

New trial would be for truth, not for Ray

The truth is out there.
Will Raoul ever be found?
Was some other gunman hired by
a racist bounty hunter?
Could the federal government
have prevented or discouraged the
murder?

The answers are out there.
But, as with most controversies
throughout the world's history, we
will not find
the truth until
years from now
regarding the
1968 assassina-
tion of Dr. Mar-
tin Luther King
Jr.



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Like the re-
cently re-re-
leased revela-
tions about the
British knowing
that Jews were
being extermi-
nated during
World War II,
the truth lies
dormant, until

someone, a scholar or a reporter,
digs through tons of once-classified
documents.

Like the murder of Sen. Robert
Kennedy, the truth waits to be re-
vealed by someone facing death
who wants to reveal a possible larg-
er truth.

Someday we'll know what really
happened on April 4, 1968, near the
second-floor balcony of the Lor-
raine Motel in Memphis, Tenn. A
new trial for confessed killer James
Earl Ray would help get to the truth.

After the assassination, police
found a rifle on the sidewalk across
from the Lorraine Motel. It had
Ray's fingerprints on it, and they be-
lieved it to be the murder weapon.
After being shown the rifle and oth-
er evidence, Ray pleaded guilty to
murder; he was sentenced to 99
years in prison.

Nearly 30 years later, the 68-year-
old confessed assassin wants new
tests conducted on the rifle and bul-
let police found. Such tests, he said,
will prove that someone else shot
King.

IT'S NOT A NEW SONG for
the convicted criminal who fled
Memphis moments after the killing
and eluded police for two months in
London, Canada and Portugal be-
fore being caught
days after confessing, Ray
tried to take back the plea, saying
he wasn't alone. His utterances
about a mysterious Raoul who told
him to bring his rifle to Memphis
have fueled debate among conspir-
acy believers for decades. Ray
claims that he gave the rifle to
Raoul before the shooting and that
Raoul had the rifle dropped near the
Lorraine Motel.

I haven't seen an account of Ray
himself explaining why he pleaded
guilty, but his attorney argues that
he had no choice, so much evidence
was stacked against him.

I see.

Overjoyed prosecutors point to
the confession — one that state and
federal courts have upheld seven
times in 30 years — saying that,
even if Ray didn't fire the gun, he's
guilty of conspiracy.

"There might have been other
people involved. But to say because

others were involved Ray should be
released from jail is just nuts," state
prosecutor John Campbell said in
recent news reports.

THERE HAVE BEEN federal
investigations; a House Select Com-
mittee on Assassinations found that
a racist group in St. Louis offered
\$50,000 to anyone who killed King.
The committee also had the rifle
tested, but it couldn't be determined
whether the rifle was the murder
weapon because the bullet was so
mangled. Tests did show that King
was killed with a similar rifle.

Close enough.

"Is the rule now that we don't be-
lieve guilty pleas?" asked G. Robert
Blakey, chief counsel for the com-
mittee that probed the assassination,
in an Associated Press story.

Ray's petition for rifle tests has
been sent by a judge to an appellate
court. Seven such requests have
been denied.

King's family and various civil-
rights leaders want a new trial so
the truth will be known before Ray
dies from liver disease.

"We must teach this nation
where the roads of racial hatred
lead," the Rev. Dr. Joseph Lowery
said on a segment of the Montel
Williams TV show, where he and
King's son, Dexter, urged that the
gun be tested using modern means.

The truth is a powerful thing.
People can spend decades, centur-
ies, searching for it.

It's the reason some still study
the assassination of President John
F. Kennedy, the reason people still
flock to the Texas School Book De-
pository, now a museum.

It's the reason that only a re-ex-
amination of King's murder will lay
to rest the ghosts that have haunted
the investigation since James Earl
Ray declared that he didn't do it.

He may have. But if he did, who
helped?

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