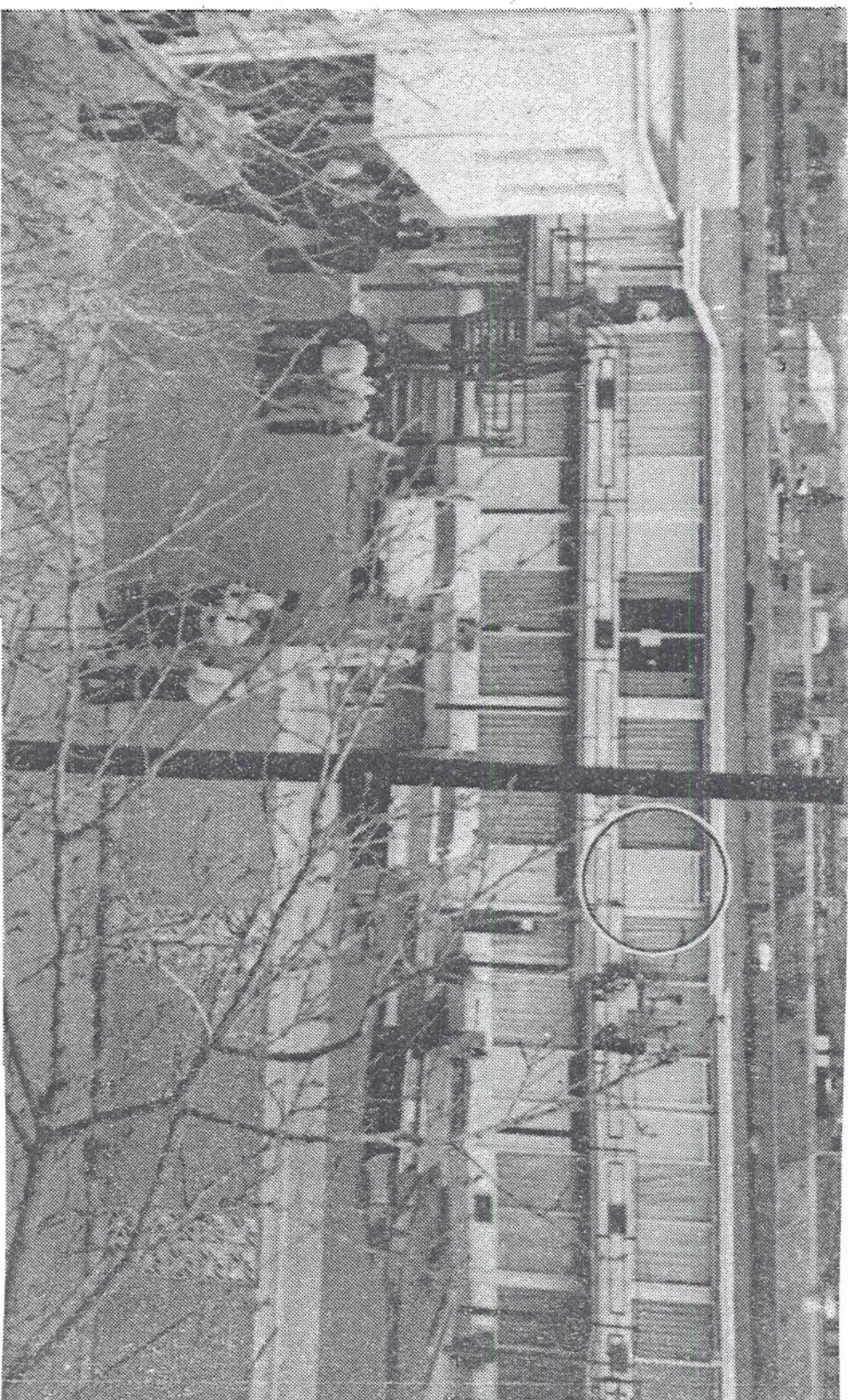


SF Chronicle JAN 2 1976

# The FBI And the Slaying of Dr. King

From NYTimes 1 Jan 75.

Dr. King was shot down as he stood in front of the room (circled) he was occupying in the Lorraine Hotel and Motel in Memphis



## The Questions Skeptics Are Asking

## Washington

For nearly eight years the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has puzzled many private citizens and even some government officials who were skeptical that James Earl Ray, an escaped ex-convict with no obvious antipathy toward the black civil rights leader, had been the lone assassin, despite Ray's own admission of guilt in court.

Last month when the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence disclosed that the Federal Bureau of Investigation had carried out a secret six-year effort to discredit publicly Dr. King, questions were suddenly being asked in official quarters: Might the FBI itself have been involved in some way in the murder of King at a Memphis motel on April 4, 1968?

Pressure for an investigation of the FBI's harrassment of King was immediate. The Senate committee considered extending its own investigation but decided to leave it to some agency that could prosecute, if evidence warranted. Within days, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division opened an examination—the first ever—of the 96-volume archive the FBI had compiled on King in the decade preceding his death.

About the same time, the New York Times began its own inquiry into the case. Although limited by Ray's refusal to talk with reporters and by lack of access to the still-classified Justice Department and FBI files, reporters investigated many of the baffling, still-unanswered questions about Ray's possible motives, movements, money and connections, as well as the activities of the FBI.

After numerous interviews over the last six weeks with present and former officials of the Justice Department and the FBI, lawyers and others familiar with the case, the Times found no evidence that would implicate the FBI either directly or indirectly in the killing.

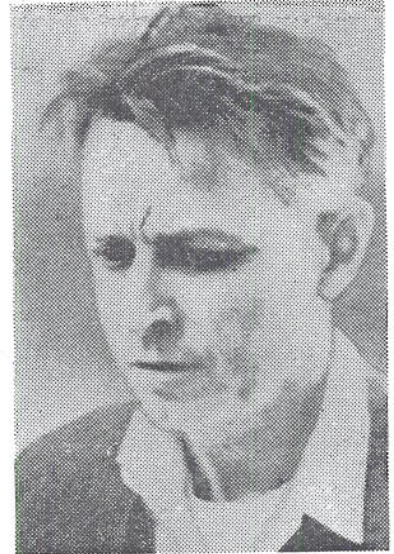
Sources familiar with the investigation by the Senate select committee asserted that they had found no evidence of FBI complicity in the portion of the King file they had examined.

The Justice Department's re-examination of the case continues. But J. Stanley Pottinger, head of the Civil Rights Division, said in an interview that so far his inquiry had turned up no evidence whatever of FBI involvement in the killing.

But many other questions remain open. The Justice Department's investigation itself is charged with a broader task than merely finding out whether the FBI had a hand in the murder. It is also trying to determine the extent of the "dirty tricks" played against King and whether any of them involved illegalities. The inquiry is checking the FBI files for possible dereliction in the bureau's original investigation of the murder or for evidence of a conspiracy itself.

In that instance, which appears to be of no consequence, the FBI's Intelligence Division provided to its General Investigative Division the name of a Los Angeles dentist with whose estranged wife King had been filmed by FBI intelligence agents entering and leaving motel rooms as well as overheard talking on the telephone, according to the

Only one occasion has thus far come to light, according to Justice Department and FBI sources, in which the bureau's efforts to discredit King overlapped with its investigation of his murder.



**JAMES EARL RAY**  
The convicted killer

sources.

The FBI's assassination investigators, considering the possibility that King's murder might have been arranged by a jealous husband, interviewed both the dentist and his wife and concluded that the man knew nothing of the crime.

Although none of them cited that particular incident as an example, many of the FBI personnel who talked to the Times emphasized that they approached the King murder case with no preconceptions about whether a conspiracy had existed.

As one put it, "He didn't have the slightest damned idea who or what" was behind the killing at the outset, and he noted that of possibilities, including the likelihood that the killer was an agent of a foreign power, but discarded such theories as contradictory evidence mounted.

So far, the Civil Rights Division lawyers say they have found only one item in the 96-volume file that caused them any alarm—an FBI proposal, made in late March or early April, 1968, to point out to friendly "media sources" in Memphis that King, the country's foremost integrationist, had taken a room there a few days earlier at the white-owned Rivermont Motel overlooking the Mississippi river.

On March 28, 1968, King and other officials of his Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a civil rights organization went to Memphis to lead a march in support of striking Municipal garbage workers. The dispute quickly turned into a violent protest when some demonstrators began smashing shop windows.

King and his aides retreated from the violence to the River-

mont, several blocks from the black-owned Lorraine Hotel and Motel in a rundown section of the city, where the King party had previously stayed.

King left Memphis the day after the disastrous march with a promise to mount another protest as soon as tempers cooled, and when he did return, on April 3—the day before he died—he and his entourage installed themselves at the Lorraine, on whose open-air balcony he was shot down the next evening.

The discovery of the FBI proposal to embarrass King publicly for having stopped at the white-owned Rivermont the week before opened the possibility in the minds of Justice Department lawyers that the FBI might have been indirectly responsible for, or even tried to engineer, King's staying at the Lorraine Motel.

But the Justice Department's investigation of the matter which has included interviews with FBI agents responsible for the proposal and a review of the Memphis press during the period in question, has produced, one official said, no evidence that the FBI ever tried to encourage the publication of such a story.

Nothing, the official said, appeared in either of the Memphis newspapers, The Commercial-Appeal or The Press-Scimitar, taunting King for his brief stay at the Rivermont.

Moreover, former aides to King have told the department that his party did not go to the Rivermont Motel of its own volition in the first place, but was taken there by the Memphis police, who believed it the most secure place for King to stay until the rioting abated.

One facet of the Justice Department's current internal review is the question of whether the animosity evidenced by J. Edgar Hoover, the late FBI director, and other high bureau officials toward King created a climate within the bureau that resulted in an investigation of his death that was not thorough and expeditious enough.

A number of former FBI agents, many of them involved in the assassination investigation, disclosed that many field agents knew that Hoover and his chief aides had been angered by King's criticism of the bureau's civil rights activities in the South, had expressed offense at his personal morals and were concerned that his association with purported Communist sympathizers might give the American Communist party a degree of control over black voters in the South.

Although knowledge of harassments aimed at King was confined to top officials at FBI headquarters, some lesser executives and field agents knew of the minor disruptions and physical and electronic surveillance of which he was a target.

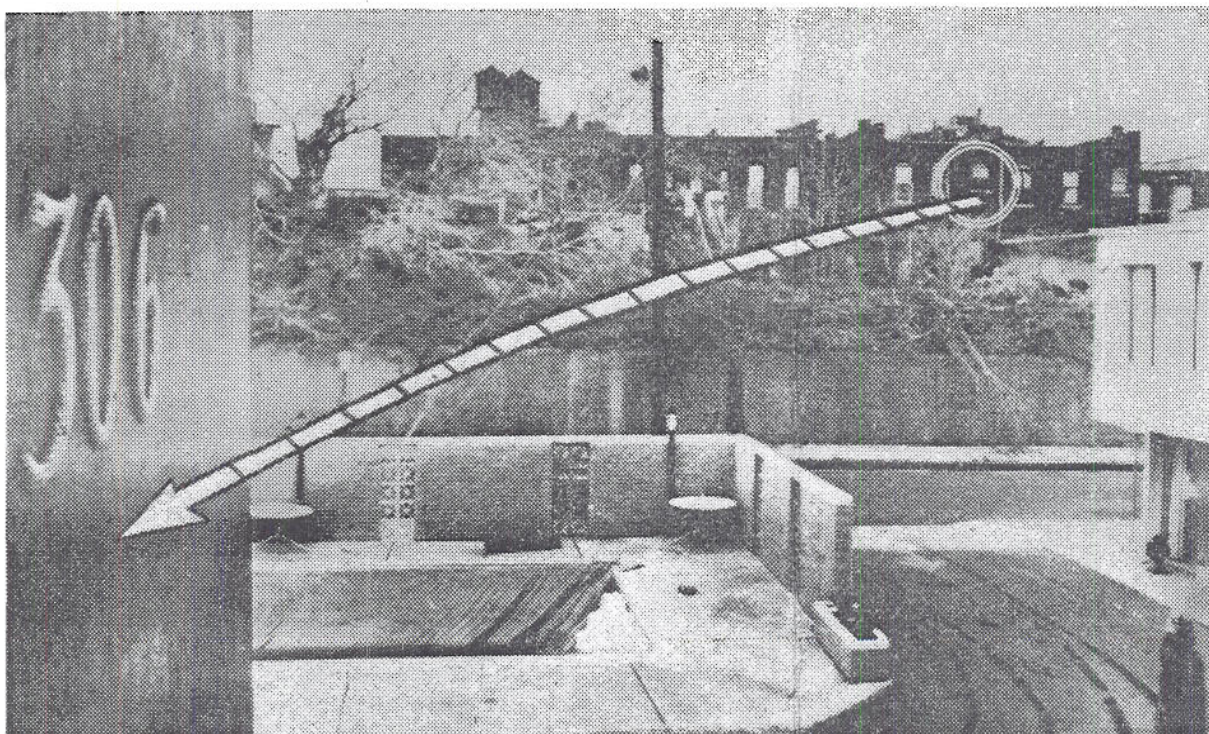
But these persons and others, including Justice Department officials who read the product of the FBI's investigation as it flowed into headquarters in 1968, insisted that the bureau's efforts to find King's killer had been unstinting.

There is, however, at least one indication that the FBI investigation may have been tardy in following up an important lead—a fingerprint clue.

Several former FBI and Justice Department officials noted that whatever Hoover's views might have been, the pressure on the bureau to find the killer had been intense, both from Attorney General Ramsey Clark and President Johnson.

One former official called Clark "a heavy hammer." Another said President Johnson "was quite provoked at us" because it took the FBI two months and four days to find Ray.

One former FBI official with responsibility for the King investigation noted that charges at the time by some blacks and radical whites that the bureau could be expected to hold back on the case "worked the other way."



The dotted line in this photo-diagram traces the approximate path of the bullet fired from the window (circled) that struck and killed Dr. King on the motel balcony in the foreground

"People were saying we wouldn't crack the case because Hoover didn't like King," the former official said, and he (Hoover) made it very apparent (within the FBI) that we had to solve it."

"We followed shotgun leads, wasting manpower a like it was going out of style," the man said, and another retired FBI official, also closely involved with the investigation, echoed that contention.

"This is a case," he said, "where we went all out. We followed not only the leads that were logical or even semi-plausible but a lot that were simply crazy, absolutely just silly. He followed them all."

The FBI's hunt for King's killer was one of the most comprehensive "special," or high-priority, investigations in the bureau's history, involving at its peak about 3000 agents—then about half the total number—more than 30,000 interviews of individuals believed to have knowledge of the case, and a cost of nearly \$1.5 million over two months.

But some former Justice Department officials, and even a few retired FBI agents, conceded that once the Bureau's investigation narrowed to Ray's whereabouts, some evidence that did not seem to lead directly to Ray, but which might have provided clues to a conspiracy, might have gone overlooked.

One former FBI official echoed that suspicion, saying that once Ray's identity was discovered two weeks after King was killed, "we were sure it was Ray" who had committed the murder, "and everything else was secondary" to finding the man.

But no one interviewed could provide any examples of leads they believed had not been energetically followed up.

Several officials, in discounting speculation about the bureau's involvement in the King killing, pointed out that if, inconceivable, the bureau had chosen to arrange for such a murder it presumably could have developed a more sophisticated and far less risky method than the employment of a mumbling ex-convict with a hunting rifle.

And several individuals in and out of government familiar with the internal workings of the FBI asserted that the bureau was institutionally incapable of making the leap from sending King

anonymous letters to arranging for his assassination.

But some questioned whether the bureau, which had had King under intermittent surveillance in the weeks before he was murdered, might have received and withheld information about an assassination plot that could have saved his life.

According to all those interviewed by the Times the FBI had no such information at the time of King's death, and had warned him of impending dangers on numerous occasions.

During the 1965 civil rights march from Selma, Ala., to Montgomery, Ala., for instance, the Justice Department sent a high official to advise King privately that the FBI had learned of a threat against his life.

Several past and present Justice Department lawyers pointed out that, to take a cynical view, whatever the degree of Hoover's personal dislike for King, it would not have been in the FBI director's interest to see the black leader martyred, but rather to relay to King every threat brought to the bureau's attention in the hope of frightening him out of the civil rights movement.

*New York Times*

## The Day Before He Died

This photo of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (center) was taken on April 2, 1968, the day before he was killed on the same spot. That spot is the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel and Motel in Memphis. With Dr. King were Jesse Jackson (left), the same man with whom he was talking when he was slain the next day, and the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Dr. King's successor as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

