

# Ray Brothers Heat Up Over

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## Prison 'Hole' Affair

Enter now, briefly, the fascinating and conspiratorial world of the Ray brothers—James Earl Ray, 44, John Ray, 33, and Jerry Ray, 37.

The limited glimpse into their lives is occasioned by their expressed concern to The Star over a recent 52-day period which John Ray, convicted of bank robbery, spent in the control unit (commonly called "the hole") at the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kan.

**JAMES EARL RAY**  
ing a 99-year sentence in the Tennessee State prison in Nashville for the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., says that he believes that John is being harassed at Leavenworth as part of an effort to persuade him, James Earl Ray, to start co-operating with the FBI in its investigation of the King assassination.

If John Ray thinks this is the reason, he did not say so in either of two letters he has written about it. Rather he chalks his troubles up to the federal government's desire to persecute "right-wingers" and white Southern segregationists.

Jerry Ray, the youngest brother and the only one not in prison, tends to lean toward brother James's theory, adding that he believes the FBI also would like to pressure him and John to start co-operating, thinking they know things they have not yet told.

James Earl Ray, meanwhile, continues to maintain that he was coerced into confessing to the slaying of the famed civil rights leader. And John Ray insists that he is serving an 18-year sentence at Leavenworth for a bank robbery he did not commit.

James Earl Ray is not yet talking much about the "conspiracy" in which he may or may not have been involved, but Jerry Ray said last week by telephone that his brother did not fire at Dr. King, that two other men were involved, and "used" James Earl Ray to implicate him while he was in Memphis on the evening of the murder. He added he does not know the identity of these two men or their motive.

But it was John's plight, not James's, about which the three brothers have written and Jerry Ray has telephoned The Star.

Prison officials at Leavenworth, interviewed Friday, readily acknowledge that John Ray spent from Sept. 19 until Nov. 10 in "the hole," but say that this had nothing to do with James Earl Ray. They said it was because John Ray had refused (1) to work in the shoe repair shop with a Negro, and (2) to live in a racially integrated, 6-man cell in Cell Block "A".

James Earl Ray's letter (it appears to be from him, any-

way; it was mailed here by an intermediary and Jerry Ray vouches for its authenticity) objects to efforts by prison officials at Leavenworth last year to confine John Ray in an 8-man cell with seven black prisoners "under the guise that they want to integrate the prison."

"There are indications," James Earl Ray writes, "that this integration ploy by prison officials is just a simple ploy by the officials—who are under the control of the J.D. (U.S. Justice Department)—to have someone named who won't co-operate with them in matters outside the jurisdiction of prison officials, then, if the blacks go for it, the officials can blame the resulting violence on the black prisoners."

Officials at Leavenworth say that there are no 8-man cells there, that the largest are 6-man cells and that while they are all racially integrated, the integration is always balanced so that a 5-1 ratio would never develop, black on white or white on black.

James Earl Ray's letter adds that when he was awaiting trial in Memphis and his "alleged defense attorney" was trying to talk him into pleading guilty, "one of the arguments this attorney used . . . was that if no such plea was forthcoming then I could expect harassment against certain family members and the J.D. might actually arrest one or both of my brothers in some connection with the crime I was charged with."

James Earl Ray enclosed a copy of a statement he said the court would not allow to become a part of the court record alleging that after he had pleaded

guilty an FBI agent visited him in prison and told him "that he wanted to find out those responsible for Martin Luther King's death, and he expected my co-operation."

He then quoted the agent as having told him that if he maintained an uncooperative attitude "I could expect my brothers

ers, John and Jerry, to be down here keeping me company."

Both of James Earl Ray's brothers did have trouble with the law after the King assassination, but no concrete evidence has been brought forth to link these troubles with their notorious brother.

John Ray was convicted of robbing the Bank of St. Louis in eastern Missouri on Oct. 27, 1970, with two other men. About \$53,000 was taken in the robbery.

Jerry Ray was arrested in July, 1970, and charged with aggravated assault in the shooting of a 17-year-old youth at the headquarters of the National States Rights Party, a white supremacist group, in Savannah, Ga.

A jury found him innocent in November of that year, however, after testimony was presented that Jerry Ray had shot the youth in self-defense after he found him trying to steal records from the headquarters.

Jerry Ray said the youth was a member of the American Nazi Party and was trying to steal the names of all N.S.R.P. members for its own use.

Jerry Ray was identified then as both a security guard for the N.S.R.P. headquarters and campaign manager for the Georgia gubernatorial candidacy that year of J. B. Stoner, an N.S.R.P. leader. Stoner, who is one of James Earl Ray's attorneys, more recently ran for the U.S. Senate in Georgia. He lost both races.

It was Stoner who first informed The Star that John Ray was having trouble in Leavenworth. Jerry Ray followed this up with a call of his own.

In a follow-up letter, Jerry Ray wrote that the FBI in St.

Louis is "trying to get me on a phony bank robbery charge." By telephone yesterday, he added that federal orders had been issued that any time he or his

brother John (when he was free) was found near a robbery, they were to be picked up and held.

The details of how John Ray wound up in "the hole" at Leavenworth vary, according to who is telling them. Combining John's version with that offered by C. J. Malley, assistant warden for custody and S. R. Witkowski, case management coordinator at the prison, this is how it happened:

All agree that John Ray stayed out of trouble from the day he entered the penitentiary in May, 1971, until September of this year.

It is also agreed that John Ray was assigned to work in the shoe repair shop at the prison and had worked there for some time without incident until, according to Ray, a "half-Jew, half-Indian" was assigned to work there with him.

Malley said that only two men work in this shop and because knives are necessary in shoe repair, the two men are normally locked inside the shop during working hours.

"One day out of a clear blue sky," John Ray wrote, "the nut (the 'half-Jew, half-Indian') ran at me with a knife. I took it away from him. Other inmates told me I should cut his throat, since it would be justified."

The man was transferred to another federal institution after this happened, Ray wrote.

Neither Witkowski nor Malley said he had heard of such an incident.

They do agree, however, that on Sept. 10 a Negro inmate was assigned to work with Ray in the shoe repair shop. (Ray refers to him as "a crazy Negro.")

"I immediately went to a guard and asked for a transfer," John Ray said. "He told me to go back and work with him."

"I decided I had three

choices: (1) kill the trouble-  
maker, (2) kill the crazy  
Negro, (3) go to my cell and  
wait until court (the prison ad-  
justment committee) opened  
and get a transfer. I take No. 3.  
At the time I figured it was the  
least of three evils. Judge Mal-  
ley called me a racist and said  
I refuse to work."

John Ray said he was ordered  
moved from his single cell to a  
6-man, racially integrated cell  
as punishment, citing the racial  
makeup of the other inmates  
rather than the number of cell-  
mates as the element of punish-  
ment involved.

Malley and Witkowski ac-  
knowledged they could under-  
stand why Ray, his attitudes on  
race being what they are, might  
think this, but insist that the  
punishment involved simply was

of the privacy of a 4-man cell.  
Most inmates regard the single  
cells as a privilege to be sought.

Malley disputed John Ray on  
other important parts of his  
story.

He said Ray was told he could  
work at some other job if he did  
not want to work with the black  
inmate in shoe repair, but that  
it would be unfair to move the  
black from the job just because  
Ray wanted him moved. The  
black was better qualified at  
shoe repair than Ray, Malley  
added.

Ray refused to take any other  
job, he said, insisting the black  
inmate be given another assign-  
ment.

After disciplining Ray by tak-  
ing him out of the single cell,  
Malley added, Ray chose on his  
own to go to solitary confine-  
ment rather than an integrated  
cell.

Malley said that John Ray  
agreed on Nov. 10 to work in  
the prison paint shop, whereup-  
on he was released from "the  
hole" and placed in a 2-man  
cell. His cellmate, he said, is  
white.

The policy at Leavenworth, he  
said, is never to force men of  
different races into the same 2-

man cell but to keep all 6-man  
cells integrated on a balanced  
basis. To have racially segre-  
gated 6-man cells, Witkowski

added, would be to encourage  
various ethnic groups—particu-  
larly Chicanos—to seek the  
same type segregation for them-  
selves.

Witkowski added that to prac-  
tice racial segregation at the  
prison would be to defy the U.S.  
Supreme Court.

Asked why they would place  
two men of opposite races in a  
locked, shoe-repair shop in  
which knives were available—  
especially when the white's  
brother was thought to have  
killed Dr. King—but not put two  
such men in a double cell  
against the wishes of either,  
Malley said the two situations  
were different.

John Ray's comments on ra-  
cial integration in prison includ-  
ed the observation: "Strange  
Nixon don't want to integrate a  
suburb, but will send a white  
segregationist to months in  
solitary because he don't want

to live in a combination bed-  
room and toilet with a Negro."

"This sneaky Nixon would do  
the same for the suburbs if he  
could get away with it," he ad-  
ded.

John Ray revealed other atti-  
tudes on politics and race in his  
writing, asserting, for instance,  
that the Justice Department is  
persecuting "right-wingers"  
while letting "black militants"  
alone.

He objected to the Justice De-  
partment's efforts to deny pa-  
roles to such persons as Robert  
B. DePugh, founder of the right-  
ist Minutemen organization, and  
(an apparent reference to him-  
self) "a person who (has) been  
convicted of robbing a jew-con-  
trolled bank."

When asked to interview John  
Ray personally at the prison  
Friday, Malley and Witkowski  
refused, citing Bureau of Pris-  
ons regulations prohibiting  
newsmen from interviewing fed-  
eral prisoners. This general pol-  
icy has been challenged in court  
and a final decision is pending.