

Unanswered questions: The King assassination

by [James W. Douglass](#) in the [July 19, 2000](#) issue

On June 9 the Justice Department reported on its 21-month investigation into the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis, concluding that U.S. agencies were not involved in murdering Dr. King. Like earlier investigations, it concluded that James Earl Ray was the lone killer.

Martin Luther King III responded to the report by asking if the government was capable of investigating itself in his father's murder. King said his family stood by the verdict of a more independent body, the 12 jurors in the Memphis civil trial last fall who found that a conspiracy to kill Dr. King—one involving government agencies—did in fact exist.

The Justice Department report dismissed evidence of conspiracy given by former Memphis bar-and-grill owner Loyd Jowers and former FBI agent Donald Wilson.

In 1968 Jowers was the owner-manager of Jim's Grill in Memphis. In 1998 Jowers told King's son Dexter and former UN Ambassador Andrew Young that at the request of a Memphis Mafia don, produce dealer Frank Liberto (now deceased), he received a smoking rifle at the rear door of Jim's Grill right after King was shot on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel. The rifle was tossed to him, Jowers said, by a police lieutenant standing in the dense bushes behind Jim's Grill and across from the Lorraine.

The Justice Department said Jowers's story was contradicted by earlier versions. It ignored the description of a fearful, resistant Jowers gradually cornered by converging evidence, as presented in William Pepper's *Orders to Kill*.

At the Memphis trial in which Jowers was found liable for conspiring with government agencies to assassinate King, a series of witnesses recounted how they told the police that the assassin's shot came from the bushes behind Jim's Grill. Yet in reviewing the trial, the Justice Department ignored the testimony of Memphis sanitation official Maynard Stiles, who told the jury that at 7:00 a.m. the next day he

was ordered to cut down these same bushes by Police Inspector Sam Evans.

The report thus avoids both the police-ordered destruction of the crime scene and the connections of the man controlling that chain of command, Police Director Frank Holloman, a retired FBI agent. In his 25-year FBI career, Holloman had been appointments secretary to J. Edgar Hoover, well known for his hatred of King.

Donald Wilson in 1968 was a 25-year-old FBI agent in Atlanta. Wilson was the first FBI agent to open the door of James Earl Ray's abandoned white Mustang in an Atlanta parking lot. An envelope fell from the car. In it Wilson discovered several papers. On two of them he saw the name "Raul" (name of the man both Ray and Jowers said they worked with in Memphis). On a third paper Wilson was startled to read the phone number of the Atlanta FBI office. Alarmed by the FBI connection, Wilson decided to withhold the papers. In 1997 he copied portions of these materials for the King family.

The Justice Department report charges Wilson with being duplicitous for withholding the papers. The report does not, however, deal with the questions raised by the papers themselves. Their contents suggest a connection between the assassinations of King and President John F. Kennedy.

Laboratory tests, which validated the age of the documents, also confirmed the authenticity of one as a page torn from a 1963 Dallas telephone book. On it the phone number for Jack Ruby had been handwritten between a circled letter "J" and the name "Raul."

The second paper with "Raul" written on it includes a possible payment schedule: a handwritten list of five items with apparent dollar amounts alongside them and added up at the bottom. Here the Justice Department report seems deliberately dense, claiming that none of the words except "Raul" has any apparent connection to the King assassination. Yet one word is "Canada," where Ray sought refuge after the assassination. Another is "hospital," a possible reference to a payoff at the autopsy site.

These words, like the police's destruction of the crime scene, raise questions the government does not recognize. Why not?