

## LES PAYNE

# Ray's Racism Shouldn't Muddy the Case



**T**HE NEW FBI director laughed, but the pro-  
tester was not joking. The dreaded J. Edgar  
Hoover had died the previous year and the  
man picketing the FBI headquarters was testing  
the new winds of openness.

"Mr. Director," the young civil rights demonstra-  
tor reportedly told Hoover's successor, "I know the  
FBI conducted electronic surveillance on Dr. King. I  
want to save the bureau some film. So I'll tell you  
right now, I like women."

Clarence M. Kelley assured the bold philanderer  
that unlike Hoover he was mindful that guaranteed  
civil liberties extended to all Americans. Kelley, a  
St. Bernard of a police chief from Kansas City,  
maintained this distance between himself and Hoo-  
ver in public as well as in private. "I don't believe in  
such activities as police roundups or vigilantes," he  
said after his confirmation in 1973. "Society has to  
place some restrictions on the police. Police, after  
all, are constantly depriving people of their liberty."  
The death of Clarence Kelley, at age 85, last week  
brought back a 1977 interview I had with him over  
the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

First I implied that by covering its tracks the FBI  
was, itself, implicated in the King case. With Hoover  
waging warfare against King and the civil rights  
movement, the FBI appeared to have been an abettor  
and possibly even a co-conspirator in the affair.

I pressed with Kelley the possibility that James

Earl Ray, who had withdrawn his guilty plea and  
professed innocence, might have been a patsy. The  
death bullet, I argued from my own findings, could  
not be linked conclusively to James Earl Ray's rifle;  
the rifle barrel could not be linked to the windowsill  
from which it was allegedly fired; Ray could not be  
positively placed in the bathroom of the flophouse  
from which the shot was allegedly fired, and it could  
not be established that the bullet was even fired  
from the window, as the FBI had concluded.

Kelley, fully briefed by his agents, listened to all  
this, and said simply, "We don't have an unbroken  
chain of evidence." He insisted that the "circum-  
stantial" case against James Earl Ray was solid, but  
he was not cocksure.

The case against Ray flared anew recently when  
King's son Dexter visited the convict and declared,  
incredibly, that the man serving 99 years for killing  
his father is innocent. Furthermore, Dexter King  
said that Ray and his hardscrabble family raised on  
the Missouri steep in the teeth of the Great Depres-  
sion was not racist.

Laying aside the assassination issue, it is baffling  
that Dexter King could ignore Ray's racial record.

I recently questioned Gerry Ray on national TV  
about his statement that his brother James has been  
wild all his life on the issue of "politics and niggers."  
A knowing grin froze Ray's face as he began his  
evasion and quibbling. I reminded him that in addi-

tion to his being quoted in a book by William Brad-  
ford Huie, writer Mike Dorman had also heard  
Gerry's account of James Earl Ray's hatred of blacks.  
Gerry Ray: Who is Mike Dorman?  
Q: A writer out of New York. Are you saying that  
you never spoke to Mike Dorman?

Gerry Ray: I can't say definitely 'cause I don't  
remember his name. But I know definitely I didn't  
tell him nothing like that and he's a damn liar if he  
said I did.

It turns out that Mike Dorman has spoken to  
Gerry Ray a half dozen times over the last year.  
"The last time I called him, I said, 'This is Mike  
Dorman and Gerry said, 'I know, I recognized your  
voice right away,' " Dorman recalled.

Dorman, who has written about the King case for  
Newsday and is the author of a book about Ray's key  
lawyer, Percy Foreman, was surprised Gerry Ray  
had denied knowing him. He was even more sur-  
prised that Ray had denied verifying his previous  
account of James Earl Ray's racism.

To say James Earl Ray is a racist is not to prove  
that he killed King. However, the evidence against  
him is as clear as the fact that he did not pull off the  
assassination and the two-month escape alone.

The King family is correct in demanding a full  
investigation. However, an intelligent probe does  
not start with the false premise that James Earl Ray  
had nothing to do with the murder.