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THE KILLING OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: ASSASSINATION OR EXECUTION?

By The Rev. Jackson H. Day

Martin Luther King, Jr., was "murdered by an intricate plot that included government agencies," according to a December 1999 jury in Memphis Tennessee, ruling in a civil wrongful death suit. On March 15, 2000, The Christian Century Magazine (p. 308-313) published [an article](#) by James W. Douglass summarizing the evidence on which this startling verdict was made. The chronology which appears below is primarily based on the evidence presented in this article.

April 4, 1967, Riverside Church, New York City. Martin Luther King, Jr. condemns the Vietnam War and identifies the U. S. government as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." The Riverside Church speech provokes intense hostility in the White House and FBI. Hatred and fear of King deepens in response to King's plan to hold the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, D. C, with an intent to shut down the nation's capital in the spring of 1968.(1)

Summer of 1967, Montreal, Canada. Three months after escaping from a Missouri prison, James Earl Ray meets a man named Raul in Montreal. Raul guides Ray's movements and gives him money for a Mustang car and a rifle. Ray later believed that this had been a set up.(2)

March-April, 1968, Washington, D. C.. In the three weeks before the killing of Martin Luther King, Jr., FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover holds a series of meetings with "persons involved with the CIA and military intelligence in the Phoenix operation in Southeast Asia."(3)

March-April, 1968, Jim's Grill, Memphis, Tennessee. Jim's Grill, a Memphis restaurant whose back door opens onto the dense bushes across from the Lorraine Motel, is owned by Loyd Jowers.

Jowers is asked by Mafia-connected produce dealer Frank Liberto to help in the murder of King and is told there will be a decoy in the plot. Jowers is also told that the police "wouldn't be there that night." Liberto has courier deliver \$100,000 for Jowers to hold at his restaurant.(4)

Meetings to plan the killing of King take place at Jim's Grill.

Participants include: (5)

** Marrell McCollough, an undercover Memphis Police Department (MPD) officer who was later a CIA employee

** Earl Clark, a Memphis Police Department Lieutenant who died in 1987

** A third MPD officer;

** Two men Jowers did not know but thought were federal agents.

Raul is present at one of the meeting and brings a rifle for Jowers to hold. (6)
The rifle is in a box. (7)

March-April, 1968. The 111th Military Intelligence Group based at Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Georgia had Martin King under surveillance, including wiretaps. (8)

April 3, 1968, Memphis Police Department (MPD).

MPD Captain Jerry Williams, who normally formed a security unit of black officers when King came to Memphis, is not asked to form a bodyguard, having been told that someone in King's entourage had asked for no security. (1999 court testimony of Williams)

Emergency tactical forces, in this case it was Tact 10, a group of four or five police cars with officers from the sheriff's and police department were around the Lorraine Motel until the afternoon before the killing. The afternoon of the 3rd they were ordered to be pulled back to the fire station on the periphery. (9)

April 3, 1968, Memphis Fire Station #2. Fire Station #2 is located across from the Lorraine Motel

After listening to King's "I've Been to the Mountain Top" speech at the Mason Temple, black firefighter and civil rights activist Floyd E. Newsum is told he is temporarily transferred away from Fire Station #2. Eventually he is told the transfer was ordered by the Police Department. (10)

Norvell E. Wallace, the only other black firefighter at Fire Station 2, also is temporarily transferred away. The officer ordering this tells Wallace that this is in response to Wallace having been threatened. (11)

April 4, 1968, the morning before the killing.

Carthel Weeden, captain of Fire Station 2, is on duty and is approached by two U. S. Army officers carrying briefcases who indicate they have cameras and state they want a lookout for the Lorraine Motel. Weeden shows them the station roof and leaves them at the edge of its northeast corner behind a parapet wall, from where the officers have a clear view of King's balcony and also can look down on the brushy area adjacent to the fire station.(12)

Members of the Army's 111th Military Intelligence Group, who had previously been associated with the Phoenix assassination program in Vietnam, are in Memphis and have been keeping King under 24 hour a day surveillance.(13) In addition to military intelligence agents, Army personnel present in Memphis include Green Berets.(14)

Bobbie Balfour, a waitress at Jowers' boarding house, was ordered not to deliver food to the second floor (where the staging area for the assassination was located) on the day of the shooting.(15)

April 4, 1968, the afternoon before the killing.

Four tactical police units that had been patrolling the immediate vicinity of the Lorraine Motel are pulled back. Later, when MPD Inspector San Evans (now deceased) was asked why the units were pulled back, Evans said a local pastor associated with King had ordered it. The pastor, however, denied this.(16)

Ed Redditt, a black Memphis Police Department detective, is removed from his surveillance post at Fire Station 2. Redditt had been watching King and his party across the street. MPD Intelligence Officer Eli Arkin comes to Fire Station 2 to take Reditt to Central Headquarters, where he is met by Police and Fire Director Frank Holloman, a retired FBI agent who had been head of the FBI Memphis field office as well as appointments secretary for J. Edgar Hoover. Holloman tells Redditt that a secret service agent has just flown in from Washington with information about a threat on Redditt's life and orders him to go home. Arkin drives him. As they arrive, they hear on the car radio about the King assassination.(17)

Frank Liberto was heard to say over the phone, "Shoot the son-of-a-bitch when he comes on the balcony." This information was given to the police and FBI and forgotten about. Liberto had previously told Mrs. Lavada Addison, "I arranged to have Martin Luther King killed." His remark was confirmed by Addison's son, Nathan. Lloyd Jowers claims that he had been approached by Mr. Liberto and asked to assist in the assassination. Jowers was to be contacted by a man named Raoul, who would give him a gun.

Jowers received the gun after the shooting.(18)

April 4, 1968, around 6 PM, 10 minutes before the killing. Guy Canipe, owner of the Canipe Amusement Company, observes a bundle being dropped in the Main Street doorway of his company, one block from the Lorraine. The bundle consists of a 30.06 Remington Gamemaster rifle and unfired bullets.(19)

April 4, 1968, a little after 6 PM, King is killed on Lorraine Motel balcony.

Marrell McCollough, now a CIA employee, but then an MPD intelligence agent who had infiltrated a Memphis community organizing group called The Invaders, is driving around with James Orange and James Bevel at the time King is shot. Immediately after hearing the shot, James Orange saw King's leg dangling over the balcony. (20) McCollough runs up the balcony stairs with King followers and kneels beside the body, seeking for a pulse, right after the shooting. (21)

Army Psyops teams photographed everything that happened at the Lorraine Motel that day. None of the film has ever been released to the public.(22)

April 4, 1968, a little after 6 PM: the sniper's shot from the brush.

Members of the U. S. Army 111th Military Intelligence Group "watched and took photos while King's assassin moved into position, took aim, fired and walked away."(23)

Olivia Catling, who lives a block away and who had walked down the street hoping to get a glimpse of King at the hotel, heard the shot that killed him and ran with her children to the corner of Mulberry and Huling Streets.(24)

Within 5-10 seconds of the shot, James Orange saw smoke coming from the brush area on the opposite side of the street, and subsequently never doubted that the fatal shot was fired by a sniper concealed in the brush area behind the derelict buildings.(25)

From the brushy area adjacent to Fire Station #2, a person with his back toward mulberry street, moving rather fast and "wearing some sort of light-colored jacket with some sort of hood or parka" is seen by Solomon Jones, King's chauffer.(26)

Immediately after the killing, MPD Lieutenant Earl Clark gives a smoking rifle to Jowers at the rear door of Jim's Grill. Jowers does not see who killed King, but believes it was Clark, the MPD's best marksman.(27)

Olivia Catling observes a man in a checkered shirt run from an alley beside a building across from the Lorraine and jump into a green 1965 Chevrolet as a police car drives up behind him. Later, Catling is convinced the running man is not James Earl Ray.(28)

Catling also hears a fireman standing alone across from the motel say to the police who drive up, "the shot came from that clump of bushes," referring to an overgrown area facing the Lorraine and adjacent to Fire Station 2.(29)

April 4, 1968, MPD respond to the shooting.

Catling observes the police ignore the man in the green 1965 Chevrolet and block off a street, leaving the car free to go the opposite way. "The Police... asked not one neighbor 'What did you see?'"(30) James Orange attempts to tell the police what he saw, but they tell him to be quiet and get out of the way.(31)

April 4, 1968, after the shooting.

J. D. Hill, a member of an army sniper team in Memphis, has been assigned to shoot "an unknown target" and, following training for a triangular shooting, is with the sniper team taking up positions in a water tower and two buildings in Memphis when their mission is suddenly cancelled. Hill realized the next day that the team must have been part of a contingency plan to kill King if another shooter failed.(32)

Snipers from the Army 20th Special Forces Group were present in Memphis during the shooting but did not participate "because the Mob contract was successful in killing Martin Luther King and framing James Earl Ray." (33)

April 4, 1968, night. Police "find" the 30.06 Remington Gamemaster that had been dropped in the Main Street doorway of the Canipe Amusement Company, one block from the Lorraine, and say it was dropped by Ray just before he jumped in his white Mustang and drove to Atlanta. Criminal Court Judge Joe Brown, who later presided over two years of hearings into the evidence, states, "It is my opinion... that this is not the murder weapon.... 67% of bullets from my tests... did not match the Ray rifle." Unfired bullets found with the rifle wrapped in a blanket are "metallurgically different" from the bullet taken from King's body. The rifle's scope had not been sited, so the Remington would have been impossible to properly aim.(34)

April 5, 1968, the Brush adjacent to Fire Station #2.

7 AM: Maynard Stiles, a senior official in the Memphis Sanitation Department, receives a call from MPD Inspector Sam Evans "requiring assistance clearing brush and debris from a vacant lot near the site of the assassination." Stiles assembles crew, goes to site, and cleans it up in a slow, methodical, meticulous manner under the direction of the police department. (Trial testimony, 1999).

8AM-9AM. James Orange notices that all bushes and brush on the hill were cut down and cleaned up. (James Orange, 1993 affidavit).

1969 The Ray Trial.

The State's main witness, Charles Stephens, was drunk at the time and was incapable of identifying anybody. Yet it was the affidavit of Charles Stephens that brought James Earl Ray back to this country from England. (35)

James Earl Ray pleads guilty to murder. Three days later, Ray fires his lawyer Percy Foreman and asks Judge Preston Battle for a new trial, something he unsuccessfully seeks for the rest of his life until his death in 1998.

1976-1978. D. C. Congressional Delegate Walter Fountroy chairs subcommittee of House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) investigating the King assassination and discovers electronic bugs on his phones and TV set. When "Richard Sprague, HSCA's first chief investigator, said he would make available all CIA and FBI records, he became a focus of controversy and media attacks. Sprague was forced to resign. His successor made no demands on U. S. intelligence agencies. (Fountroy testimony, 1999 trial).

1978 William Pepper begins investigating King Assassination and eventually becomes convinced Ray is innocent.

1995 William Pepper and British television producer Jack Saltman, working on independent investigations, locate Raul, living quietly with his family in NE US.

1995 William Pepper publishes Orders to Kill: The Truth Behind the Murder of Martin Luther King."

1997 King family contacts Pepper and after seeing his evidence is convinced and supports Ray's request for a new trial.

1997 Raul's family is visited by "the government" three times, and the

family believes the government is watching over them and monitoring their phone calls, taking comfort in the impression that they are being protected. (Barbara Reis of Lisbon Publico, interview with a family member of Raul.)

1998 James Earl Ray dies. King family unsuccessfully asks President Clinton to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission comparable to South Africa's that would offer legal immunity in exchange for truth telling.

1998 Loyd Jowers makes a tape-recording of a two-hour-long confession at a meeting with Dexter King and Andrew Young. Young believes Jowers wants "to get right with God." Jowers denies knowing the plot's purpose was to kill King.

1998 King Family files wrongful death suit against Loyd Jowers, who had said he had been part of a conspiracy to kill King. Suit is called King v. Jowers and Other Unknown Co-Conspirators. To emphasize that the purpose of the suit is simply to get at the truth, the King Family asks only \$100 in damages.

December 1999, 12 person jury (6 white, 6 black), rules that Jowers is guilty as charged; King was murdered by an intricate plot that included government agencies.

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End Notes

1. Testimony of James Lawson at 1999 trial. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.
2. James Earl Ray, 1995 deposition. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.
3. Former DC Delegate to Congress Walter Fountroy, who discovered this information in his files on the King assassination after he left Congress in 1991; interview with James W. Douglass, author of the Christian Century article, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.
4. Jower's 1993 testimony on Prime Time Live with Sam Donaldson. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.
5. Jowers' tape-recorded 1998 meeting with Martin Luther King's son Dexter and former UN Ambassador Andrew Young. The Christian Century Magazine,

March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

6. At a meeting in 1997 or 1998 attended by Jowers and Pepper with Dexter King, Pepper shows a series of pictures and Jowers picks out the picture of Raul, which was a 1961 passport photo when Raul emigrated from Portugal to U.S. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

7. Jower's 1993 testimony on Prime Time Live with Sam Donaldson. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

8. Summary of the Summation of Dr. William Pepper, Attorney at Law, for the Plaintiff, before the Honorable James E. Swearngen, December 8th, 1999, from the transcript of the case of Coretta Scott King vs. Lloyd Jowers on the matter of a conspiracy to murder Dr. Martin Luther King.

9. Summary of the Summation of Dr. William Pepper, Attorney at Law, for the Plaintiff, before the Honorable James E. Swearngen, December 8th, 1999, from the transcript of the case of Coretta Scott King vs. Lloyd Jowers on the matter of a conspiracy to murder Dr. Martin Luther King.

10. Testimony of Floyd E. Newsum at 1999 trial. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

11. Testimony of Norvell E. Wallace at 1999 trial. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

12. Testimony of Carthel Weeden at 1999 trial. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

13. Douglas Valentine, author of The Phoenix Program, 1990, testimony on discoveries while researching his book. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

14. Discovery by Walter Fountroy, subcommittee chair of the 1976-1978 House Committee on Assassinations; interview with James W. Douglass, 1999. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

15. Summary of the Summation of Dr. William Pepper, Attorney at Law, for the Plaintiff, before the Honorable James E. Swearngen, December 8th, 1999, from the transcript of the case of Coretta Scott King vs. Lloyd Jowers on the matter of a conspiracy to murder Dr. Martin Luther King.

16. Investigation of Philip Melanson (author of The Martin Luther King Assassination, 1991). Melanson had interviewed MPD Inspector Sam Evans

to find out why the units were pulled back, and Evans said a local pastor associated with King had ordered it; however, the pastor denied this to Melanson. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

17. Testimony of Ed Redditt at 1999 trial. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

18. Summary of the Summation of Dr. William Pepper, Attorney at Law, for the Plaintiff, before the Honorable James E. Swearngen, December 8th, 1999, from the transcript of the case of Coretta Scott King vs. Lloyd Jowers on the matter of a conspiracy to murder Dr. Martin Luther King.

19. 1999 trial testimony of Circuit Court Judge Arthur Hanes, Jr, of Birmingham, who had interviewed Guy Canipe before Canipe's death. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

20. James Orange, 1993 affidavit. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

21. Andrew Young, on 1998 tape recording with Jowers. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

22. Summary of the Summation of Dr. William Pepper, Attorney at Law, for the Plaintiff, before the Honorable James E. Swearngen, December 8th, 1999, from the transcript of the case of Coretta Scott King vs. Lloyd Jowers on the matter of a conspiracy to murder Dr. Martin Luther King.

23. Douglas Valentine, The Phoenix Program, 1990. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

24. Testimony of Olivia Catling at 1999 trial. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

25. James Orange, 1993 affidavit. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

26. Solomon Jones, April 4, 1968, 11:30 PM police interview and Apr 13, 1968 affidavit to FBI. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

27. Jowers, 1998 tape recorded interview with Dexter King and Andrew Young. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

28. Testimony of Olivia Catling at 1999 trial. The Christian Century

Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

29. Olivia Catling, statement to James W. Douglass. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

30. Testimony of Olivia Catling at 1999 trial. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

31. James Orange, 1993 affidavit. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

32. Confession of J. D. Hill, prior to Hill's death, to his best friend, former CIA operative Jack Terrell; videotape testimony before 1999 trial. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313

33. Summary of the Summation of Dr. William Pepper, Attorney at Law, for the Plaintiff, before the Honorable James E. Swearngen, December 8th, 1999, from the transcript of the case of Coretta Scott King vs. Lloyd Jowers on the matter of a conspiracy to murder Dr. Martin Luther King.

34. Testimony of Criminal Court Judge Joe Brown to trial jury, 1999. The Christian Century Magazine, March 15, 2000, p. 308-313.

35. Summary of the Summation of Dr. William Pepper, Attorney at Law, for the Plaintiff, before the Honorable James E. Swearngen, December 8th, 1999, from the transcript of the case of Coretta Scott King vs. Lloyd Jowers on the matter of a conspiracy to murder Dr. Martin Luther King.

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