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@^By NICHOLAS DANILOFF=

(WASHINGTON (UPI) - The writer of a book about assassin James Earl Ray says a House panel should focus on motives rather than "mechanics" when it takes a new look into the slayings of Martin Luther King Jr. and President John F. Kennedy.<

The committee, chaired by Rep. Thomas Downing (D-Va.), will study unpursued leads in the two cases that turned up during congressional investigations into the U.S. intelligence community.<

Pennsylvania attorney Richard Sprague, who prosecuted former United Mine Workers president W.A. "Tony" Boyle for murder, will conduct the re-opened probe. The new investigation could last up to two years.<

George McMillan, a writer who has investigated both murders, told UPI in an interview he doubts whether the new congressional investigation will turn up significant developments or shake the lone assassin theories of each.<

"The way to solve these crimes," McMillan said, "is not to get bogged down in ballistics and mechanics. The way to solve them is to discover a motive in the assassinations.<

"When I was working on the King assassination, I put a sign on my desk: 'The real question is not how, but why?'"<

McMillan spent seven years researching and writing "The Making of an Assassin," a book coming out this week on Ray and the King assassination.<

During his investigation McMillan got to know Ray's father and

brothers, interviewed his prison mates and undertook a painstaking search of relevant documents, affidavits and family history.<

He never managed to interview Ray, who pleaded guilty to the crime and was sentenced to 99 years in prison.<

McMillan says Ray:<

- Was passionately political; admired the Nazis; at one time carried a picture of Hitler in his wallet.<

- Traded in drugs in the Jefferson City, Mo., penitentiary, saving up several thousand dollars.<

- Told his brothers at a 1968 Chicago reunion after escaping from jail that he was going to kill King. Before the assassination, he called his brother, Jeffrey, in Chicago to say: "Big Nigger has had it."<

- Viewed the projected assassination as a way of forcing American politics into a more conservative mold, with himself as a hero.<

- Planned his escape carefully, evading the police who were on his trail within 15 minutes of the crime, escaping to Canada, where he arranged for a Canadian passport, and contemplating flight to Rhodesia or Angola.<

- Spoke about being paid by a foreign agent whom he called "Raoul" to writer William Bradford Huie. Later, he changed his story, and Huie concluded there was no "Raoul."<

The Select Committee on Assassinations holds its next formal session Nov. 15. Sprague wants to assemble enough material to convince the next Congress to extend the panel's mandate for as long as necessary.<

Unanswered questions in the King assassination include why a police officer guarding the civil rights leader at the Lorraine Motel in

Memphis, Tenn., was taken off the assignment the day before King was killed and after a meeting of CIA and FBI officials, whether there was a conspiracy and how Ray could have undertaken and financed the assassination and the getaway alone.<

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