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(Black)

Was James Earl Ray patsy in MILK death?

BY DAN CARPENTER

While politicians, civil rights leaders, and other admirers of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. clamor for the declaration of a national holiday in his honor, a few men, virtually unaided and virtually unknown to Blacks, tried doggedly toward a much

more urgent goal. They hope to show, through a mountain of research and in direct confrontation with the federal government, that the official version of the assassination of one of America's greatest leaders was a lie. Most of the work is being done by author Harold Weisberg and Atty. James Lesar, both serious students of the American assassinations of the 1960s. A tireless investigator who has written books rebutting the official versions of both King's and John F. Kennedy's assassinations, Weisberg is helping Lesar build the factual arsenal for his battle to obtain a new trial for James Earl Ray. Co-counsel to Lesar are Attys. Bernard (Bud) Fensterwald and Robert Livingston. Ray, who is serving a 99-year sentence after pleading guilty to the crime in 1969, has persistently denied killing King except for that plea, which Ray he entered under

pressure from his former attorney, the celebrated Percy Foreman.

Foreman had a huge financial interest in a book about the assassination, whose author, William Bradford Huie, portrayed Ray as the lone assassin. Acquittal of Ray presumably would have made the book worthless; thus, Foreman stands accused by his former client of having had a critical conflict of interest.

Then there are questions of evidence, never tested in the Memphis "minitrial" at which Ray pleaded guilty.

Authorities never have been able to link Ray to a murder weapon, and there are eyewitness accounts that the shot which killed Dr. King on the night of April 4, 1968 came not from the rooming house from which police say Ray fired, but from a knot of bushes below the motel balcony where King was standing when he was struck.

Critics of the official version of the slaying of King have charged that there are a number of other holes in the state's case against James Earl Ray. His defenders contend that state and federal authorities do not want a trial because they would be unable to plug these alleged holes and would have to admit they failed to solve this sensational crime.

Presumably, a great many Americans would then be asking an awfully tough question: Why?

While never remotely resembling a groundswell, interest in reexamining the assassination of Dr. King has gained some impetus from the recent revelations of federal surveillance and harassment of Black leaders and other political activists.

There was, for example, the famous memo from then FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover,

issued a month before King was slain, warning of the possibility that a "Messiah" might rise to lead a full-fledged Black insurrection in this country.

That disclosure, coupled with evidence that King was broadening his political perspective and questioning the effectiveness of his non-violent approach at the time of his death, has greatly fueled speculation that the government or wealthy, racist private interests may have been behind his murder.

Ray himself hinted during the "minitrial" that others were involved in the murder. He has also said he was a peripheral and unwilling element in a conspiracy to kill King.

Atty. Livingston seems to assume the worst. In a recent issue of Rolling Stone magazine, he was quoted as saying: "I am of the opinion that there are some people that the Department of Justice would just as soon not have to catch. I suspect that the thing could be linked up to the CIA, (Turn to page 14, please)