



Diagram exhibited at Aug. 15 House hearings on Martin Luther King's murder.

ASSASSINATIONS

Ray looks guilty as alibis dissolve. But was he alone?

By Jefferson Cohen

WHEN THE HOUSE SELECT Committee on Assassinations presented its first week of nationally-televised hearings, the American people saw—for the first time—what a prosecution of Ray would look like. It was not unconvincing. However, the committee was established for the primary purpose of determining whether a conspiracy had taken the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. On this question, the committee was mute. When the King hearings resume on Nov. 9, the issue of conspiracy will have to be faced.

There are several nagging, unresolved

questions that seem to point toward conspiracy:

•*Finances.* Between the time of his April 1967 prison escape and the King assassination a year later, Ray spent almost \$10,000 in travels through the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Yet his only known source of income was his seven-week stint as at a \$94-a-week dishwashing job in Chicago. Where did the thousands of dollars come from?

In 1968, the FBI searched through every unsolved robbery and burglary that could possibly be linked to Ray. The authorities in Canada and Mexico did the same. Yet not one crime could be tied to Ray. An explanation offered by writer George McMillan, and Justice Department sources, is that Ray left prison with some \$6,000 earned from drug-dealing inside the prison. If this were true, it is hard to explain why Ray—who demonstrated no affinity for the “work ethic”—would take a low-paying job in a steaming restaurant kitchen.

•*Aliases.* Because he was an escaped

convict, Ray lived under a series of aliases as he traveled about North America and Europe. Four of Ray's aliases—Eric S. Galt, John Willard, Paul Bridgman, and Ramon Sneyd—correspond to real men, all residents of the Toronto suburb of Scarborough. Three of the men actually lived within walking distance of each other. Three of the four resemble Ray, especially as described *verbally* on I.D. cards. Eric S. Galt and Ray even have matching scars. How did Ray acquire these near-perfect aliases? Is there any connection to a murder plot?

•*Motive.* As a fugitive in his year of freedom, Ray had secured a lifestyle of leisure and material comfort like he had never known before. What could have motivated Ray to give this up in order to kill King? For every piece of evidence indicating a possible racial motive, there is counter-evidence. At his Chicago kitchen job, for example, Ray worked closely with 20 black co-workers without incident. Ray seemed much more interested in money than politics. Perhaps someone offered Ray a payoff.

A trial without a trial.

The committee shelved these conspiracy questions until November. It set out, as its first task, to prove Ray's guilt in the killing, or as one committee member put it in a closed-door session: “We're going to nail Ray to the cross.” In its attempts to publicly crucify Ray, the committee ran up against his defense attorney, Mark Lane. The proceeding had the trappings of a trial—attorney clashes, alibi witnesses—despite the repeated reminders of acting chairman Richardson Preyer (D-NC) that this was a congressional hearing. But Preyer himself, a former federal judge, confirmed the trial-like nature of the hear-

ing with several slips-of-the-tongue, like, “This *court* stands recessed.”

Through aggressive and numerous objections, Mark Lane certainly reacted—if not over-reacted—as if a trial were in session. After 15 years of writing and lecturing from a conspiracy viewpoint, Lane has acquired an increasingly paranoid style. He is prone to attack anyone who dares to criticize his theories as having been “duped” by the FBI/CIA, taken the FBI/CIA line, or of being on the payroll of the intelligence agencies. Recent “dupes” have included the ACLU, Frank Donner, *New Times* magazine, and the Assassination Information Bureau.

Lane's paranoid approach came out during Ray's two and a half days of testimony. When Ray was offered a committee exhibit consisting of an excerpt of a witness' interview, instead of the full interview, Lane began talking about “doctored documents.” At a later point in the proceeding, Lane accused committee chairman Louis Stokes (D-OH) of a “deliberate effort to deceive the American people by distorting the evidence.” When a committee member mentioned that one of Ray's alibi witnesses had recently died in Memphis, Lane murmured, “Strange things going on in Memphis.”

Lane's overreaction, his querulous and rambunctious posture, his repeated use of the word “outrageous” to describe the committee's moves, had the unfortunate effect of deadening one's interest in Lane's objections—including several that were valid. (Lane's charge that Stokes had used “deliberate deception,” for example, was prompted by the chairman's innuendo that Ray submitted a Los Angeles-to-Atlanta change-of-address card after reading a Los Angeles *Herald-Examiner* article about King. In fact, as Lane pointed out, the article was published the day *after* the change-of-address card was submitted.)

Due to the interruptions between Lane and the committee, progress was slow. The numerous interruptions made it difficult for millions of television viewers to really scrutinize James Earl Ray, his story, and his alibi. Once, when Lane and Stokes were haggling out a legal point, Ray squeezed in, “If you let me explain, I think we could avoid eight months of arguing.”

Committee scrutinizes Ray's alibi.

Perhaps the committee's main accomplishment was in poking additional holes in James Earl Ray's already frayed story. Ray began his testimony by reading a 38-page opening statement that reshaped the “Raoul” story: Ray was manipulated by a French-Canadian smuggler who kept Ray supplied with thousands of dollars in payment for smuggling runs and other errands; Ray brought a rifle to Memphis for what “Raoul” had described as a gun-running scheme; “Raoul” or someone else shot King while Ray was blocks away at a gas station. The committee attacked Ray's testimony on the following points:
Did Ray stalk King?

The committee tried to show that Ray stalked King for two weeks from L.A. to Selma to Atlanta to Memphis. This theory was largely based on circumstantial evidence that Ray tracked King by following his trail in newspapers. The committee produced the change-of-address card that Ray filed upon leaving L.A., which diverted his mail to Atlanta, King's hometown. Ray had previously claimed that he left L.A. for New Orleans on "Raoul's" orders, with no intention of moving to Atlanta.

The committee suggested, but could not document, that Ray tracked King to Selma, Ala., on March 22. Ray claimed that he ended up in Selma because he "got lost" and took a wrong turn.

The committee produced an Atlanta laundry receipt, a counter book, and the aging laundry clerk who had been in charge of the counter book, to show that Ray had returned to Atlanta on April 1, the day after purchasing a hunting rifle in Birmingham. Ray adamantly main-

Unanswered questions point to a conspiracy, as House Committee "nails Ray to the cross."

tained that he took a slow, four-day drive—following "Raoul's" orders to deliver the rifle—from Birmingham directly to Memphis, without a stop in Atlanta. King was at his Atlanta office on April 1, the day "Eric Galt" dropped off his laundry. And Atlanta papers announced King's upcoming trip to Memphis on April 1.

Who was Raoul?

Through his interrogation of Ray, chairman Stokes raised questions about the existence of "Raoul." Why can't Ray provide a better description or full name for "Raoul"? Why can't Ray provide the name or descriptions of witnesses who saw Ray in the presence of a second man? If "Raoul" took the rifle from Ray on April 3 in Memphis, why are Ray's fingerprints on the rifle, but not "Raoul's"? Ray's response is that some of these answers could very well be found in the FBI's files—many that have been denied Ray.

And if "Raoul" framed and then abandoned Ray as a fall-guy, why does he decline offers of commutation in order to protect the man who betrayed him?

Did Ray confess?

While some of the evidence...

...stating King was purely circumstantial, nothing was more shakey than the committee's presentation of an alleged jailhouse confession. When Lane called this move "an outrage," it was one time he could not be accused of exaggeration. Ray immediately called the statement "false." The source of the allegation was Alexander Anthony Eist, a detective chief inspector at Scotland Yard, who was Ray's personal guard for ten days following his London arrest. According to Eist, Ray was a proud racist who took credit for the assassination, and planned on gaining fame and fortune as a result of his act.

The Eist statement was read into the record by Congressman Sam Devine (R-OH), an ex-FBI agent, who admitted *after reading it* that Eist's reliability had not been checked. Even a cursory investigation would have revealed that Eist resigned from Scotland Yard after facing charges of corruption and obstruction of justice. The committee was apparently not troubled by the fact that Eist had waited ten years before making the confession public. Eist's statement seems especially remarkable, since in all of Ray's interviews and discussions in the ten years of his imprisonment, he has consistently denied his guilt and has professed no strong racial beliefs.

Does Ray have an alibi?

Ray has contended that he was blocks from the murder scene at a gas station when King was killed. Mark Lane supplied information about Ray's alibi witnesses to the committee, and he featured an interview with one, Dean Cowden, in the paperback edition of his book on the King assassination. Lane quoted Cowden as saying that he saw Ray at the Memphis gas station just minutes before the killing.

In testimony before the committee, Cowden admitted that he had perpetrated a hoax on both Lane and the *National Enquirer*. On the day of the assassination, he had been at home in Port Natchez, Texas, hundreds of miles from Memphis. The committee seemed to take great pleasure in Lane's having been victimized by

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Ray has his day in "court"

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a hoax, and indicated that Lane's slovenly research was to blame.

The committee also called the two owner/operators of the Memphis gas station. Neither could recall seeing Ray or his white Mustang on that day.

Jackson is skeptical.

Even after the House Assassinations Committee completed its week-long prosecution of Ray by picking apart his alibi, there were several committee members: Walter Fauntroy (D-DC), Floyd Fithian (D-IN), Harold Sawyer (R-MI), who still suspect that Ray did not act alone.

Ray's contention that he is a totally innocent patsy will gain credibility only if Ray and his attorney can come forward at the November hearings with a better alibi and an explanation for "Raoul." But as Lane indicated to a Boston radio interviewer at week's end, it is possible that Ray will not testify in November.

Without Ray and Lane in the hearing room, the proceeding will slip back into

its tightly scripted and staged format. There will be no more surprises or interruptions. There will be little or no input or criticism from responsible researchers and experts when the committee deals with the important conspiracy questions. This is due to the efforts of chief counsel G. Robert Blakey, whose orchestration and detailed scripting of the upcoming proceedings prompted one Capitol Hill reporter to characterize him as "the Tchaikovsky of congressional hearings."

Rev. Jesse Jackson was one of the few non-press people attending the hearings daily. A week before, Jackson had accompanied Lane and others on a visit to Ray in a Tennessee state prison. In Tennessee, Jackson had expressed his belief that Ray was very likely an innocent patsy.

After the hearings, Jackson's view had shifted markedly. He complimented the committee's work, and commented, "The disruptive tactics came from Ray's corner."

Jackson commented on the accused assassin, "We now know less from Ray, but we know more about Ray. He still thinks he can outwit the entire committee. A street criminal never gives up."

Jackson continued, "Our charge is to remain vigilant. We must be willing to pursue conspiracy theories without succumbing to paranoia." ■

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