

## 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.



**ROCHELLE  
RILEY**

Like the 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?

*Rochelle Riley's column appears  
on Tuesdays and Thursdays in Fea-  
tures. She can be reached at (502)  
582-4674 or at RILEY525@aol.com.*