, unaware that the letter would soon reverberate around the world.

An intensely disciplined Christian, King was able to create an uplifting manifesto for nonviolent resistance, based on the teachings of Jesus and Gandhi. "There are two types of laws, just and unjust," King wrote from jail, echoing St. Thomas Aquinas. "One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws." His elegant jottings conveyed the voice of a prisoner thundering like a prophet in a world chock-full of hate.

Throughout the 1960s the very word "Birmingham" conjured up haunting images of the brutality of Eugene "Bull" Connor's police squad, church bombs, snarling dogs and high-powered fire hoses strong enough to rip the skin off a protes-



Martin Luther King Jr. in Birmingham jail, April, 1963

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

tor's back. When King spent his nine days in Birmingham jail, it was one of the most rigidly segregated cities in the South, although African Americans made up 40 percent of the population. As Harrison Salisbury wrote in the *New York Times*, "the streets, the water supply, and the sewer system" were the only public facilities shared by both races. "As Birmingham goes," King predicted, "so goes the whole South." By the time King was murdered in Memphis five years later, Jim Crow laws were on the way out and "Letter From Birmingham Jail" was on its way to being

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translated into more than 20 languages.

Thanks to King's letter, "Birmingham" became a clarion call for action by the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, especially in the 1980s, when the international outcry to free Nelson Mandela reached its zenith. Archbishop Desmond Tutu quoted the letter in his sermons, Jamaican reggae singer Bob Marley kept the text with him for good luck, and Kwame Nkrumah's children chanted from the missive as if it were a holy text. During the Cold War Czechoslovakia's Charter 77, Poland's Solidarity and East Germany's Pastors Movement all had "Letter From Birmingham Jail" translated and disseminated to the masses via the underground circuit. Just as King had been inspired by Henry David Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience," written after a one-night stay in a Massachusetts jail to protest the Mexican-American War, around the world a new generation of the oppressed embraced the letter for its courage and inspiration.

To King, segregation and apartheid were clearly unjust laws because they distorted the soul and damaged the personality. His remedy: nonviolent direct action, the only spiritually valid way to bring gross injustice to the surface, where it could be seen and dealt with. "We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and Godgiven rights," King wrote in the letter. "The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at the lunch counter."

It is this refusal to wait for "Godgiven rights" which has caused the letter to be embraced so enthusiastically by the

oppressed. In Jerusalem in 1983, for example, the nonviolent activist Mubarak Awad, an American-educated clinical psychologist, translated the letter for Palestinians to use in their workshops to teach students about civil disobedience. Several years later, Awad used the letter in organizing the December 1987 intifada uprising in the Israeli-occupied territories. Palestinians denied rights took matters into their own hands—with general strikes, boycotts, noncooperation measures, civil disobedience, and tax resistance. When a Chinese student stood in front of a tank in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, unflinching in his democratic convictions, he was symbolically acting upon King's teachings as elucidated in his fearless letter. Argentinian human rights activist Adolfo Perez Esquivel, the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize winner, was inspired, in part, by King's letter to create Servicio Paz y Justicia, a Latin American organization that documented the tragedy of the *desaparecidos*.

Today one would be hard-pressed to find an African novelist or poet, including Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, who has not been spurred to denounce authoritarianism by King's notion that it was morally essential to become a bold protagonist for justice. Even conservative Republican William J. Bennett included "Letter From Birmingham Jail" in his *Book of Virtues*.

The key to the universal appeal of King's letter lies in the hope it provides the disinherited of the earth, the millions of voiceless poor who populate the planet from the garbage dumps of Calcutta to the AIDS villages of Haiti. The letter has so many moving passages that pulling quotes from the text diminishes the impact of

reading the entire statement. The letter shows King as a gifted prose stylist, although one who takes his linguistic lead from the New Testament and his Baptist preacher's pulpit. One would have to be cold-blooded not to be emotionally moved by the incarcerated King's determination to win full citizenship for black Americans and his sober-minded rejection of the gradualist approach to civil rights:

"Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, 'Wait.' But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sister and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year old son who is asking: 'Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?' . . .

"When you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a

Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness' then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait."

Today the three-story Birmingham City Jail is an administrative building used by the police department, and King's narrow cell has been reconstructed, complete with the original iron bars, in the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. Meanwhile, the National Park Service has designated Sweet Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, where King lived and is buried, a historic district. Banks, businesses and government offices are closed to honor the civil rights martyr on his birthday every January.

But the living tribute to King, the one that would have delighted this apostle for nonviolence the most, is the impact that his "Letter From Birmingham Jail" has had on three generations of international freedom fighters. This five-page pamphlet, brimming with poetic flourishes and irrefutable logic, now stands as the supreme 20th-century testimony, along with Gandhi's hunger strikes, of how Davids can stand up to Goliaths *without* spilling blood. As an eternal statement that infuses hope into the valleys of despair, "Letter From Birmingham Jail" is unrivaled, a rousing American treasure as distinctive as the Declaration of Independence or the Emancipation Proclamation. ■

Solving the Mystery of His Murder

4/12/98
KILLING THE DREAMER
James Earl Ray and the
Assassination of
Martin Luther King, Jr.

By Gerald Posner
Random House, 447 pp., \$25

Reviewed by ROBERT SHERRILL,
whose books include "Gothic Politics in the
Deep South."

Unless the killer is captured on the spot, gun in hand, as was Sirhan Sirhan after shooting Robert Kennedy, the assassination of a great leader spreads the virulent suspicion that it must have been done through the conspiracy of powerful, shadowy forces. Many of us simply can't believe that one crummy

nobody, a Lee Harvey Oswald or a James Earl Ray, is capable of carrying out a murder that so profoundly changes history.

For 30 years, that suspicion has hung over the murder of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Members of King's family are among the many who doubt that Ray had anything to do with it. King's son Dexter said on ABC last year—with

INSIDE

JIM CROW

3

JOHN CASEY AND JANE SMILEY

8

BOOK REPORT

15

others in the family nodding assent—that they did not believe Ray pulled the trigger or even knew the murder was about to take place. They are convinced that Army intelligence, the CIA and the FBI were responsible for the assassination, and that President Lyndon Johnson was part of the plot.

Gerald Posner has taken on the task of liberating everyone from such wild surmises. Four years ago, in *Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK*, he concluded that Oswald acted alone in killing the president. Now Posner is back with an effort to put the blame solely on Ray for the shot that was fired at dusk on April 4, 1969, as King stood on a Memphis motel balcony talking to friends.

See ASSASSIN, page 10



Mug shot of James Earl Ray in 1959

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ASSASSIN, *From page 1*

Does Posner entirely reject the possibility of a conspiracy? He comes close.

On his way to constructing a persuasive case against Ray, Posner has dismantled the faulty theories concocted by some of the earlier investigators and some of the highly fanciful evidence they worked with. Like all notorious murder cases, the King assassination attracted its share of kooks and drunks eager to confess they did it, or to tell all, with conflicting embellishments, about their favorite suspects.

How does one go about clearing the CIA and FBI of complicity? It's virtually impossible. Posner does about the best that can be done, by examining the qualifications of the accusers, such as Fletcher Prouty, a former military officer who was an adviser to director Oliver Stone for the movie "JFK" and was the prototype for the mysterious "Mr. X" in that film. Prouty is dead certain the CIA killed both King and Kennedy.

Ah, yes, the Oliver Stone virus is loose again. Kenny Herman, the colorful Memphis private eye who has done considerable work for Ray's latest lawyer, told Posner, "The Oliver Stone film will be the last big thing done on this case. And you know how they are in Hollywood. Hell, they aren't interested in the facts, they just are looking for the best story. I actually don't know whether Ray did it or not. But I know the whole case has changed as a result of what we have uncov-

ered. We have one hell of a story for 'em out in Hollywood."

One of the things Herman and his partner uncovered was a man named Raul, who, they said, was the elusive "Raoul." If true, this would have been a very big deal, perhaps supporting the centerpiece of Ray's claim of innocence. Ray's story from the beginning is that he bought the rifle and scope on instructions from a man named Raoul, his new partner in a gunrunning scheme. He says he turned the weapon over to Raoul the day before King was shot and therefore couldn't himself have used it in the assassination. In short, Ray—though his fingerprints are the only ones found on the rifle—says he was set up.

For three decades Ray's "Raoul" alibi has had nobody to go with it. Then Herman, the private eye—following a lead supplied by one of the goofiest informants in the book—came up with a guy in New York who, he said, was a perfect candidate. Ray, looking at a photo of him, agreed positively that it was "Raoul." Ah, gee, too bad. Turns out, says Posner, this New Yorker had worked in the same auto plant for 30 years and hadn't left that state except once on a trip to Oregon. Littered with dozens of busted balloons like that—some exploding on their own, some pricked by Posner—and by Ray's endless pratfalls over his own lies, this sad saga sometimes has elements of a farce.

Killing the Dream is a first-rate summation of Ray's

wretched *Angela's Ashes* childhood, when he couldn't even afford the five-cent school lunch (perhaps the most memorable part of the book); his flop as a soldier; his time in and escape from prison; his international wanderings, including his 65-day flight after the assassination. Posner also gives a moving account of the sanitation strike that brought King to Memphis.

For one who is cool to theories of a sophisticated conspiracy, Posner is generous in acknowledging some of the things that do indeed raise justifiable suspicions. How could the Memphis cops make so many blunders in letting Ray get away? Why was Ray's attorney, the hotshot Percy Foreman of Houston, suddenly so outrageously incompetent and so eager to have Ray plead guilty, thereby killing any chance for the full story to come out at trial? Ray was a petty criminal, a career thief, not a murderer, so "how could he so coolly stalk his target, pick a perfect sniper's nest, and then dispatch a single shot as effectively as any professional hit man, without guidance from others?"

Hanging over it all is the mystery of Ray's motive for the slaying. For money? There is evidence he thought he would be rewarded by rich segregationists. Or maybe the shot was fired from ambition. Pulling the trigger on King, says Posner, may have come from the driving desire of "a four-time loser looking for a big score" to "put himself in the history books." If so, he sure got what he wanted. ■



PHOTOGRAPH REPRODUCED IN THE BOOK FROM HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASSASSINATIONS (PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSEPH LOUW OF THE PUBLIC BROADCAST LABORATORY. COPYRIGHT © 1968 TIME INC.)

This photograph was taken within minutes after Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was shot. King's aides and friends are pointing in the direction from which the assassin's bullet came.

BOOK

SUNDAY

Celebrating the Vision Of Martin Luther King

DREAMER

By Charles Johnson
Scribner. 236 pp. \$23

Reviewed by JABARI ASIM,
an assistant editor of *Book World*.

Although *Dreamer* takes as its subject the extraordinary life of Martin Luther King Jr., it is hardly a straightforward fictional recreation. Charles Johnson's novel—his first since winning the 1990 National Book Award for *Middle Passage*—only indirectly examines the historical King. It focuses instead on the fallen leader as a symbol of moral power, a catalyst sparking an examination of various conflicts and conundrums that have arisen throughout humanity's eventful existence. Why does God tolerate injustice? Are men truly created equal? Is real racial harmony possible? These are just some of the problems Johnson probes, and with his usual philosophical bent. Because King was a trained philosopher, he provides an ideal conduit through which Johnson can pursue his investigations. However, King is just one of a trio of characters at the center of Johnson's story.

Matthew Bishop, a 24-year-old civil rights movement volunteer and philosophy student,

serves as principal witness and chronicler. A bespectacled James Baldwin look-alike who talks "like a thesaurus" and wears a pencil-holder in his shirt pocket, Matthew longs for an experience that will revive his lagging faith. He confesses, "I no longer could breathe life into the vision the Bible embodied—or, for that matter, into any system of meaning, though I desperately wanted to."

Chaym Smith, the third man in Johnson's triumvirate, is King's double, a human mirror-image whose life has been as unfortunate as King's has been blessed. He is also an apparent shapeshifter and a gifted mimic with a history of mental illness, "a constantly mutating soul" who believes he's been cursed from birth and possesses "an inverted Midas touch"—that is, "everything he brushed against transmogrified into crap."

Matthew, King and Smith—voracious readers and serious thinkers all—are brought together during the summer of 1966, in the middle of King's perilous foray into Chicago. As Johnson unreels his philosophical concerns, readers may become conscious of the author behind the scenes, posing his own arguments through his characters' voices. This isn't unusual in fiction, just more noticeable in a novel

See DREAMER, page 10

The Washington Post

WORLD

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Dreamer

DREAMER, From page 1

that's primarily about ideas rather than plot, place or personalities. Johnson's characterizations sometimes suffer as a result of his intellectual obsessions, but his ideas are so fascinating that the lack is forgivable. His attention to style and momentum also helps, as do his occasional—and usually unexpected—interjections of humor.

The '60s have become "the first truly theatrical decade," Bishop observes, a time "so fluid, so polymorphous you could change your identity—reinvent yourself—as easily as you restyled your hair." It is in the spirit of reinvention that Smith arrives at King's temporary headquarters in Chicago's "Slumdale" and offers his services as a decoy. Often mistaken for King, Smith has been harassed, threatened, pushed from subway platforms. He decides that he might as well get paid for his troubles. "I figure if I'm catchin' hell 'cause of you, I might's well catch it for you instead," he tells King.

Reluctantly, King accepts Smith's offer. He dispatches his double to a farmhouse in southern Illinois, where he'll be trained and watched

"For all of the death threats and the obscenities regularly telephoned into King's wife's ear, his closest pre-Memphis brush with extinction came at the hands of a black woman named Izola Curry, who plunged a letter opener inches from his heart."

by Bishop and Amy Griffith, a beautiful young volunteer with whom Bishop has fallen hopelessly in love.

Meanwhile, riot-ravaged Chicago has become King's toughest trial yet. Death threats weaken his family's stability. FBI henchmen shadow his every move. Methods that were successful during Southern campaigns prove futile in the North. Class divisions undermine his credibility and provide ripe targets for exploitation by those opposed to King's efforts to end slum housing. To make matters worse, his leadership style is condemned as outdat-

ed, genteel, bourgeois.

"A new black cat was on the scene," Bishop reports, "represented by the fierce black masculinity of Stokely [Carmichael], who told it like it was—and by ex-cons in the Black Panther Party." Johnson reserves his roughest treatment for the young, violent aspirants who vied to assume King's mantle of leadership. Black Power is referred to as a "plague," and the visceral vulgarity of its adherents is embodied in a bombastic, bile-spitting activist who calls himself Yahya Zubena. Clearly modeled after Eldridge Cleaver, Zubena is a media darling and self-styled writer whose best-known work is a poem called "Nigger, Nigger, Wake Up!"

The call for armed resistance, coupled with Northern whites' enthusiastic hostility, confirms Bishop's fear that the SCLC is out of its element: "There was something biblical, mythic, and ritualistic in their [whites'] hatred of their darker brothers, something in the blood, as if to found and sustain a city, a sacrificial slaughter must take place."

But even in a society so riven by long-established hatreds, things can seldom be reduced to the simplicity of black and white. For all of the

death threats and the obscenities regularly telephoned into King's wife's ear, his closest pre-Memphis brush with extinction came at the hands of a black woman named Izola Curry, who plunged a letter opener inches from his heart. In turn, Bishop and Smith each narrowly avoid death at the hands of black—not white—assailants. It is through these kinds of ironic twists that Johnson illustrates what he refers to as a Pandora's box of racial paradoxes, among them the fact that the black community's greatest threat

may derive from its own divided self, a mad impulse toward self-hatred that echoes W.E.B. DuBois's concept of double consciousness.

The complex, unreliable nature of the self is perhaps primary among Johnson's explorations. His charac-

ters' thoughts often revolve around the suspicion that man's craven egoism keeps him from the dedication required to work toward true equality. For both Smith and Bishop, King is a living argument against such tragic selfishness, proof that enlightenment—even transcendence—is achievable. Johnson's King is hardly a saint, but his desire to do the right thing is genuine. "Not once did he exclude himself from the realm of sinners, though more than anything else in this world he wanted to be a good man," Matthew reflects. Equally important, King was an intellectual comfortable with the idea of faith, who saw no conflict between hope and reason.

Admirably, Johnson doesn't waste time and pages on conspiracy theories. He leaves to others—historians, perhaps—the uncovering of the levers and pulleys behind King's murder. Instead he has produced an important and engaging meditation on the vagaries of motivation and identity, one with answers that lead only to other, equally intriguing questions. His *Dreamer* is what we've come to expect from Johnson: a tale that's complex, richly told and open-ended enough to inspire readers to launch their own imaginative explorations. ■