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Ray Profile 540

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NEW YORK AP - People who knew James Earl Ray say he wasn't a racist, he wasn't political and he wasn't a killer. Why would a man like that kill the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.?

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Ray Profile sub

NEW YORK Ray Profile A277 sub 3rd graf: King Jr.?

"I don't agree" with the theory that there was no conspiracy, Ray volunteered in the Memphis courtroom where he pleaded guilty to King's murder and accepted a 99-year prison sentence.

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"I don't agree with the theory that there was no conspiracy," Ray volunteered in the Memphis courtroom, where he pleaded guilty to King's murder and accepted a 99-year prison sentence.

His plea came on his 41st birthday.

His life, except for the one sensational crime, was undistinguished, secretive, almost faceless.

He spent nearly one-third of his life in prison. When he was fleeing the most intensive manhunt in history, he was able to assume identities of several strangers who looked like him.

"He was innocuous. He was the sort of prisoner you would rarely notice," said Fred Wilkinson, director of the Missouri Department of Corrections.

Ray was born in Alton, Ill., son of a laborer who had nine children.

Two brothers also went to prison. He never married, although he lived briefly with women several times. He liked country and western music and he went to dancing schools.

He was in the Army for three years after World War II, in this country and in Europe. He was sent to the stockade for three months once for drunkenness and breaking arrest.

In 1948, disgruntled at being shifted from the Military Police to the infantry, he accepted a general discharge for "ineptness."

Brother John Larry Ray said Ray didn't drink or smoke and worked hard before his Army stint.

"After he came back, he drank and didn't believe in working. The Army changed his whole outlook on life," the brother said.

After Ray returned to civilian life, he spent 13 of the next 19 years behind bars. He served eight months for burglary in Los Angeles, 22 months for robbery in Illinois, three years for forgery in Kansas and seven years for robbery in St. Louis.

"There was nothing in his mental makeup or background to indicate anything but a recidivistic criminal whose crimes were all associated with money," said Dr. Donald B. Peterson, superintendent of the Fulton, Mo., state hospital.

John Larry Ray agreed. "If my brother did kill King, he did it for a lot of money," said John.

A fellow prisoner described Ray as "tight as a tick." "Boy, if you owed him money, even a few cents, he'd bug you to death," he said.

Ray made three attempts to escape from Missouri prison and succeeded on March 23, 1967, by hiding in a big breadbox.

In the interim before King's murder a little over a year later, Ray moved mysteriously to Canada, through the United States and to Mexico, in the pay of a mysterious blond Latin named Raoul, whom he met in Montreal.

He told of his travels in a journal made available exclusively to author William Bradford Huie. Ray told how Raoul set him up under false identity in Birmingham, Ala., bought him a white car, and financed a smuggling-and-vacation trip to Mexico and the West Coast, where a plastic surgeon removed his one distinguishing mark—a prominent nasal tip.

In Los Angeles, Ray took dancing lessons as he had in New Orleans and Birmingham. His Los Angeles dance studio director, R. L. MacKay, remembered him as

"reticent, retiring—you would almost say evasive."

"If he had any political inclinations, he never once mentioned them," said MacKay. "As far as people thinking he shot Dr.

King as a political act, I would be inclined to think that's a bunch of baloney. If he was motivated by anything, it would be money."

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