

Mr. Les Payne
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Dear Les,

At 85 and feeble, I've just returned from physical therapy and have about an hour before leaving for Lil's appointment with our dermatologist. Not enough time for much work and what is on my mind is your disgracing yourself by the most faithful copying of the abuses of so many white journalists in your column of May 3, "In Death, Ray Escape With Last Laugh."

In this Bill Kopper, with whom I do not agree, is irrelevant. So also was the mistaken part of what the King family did. If they had not made the mistake the other way thirty years ago there would have been a trial.

And people like you, who have made ^{real} no effort to learn the actual facts, would have learned that the prosecution could not even place Ray in the City of Memphis at the time of the crime and that the crime was impossible as the phony solution was made up. Absolutely impossible! And so you can feel really good about how faithfully you serve your people in this, that rifle was not even used in the crime—could not have been.

As you may remember, unless your memory has also changed ~~and~~ as from this and other columns you have, I stick to the official evidence.

And with all I've published I have yet to get a call or a letter from any of those of whom I've been so critical. No complaint from any of them of an unfairness or of inaccuracy. *Not one!*

You do not know enough to think of it this way but in effect you are defending lynchers. The actual assassins are free and people like you are assuring they will live their lives out in freedom.

If you question any of this, do what off and on for a couple of years you said you have to do, come down with Vi. I'll show you.

All the stuff that Posner corrupts in his new book, aided and abetted by your associate Colford, I brought to light in various ways and he credits to those who use it as he misuses it. When Colford had orgasms over Posner's previous book I bought a copy of my Case Open and sent it to him at the suggestion of a friend who apparently never understood that holding his job means more to Colford than informing the people ^hhonestly. Colford ^{ing} raved about Case Closed but did not mention Case Open. In which I referred to Posner as a shyster, a plagiarist and as a man who has trouble telling the truth even by accident. Without a word from him.

I'm doing what I can, making a large record for our history in which it can ^{exist} only if some are concerned enough to make that more important than money or prestige or being loved by the major media. Best to you all, Harold Weisberg

Harold Weisberg

LES PAYNE

Newsday 5/3/98

In Death, Ray Escaped With Last Laugh



THE EVIL that James Earl Ray did shall live on while the details are interred with his bones.

Ray was central to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A naive Dexter King insists beyond all evidence that Ray had nothing to do with his father's murder. In this deception, the youngest son bears the nose hook of attorney William Pepper, who incredibly convinced the King family of Ray's innocence while representing the admitted murderer serving 99 years in prison.

As long as Ray lived, his attorney was obliged to deny all involvement, otherwise his client would have continued his rot on a conspiracy-to-murder rap. Death releases Pepper of such obligations. However, the King family can hold Ray responsible while seeking others involved.

The list of powerful white men and government agencies to consider is long and troubling. President Lyndon B. Johnson, toward the end of his tenure, reportedly referred to Dr. King as that "goddamn nigger preacher." This endearment flowed from King's opposition to the Vietnam War. Dexter King's opinion aside, LBJ had no direct hand in King's murder, though he might have seen in the demise of his nemesis the good Lord taking his own private vengeance. After mercilessly harassing King in life, J. Edgar

Hoover had to cover his tracks after the murder. The director had once defamed King as a "notorious liar" and even had his agents attempt to provoke the civil rights leader to commit suicide. Zealous FBI agents also wiretapped, electronically surveilled, harassed and stalked King around the clock for some five years. Yet they would have the world believe that they were strangely absent the day King was gunned down in Memphis.

The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, which committed major acts of mayhem, including murder, against other civil rights activists, was certainly not above funding or lending its good offices to a serious attempt on the life of Dr. King.

In addition, Dr. King was targeted for character assassination and worse by literally hundreds of racist groups and individuals.

Notwithstanding possible outside involvement, James Earl Ray was deeply involved and very likely the triggerman. Ray's attorney Pepper mistakenly paints the picture of a Ray as a dim and harmless loner with not a racist bone in his body.

Though often underestimated, Ray proved to be a shrewd opportunist whose emotional equipment and ability for decisive action ran deep. A Missouri parole board psychiatrist diagnosed him as obsessive-compulsive. Criticized as a bungler, he occasionally showed flashes of criminal daring, including two

successful prison escapes.

"I suspect that everyone in here [prison] has escaped in the back of his mind," Ray told Playboy magazine after his 1977 escape from the Brushy Mountain Prison. "The only thing is whether they got the fortitude to go through with it."

This gutsy loner also had the racist's motive to kill King, contrary to Dexter King's assessment. "I met Ray. He is not a segregationist," King's son said in an NBC interview. "I've met his family. They are not people who strike me as racist." The entire Ray family must still be laughing at this one.

"All his life, Jimmy [Ray] has been wild . . . against niggers, and he's wild on politics," said Gerry Ray, who was the closest person to his brother James. "Nobody can reason with Jimmy on the two subjects of niggers and politics." Ray even refused once to transfer to a softer prison life in Leavenworth because the unit dormitories were desegregated.

To prove that Ray was a racist, and the evidence is piled to the sky, is not to prove that he killed King; however this latter evidence is substantially higher than a molehill.

With Ray's death, attorney Pepper, with Dexter in tow, will fast-forward with his Hollywood theories that will direct attention away from those who helped Ray assassinate Dr. King. A grateful Ray is no doubt smiling in hell.