

Disturbing Mystery in King Case

BY MAX LERNER

JAMES EARL RAY, the killer of Dr. Martin Luther King, strikes me less as an out-and-out fanatic than a classical case of a man who was a Big Shot in his own mind, to compensate for his inner knowledge that in reality he was only a pipsqueak. Someone with such delusions of grandeur might well insist—as Ray did in the courtroom—that there was a conspiracy. It would be his last hurrah as a Big Shot to surround himself with the aura of mystery.

The trouble with these cases is that, where there is a great public stake in the historical truth, the usual adversary proceeding of crim-

inal law doesn't necessarily give the answer. It depends on both sides fighting it out. Where one side folds, as in Ray's case, the adversary proceeding ends.

No way remains by which the third party—in this case the American people, white and black alike—can arrive at the truth it seeks. The Justice Department says it will pursue its investigation, which may prove useful. But there should be a public court of inquiry of some sort, with subpoena power but without the power to punish, which could clear away the smoke and get at the fire. Then history, which has not had its day in its own court, would be served.