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James Earl Ray, Lone Gunman

Thirty years ago today, James Earl Ray assassinated Martin Luther King by firing a single 30.06 bullet through his lower right jaw as the greatest civil-rights leader in American history was leaving his room at the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis to go to dinner at his friend Billy Kyles' house. Ray fired his shot from the bathroom of the flophouse across the street.

Since he was no more than six minutes away by car from the state border, Ray succeeded in escaping Tennessee. He was nabbed two months later at London's Heathrow Airport, when an official there discovered he was carrying a gun and two passports.

"I feel so trapped," Ray said. He was detained in London and extradited. He arrived in the United States on July 18, 1968, and, after spinning a series of weird stories about a mystery man named "Raoul" who was really responsible for the assassination, he pled guilty. Three days after that, he wrote a letter to the judge in the case and said no, he was actually innocent.

Ever since and for many reasons — some honest, some duplicitous; some derived from grief, some derived from greed — the King assassination has run a close second to JFK's as the conspiracy to end all conspiracies. The King family has been understandably unsettled since 1969, when Coretta Scott King de-

clared that Ray had to have been involved in a conspiracy. Last year, King's youngest son, Dexter, even said he thought Ray, who has been rotting in jail, was innocent.

He isn't. "There is no doubt that James Earl Ray shot and killed Martin Luther King," says Gerald Posner in his superb new book on the assassination, "Killing the Dream." Posner goes exhaustively through the evidence and uncovers answers to the questions of "what motivated him, and whether he acted alone."

Ray was a committed racist and career criminal who had heard that, in St. Louis, there was a \$50,000 bounty on King's head. "That he was driven primarily by money," Posner says, "does not necessarily mean that he was hired to commit the crime."

And after extensive research of Ray's close relationship with his two crooked brothers, John and Jerry, Posner posits a "crude family plot" inspired by the possibility of scoring \$50,000.

The King family's hunger to find out the whole truth is understandable. Tragically, by siding with James Earl Ray — the man who killed Dr. King and could end this 30-year charade with one simple recitation of the truth — Dexter is making common cause with the man Gerald Posner conclusively proves shot and killed his father.