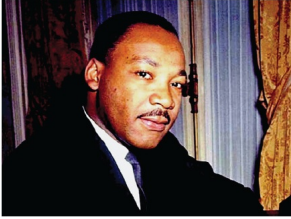


The death of Martin Luther King Jr: James Earl Ray tapes raise more questions 45 years later

Written by Ronda Racha Penrice
Monday, 08 April 2013 09:48 -



Two years after their re-discovery, restored video footage of Dr. King's convicted assassin, James Earl Ray, in custody in Memphis as well as on trial, have been released just in time for the 45th anniversary of Dr. King's murder.

Reportedly, the Shelby County Sherriff Department purchased a Sony video recorder and video camera back then for the sole purpose of documenting Ray upon extradition, while in custody and during the 1969 trial.

Did James Earl Ray act alone?

Although some hail the tapes as a major addition to the historical archives for one of the most horrific events of the last half of the 20th century, others have once again raised questions about whether Ray acted alone.

Investigative reporter Jerry Mitchell for The Clarion-Ledger in Jackson, Mississippi is one of them.

In his April 3 blog post "Former Justice official to FBI: Run MLK prints" for the paper, Mitchell

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spotlights G. Robert Blakey, who served as Chief Counsel and Staff Director to the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations from 1977 to 1979, which investigated the assassinations of both John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Apparently there are “many unidentified fingerprints through the FBI’s Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System” that have never been run, that might prove that James Earl Ray did not act alone. According to Blakey, who advocates running the prints as well as pursuing further investigation as long as the cost is reasonable, “thoughtful people today, not just nuts, think that more people than James Earl Ray were involved.”

The King family and friends have doubts

In March 1997, Dr. King’s son, Dexter, publicly met with Ray and said, “I want to ask for the record: did you kill my father?” to which Ray responded “No, I didn’t, no, no.” To the surprise of many, Dexter King accepted that, stating, “I believe you, and my family believes you, and we will do everything in our power to see you prevail.” The fact that the rifle Ray admitted to buying and bringing to Memphis was never test-fired and that its bullets were never compared to the bullet that killed King also fed the doubts.

King’s close associates are also among the many who believe that either Ray did not kill King or he, at the very least, did not do so alone. “I have always believed that the government was part of a conspiracy, either directly or indirectly, to assassinate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,” the Rev. Jesse Jackson wrote in the forward to second edition of James Earl Ray’s autobiography, “Who Killed Martin Luther King Jr.?” in 1997.

Five years ago, Andrew Young, who was with King in Memphis, seemed to surprise Soledad O’Brien in her investigative report for CNN, “Eyewitness to Murder: The King Assassination,” which launched the network’s controversial Black in America series, when she pushed for his thoughts on James Earl Ray killing Dr. King. “I don’t think he had anything to do with the killing,” he told her.

In the April 12, 2008 post “Was James Earl Ray Martin Luther King’s Killer? Doubts Remain,” Young is quoted as saying, “I’ve always thought the FBI might be involved in some way.”

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“You have to remember this was a time when the politics of assassination was acceptable in this country. It was during the period just before Allende’s murder. I think it’s naïve to assume these institutions were not capable of doing the same thing at home or to say each of these deaths (King and the two Kennedys) was an isolated incident by ‘a single assassin.’ It was government policy,” he added.

A case of reasonable doubt

And there is more than reasonable doubt. Born in Alton, Illinois in 1928, Ray did serve in the Army at the close of World War II in Germany. Once back in the U.S., he became a career criminal. He was convicted of burglary in California in 1949, armed robbery in Illinois in 1952, mail fraud in Missouri in 1955 and then armed robbery of \$120 in a St. Louis grocery store for which he received a 20-year sentence in 1959. In 1967, however, he escaped the Missouri prison, reportedly traveling to several cities outside the country in Canada and Mexico before deciding to assassinate Dr. King.

According to FBI reports, Ray’s plan was well executed, with him spending time in Atlanta, King’s hometown, purchasing a weapon in Birmingham and then traveling to Memphis where he allegedly assassinated Dr. King. Before being apprehended in London in June 1968, Ray — who had interestingly found time to volunteer with the George Wallace presidential campaign in California before heading south to kill Dr. King — reportedly had plans to flee to the African nation of Rhodesia where a white minority regime reigned.

Then there are the questions about one of the men in the King entourage in Memphis being on the government’s payroll as well as the absence of sufficient black security for King in Memphis. Of course it is no secret that infamous FBI head J. Edgar Hoover targeted King relentlessly.

On top of all of this, nothing in Ray’s background suggests that he was ever the sophisticated criminal his later travels to London imply, plus his criminal past never included murder.

New tapes don’t dispel doubts

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Then there's Loyd Jowers, a restaurant owner near the Lorraine Motel, who detailed a conspiracy to kill King involving the Mafia and the U.S. government, to ABC's Prime Time Live in December 1993.

So the tapes of Ray, while interesting, do little to dispel such doubts.

If anything, the virtually all-white everything, from the sheriff's department to the judges and prosecutors to the reporters and, yes, jurors, show and prove just how incredibly unbalanced the scales of the 1960s criminal justice system truly were, making it very impossible to believe that true justice could even emerge under such duress.

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