

# FBI Inquiry In King Death Is Defended

By Mike Shanahan  
Associated Press

Two former FBI agents said yesterday the agency investigated every lead it could find indicating there might have been a conspiracy behind Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination.

Disputing contentions that the investigation was flawed, retired agent William Lawrence testified. "It was conducted as thoroughly, fairly and intensively as an investigation could be.

"It was one of the seven or eight most intensive investigations ever pursued by the FBI," Lawrence told the House Assassinations Committee.

Robert Jensen, who was Lawrence's boss at the time in the Memphis FBI bureau, said several conspiracy theories were investigated, including the possible involvement of the Mafia, the Ku Klux Klan or a communist government.

Last week, Arthur Murtaugh, another retired FBI agent, told the committee the investigation failed because it stopped with the arrest of James Earl Ray, now serving a 99-year prison term for the murder of the famed civil rights leader.

King was shot to death on April 4, 1968, as he stepped out of his room in a Memphis motel.

Murtaugh said the FBI's intelligence division, not its criminal division, handled the search for King's killer. Murtaugh said the FBI treated the probe as a fugitive case, allowing conspiracy leads to go cold after Ray's arrest in London.

Charles D. Brennan, a senior official at the time of the assassination, said he could recall no one in the top echelon of the agency even discussing possible conspiracy theories.

But Jensen, the agent in charge of the Memphis FBI office in 1968, asserted yesterday that a number of avenues were explored:

- That Ray may have a " sleeper" communist agent because he lived in cheap rooming houses and regularly used pseudonyms of East European origins.

- That Ray's brothers, John and



ROBERT JENSEN

... details conspiracy-theory probes

Jerry, may have played a role, a suspicion still under investigation by the committee.

- That the Ku Klux Klan or other right-wing groups were possibly involved. Other FBI field offices pursued the same theory.

- That "a stranger appeared in town [Memphis]" who was alleged to have some connection to the assassination.

- That the Mafia was somehow connected with the killing.

Jensen said there was never any evidence developed that anyone other than Ray was involved. He recounted how Ray first purchased a rifle in a Birmingham sporting goods store, then returned it for another, more powerful weapon.

Ray told the store clerk he was returning the rifle because "his brother said it wasn't the kind of thing he wanted," Jensen said.

Jensen testified that Ray's brothers were questioned by the FBI, "but the interviews were not fruitful."

Committee investigators have been examining various theories of direct or indirect FBI involvement in King's assassination.

Committee counsel G. Robert Blakey said yesterday that there is no evidence of any contact between Ray and the FBI before the assassination.