

Ray trial evidence leads to

Los Angeles Free Press

(In the March 21 edition of the LA Free Press, Peter Dawnay published an article which supported the speculation that two entirely different men were identified as George Ramon Sneyd (Ray) in London and that the possibility of a conspiracy in the death of Dr. M. L. King was very real indeed. Since that time, the events surrounding James Earl Ray's trial in Memphis have lent even more credence to the theories of conspiracy. Ray's all too speedy trial and subsequent demand for retrial have added to the mystery surrounding the case. Although the Free Press does not fully subscribe to Mr. Dawnay's reports, we feel that his investigation of the matter contains enough information of substance to warrant close attention, especially in view of Ray's impending retrial. For this reason, we will be presenting a series of articles by Peter Dawnay in the coming weeks which we hope you will follow closely. Ed.)

PETER DAWNAY

When the late and unlamented W. Preston Battle made the astounding statement that a full trial of James Earl Ray "would have muddled our understanding of the substantial evidence which established Ray as the killer," he was probably saying little more than the truth. For at least a month before the farcical non-trial, Battle had been in possession of evidence that made it clear that Ray was not responsible for the death of Martin Luther King. An open letter had been sent to him by Joachim Joesten, author of many books on the Kennedy assassination, dated 27 January, 1969, which contained the allegation that Ray was being framed by the FBI, an allegation backed by a 45,000 word documentation of the case, copies of which were also sent to Dr. Ralph Abernathy, the American Civil Liberties Union, and various newspapers.

A copy of the open letter was also mailed to Percy Foreman, Ray's attorney. On January 29, Foreman wrote to Joesten indicating that he would appreciate receiving a copy of the documentation. Joesten replied, in a letter dated February 3, that since he had reason to believe that Foreman had been discussing with the public defender and others the advisability of persuading Ray to plead guilty, he would not supply him with a copy unless he had Foreman's written assurance that he would in no circumstances agree to putting forward a plea of guilty on his client's behalf.

At that stage, Ray's trial was scheduled to start on March 3. It is a matter of record that four days after Joesten's letter to Foreman was posted, William Bradford Huie was arrested for contempt of court on account of articles published weeks before in LOOK magazine. Thus notice was served to the American press that nothing relating to the case was to be published. Exactly a

week later a hearing was held on a motion by Foreman for a further 90 day continuance of the case on the grounds that he could not be ready by the scheduled trial date. The trial was in fact continued until April 7. However, on March 7 it became apparent that a hearing was to be held on March 10 and that Ray was to change his plea to guilty. The hearing turned out to be the trial itself.

Thus it would seem that on February 14, when Foreman asked for, and got, a continuance, he was not intending to persuade his client to plead guilty. If he had been, he could have needed no further time in which to prepare his case. What then, made him change his mind, and why, once he had done so, was the whole process rushed through with such haste? And what made Ray, once the trial was over, change HIS mind and decide that he would like a retrial?

For an answer to these questions, one only has to look at the account of the so-called trial published in the NEW YORK TIMES of March 11. The "substantial evidence," which according to Battle "established Ray as the killer," turned out to be the following:

1) A bundle of articles found not far from the rooming house from which the shot is supposed to have been fired. Among other things, they included a rifle, a pair of binoculars, some underwear and a transistor radio.

2) Evidence that Ray bought the rifle and the binoculars.

3) Evidence that Ray checked in that afternoon at the rooming house using an assumed name.

4) Evidence that Ray's car was seen leaving the scene shortly after the shooting.

All the other evidence which the prosecution outlined, although it did not produce a single witness to substantiate any of it, merely concerned details of Ray's movements both before and after the killing. It had no bearing whatever on whether Ray had or had not fired the shot but it no doubt impressed people with the "thoroughness" of the FBI's investigation. It is no wonder that when Ray realised just how little

conspiracy speculation

they had on him, as he expressed it himself, he saw that he had been taken for a ride.

For although the evidence may look impressive to the uninquiring mind unfamiliar with the facts, it amounts precisely to one enormous zero. A thorough discussion of every part of it is not possible here, but we can at least look at one or two revealing aspects.

The most significant paragraph in the NEW YORK TIMES' account relates to the evidence presented by Robert G. Jensen, the agent in charge of the Memphis office of the FBI. In reporting that evidence, the paper says: "The FBI began the search for Ray in Los Angeles after learning that Galt and Lowmyer were aliases Ray had used."

Not only is that statement of Jensen's false and inaccurate, but

it glosses over the one key question of the whole investigation—how did the FBI establish that Galt was Ray? That this question was intentionally glossed over is clear from the fact that no single reference to Ray's fingerprints was made during the entire hearing unless we are to believe that the NYT omitted this, the most crucial part of the evidence. But there was a very good reason why the fingerprints should not have been referred to, as I shall show.

At the extradition hearings in London held on June 28, 1968, an FBI fingerprint expert, George J. Bonebrake, testified that he had found Ray's left thumbprint both on the rifle and the binoculars and one of his fingerprints on the rifle sight. According to the READER'S DIGEST of September 1968, the FBI had 19 separate cards on Ray at their headquarters in Washington. Since Ray had a lengthy criminal career, there can indeed be no doubt that the FBI had his fingerprints on file. Despite this, it took them 15 days to identify him as the killer.

It will be remembered that, during the week after the shooting, the FBI loudly proclaimed that there was no evidence that more than one man was involved; it did not appear, however, to have much idea as to who that man was. All it did have, and the court makes this clear, was evidence that the killer had left in a white Mustang, that a man calling himself Lowmyer had bought the rifle in Birmingham on March 29 and

had given an address which was also the address of an Eric Starvo Galt, and that a man called Eric Starvo Galt who owned a white Mustang had spent the night before the murder at the Rebel Motel in Memphis.

King was shot on April 4. On

April 11, exactly a week later, a white Mustang registered in the name of Eric Starvo Galt was found abandoned in Atlanta.

Since one or two small clues indicated a connection between this car and the killing, the hunt was then on for Eric Starvo Galt. Laundry marks led in the direction of Los Angeles and it was found that a man called Eric Starvo Galt had attended the International School of Bartending there. The school was even able to produce a picture of the wanted man. Accordingly, a warrant was

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issued for Eric Starvo Galt's arrest on the 17th of April.

One should bear in mind that there was no such person as Eric Starvo Galt, but that the FBI began the search for Galt in Los Angeles; not for Ray, as the prosecution maintained at Ray's

trial. For the warrant issued to Galt on April 17 carried with it the Los Angeles photograph. It was only two days later that a fresh warrant was issued for James Earl Ray. Hoover himself explained to reporters how the identification of Ray had been made. It had been the result of a systematic and exhaustive search of latent fingerprints. But it later turned out that these fingerprints were not those found on the rifle or the binoculars, but a thumbprint found on a map in a rooming house in Atlanta where Galt had stayed during the last week of March. And this map was found after April 7. If this constitutes proof that Galt was Ray, and that Ray therefore shot King, then it ought to be equally easy to prove that Abraham Lincoln was shot by Jack the Ripper.

For the fact of the matter is that if the fingerprints found on the scene of the crime are identifiable as Ray's there can be no explanation of the fact that the FBI spent six days searching for the non-existent Galt. If the thumbprint found in Atlanta after the issuance of the Galt warrant could be identified as Ray's within two days, why was it not pos-

sible to do the same with the fingerprints found on the rifle and binoculars?

Either those fingerprints were not there, in which case Bonebrake committed perjury at the extradition hearings in London, or, if they were, the FBI deliberately withheld its knowledge of their identity for 15 crucial days, in which time the fugitive was able to escape to Canada. But one thing is certain: a thumbprint found on a map in a room which the suspect left over a fortnight before, does not prove that Galt was Ray.

Equally fantastic, and indeed, even more incredible is the identification of Ramon George Sneyd as Ray. It will be remembered that Ray adopted this alias in Canada and was using it when arrested at London Airport.

According to the READER'S DIGEST of September 1968, in an account obviously based on inside sources, the FBI spent 1.4 million dollars, deployed 3,014 agents and logged 500,000 miles of travel in their search for Ray. It appears, however, that between April 19 and June 1, they did not turn up one single clue as to his whereabouts. Acting on a hunch, it seems, they and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police combed through more than 240,000 passport applications in the hope that they would find one traceable to Ray. The only thing they had to go on were Ray's photographs. But this was enough. On June 1, an RCMP constable spotted a photograph on a passport application which resembled Ray. The name on the application was Ramon George Sneyd and further investigation proved that the application was fraudulent. This account is corroborated by a statement issued by the Canadian embassy in Washington on the day of Ray's arrest.

But the amazing part of this story is that this photograph (it was published shortly after the arrest) bears very little resemblance to the photographs previously published of Ray and Galt; that anyone would have picked it out from nearly a quarter of a million photos defies all credibility.

Handwriting analysis subsequently revealed that Sneyd and Ray were the same man, and a search of airline records show-

ed that Sneyd had flown to London on May 6, so the DIGEST account tells us. Scotland Yard then flashed word that Sneyd had gone on from London to Lisbon. An "All Ports" warning was put out for a man travelling under the name of Ramon George Sneyd on the 6 June, and on June 8 he was apprehended.

I discussed in a previous ar-

ticle the extraordinary story of the arrest. The question of which of the two men arrested was Ray, and which subsequently appeared in the courtroom at Memphis is an important one, but I cannot go into it here. I will only note in passing that the question of how and why Sneyd was spotted has never been officially explained.

Enough has been said, however, to show that the case against Ray was probably based on the purest fabrication, and certainly on the flimsiest foundations. All of this and much more was contained in the documentation sent by Joesten to Judge Battle, of which Foreman was certainly aware if he didn't actually read it. The combined efforts of these gentlemen to pressure Ray into pleading guilty in order "to save his life" can therefore only be regarded as one of the darkest stains on the whole history of justice.

But this is not all, for they both connived at one of the most outrageous falsehoods ever to go unchallenged in a court of law. They allowed Inspector Zachary of the Memphis Police Department to testify that he had found a rifle which was later determined to be the murder weapon. Now it is well established that the bullet which killed King was a dum-dum, and it must therefore have been impossible to establish that one weapon to the exclusion of all others was used in the killing.

No chain is stronger than its weakest link and the chain of evidence connecting Ray to the killing snaps at this point. Even if he did purchase the rifle and the binoculars, and even if he was

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Galt, assertions that by no means have been proved, it does not prove that Ray shot King. The very fact that the prosecution claimed that they could identify the murder weapon reveals that they knew only too well the weakness of their case.

But what is even more astounding is that Foreman should then go on record in LOOK magazine as saying that he has assumed Ray's guilt from the outset and never even asked him about it. The transistor radio which was found with the rifle, so he tells us, carried Ray's identification number in the Missouri penitentiary from which he escaped in 1967. Although this is corroborated by Huie in his article in the same issue, I have never seen this fact mentioned in print before. Funny that it wasn't mentioned during the trial. They had not only the fingerprints, you see, but an easily traceable ID number. But still it took them 15 days to put the finger on James Earl Ray. Perhaps one can understand why, like the fingerprints, this fact was not mentioned in court.

But Foreman, of course, had good reason to want to justify himself. Consider again the course of events. On January 29, of his own admission, he becomes aware of Joesten's documentation. On February 7, the press is effectively muzzled by Huie's arrest. On February 14, Foreman asks for a 90 day continuance and gets a 35 day delay. He therefore has over seven weeks in which to prepare his case. Thus, there is good reason to believe that he will do his duty by his client. But just three weeks later comes the unconfirmed report that Ray will change his plea to guilty, and

before anyone has had time to turn round, he is hustled into court within three days and convicted of evidence which no competent lawyer could be failed to tear to shreds. The case, to all intents and purposes, is then closed.

To crown it all, both Huie and Foreman, the two men with most reason to know that Ray was innocent as charged, then break into print to proclaim Ray's guilt.