

Sorority Information Meeting and Open House

January 11, 1996
Ben Linder Room, EMU
6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

King's death a mystery 28 years later

■ **MURDER:** New evidence and a conspiracy theory continue to keep the case investigated, questioned

The latest chapter in the mystery that still clings to the 28-year-old murder case unfolds like this:

"I was here one day and a man called me," says lawyer Lewis Garrison. "He said, 'My wife has some information you'd probably be interested in. I've been trying to get her to come forward for 25 years. But she's scared.'"

"They came in the next day or two. They never asked for any money. She said she had known 'Raul' down in Texas. ... She had a photograph of this Raul's cousin. She gave the investigators names of people who knew him."

Garrison pauses, recalling his apprehensiveness when he first heard all of this — especially that name, Raul.

Then, he says, "Everything has checked, just like the sun rising and setting." But his quiet voice carries a kind of weariness.

Many considered the case solved decades ago, and yet it has never seemed to rest. Perhaps because of all the sleuths and diehards drawn to its heroic victim. Perhaps because of its taciturn villain. Or perhaps because of the tragic irony of a single lead slug stopping history.

The murder victim those 28 years ago: Martin Luther King, Jr.

As the nation marks a day of remembrance Monday for King, the spellbinding preacher whose nonviolent crusade for civil rights won him the Nobel Peace Prize, there will be many speeches about his life.

But King's death on a motel balcony in Memphis on April 4, 1968, will loom in the background, along with an extraordinary new round of claims about who caused it.

There's the claim of Glenda Grabow, who told Garrison about "Raul," leading some to believe they finally had found the shadowy, Latin-accented gunman long suggested as a

conspirator but dismissed as imaginary by prosecutors.

And then there's the Memphis restaurant owner who sought immunity from prosecution if he detailed the assassination plot in which his former waitress implicated him. And the man identified as an ex-Special Forces soldier who tied military intelligence to the murder, a charge the Pentagon dismisses as laughable.

These purported leads and many others are detailed in a new book by William F. Pepper, a lawyer who marched with King but today represents James Earl Ray, now serving a 99-year sentence as King's killer.

In *Orders to Kill: The Truth About the Murder of Martin Luther King*, Pepper quotes several people — some by name and others with pseudonyms — who say they were personally involved in or were privy to a complex plot to kill King.

The Associated Press contacted many of Pepper's sources and investigators who worked with him on the case and, with minor exceptions, they say he wrote accurately about them. Some even tried to show they had more to lose than to gain by coming forward.

Still, it is difficult to determine just who is telling the truth; there are too many sealed documents and fictitious names, and 28 years have passed.

Pepper asserts: "The body of new evidence, if formally considered, would compel any independent grand jury ... to issue indictments against perpetrators who are still alive."

But prosecutors in Memphis continue to reject any notion of reopening the case, and discount Pepper's leads.

"He wrote 500 pages of suppositions — and extrapolations on suppositions," District Attorney General John Pierotti said.

Pierotti said some witnesses Pepper quotes have given conflicting statements to prosecution investigators. In other cases, he said, those cited as witnesses are impossible to find.

"They're either dead or people who wish to remain anonymous," Pierotti scoffed. "That's pretty difficult to take to court." Pepper's book, released at the

end of 1995, was preceded by a televised mock trial for Ray on HBO in 1993, in which Pepper was joined by television producers who continue to press for a review of the case.

"The whole thing was gone into as a commercial venture," Pierotti charged. "It has not succeeded, and now it just drags on."

The mystery might have ended in a Memphis courtroom about a year after King's assassination when Ray pleaded guilty. He was then a hapless thief who had been on the run following a prison escape.

His fingerprint was found on a rifle dropped near the shooting scene; officials called it an open-and-shut case.

Many, including then-FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, insisted Ray had acted alone — that there were no other plotters. Yet even as he pleaded guilty, Ray dissented.

"I don't agree," he told the judge, "... about the conspiracy."

Ray's cryptic comment planted a seed of doubt, and many others followed.

Historians later revealed that Hoover's FBI had directed a years-long campaign of bugging and harassment against King. In 1978, a special congressional investigation concluded that indeed a conspiracy had been behind King's death, but that the government was not involved. Then came reports of Army intelligence units shadowing King all the way to Memphis. Some members of the House probe said it should be reopened.

For years, Ray has sought to retract his guilty plea, saying it was coerced.

Still pending in court are a bid for a new hearing and, separately, a civil lawsuit seeking damages against alleged conspirators, both named and unnamed.

After fleeing prison, Ray has always said, he made his way to Montreal, where he met a mysterious man named Raul, a gunrunner who engaged Ray in his contraband smuggling and then set him up as a patsy, directing his movements up to the day of King's killing.

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