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Who Killed Martin Luther King?

by Maria Gilardin / April 4th, 2008

This article is based on the work of a remarkable man. Dr. William Pepper is an attorney, author, and friend of Martin Luther King and his family. In February 1967 King had asked to meet a young man whose work as a journalist in Vietnam showed the terrible impact on the civilian population. King wept and never wavered in his opposition to the war. That young man was Bill Pepper. He became James Earl Ray's lawyer and assembled the evidence that exonerated Ray — some of which is described below.

Six-oh-one p.m., April 4th, 1968, Martin Luther King has been felled by a single shot.

In 1977 the family of Martin Luther King engaged an attorney and friend, Dr. William Pepper, to investigate a suspicion they had. They no longer believed that James Earl Ray was the killer. For their peace of mind, for an accurate record of history, and out of a sense of justice they conducted a two decade long investigation. The evidence they uncovered was put before a jury in Memphis, TN, in November 1999. 70 witnesses testified under oath, 4,000 pages of transcripts described the evidence, much of it new. It took the jury 59 minutes to come back with their decision that Loyd Jowers, owner of Jim's Grill, had participated in a conspiracy to kill King, a conspiracy that included J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI, Richard Helms and the CIA, the military, the Memphis Police Department (MPD), and organized crime. That verdict exonerated James Earl Ray who had already died in prison.

The news of the verdict, in one of the most important national security trials in modern history, was suppressed. And to this day — with very, very few exceptions — the public does not know that this trial took place and what the outcome was.

William Pepper's 2003 book, *An Act of State, The Execution of Martin Luther King*, published by Verso, gave a detailed report of the trial. The book was systematically ignored. Pepper said in February 2003 that he had been personally turned down by reviewers for major media. They did not want to put their jobs and reputation on the line.

The *New York Times* refers to Pepper's work as "nonsense" in the context of their favorable reviews of Gerald Posner's book on the King assassination, *Killing the Dream*. Richard Bernstein praised Posner for stating once and for all that: "James Earl Ray murdered the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr."

In a new attempt to break the silence Verso has just issued *An Act of State* in paperback. Also, for the first time, parts of the never before seen video record of the 1999 trial are being released on Youtube.

What was so dangerous about the 1999 Memphis trial that it had to be suppressed? The evidence presented — under oath and on the record — made it abundantly clear that the reports of the 1997 House Select Committee on Assassinations, of the Civil Rights Commission appointed by Clinton's AG Janet Reno, and the *New York Times* were all wrong. James Earl Ray did not murder King.

With the guilty verdict for Loyd Jowers the jury came closer than anybody before to the identity of the real killer. Jower's actions in preparation of the assassination and on the day itself, together with the testimony from witnesses who had never been heard before, allowed a minute by minute reconstruction of how and why the crime was committed.

Apparently nobody, not the Mafia, the Memphis Police, the FBI, the CIA, or the Army Military Intelligence teams were taking any chances. If the Mafia contract had not succeeded, someone else was prepared to kill King. When King stepped out on that balcony at the Lorraine Motel he did not know that he was under complete surveillance and that more than one gun was aimed at him.

On December 8, 1999, Dr. William Pepper made his closing statement to the jury in Memphis. Martin Luther King, he said, had become more than a civil rights organizer, and more even than a voice against the war on Vietnam. Pepper explained why King had become so dangerous to the ruling powers that a decision was taken at the highest level that he was not to leave Memphis alive.

Pepper said:

I put it to you that his opposition to that war had little to do with ideology, with capitalism, with democracy. It had to do with money. It had to do with huge amounts of money that that war was generating to large multinational corporations that were based in the United States.

When he threatened to bring that war to a close through massive popular opposition, he was threatening the bottom lines of some of the largest construction companies, one of which was in the State of Texas, that patronized the Presidency of Lyndon Johnson and had the major construction contracts at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam. (Brown and Root was the contractor for the dredging of Cam Ranh Bay – M.G.) This is what Martin King was challenging. He was challenging the weapons industry, the hardware, the armament industries, that all would lose as a result of the end of the war.

The second aspect of his work that also dealt with money that caused a great deal of consternation in the circles of power in this land had to do with his commitment to take a massive group of people to Washington and there to encamp them in the shadow of the Washington memorial for as long as it took. For as long as it took, they would make daily trips to the halls of Congress and they would try to compel the Congress to act, as they had previously acted in terms of civil rights legislation, now to act in terms of social legislation.

Now, he begins to talk about a redistribution of wealth, in this the wealthiest country in the world that had such a large group of poor people, of people living then and now, by the way, in poverty. That problem had to be addressed. And it wasn't a black-and-white problem. This was a problem that dealt with Hispanics, and it dealt with poor whites as well. That is what he was taking on. That's what he was challenging.

The powers in this land believed he would not be successful. Why did they believe that? They believed that because they knew that the decision-making processes in the United States had by that point in time, and today it is much worse in my view, but by that point in time had so consolidated power that they were the representatives, the foot soldiers, of the very economic interests who were going to suffer as a result of these times of changes. So the very powerful lobbying forces that put their people in the halls of Congress and indeed in the White House itself and controlled them, paid and bought them and controlled them, were certainly not going to agree to the type of social legislation that Martin King and his mass of humanity were going to require.

So there was a fear. What happens when they are frustrated? What happens when they don't get any satisfaction? What would happen? They feared, the military feared, that there would be a violent rebellion in the nation's capital. And they didn't have the troops that could contain half a million angry poor alienated Americans. They didn't have the troops. Westmoreland wanted another two hundred thousand in Vietnam. They didn't have them to give to him. They didn't have them.

They were afraid that what Mr. Jefferson had urged many, many times, that the body politic can only be cleansed by a revolution every twenty years. They were afraid that Mr. Jefferson would be listened to and that that revolution would take place.

Because of that, those factors, Martin King was not going to be allowed to bring that group of people to Washington.

Dr. William Pepper, continuing his closing argument, went on to address the planning of the King murder, pieced together by his personal decade long research as well as from the 13 volumes of background material that accompanied the 1997 House Select Committee on Assassinations Report. On those pages Pepper found much evidence that contradicted the official findings, including a detailed history of the FBI surveillance of King and the infiltration of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Civil Rights movement.

In December of 1963, less than a month after the Kennedy assassination, FBI officials met in Washington to explore ways to "neutralize King as an effective Negro leader". In spite of that material in their files the House Select Committee declared that the FBI played no role in the assassination.

Looking back at the way in which Pepper summarized the evidence collected throughout the trial it becomes obvious how carefully crafted his legal approach was. Loyd Jowers was the defendant and, having been personally so close to the assassination, he was an extremely valuable witness. But his actions, the physical location of his bar and grill, adjacent to the brushy area across from the Lorraine Motel, were only a small part of a much larger picture, in the words of Pepper the wider conspiracy to kill King.

Then, as now, the onus that the right as well as the left puts on the word "conspiracy" has to be taken into account. Pepper, in his explanation to the jury, took back that word and gave it its proper legal and historic meaning. He asked the jury to find that this "constituted conspiracy, legally civil conspiracy under the law."

Pepper developed for the jury the string of "coincidences" that constitute conspiracy, a chain of evidence backed up by 70 witnesses. All of it can be looked up in detail on 4,000 pages of transcripts or in his book, *An Act of State*. Here are just a few questions and examples:

The case against defendant Loyd Jowers was the best documented, partly by Jowers' own admission. Jowers testified that he was asked by Mafia-connected produce dealer Frank Liberto to help in the murder of King. He received money and a gun to hold.

Three witnesses took the stand and corroborated Liberto's involvement. John McFerren told the jury that, on the afternoon of the assassination, he heard Liberto shout into the phone "Shoot the son-of-a-bitch when he comes on the balcony." Liberto told Mrs. Lavada Addison, "I arranged to have Martin Luther King killed." Addison's son, Nathan, confirmed his remark.

However the Mafia plan would not have succeeded if it had not been for the involvement of many others: Why did King end up in the Lorraine Motel where he had never stayed before? Who made him change his room from a secluded ground floor room to the second floor balcony space? Who ordered MPD Captain Jerry Williams, who normally formed a security unit of black officers when King came to Memphis, not to form a bodyguard this time?

Across from the Lorraine Motel was Fire Station no. 2. Who ordered the only two black firefighters not to show up to work that day? Floyd E. Newsum was later told the order came from the MPD. Norvell E. Wallace was told his life had been threatened and he needed to stay home.

On the morning of the assassination Carthel Weeden, captain of Fire Station no. 2, testified that he was approached by two U. S. Army officers carrying briefcases who indicated they had cameras and wanted the roof of the station for a lookout on the Lorraine Motel. They left after the assassination.

Members of the Army's 111th Military Intelligence Group, based at Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Georgia, had come to Memphis and were keeping King under 24 hour a day surveillance. MPD intelligence office Eli Arkin testified at the trial that they worked out of his office.

About 10 minutes before the assassination of King, Guy Canipe, owner of the Canipe Amusement Company, observed a bundle being dropped in the Main Street doorway of his company, one block from the Lorraine. The bundle consisted of a 30.06 Remington Gamemaster rifle and unfired bullets — the rifle James Earl Ray was supposed to have used for the assassination.

Loyd Jowers testified that immediately after the killing, MPD Lieutenant Earl Clark, now deceased, came out of the brushy area and gave him a smoking rifle at the rear door of his restaurant, Jim's Grill. Jowers did not see who killed King, but claimed it was Clark, the MPD's best marksman.

Criminal Court Judge Joe Brown, who later presided over two years of hearings into the evidence, stated, "It is my opinion... that this is not the murder weapon... 67% of bullets from my tests... did not match the Ray rifle" The rifle's scope had not been sited; therefore the Remington from Canipe's door could not have been properly aimed.

Several witnesses at the 1999 trial testified that they saw two men running away from the brushy area, one burning tires as he drove away in a green 1965 Chevrolet past a police car that took no notice, another getting into a police car and being driven away. Nevertheless, the official story has always been that nobody shot from the bushes but that James Earl Ray fired from a bathroom window of the rooming house.

Why then did Maynard Stiles, a senior official in Memphis Sanitation Department, receive a call from MPD Inspector Sam Evans at 7 am on the morning after the assassination "requiring assistance clearing brush and debris from a vacant lot near the site of the assassination." Stiles assembled a crew and cleaned the site under the direction of the police department.

This is just part of the evidence covered by the 1999 trial. Much of it had been assembled to be presented in the trial that James Earl Ray fought to have for almost 30 years. Given the nature of the evidence it is not surprising that it was never allowed to take place.

The major media and most authors have perpetuated the myth that James Earl Ray confessed. William Pepper, who represented Ray until he died, says that Ray pleaded guilty on advice of his lawyer who told him that this would be the best avenue for a trial — but that Ray never confessed.

There were several attempts to bribe Ray into a confession. One of Ray's lawyers, Jack Kershaw, was asked by a publishing company to offer Ray \$50,000, parole and a new life if he finally confessed. Ray refused. Ray's brother Jerry was contacted with the same offer with a higher monetary amount (\$200,000). Ray, again, refused.

Just before Ray's death MPD officer Tim Cook, in the presence of William Pepper, leaned heavily on Ray to admit his guilt. He promised Ray that in return he would be released and could die surrounded by his family. Ray refused and died alone on April 23, 1968.

One year and 8 months after his death a jury listened to the closing statement of Ray's former lawyer, William

Pepper, testing the evidence that should have freed Ray.

Pepper's closing words were:

Let me close by saying to you that long after people forget what has been said in this courtroom, all the words that you've heard from witnesses and lawyers, and long after they have forgotten about accounts that they have read about this case, they are going to remember what was done here. They are going to remember what action you took, what decision you came to.

You have got to understand the monumental importance of your decision. (The public) are going to forget everything I said, everything defense counsel has said, everything the witnesses have said. They are going to remember one thing, the ruling of this jury, the verdict of this jury because you have heard evidence that has never before been put on in a court of law.

That is why your decision at this point in time is the most significant decision that will have been taken in thirty-one years in terms of this case. Please don't underestimate the importance of it.

In our view, what has happened in this case, the injustice that has happened in this case ... is representative of the failure that symbolizes to me the failure of representative democracy in this country. Isn't it amazing that one could say that over a simple murder case? But when you look at the wealth of evidence that has come forward and you understand how this case has been conducted and you understand how it has been covered up, and when you see how unresponsive elected officials and government have been and how complicit they have been, you can come to no other choice.

Governmental agencies caused Martin Luther King to be assassinated. They used other foot soldiers. They caused this whole thing to happen. And they then proceeded with the powerful means at their disposal to cover this case up.

You know, these things do not happen as a rule without the involvement of other people and in this case, this type of murder, without the involvement of seriously prominent individuals in government. So it is in my view a failure of democracy and this Republic that it has not been able to bring this forward.

What we're asking you to do at this point in time is send a message. We're asking you to send a message, not just right a wrong. That's important, that you right a wrong and that you allow justice to prevail once and for all. Let it prevail.

But in addition to that, we're asking you to send a message, send a message to all of those in power, all of those who manipulate justice in this country that you cannot get away with this. Or if you can get away with it, you can only get away with it for so long.

Send that message. You, you twelve, represent the American people. You are their representatives with respect to justice in this case. They cannot be here. The media will keep the truth from them forever. You represent the people of this land. You must speak for them.

You have this duty to yourselves, this obligation to your fellow citizens, and you have an opportunity to act in a most significant way that perhaps you can ever imagine, because your verdict of conspiracy in this case, your verdict of liability for the defendant and his other co-conspirators, means history is rewritten, means textbooks have to be rewritten, means the actual result of this case and the truth of this case now must come forward formally.

On behalf of the family of Martin Luther King, Jr., on behalf of the people of the United States, I ask you to find for the plaintiff and find that conspiracy existed and that those conspirators involved not only the defendant here but we're dealing in conspiracy with agents of the City of Memphis and the governments of the State of Tennessee and the United States of America.

We ask you to find that conspiracy existed and once and for all give this plaintiff family justice and let's cleanse this city and this nation of the ignorance that has pervaded this case for so long.

After less than an hour the jury returned with the verdict, read by Judge James E. Swearngen.

THE COURT: In answer to the question did Loyd Jowers participate in a conspiracy to do harm to Dr. Martin Luther King, your answer is yes. Do you also find that others, including governmental agencies, were parties to this conspiracy as alleged by the defendant? Your answer to that one is also yes.

Memphis, TN, December 8, 1999.

Their verdict finally lifted responsibility for the murder from James Earl Ray and should have opened the investigation of organized crime, the FBI, the CIA, the military, and the Memphis Police Department.

Postscripts:

1. Given all the new evidence presented in the trial, the King family approached President Bill Clinton and asked for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Clinton refused and turned the matter over to AG Janet Reno who appointed a civil rights commission.

In June 2000 the United States Department of Justice published their conclusion that quote: "the trial's evidence fails to establish the existence of any conspiracy to kill Dr. King... we found no credible evidence to disturb past judicial determinations that James Earl Ray killed Dr. King."

2. In February 2008 news from New York: Dr. Pepper makes the case for the NYC 911 Ballot Initiative and the re-investigation of 9/11 by an independent citizens commission.

Sources:

The [transcripts of 1999 Memphis trial](#).

The video of major parts of the court proceedings on Youtube can be reached via the [following site](#).

The audio recording of [Pepper's closing argument](#).

Maria Gilardin produces TUC Radio, a weekly half-hour radio program that is distributed for free to all radio stations via Pacifica Radio's KU Band, and as an mp3 file on TUC Radio's web site. She may be reached at: tuc@tucradio.org. [Read other articles by Maria](#), or [visit Maria's website](#).

This article was posted on Friday, April 4th, 2008 at 5:00 am and is filed under [Justice](#). [Send to a friend](#).

7 comments on this article so far ...

Robert B. Livingston said on April 4th, 2008 at 7:53 pm #

Maria Gilardin provides recordings of Pepper at her website. (Also available at the A-Infos Radio Project.)

TUC is among the very best independent radio programs in the world. If one hasn't listened one has missed a lot!

Maria is herself one of the most brilliant, fascinating and beautiful people I've ever had the pleasure to meet.

Here's a snapshot of her last year at an event in Oakland:

<http://tinyurl.com/54egqv>

Todd Boyle said on April 4th, 2008 at 8:51 pm #

I find the work of Bill Pepper credible based on what I have heard at TUC Radio i.e. this transcript. I find Maria Gilardin a credible and trustworthy journalist, bringing countless valuable voices to the national audience.

I find the Dept. of Justice lacking in credibility. I find the U.S. government systematically lying to the American people, by both omission and secrecy, and overt lying and misrepresentation. A government that continually twists the meaning of constitution, law and treaty, torturing people, snooping without warrants, holding prisoners without habeas corpus, lacks credibility.

The track record of the U.S. government in past crimes is poor. We were told Oswald acted alone, a magic bullet hit both victims, we were told America was under attack in the Tonkin Gulf, that Saddam harbored Al Qaida and was preparing to detonate nuclear bombs in American cities. The entire federal government from Bush and Congress, down to the local IRS or FCC or military recruiters, continually talks to us as if we were children or imbeciles. Meanwhile killing millions of people in imperial wars of aggression.

So the DOJ can take their "conclusion" and shove it. We have learned, long ago, not to expect any justice from the Dept of Justice. And we are not surprised by their "opinion" that Bill Pepper and his witnesses are "not credible". Lacking a real rebuttal they apparently fall back on smear and ad-hominem.

I remain open to factual rebuttal if there is any.

Courtenay Barnett said on April 5th, 2008 at 9:59 am #

I MET A MAN –OR, WAS IT JAMES EARL RAY WHO KILLED DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING?

I met a man. His name was Tupper Saussy. He happened to have been the ghost writer for a book by James Earl Ray, entitled "Tennessee Waltz" published in 1987. The book gives Ray's account of the events to state that he did not kill Dr. King.

Saussy's view, in his long conversations with me, was that James Earl Ray was not Dr. King's murderer and he explained to me in considerable detail why Ray was not the killer, then gave me a copy of the book which I then read.

On Thursday, the 3rd April, 2008, I watched a CNN special on the eve of the anniversary of Dr. King's assassination. The book came back to mind and I asked myself on conclusion of the CNN special – why is CNN trying to confuse the public?

Before I return to the book's contents, I would invite the reader to look at the physical location at the Lorraine Motel, where Dr. King was shot, and consider the photographs of the positioning of surrounding buildings, the trajectory of the bullet, and the direction that the witnesses present were all pointing to when the single shot rang out that killed Dr. King. The web site is worth a visit and it is at :- (<http://www.whatreallyhappened.com/ARTICLE1/overlooked.html>).

The reasoning at the web site is sound, the pictures are clear and the conclusions can logically be drawn.

Back to the book. Read Ray's own story for yourself and draw your own conclusions. The points I would leave you with are these:-

A. Why would the witnesses present all be pointing in the direction they heard the shot come from, and CNN be leading the unsuspecting public in 2008 towards some alternative belief that they were pointing elsewhere to a window at a rooming house across the street, from where Ray is supposed to have shot Dr. King?

B. Is there anything to be made of Ray's reference to an operative or handler called "Raoul", and if Ray was this perfect sniper shot who assassinated Dr. King – did he simply conveniently drop all his evidence outside the doorway of the rooming house, to link him to the crime?

C. If, it was Ray's doing from reference to B above – then why don't the test bullets fired from the weapon attributed to Ray not ballistically match the bullet taken from Dr. King – so who did fire the weapon that killed Dr. King?

Conclusion

A single person cannot be in two places at the same time. There are two (2) vantage points for the location of the sniper who did the shooting (1) a window from the rooming house and (2) the Gattis penthouse (to which Andrew Young and all other witnesses are pointing at the time of the shooting).

Again, carefully review the photographic evidence at the web site:-
(<http://www.whatreallyhappened.com/ARTICLE1/overlooked.html>).

Now – you decide – who killed Dr. Martin Luther King?

When the state is confronted with legitimate challenges against its destructive polices:-

“...I knew that I could not ever again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greater purveyor of violence in the world: my own government.” Martin Luther King in his “Beyond Vietnam” 1967 speech.

it has the power to destroy those who dare speak truth to power. The agents of the government of the United States of America did first attempt to destroy the reputation of Dr. Martin Luther, and used its FBI's COINTELPRO program to try by criminal means to destroy the credence of those who fought for and sought equal rights and justice. When that failed – well – simply stated, the agents of the state just murdered Dr. King.

Courtenay Barnett – 4th April, 2008

Courtenay Barnett is a graduate of London University. His areas of study were economics, political science and international law. He has been a practising lawyer for over twenty years, has been arrested for defending his views, and has argued public interest and human rights cases. His web site: www.globaljusticeonline.com

Christopher Black said on April 7th, 2008 at 6:07 am #

I also have read the book by James Earl Ray, several years ago and it was very compelling for me as a criminal lawyer. It was clear to me he was fixed up with a lawyer working for the government to shut him up and it is clear he had nothing to do with the murder of King. He was a patsy. Set up to take the fall. When I heard Judy Woodruth on the Lehrer News Hour on PBS state that Ray had confessed to the murder I was shocked. Though I guess I shouldnt have been. He never confessed. He always denied it til the day he died. But as Aldous Huxley once wrote “You shall know the truth and it shall make you mad.”

Gary Revel said on April 7th, 2008 at 4:39 pm #

The Martin Luther King Assassination Investigation has found that James Earl Ray did not shoot MLK. He was not the assassin as claimed by the Prosecution in the case and did not plead guilty to killing King but rather pled 'legally' guilty to being a part of a conspiracy to kill King. He had been told by his attorney, Percy Foreman, that because he had been near the scene and was an escaped convict at the time that he would get the electric chair for King's murder if he went to trial. It made no difference to Jimmy Ray's attorney, the prosecution, the court or the US Government that he was not guilty.

Gary Revel

Martin Luther King Assassination Investigation News Feed

<http://www.garyrevel.com/news2.xml>

Edward Rynearson said on April 13th, 2008 at 3:20 pm #

Additional William Pepper resources including Air America interview from 4/11/2008 at:

http://www.alexjonesfan.com/pepper_william

georgeinPA said on April 20th, 2008 at 2:23 pm #

O.K. so a jury found that Mr. Ray did not commit the crime. The jury in Dallas found Lee Harvey Oswald innoc....OH! Wait a minute! That's right, there was no trial in Dallas...of anyone! The same people were involved though...Good 'ol J. Edgar, the CIA ,

the FBI and of course we are told that only "Tinfoil hat wearers" would ever question the integrity of any of THESE characters!

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