

King's Assassination



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NINE YEARS AGO, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., spiritual leader of the civil rights movement, was gunned down in Memphis. An escaped convict named James Earl Ray was nailed for the murder.

Yet nagging suspicions persisted that he may have been hired by others. The public doubt finally forced a Justice Department task force to review the case. It has now concluded that Ray "was the assassin and that he acted alone."

House investigators, however, have challenged the Justice Department's findings. In a confidential, 16-page analysis, they have pointed out significant inconsistencies and omissions in the task force report.

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THE HOUSE investigators don't pretend that they have solved the case. But they have set forth their clues in a fascinating secret report, stamped "Sensitive." Here are the highlights:

- While Ray was serving time in the Missouri state penitentiary, he told cellmates that he would kill King "if the price was right." Ray also was quoted as saying he intended to seek out a "businessmen's association" which allegedly had offered \$100,000 for King's murder.

- On April 23, 1967, Ray escaped from the prison by hiding in a large

bread box, which was loaded on a bakery truck. The congressional investigators are trying to find out "whether anyone aided Ray in his escape and whether this assistance was connected" to the King assassination.

- The committee has received unverified reports that Ray was in touch with the Beverly Hills office of Litton Industries in California. While he was posing as Eric Galt, he also listed as his previous employer a Pascagoula, Miss., shipbuilding company owned by Litton Industries. The investigators are checking "whether there is any relationship between Ray and Litton Industries."

- A witness has told investigators that he overheard a telephone conversation on the afternoon of the King assassination. "Frank Liberto, a person with alleged organized crime connections, said: 'Shoot the bastard. Do it this afternoon. Shoot him, even if you have to do it on the balcony, just do it.'"

- Ray fled to Toronto after the assassination. He applied for Canadian birth certificates under the names of Paul Bridgman and Ramon George Sneyd. He finally obtained a birth certificate and passport in Sneyd's name. The House investigators want to know whether he could have obtained them "without the assistance of some presently unidentified person or persons."