

By HAROLD WEISBERG

Fear that he will be permanently silenced by the real killers of black civil rights leader Martin Luther King caused James Earl Ray to make his abortive prison break on May 3.

Ray, despite having been threatened and pressured into pleading guilty to a charge of first-degree murder and being sentenced to 99 years in jail, did not do the shooting.

From my exhaustive investigations, I am certain that there was a conspiracy to kill King, but that Ray was only a decoy.

No evidence exists which could have convicted Ray of the crime. But in the haste to gain a conviction, our law enforcement agencies chose to ignore this.

Ray now wants to prove his innocence. But he knows that he can do this only by living to go to court again, and it is my opinion that he fears he will be silenced before he can.

He is appealing for a new trial but he faces a long period in jail before he will be successful.

Close-mouthed Ray has never identified the people with whom he was associated in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968, the date King was shot. It is very possible that he will never name them — it would not be necessary to do so in showing his innocence in any new trial.

But he must have a very real fear that these people, who did kill King, want him silenced.

It is a fear he has had ever since he was arrested, a fear underlined by threats on his life, and the knowledge that violence in jail is a way of life.

Although I know of no acts of violence against Ray in the Brushy Mountain State Prison in Tennessee from which he tried to escape, I know the possibility of his being murdered is something he lives with every day. Murders in jail are not uncommon. They can easily be arranged.

I believe this knowledge forced him into the attempted jailbreak.

Ray undoubtedly felt he would have been safer outside prison walls to conduct his fight to prove his innocence.

My own efforts to find out the truth in the killing of King have involved a two-year battle with Memphis court authorities, the U.S. Attorney General's office, and even Ray's own lawyers.

Although all I was seeking were matters of public record, I have been continually lied to by these people — including top federal officials who denied the existence of public documents which I finally forced them to give me through taking legal action.

As well as obtaining these documents, I have been frequently in touch with Ray and have personally interviewed or arranged to be interviewed, witnesses in Memphis, New Orleans, Los Angeles and as far away as London, England.

My conclusions in analyzing all this information are that James Earl Ray was framed, not only by his associates, but by our own law enforcement agencies in being convicted of King's murder.

Although he was in Memphis at the time of the killing, and undoubtedly engaged in some kind of criminal activity, there is no evidence that this activity involved him killing King.

On March 10, 1969, when Ray pleaded guilty to first-degree murder, it was because of heavy pressure from his lawyers and threats of the electric chair if he did not 'cop a plea.'

Had he pleaded not guilty, there is no way the prosecution could have proven he killed King.

Nobody can identify Ray as being in

Former Senate Investigator Claims . . .

James Earl Ray Fears He'll Be Slain By Real Killers of Martin Luther King

A former Senate investigator, Harold Weisberg is the author of the book, "Frame-Up: The Martin Luther King/James Earl Ray Case." After a two-year probe into the assassination of King, Weisberg concluded that Ray was innocent despite pleading guilty to first-degree murder.

On May 3 Ray put a dummy in his cell bed at Brushy Mountain State Prison in Petros, Tenn., broke bars on a ventilation fan and escaped. He attempted to go under the prison wall through a steam tunnel but was driven back by the extreme heat and was recaptured in the prison yard.

Here, exclusively for ENQUIRER readers, Weisberg tells why Ray was forced into his escape attempt — and how Ray now wants to prove his innocence.



HANDCUFFED James Earl Ray in Memphis, Tenn., shortly before he pleaded guilty in the King slaying.



HAROLD WEISBERG
Believes Ray innocent

The rifle that Ray supposedly used to kill King, found in a shop doorway after the killing, was, I believe, planted.

I have in my possession proof that the bundle containing the rifle is not authentic, and in fact was staged by the police.

In any case, no ballistics evidence could be produced to tie in this rifle with the bullet which killed King.

The prosecution knew all this when they negotiated the guilty plea — a plea which they also knew was opposed by Ray.

But Ray, an escaped convict whom they could undoubtedly prove was in the Memphis area at the time of the killing, was a perfect patsy for the law enforcement agencies. His plea of guilty, brought through fear of legal execution, wrapped up the King killing case without delving into the possibility of conspiracy.

There is no doubt in my mind that Ray was set up as a decoy by the people who really committed the crime. 'Evidence' was planted to implicate him.

And it suited the purposes of our justice to accept that evidence without investigation. Now Ray has to fight a judicial system which framed him, while his continued living is a constant danger to the real killers.

the rooming house from where the assassin's shot is alleged to have been fired, or even at the general scene of the crime. Neither the rooming house manager, Mrs. Bessie Brewer, nor Charles Stephens, a lodger — two 'witnesses' who are claimed by police to have seen the man who killed King — can positively identify that man as Ray. Because of Ray's forced plea, these witnesses were never tested under courtroom examination.

Ray's fingerprints were found only on easily movable — and therefore easily planted — objects, such as beer cans and a pair of binoculars. The prints were never found in the room he was alleged to have rented, on furniture in it that he was alleged to have moved, in the bathroom from where he allegedly fired the sniper's bullet, or on the white Mustang car he was alleged to have used in a 400-mile escape dash.



Martin Luther King