

*Nothing new  
in this*

[CB] - UM #1477-256 / 1

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES -- PRODUCTION #1477-256  
"MARTIN LUTHER KING": INTERVIEW WITH JIM LESAR

OKAY, HI THERE. UH, NOW GO TO SOUND ROLL ELEVEN AND CAMERA ROLL TWENTY-ONE AND IT'S A NEW PERSON. THE INTERVIEW WITH JIM LESAR, L-E-S-A-R. AND IT IS MARKER FOURTEEN NEXT.

21, TAKE 14. MARKER.

INTERVIEWER      Okay, Jim, for starters, if you could just give me your full name with the correct spelling.

JIM LESAR          It's, uh, James Hiram Lesar. L-E-S, as in Sam, A-R.

INTERVIEWER      And your affiliation with James Earl Ray professionally was what?

JIM LESAR          I represented James Earl Ray from, uh, 1970 to about, uh, 1975.

INTERVIEWER      Go over for me, if you will, the official government scenario of what happened the day Martin Luther King was killed in relationship to James Earl Ray.

JIM LESAR          Well, in essence, the--the, uh--the government, uh, here, the, uh--the district attorney of Shelby County, Tennessee, uh, alleged that, uh, James Earl Ray brought a rifle into the rooming house at, uh, uh--on South Main Street, uh, and that at approximately six o'clock fired a shot out of a bathroom window which struck Dr.

King as he was, uh, leaning over the balcony at the Lorraine Motel, uh, across the street on the backside of the rooming house.

INTERVIEWER      Could you do that once for me--

JIM LESAR          [LAUGHS]--

INTERVIEWER      --again, with a little more detail--

JIM LESAR          Okay--

INTERVIEWER      --picking it up with the point where--and the main beats I'm looking for there is James having bought the gun--

JIM LESAR          Uh huh--

INTERVIEWER      --going to Memphis, renting a room--

JIM LESAR          Right--

INTERVIEWER      --shooting, dropping the bundle--

JIM LESAR          Uh huh--right--

INTERVIEWER      And then--

JIM LESAR          Okay.

INTERVIEWER      Once again, if you can just run through that quote official alleged scenario.

JIM LESAR          Yeah. The, uh--the district attorney of Shelby County alleged that, uh, James Earl Ray had purchased a rifle in Birmingham, Alabama, taken it to Memphis, Tennessee, and on the h--afternoon of the day that, uh, Dr. King was shot, had taken the rifle into a rooming house on South Main Street, uh, gone to the bathroom about, uh, six o'clock in the evening, and fired a shot at Dr. King, who was then leaning over the balcony, uh, of the Lorraine Motel across the street from the bathroom window. Uh, the state then alleged that, uh, after having fired the shot, Ray, uh, wrapped a number of his possessions, uh, in a, uh--a--a blanket, uh, and took that--including the rifle, m--and took that out

of the rooming house on the Main Street side and dumped it in front of Canipes(?) Amusement, uh, Center, uh, right next door to the rooming house. Then got in his white Mustang and fled the scene.

INTERVIEWER In general--we'll get into more specifics a little bit later--but in general, how do you feel about that scenario?

JIM LESAR Well, uh, there are, uh, a number of problems with it. Uh, uh, first of all, it, uh, is, uh, very peculiar that someone involved in an assassination would leave the evidence at the scene of the crime. Uh, it strikes many people, myself included, that that looks like a set-up. That somebody else gathered that evidence up and planted it there. In addition, uh, the, uh, site of the shooting from the--the bathroom at the rear of the rooming house does not seem to me, uh, to have been, uh, the most likely place from which the shot was fired. There was another location, uh, that I think is more probable. There--opposite the, uh, Lorraine Motel there was a--a r--a retaining wall above the street, and then a--a--a very thick bramble of bushes. Uh, and I think it is quite plausible that the shot could have been fired from that location rather than from the rooming house. Then, uh, another problem is the, uh, question of what motive James Earl Ray had to, uh, fire the shot, uh, uh, to--to shoot Dr. King, uh, alone, as the official scenario is, is that he is a lone assassin. And, uh, there is no, uh, really compelling evidence that he had a motive, uh, sufficiently strong to do that. He was an escaped convict at that time. Uh, there is indication that he was, uh, uh, being sent from place to place by someone else, run across the--the, uh, Canadian-U.S. border, then later run across the Mexican-U.S. border. And that he's being moved around. So the suggestion is, is that he had, uh--whatever he was doing, whether or not he was involved in the assassination, he had confederates in his activities.

INTERVIEWER Based on what you know and all of your research, what is your feeling about his acting alone?

JIM LESAR M--I--my belief is, is that--that, uh, he did not act alone. Well, uh, first, that he did not fire the shot.

INTERVIEWER Okay, let's start that again.

JIM LESAR Yes.



INTERVIEWER Okay, go ahead.

JIM LESAR Yeah. My belief is, is that first, that James Earl Ray did not fire the shot. Second, that he was set up by people that he had been associ--in a--in association with, uh, since shortly after he had escaped from the Missouri Penitentiary the year before.

INTERVIEWER Which is basically the Raul period, right, correct?

JIM LESAR Yes.

INTERVIEWER Okay.

JIM LESAR Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER Let's go through that--the basic Raul theory. Walk me through that once, in terms of--

JIM LESAR Uh huh--

INTERVIEWER --how James Earl Ray met Raul and basically where his relationship with him took him during that period, all the way up through the assassination.

JIM LESAR Uh huh. Well, uh, Ray alleges that, uh, after he escaped from the Missouri pen and fled to Canada, that, uh, uh, there were certain things that he obviously needed. One was money. A second was a passport. So--some form of identification. And that in a--in a bar in Montreal he met a mysterious person named Raul. Uh, whether that's a--a real name or--or, uh, an alias, uh, neither Ray nor anyone else knows. But Ray claimed that, in exchange for Ray's agreeing to perform certain, uh, tasks, evidently of a criminal nature, one, he was provided with money and two, he was promised that at some por--point he would be given identification, a passport, something he needed to get out of the country. And there is evidence that, in fact, Ray, uh, did run things across the border from, uh, Canada to the United States, and that he later, uh, ran, uh, contraband of some kind across the Mexican-U.S. border.

INTERVIEWER And where from there? I mean, explain that relationship to me as it developed.

JIM LESAR

Well, the, uh, uh--[MUMBLES]--Ray also says that it is Raul who instructed him to purchase the rifle, uh, at the Aero-Marine Supply Company in Birmingham, Alabama. And, uh, that, uh, Ray--uh, that he was directed by Raul to, uh--to--first, uh, uh, to backtrack a bit, Ray went into the Aero-Marine Supply Company and bought the wrong rifle. He was then--he--he brought it back and was then told by Raul to go back and get a different rifle. He did, and that is the rifle that he took to Memphis. Uh, then at Rau--at Raul's instructions, he went to Memphis and was instructed to go to the rooming house and did so. Uh, it is murky, but it is a--it is, in my belief, a very believable story, and the--the only one that accounts for Ray's, uh, strange peregrinations. Uh, his--his, uh, travels from Canada to Birmingham, from Birmingham out to Los Angeles, uh, and then across the Mexican border. Those sort of things--uh, his purchase of a car, uh, uh, with, uh, uh, a couple of thousand dollars that he just didn't have indicate that he was getting money from some source, and that somebody was directing him to go hither and yon.

INTERVIEWER

So basically you--just to rephrase--

JIM LESAR

Uh huh--

INTERVIEWER

How do you feel about James' story about Raul?

JIM LESAR

I beli--I believe that there was a Raul. And that Ray was in contact--[MUMBLES]--in contact with him and directed by him.  
[BACKGROUND NOISE]

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

BEEP. BEEP.

AND PLEASE GO TO CAMERA ROLL 22. AND IT'S A CONTINUATION WITH LESAR, MARKER FIFTEEN.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

MARKER.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

INTERVIEWER Explain if you would, again, your thinking about whether James' story about Raul is true or not, and why.

JIM LESAR Well, uh, when Ray escaped from prison, uh, uh, he had no, uh--no money. Very--very little money. He did work for a brief period of time in Chicago, but he had minimal funds. And yet he travels about during this, uh, uh, period after his escape from the prison, uh--he travels about at ease, he's--he purchases, uh, an automobile for a couple of thousand bucks and this is, remember, 1960, uh, seven, when the two thousand dollars is real money. Uh, and not the kind of money that a person, uh, uh, in--with his job skills could have saved up, uh, easily. Uh, he travels, uh, uh, all over the North American continent. He goes to Birmingham. He goes to New Orleans. He goes to Los Angeles. He goes to Mexico. And the indications are that he is, uh--he's performing tasks for somebody when he does these things. Uh, and I don't believe that, uh, without some assistance, Ray could have done these things.

INTERVIEWER There are a number of areas of controversy about Ray's being the assassin. I'd just like to kind of go through these and get your comment on each area--

JIM LESAR Uh huh--sure--

INTERVIEWER Number one, Ray's quote expertise as a marksman.

JIM LESAR Uh, he had none.

INTERVIEWER Okay, if you could just basically state that in a statement and elaborate on that.

JIM LESAR I mean, hi--there's no--there's no evidence that, uh, uh, uh, since his, uh, period in the Army, uh, during--during World War II that he had any, uh, uh, experience firing, uh, a rifle. In fact, the--the evidence is, is that, uh, wh--from the people who, uh, witnessed his purchase of the rifle in the--uh, in Birmingham, is that he didn't know the first thing about rifles. He was confused about what he wanted, didn't know what he wanted, got the wro--bought the wrong rifle and had to come back and exchange it for another one. Uh, so he didn't have the kind of familiarity with firearms that you would expect of somebody who was going to murder someone.



INTERVIEWER The man in the bushes--

JIM LESAR Uh huh--

INTERVIEWER --the appearance of this figure who was suspected to possibly have fired a shot from the bushes [UNCLEAR]--

JIM LESAR Uh huh--

INTERVIEWER How do you feel about that? True or--

JIM LESAR Well, I think that it--it is--it's potentially significant because I think that, uh, that was the better location from firing it--for firing a shot, and--and the only one that is, I think, consistent with the evidence. Uh, so it seems to me that--that that eye witness report cannot be written off.

INTERVIEWER The eye witness who saw--supposedly saw James Earl Ray in the hallway right following the gunshot--

JIM LESAR Yes--

INTERVIEWER --Mr. Stevens--

JIM LESAR Charles Quitman Stevens. Yes.

INTERVIEWER A lot of controversy about his credibility.

JIM LESAR He had no credibility. Uh, h--he was--he was, uh, stone drunk at the time, uh, of the shooting. Uh, uh, a cab driver, James McGraw, uh, had, uh, come by to pick him up, and he was too drunk to get him into the cab. Uh, his, uh, uh, so-called, uh, eye witness testimony was absolutely worthless.

INTERVIEWER Mr. Blakey claims that his--Mr. Stevens' significance was not so much in the area of making an identification of Ray as of confirming a gunshot from that room at that time. How do you feel about that?

JIM LESAR [MUMBLES] Well, I--[MUMBLES]--from all accounts, uh, Stevens was, uh, so dead drunk that, uh, uh, uh, there's no way of relying upon, uh, his testimony about, uh, uh, uh, a shot. And in addition he was, uh, inside a room. Uh, how he could determine from

inside the room where the shot came from, assuming he even heard a shot--which I think's very doubtful--uh, no one knows.

INTERVIEWER We touched on this, but just to go over this again. The bundle that's dropped--

JIM LESAR Uh huh--

INTERVIEWER --outside. A lot of controversy there about why he would have dropped it.

JIM LESAR Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER Your feeling there.

JIM LESAR Well, my feeling is, is that, uh--that he would not have dropped it there, uh, uh, [MUMBLES] absent, uh, uh, some extraordinary, uh, uh, event that just didn't happen. Uh, there's no reason why he would, uh, take evidence that is linked to him and leave it in a place where it is sure to be discovered, because it traces back to him. This is the murder weapon. [MUMBLES] Unless, uh, you want to be caught, you don't do that. And the evidence is that he didn't want to be caught. Uh, in fact, uh, uh, he fled the scene.

INTERVIEWER The fingerprints on the rifle, definitely--

JIM LESAR Well--

INTERVIEWER --one print identified.

JIM LESAR He bought the rifle. There's no doubt that his fingerprints, uh, should be on the rifle.

INTERVIEWER Okay, elaborate on that a little bit just in terms of how that basically then is insignificant in the case--

JIM LESAR Well, it--it--it, uh--it means nothing because his, uh--his fingerprint could have been, uh, w--uh, on the rifle when he purchased it. Somebody else could have handled the rifle, wiped the--the, uh, prints off, missed his print. Uh, it just has no--no significance other than to establish the fact that he was connected with the rifle, but that's conceded. He did buy the rifle.



INTERVIEWER The ballistics test--

JIM LESAR Yeah? Yeah. [BACKGROUND NOISE] The ballistics were meaningless. The--

INTERVIEWER Wait for the cycle to go by--

JIM LESAR Yeah.

INTERVIEWER Okay.

JIM LESAR Yeah. Uh, the ballistics tests, uh, according to the FBI, uh, uh, ballistics expert, Robert Frazier, uh, were meaningless. He was unable to make any, uh, positive, uh, link between the bullet and the rifle.

INTERVIEWER So basically this area of what they call consistency, the consistency is--then has no meaning.

JIM LESAR It--it--it--the fact that it--[MUMBLES]--that, uh, uh, the, uh, bullet markings are said to have been consistent with having been from the--the rifle means absolutely nothing. It was also consistent with several million other rifles of the same kind.

INTERVIEWER The Mustang--

JIM LESAR Uh huh--

INTERVIEWER The Mustang supposedly was sighted by men in the shop driving by right after the bundle was dropped.

JIM LESAR Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER Yet Mr. Ray claims that he was away from the location at that particular time--

JIM LESAR Uh huh--

INTERVIEWER How does that figure--

JIM LESAR Well, there were--there were--there were, uh, a number of witnesses who test--who, uh, when w--they were interviewed by the public defender's office who had u--who, for a period of time,

represented James Earl Ray before the guilty plea, uh, who testified to the--to the presence of two white Mustangs at that location. Uh, so, uh, that also does not, uh, uh, uh, definitely establish anything.

INTERVIEWER A lot of controversy about James' visit to the gas station.

JIM LESAR Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER Obviously that was a pretty strong alibi. Go to the gas station, find someone--

JIM LESAR Right--

INTERVIEWER --and you're out.

JIM LESAR Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER They never found anyone, supposedly. What's your feeling on that? What's your understanding of that?

JIM LESAR Well, I--uh, I would--I'll have to defer you, uh, to, uh, Harold Weisberg on that, because he investigated that, uh, angle.

INTERVIEWER Now, I know you said that there was another, pretty large area that--why did--if all of this were true and James' story about Raul was true, why would he plead guilty?

JIM LESAR Well, the guilty plea is, uh, the result of a complicated series of events that began when Ray, uh, entered into a contractual relationship with, uh, an Alabama author, William Bradford Huey. Huey, uh, as a result of this contractual relationship, ended up paying for Ray's defense. And, uh, Ray became dissatisfied with that, uh, defense. The trial was initially set for November the 12th, 1968. Uh, Ray had been extradited, uh, back from England in July of '68. As the trial date approached, he became more and more nervous about, uh, going to trial with, uh, uh, Art Haynes Jr. and Sr. And shortly [MUMBLES]--a couple of days before the trial, uh, he, uh, conferred with his brother, uh, who came to--to see him in prison. And as a result, the--the--the--the brother advised him very strongly that, uh, uh, uh, matters were being controlled by William Bradford Huey. James Earl Ray wanted to take the witness stand. William Bradford Huey did not, because

Huey had a financial interest, he had a contract for the exclusive rights to Ray's story. And if Ray testified there was no longer any exclusive to the story. It would all be a matter of public knowledge, public record. So Ray, now distrustful of his counsel, uh, i--talked with his brother and his brother went out and got Percy Foreman of Houston, Texas to fly to--to Memphis just--

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

BEEP. BEEP.

OKAY, CONTINUING AND THIS IS NOW SOUND ROLL TWELVE, CAMERA ROLL 23. CONTINUING WITH JIM LESAR. MARKER SIXTEEN IS NEXT.

MARKER.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

INTERVIEWER We were picking it up with Ray's brother contacting Percy Foreman--

JIM LESAR Yes. Uh, [CLEARS THROAT], uh, Ray's brother got Percy Foreman to--to fly in and, uh, Foreman flies in, says that--reads the contracts that had been entered into between the Hayneses and William Bradford Huey and James Earl Ray, says that he can break the contracts, agrees to represent James Earl Ray, says not to worry about his fee, uh, and that he's not entering into any book deal until after, uh, the trial is complete. Uh, Foreman, uh, appears the day of the trial, the judge grants Ray's motion to allow Foreman to replace Haynes as his attorney. And Foreman then asks for a long delay in the trial date. He then proceeds to sit down with William Bradford Huey a couple of weeks later and to tell Huey that he wants to get himself inserted into the contracts, only he wants a greater percentage of the b--of the, uh, book profits than Haynes was entitled to get. In January, as the trial date of March the--the 11th approaches, uh, Foreman gets himself, uh, put into the contracts and gets Ray to sign his percentage over to Foreman. Then, uh, in what I think was a very, uh, critical development, uh, the Shelby County D.A. subpoenas William Bradford Huey to testify--testify before, uh, the grand jury. So you now have [MUMBLES] the bizarre circumstance in which the man who is paying for the defense is



going to be called to testify against the man who's defense he's paying for. And up to this point Huey had remained in Alabama. And could not be subpoenaed there. And for some reason he suddenly decides to show up in Memphis and talk to the grand jury. And he does testify against Ray at the grand jury proceeding. Immediately after this, the Shelby County DA sends, uh, Foreman a letter s--saying that he's adding several additional witnesses who will testify at the trial. One of them is William Bradford Huey. So now Foreman is confronted with the situation, undoubtedly highly embarrassing to him, where the man who's paying his fee is testifying to the Shelby County grand jury against his client, and going to testify at the trial, if the DA gets his way. At this point Foreman begins to pressure Ray to plead guilty. And, uh, Ray [BACKGROUND NOISE] starts to distrust Foreman. [BACKGROUND NOISE] He'd already had some prior reason to distrust him--

INTERVIEWER

Sorry--

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

INTERVIEWER

--at this point--

JIM LESAR

Yeah. At this point Ray begins to--to distrust Foreman even more. He had--uh, he'd had some distrust of him because he got the--the sh--uh--the Shelby County public defender appointed to assist him, and Ray had a low regard for public defenders generally. And re--in fact, refused to cooperate with the public defender when he came to his cell to interview him. Foreman, in pressuring Ray to plead guilty, tells him that if you don't plead guilty, then I'm going to, uh [MUMBLES]--then I will withdraw and you will be defended at trial by the public defender. Well, that was anathema to James Earl Ray. And that, I think, was an important part of the reason why he pled guilty. He felt that Foreman wasn't going to--to give him an honest defense, and that the public defender's office couldn't give him a good defense. And therefore he reasoned that his only shot at it was to plead guilty and then to try and reopen the case later. And, in fact, when he agrees to plead guilty, immediately after he--he initials the, uh--the statements that he's going to plead guilty to on Monday, March the 11th, uh, he begins to, uh, uh, mutter about, uh, uh, these things in his jail cell, word leaks out that he's unhappy with Foreman. Foreman comes storming back into--to Memphis, and on, uh, uh, the day

before the trial is set--the day before the guilty plea--Foreman enters into two extraordinary, uh, letters with Ray, and under the terms of those letters, uh, uh, Foreman promises that he will pay James Earl Ray's brother, Jerry Ray, five hundred dollars if James Earl Ray will plead guilty with no embarrassing circumstances to take place. It is as bizarre and outrageous as anything I've ever heard of in the conduct of a--of a criminal case by a defense attorney.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

INTERVIEWER The, uh--what I need you to do is just give me one brief summary [UNCLEAR] basically generalized about the ethical behavior of [UNCLEAR]--

JIM LESAR Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER And maybe just pointing out the specific at the end.

JIM LESAR Yeah. Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER Why did James Earl Ray plead guilty?

JIM LESAR He pled--in--in essence he pled guilty because he couldn't trust his attorney. He felt his attorney had sold him down the river. And his attorney was threatening to withdraw from the case and put another attorney in charge of the trial at the last minute, an attorney that Ray believed could not handle his defense.

INTERVIEWER But would that be a reason for him to plead guilty, as opposed to just not screaming for another attorney?

JIM LESAR Well, uh, under--under normal stan--circumstances, yes. But in this case Ray had already previously been granted another attorney by the trial judge, and at the time the trial judge allowed that he made it very clear that he was not going to grant another such request for a new attorney. So Ray felt boxed in.

INTERVIEWER I'm going to ask you to do that summary for me once again--

JIM LESAR Uh huh--yeah--

INTERVIEWER --and referring actually to a public defender as opposed to another attorney--

JIM LESAR Okay--

INTERVIEWER I think that's--

JIM LESAR Yeah, all right. Okay.

INTERVIEWER Okay. So once again, if you will, in brief summary, why did James Earl Ray plead guilty?

JIM LESAR Ray pled guilty because he felt he could not trust his trial attorney, Percy Foreman. And because he could not stomach going to trial with the public defender who he had a very low regard for.

INTERVIEWER If you would give me that answer again--

JIM LESAR Yeah--okay--

INTERVIEWER --and incorporate the business of that he couldn't ask for another attorney--

JIM LESAR Yeah, okay--

INTERVIEWER --in one statement--

JIM LESAR Yeah. Right.

INTERVIEWER Okay.

JIM LESAR Yeah. Ray pled guilty because he couldn't trust his trial attorney, Percy Foreman. He couldn't stomach going to trial with a public defender, who he had a very low regard for. And because the trial judge had told him he wasn't going to be allowed to change attorneys again.

INTERVIEWER Recently there's been this material that's come up in FBI files concerning the existence of a James Hardin. Could you basically tell me what you know about Hardin, and how he could possibly relate to this Raul?



JIM LESAR

Well, um, I know only a little bit about Hardin. What I know is that, uh, he is named in e--that there is a, uh, uh, a James Hardin who is named in FBI reports as having visited Ray when he was, uh, in California. And that, uh, this then becomes, uh, very--a potentially very important lead, because it is evidence that Ray did have, uh, some associates. That he was not a loner. And that if there's anything in this person's background that might suggest involvement in a cru--criminal enterprise, then it's a lead that should have been checked out very carefully.

INTERVIEWER

What does it say in terms of the--I guess my question is--and this may be hard for me to ask--for you to answer--but could Hardin be Raul?

JIM LESAR

Uh, I don't know. I don't know enough about, uh, Hardin to know whether he could be Raul.

INTERVIEWER

Knowing what you know about the FBI activities concerning Mr. King for so many years, in particular Mr. Hoover's activities--

JIM LESAR

Uh huh--

INTERVIEWER

--what does--does it strike you as odd that something like this wasn't followed more closely?

JIM LESAR

Well, uh, it--it--

INTERVIEWER

I'm sorry, we're going to stop and change rolls--

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

BEEP. BEEP.

OKAY, PLEASE GO TO CAMERA ROLL 24. CAMERA ROLL 24.  
AND NEXT WILL BE MARKER 17.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

CAMERA ROLL 24. TAKE 17.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

MARKER.

INTERVIEWER Based on what you know about the Hardin presence and based on what you know about the FBI involvement, what's the significance of something like this obviously having been investigated but not followed up?

JIM LESAR Well, the significance is this is a--uh--is a potential lead of, uh--of, uh, uh--that, uh, could have been very productive. Uh, one can't say because it was never properly followed up. At least, uh, from this document it would appear that, uh, the proper, uh, uh, follow-up investigation was not carried out. Uh, they had a lead concerning, uh, a man named, uh, James C. Hardin, uh, who had--was in contact with Ray, uh, in--on the west coast, uh, shortly before the assassination, received phone calls from Atlanta and New Orleans, two cities with which Ray was associated. And, uh, there, uh, is a suggestion from somebody who contacted the manager of the St. Francis Hotel that, uh, he knew something about the association of Ray and these James--and this James Hardin that might entitle him to reward money, uh, concerning the--the, uh, King assassination. Uh, that is the kind of lead that you just couldn't afford to ignore if you were conducting a proper investigation.

INTERVIEWER Run that through for me once again--I'm sorry--

JIM LESAR Uh huh--

INTERVIEWER --that's fine. [UNCLEAR]

JIM LESAR Okay.

INTERVIEWER [UNCLEAR]

JIM LESAR This way?

INTERVIEWER Yeah. Based on the documents, basically who is James Hardin and what--you know, how does his name come forth--

JIM LESAR Well it [MUMBLES]--his name, uh, crops up, uh--

INTERVIEWER The name James Hardin--

JIM LESAR The name James Hardin crops up, uh, in an FBI document, uh, involving, uh, an FBI interview of the manager of the St. Francis

Hotel, a hotel at which, uh, James Earl Ray stayed. And the--the, uh, manager recalls, uh, that Ray had received--

INTERVIEWER I'm sorry, we're getting some noise--

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

INTERVIEWER Okay, all right.

JIM LESAR You want me to begin again--[LAUGHS]

INTERVIEWER I'm sorry--if you could just go once again--

JIM LESAR Yeah--

INTERVIEWER --beginning with the names James Hardin--

JIM LESAR Yeah. Uh, the name James Hardin crops up in--in FBI, uh, document, uh, in--at the end of May, '68, uh, when the FBI is investigating the King assassination, and they interview the manager of the St. Francis Hotel in Los Angeles, and he recalls that, prior to the assassination, Ray had received, uh, some phone calls from a man, James C. Hardin, and an--a visit, uh, from a man of that name. The phone calls are from Atlanta and New Orleans. Uh, cities that Ray was associated with during the period prior to the assassination. And so there is an indication here of an important relationship between James Earl Ray and somebody, uh, named James Hardin. That kind of a lead should have been followed up to the hilt.

INTERVIEWER Why do you think it wasn't?

JIM LESAR Uh, the most l--plausible explanation is, is that from the moment of the assassination on, the FBI fixed on one individual, originally known under the name of Eric Starvall(?) Gault(?) and other aliases, and later identified as James Earl Ray, and had conducted a great man hunt for one individual without ever seriously, uh, investigating the conspiracy angle.

INTERVIEWER What are the chances that--that Hardin could have been Raul?

JIM LESAR I s--I don't have enough information about Hardin, uh, to make that judgment. The most important thing is, is that it indicates



that Ray was not a loner. That he was in contact, uh, with someone else, uh, uh, apparently, uh, uh, some--[MUMBLES]--some bit of mystery about the contacts. And the contacts, uh, were--involved geographical locations where e--e--Ray i--was active.

INTERVIEWER What is your feeling at this time, having been through all the research that you've been through, in terms of the conspiracy theory?

JIM LESAR W--what is my--

INTERVIEWER What is your feeling about--let me ask it this way. After all you've been through, James Earl Ray did it alone? He didn't do it--

JIM LESAR No--

INTERVIEWER He was the patsy to a conspiracy--

JIM LESAR Yeah--

INTERVIEWER Where does your--where does your--

JIM LESAR Uh, my belief is that Ray did not fire the shot that killed Dr. King. Whether e--he was, uh, wittingly involved in the attempt, uh, about, uh--against Dr. King in some manner, uh, I think the--the, uh, evidence is still out on that one. Uh, my basic impression is, is that he was set up for the crime, and took, uh--took the fall for it.

INTERVIEWER So basically this concept of--a lot of people say that, well--let me ask it this way. Does James Earl Ray have the intellectual capacity to pull something like this off?

JIM LESAR Well, I think when you take, uh, uh, all of the things that occurred, uh, uh, that it was [MUMBLES]--beyond his, uh, capacity to do it all by himself, when you--you take into the--the purchase of the rifles and the, uh--the flight to Canada and then from Canada to--to Europe, uh, the procuring of, uh, a, uh--of a passport. I don't think that Ray himself did do that.

INTERVIEWER Tell me a little bit about your involvement in getting the release of the FBI files.

JIM LESAR Um-- Well, uh, initially in 1975, uh, I filed suit on behalf of Harold Weisberg for the, uh--the basic evidence in, uh, the King assassination case. And ultimately the FBI provided, uh, some sixty thousand pages of, uh, documents, both from FBI headquarters and from several field offices. Uh, later I filed suit in, uh--in my own name, uh, for materials that had been obtained by the [MUMBLES]--excuse me. I filed suit in my own name for the notes that had been made by the Office of Professional Responsibility when they conducted their review of the King assassination.

INTERVIEWER When you received the documents--and I know this is probably a question for Weisberg--

JIM LESAR Yeah--

INTERVIEWER --what areas surprised you?

JIM LESAR Well, that's, uh, uh, really is a--largely a question for Mr. Weisberg, except there are two or three things that were extremely significant. One is, uh, the, uh--the FBI's, uh, laboratory testings, uh, indicating the absence of, uh--of, uh--uh--any powder residues on the bathroom window sill from which the shot was allegedly fired. Uh, second, uh, the, uh, FBI had employed a, uh, cotton swab test, uh, to determine, uh, [MUMBLES]--let me rephrase that. The FBI, uh, employs a cotton swab test to determine whether or not a rifle has been fired since it was last cleaned. And they performed that test on the rifle that Ray returned to the Aero-Marine, uh, Supply shop in Birmingham, but astoundingly did not perform the test on the murder weapon itself. At least after extensive searches, a high Department of Justice official said that they were unable to find any such test. He also said that it was quite logical that the test should have been done, but they just couldn't find it. Uh, that was--was certainly, uh, uh, a major discovery. There were also, uh, uh, documents, uh, in those files indicating, uh, the, uh, uh, surveillance on, uh, uh [MUMBLES]--indicating that Ray's correspondence, even to, uh, the judge who tried him, had been intercepted.

INTERVIEWER Knowing what you found out from all these episodes, what does this say to you about the efficiency and the credibility of the select committees?

JIM LESAR Well, I--I--[MUMBLES]--uh, hopefully we will be able to obtain the, uh, records of the select committee one of these days so that we can, uh, make a--have a better basis for making a judgment of the select committees work. But it certainly--at this point there are certainly questions, uh, about the degree of--of thoroughness and the adequacy of its investigation.

INTERVIEWER Okay, cut for a second.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

BEEP. BEEP.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

OKAY, PLEASE GO TO SOUND ROLL 13 AND CAMERA ROLL 25. MARKER 18 NEXT. CONTINUING WITH JIM LESAR ON SOUND ROLL 13, CAMERA ROLL 25. MARKER 18 NEXT.

MARKER.

INTERVIEWER Explain to me once again this swab test issue and the significance of that.

JIM LESAR Well, the--the significance of the swab--

INTERVIEWER Sorry--

JIM LESAR Yeah--

INTERVIEWER Go--

JIM LESAR The significance of the swab test is, is that it would have indicate whether or not the actual murder weapon, uh, had been fired and it also, uh, w--uh, raises a question about why the FBI would run the--the test on one weapon and not the other. Uh, which seems very suspicious.



INTERVIEWER Okay, if you could actually just tell me that again, about--tell me the story again about the fact that it wasn't tried on one weapon, and then--

JIM LESAR All right. You want me to go into the--the four year background of it or n--

INTERVIEWER No, I--

JIM LESAR No. Okay. All right. Uh, the FBI has a cotton swab test that it, uh--

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

JIM LESAR The FBI has a cotton swab test that it used to--to, uh, determine whether or not a rifle has been fired, uh, since it was last cleaned. In this case, uh, it ran that test on the rifle that, uh, Ray returned to the Aero-Marine Supply shop in Birmingham. It was unable, after extensive search efforts, to locate any such, uh, test on the actual murder weapon. Uh, this raises, uh, uh--the significance of this is, first, that, uh, uh, as a result of the, uh--the fact that there are no such tests, uh, results extant on that rifle, we don't know whether the rifle was fired or not. Secondly, uh, the, uh--it raises questions as to whether or not, uh, the FBI either did not perform the test or performed it and then destroyed the results. Uh, [MUMBLES] which--so it raises further suspicions about the FBI's handling of the case.

INTERVIEWER What about the logic of this whole issue about this bathroom--

JIM LESAR Well, the, uh, uh--if you stop and think about it a minute, you're in a--a--the rooming house is in, uh, an area, uh, a rundown area of Memphis, Tennessee. And, uh, the clientele of the rooming house are, uh, uh, [MUMBLES] bums, alcoholics, uh, people disposed to drink a lot. In fact, the main witness, eye witness, alleged eye witness against James Earl Ray, Charles Quitman Stevens, is drunk that very afternoon. Now, the official story is that Ray went into the--to bathroom and locked himself in there to wait for Dr. King to appear on the balcony. How--[MUMBLES]--could he know that there would be nobody in this, uh, uh, alcoholic center who would knock on the bathroom door and demand an immediate need to use it, given their consumption of,

uh--of, uh--of liquor. Uh, so it--it seems, uh, an unlikely way to carry out, uh, an assassination. Simply on that basis.

INTERVIEWER Knowing James Earl Ray, what do you feel in terms of his capability of actually committing a crime like this?

JIM LESAR Well, uh, there--first of all, he has--there's no background that would indicate, uh, a capability, uh, of committing murder. Uh, he had a history of crime yes. But they were petty, uh, crimes. Uh, there's no, uh, indication that he'd ever shot or--or, uh, anyone before. Uh, and my personal impression of--of Ray, uh, is that he was, uh, a rather meek and, uh--and, uh, uh, restrained, uh, individual. His primary interest, uh, in life was--was money and he was willing to commit, uh, a certain category of crimes to do that. But nothing suggesting that he was prepared or capable of committing murder.

INTERVIEWER Mr. Blakey's comments in terms of motive were all based on money.

JIM LESAR Uh huh. Well--

INTERVIEWER Based on the fact that there was this fifty thousand dollar reward--or fifty thousand dollar payment for anybody who would kill King and so forth. How do you feel about that?

JIM LESAR Well, if--if Ray--assuming that Ray was consciously involved in a conspiracy to assassinate Dr. King, money would be the only motivation that I can really see. Uh, but if money is what motivated Ray, then clearly there has to have been a conspiracy. Somebody has to have pro--provided the money. Ray didn't have any, and he certainly wanted it. Uh, but, uh, other than that, I can't see any motive for Ray's participation in the crime.

INTERVIEWER Could you actually see the potential of him actually killing someone for the money?

JIM LESAR I don't think so. Uh [MUMBLES] simply because, uh, [MUMBLES], uh, there's no past history of it. Uh, and, uh, he does not seem to be, uh, the type of individual to me--from lengthy conversations with him I doubt that he's the kind that could have done it.

INTERVIEWER What is your hope about all this?

JIM LESAR

Well, m--at the moment my--my primary hope is, is that, uh, uh, Congress will, uh, do for the King assassination records of the house select committee on assassinations and, uh, other government agencies what it did for the records pertaining to the John F. Kennedy assassination. That it will pass legislation enabling us to get at all of the evidence that has been accumulated by various governmental authorities over the years so that we can assess, one, whether the house select committee [MUMBLES] investigation was competent and thorough, and, uh, two, whether there is, uh, uh, any other, uh, evidence that researchers can, uh, uh, search out that would, uh, uh, cast the assassination in a different light than, uh, it has been heretofore.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think there's a realistic potential of that happening?

JIM LESAR

I think that the--that the government is going to have to, uh, face up to it at some point. Uh, the legislation on the John F. Kennedy assassination records has set a very important precedent. Uh, and, uh, it would be anomalous, uh, that it not be applied equally to the equally it not more--uh--the equally disturbing assassination of, uh, a paramount, uh, uh, black American political and social leader like Dr. King.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, let's cut.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

BEEP. BEEP.

OKAY, MARKER 19 NEXT. MARKER 19.

MARKER.

INTERVIEWER

What would be the next step with this Hardin information?

JIM LESAR

Well, I think that the--[MUMBLES]--obviously, uh, it's tremendously important now to get the house select committee records, uh, on the King assa--assassination disclosed, uh, so we can find out, uh, what the house select committee, uh, did about this, uh, if anything. Uh, we need to know specifically what they did about Hardin, as well as what they did about, uh, uh--what their investigation, uh, did as a whole.



INTERVIEWER Okay, cut.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

NEXT WILL BE MARKER 20. MARKER 20.

MARKER.

INTERVIEWER How important is the surfacing of information like Hardin, and what should be done with this--

JIM LESAR Well, it's extremely important, uh, and, uh, both to the solution of the case and to the, uh, legal rights of the alleged assassin, James Earl Ray. I think that, uh, immediately, uh, the Congress should act to, uh, release the house select committee records on their investigation. Uh, we need to find out, uh, what they did, if anything, to run down this lead. And to, uh, see, uh, what the FBI did. Uh, it appears that the FBI did precious little, despite the fact that it was faced with a very solid lead. We need to know that. And if the FBI did nothing, and if the house select committee failed to properly investigate the matter, then it must be opened, uh--reopened officially.

INTERVIEWER Good, cut. I think we got it.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATION]

BEEP. BEEP.

[END OF INTERVIEW WITH JIM LESAR.]