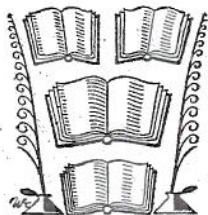


Review did not appear in the magazine Saturday Review.

## World of Books



# The Non-Story Of James Earl Ray

— **John Barkham**

William Hogan's column does not appear on Wednesdays

**W**HY DID James Earl Ray kill Martin Luther King? Although he has been convicted of the crime and sent to jail for 99 years, we still do not know the reasons for Ray's act since he elected not to testify at his trial. He stands branded as an assassin before the bar of history but for motives that can only be surmised.

"He Slew the Dreamer," by William Bradford Huie, the author-reporter with whom Ray signed a contract for his story, dutifully fills in some of the details of Ray's movements up to the moment he fired the fatal shot in Memphis. It also records something of his behavior in custody before and after his trial. But the "why" of the murder remains unanswered. Nor, it now seems, will it ever be answered unless and until Ray chooses to do so.

Huie, a deep-rooted Southerner who specializes in analytical chronicles of sensational crimes, confesses to being baffled by Ray. The King assassination was made to order for a Huie book, and within a few days of Ray's arrest in London on June 8, 1968, Huie fired off a letter through Ray's attorney offering a substantial amount of cash for his story.

The money was paid and Ray periodically replied in writing to Huie's questions (the two men did not meet until after the

trial). When questioned on crucial points Ray evaded giving answers.

In fact Ray proved to be a very slippery customer indeed. He had no compunction in changing his story whenever it suited him. Huie, operating through Ray's succession of lawyers, found himself within sight of his quarry but tantalizingly unable to grasp it. "I concluded," he admits at one point, "that Ray would never directly tell the truth about the murder. But . . . he seemed willing for us to have the truth if we could worm it out of him."

Thus what we are left with is Huie's guess at the truth. His picture of Ray is of a misfit in society, inept in whatever he undertook, a "loner" driven almost inevitably into crime. In 1968 he was at large after having escaped from a Missouri penitentiary. According to Huie, Ray yearned to win notoriety as one of the ten most wanted criminals on the FBI list.

Huie reaches the conclusion that Ray was not part of a conspiracy but acted alone in shooting Dr. King. However, Huie is unsure whether Ray reached his decision to kill alone or whether he consulted with others.

What Huie's book boils down to is a reporter's account of a big story he went after but failed to get. (Delacorte; \$5.95).

*Saturday Review*