

Unmasking the King Probe

By Jim Douglass

The following article is largely based upon interviews done with former FBI agent Don Wilson by correspondent Jim Douglass. As Douglass mentions in the article, there is a possibility that the evidence that Wilson acquired was deliberately planted to create a false trail. The editors would like to reassert that possibility in advance as we believe that a skeptical attitude is the one most valuable in regards to any "silver bullet" scenario. One only has to recall what happened to Bill Pepper on ABC television in 1997. There, one of Pepper's assumedly dead "hit men"—Bill Eidson—turned up live on camera. The MLK case is still "in play" and we therefore think it wise to be cool toward any significant developments since they may be designed to backfire.—Eds.

Pepper, is there any more obscurity in Martin Luther King's execution than there was in John Kennedy's.

Given that state of the question, what is at stake, then, in the Justice Department's reopened investigation into the assassination of King?

Judging from the story of key witness Donald G. Wilson, it could be the power of an FBI agent's conscience to rip off the masks from the intelligence agencies behind King's murder. What may reveal those forces more dramatically than Wilson's evidence is the government's own response to that evidence. Wilson's story provides not only a window into King's killing but into the government itself.

When King was shot to death on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Donald Wilson was a 25 year old FBI agent in Atlanta. Wilson had joined the FBI to "do something positive in civil rights from an investigative standpoint" he told me in an interview. During his FBI training, however, Wilson was shocked to see the Bureau upholding segregated housing in Maryland for the only black member of his class. "It became patently clear," he said, "I had made a serious error in judgment. This in fact was a racist organization."

As Wilson spoke his mind to fellow agents about racist incidents in the Bureau, he was given a stark warning. On an assignment where only the FBI knew his identity and whereabouts, he received a long distance phone call from an "operator" who told him to return home immediately—his baby daughter was deathly ill. Wilson phoned his wife and learned their child was fine. But he knew the FBI had sent the message.

In Atlanta the Bureau assigned its agent with the sensitive conscience not to his first choice of duty, civil rights, but to the politically more innocuous stolen cars division. It thereby unwittingly facilitated Donald Wilson's becoming the first FBI agent to open the door of James Earl Ray's abandoned white Mustang, in an Atlanta parking lot one week after King's assassination. There he discovered two papers, each bearing the name "Raul" in the midst of other written information. He kept the papers secret from the Bureau whose Atlanta agents had just witnessed celebrating King's murder.

For 29 years Wilson maintained silence about the papers: during 10 years with the FBI, ten years as an assistant director of security for Amoco Corporation, and another near-decade running his own gasoline-testing business in Chicago from which he retired last year to become a high school teacher. He kept the papers in a variety of places, ranging from safety-deposit boxes to the pages of an old stamp album.

In 1997 Wilson was shocked to see Coretta Scott King on television make a moving courtroom appeal for a trial for James Earl Ray. He realized the papers he had preserved could help her. Ray had claimed Raul was the name of the mysterious gunman who set him up, whereas the government denied Raul's existence. "What I had," Wilson said, "didn't extricate Ray from the arena of suspicion, yet it was a degree of corroboration for his story—at least about the existence of this man."

Wilson contacted Ray's lawyer William Pepper and the King family. With their encouragement, he went public with the papers in March 1998. The FBI immediately denounced Wilson's story and the documents as a total fabrication. Mrs. King, however, made the papers a primary basis for her appeal for a new investigation into her husband's murder, which is now taking place.

In September, Donald Wilson phoned me from his home near Chicago to describe what he and his wife were experiencing from the reopened King investigation. When Wilson discovered the Justice Department had him and his bank under surveillance, he sensed his being targeted as a witness with evidence threatening the government. To the dismay of lead investigator Barry Kowalski, he then refused to turn over the papers. He and his wife received a series of phone calls from Kowalski. The Justice Department obtained a search warrant from a Chicago judge to go into Wilson's bank vault after the papers. Wilson finally surrendered them to a federal marshal who promptly contaminated them, confirming Wilson's sense that the government had no intention of treating them as proper evidence.

It is worth noting that the King family has insisted all along that there be no involve-

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Consider: In the last year of his life, Martin Luther King denounced and unmasked the mighty in their prosecution of the Vietnam War. He called his own government "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." He proclaimed good news to the poor by organizing the Poor People's Campaign that he hoped would shut down Washington, D. C., until the government agreed to eliminate poverty in America. He took on the lot of poor Memphis sanitation workers in a dramatic strike on the eve of the Poor People's Campaign. By the end of his life, Martin Luther King had become a radical prophet, calling for an end to militarism and a resurrection of the poor through massive civil disobedience in the nation's capital.

What is the likelihood that U. S. government forces *did not* assassinate Martin Luther King, Jr.?

Adding to the obvious motivation the trails of evidence established by the works of Mark Lane, Philip Melanson, and William

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ment in the reopened case by the FBI, whose effort to get King to commit suicide through their use of surveillance tapes has long been public knowledge. Janet Reno agreed to the King placement of the FBI as out of bounds. However, how realistic was it to expect the covert action arm of a guilty government to be tied up by its Attorney General?

Is there anything in the papers seized from Wilson by the Justice Department that could be indeed "critical"; not to a bogus investigation of the death of a martyr but to the legitimacy of the government conducting it? There are two separate papers, according to Wilson. One is what he calls the "telephone document". This is a page from a 1963 Dallas telephone book from the 'H' section. The page included Hunt Oil Company. Wilson says he was astounded to learn from Pepper that a phone number written at the top of the page, preceded by the letter 'J' and followed by the name "Raul" and the Dallas area code, was listed in 1963 as belonging to Jack Ruby's Vegas Club in Dallas. Wilson calls the second paper from James Earl Ray's Mustang the "pay-off schedule document." It has a written list of itemized expenses, what appear to be dollar amounts for names and places that add up to a total of \$450,000.00. The items include "hospital", "M. Gallina," and "Sonesta". At the bottom of the paper is a message: "before 4-15 H. man after Raul," followed by an extension number. Opposite "Canada", the final item in the list, is the figure \$75,000.00. Canada was Ray's destination after Atlanta. But the handwriting on the papers does not match Ray's.

When Wilson looked in Ray's car, he saw that its ashtray was overflowing with cigarette butts. Ray did not smoke. Wilson also noticed that the right front door was slightly ajar: "Like when you lock a door sometimes, you slam it but it just doesn't quite catch all the way." It was when he opened this door that "a small white envelope the size of a kid's valentine fell in front of his shoes. The envelope contained the Raul papers. Also in the envelope, Wilson says, were a business card from a gun shop in Dallas, Texas, and a business card for a Baton Rouge, Louisiana towing company.

On the King holiday of January 18, 1999, it was reported by both CNN and the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, that Donald Wilson had been at least partially vindicated in his claims. Justice Department sources conceded that scientific examination of the documents have shown they are not likely forgeries. What they

do actually represent is something else awaiting to be shown by a real investigation. Nevertheless, I asked Wilson if he thought that the papers may have been planted as a false trail for someone like him to find. He answered, "There are several possibilities. Number one, someone simply dropped them in their haste to leave that car. Secondly, they were planted there to create a false trail. Or third, they were planted there to create actually a legitimate trail, for whatever reason."

Whatever the correct explanation is for the papers, Donald Wilson seems to be pushing the Justice Department in directions it finds uncomfortable. The government knows it has an experienced opponent in its former FBI agent. As a member of the department told Wilson privately, "You're the FBI's worst

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In 1999 at age 56, Donald Wilson is a teacher in a special tutoring program for high school students with behavioral problems. He takes a special pride in the achievements of his students, whose respect for their teacher has perhaps been deepened by their recognition of him on television as a dissident FBI agent in the King case. In one our phone conversations he said quietly, "This takes a lot of faith. It's so disheartening what these people of power do." ♦

Posner / King

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"The district attorney general's office in Memphis at times seemed like a second office. District Attorney General Bill Gibbons encouraged his staff to help my wife, Trisha, and me... Particularly stellar was Assistant District Attorney General John Campbell. As lead prosecutor for the past four years, he knows the case better than anyone in the office, and he saved me from heading down many fruitless paths of inquiry..." — Gerald Posner (Acknowledgment from his book *Killing the Dream*, page 338.)

Several months ago, I wrote to Assistant Attorney General John Campbell, explained who I was and what my intentions were, that I was writing on the Ray-King case and I wanted to talk to him. In my letter, I also included my area code and telephone number (have an answering machine), my mailing address, and an S.A.S.E. If necessary, I was even willing to drive to Memphis at Mr. Campbell's convenience. To this day, I have not received a single response from Assistant Attorney General Campbell.

At first, I thought, maybe, he doesn't like me, but I quickly deleted that as a possibility, because Mr. Campbell and I have never met in the flesh. Therefore, he can't pass judgment on my personality. So, what is it? My stance on the Ray-King case? Surely not, for Mr. Campbell is an intelligent, highly educated human being, holding the position of assistant attorney general. In holding the position of assistant attorney general he is sworn to uphold the law, and in order to uphold the law he must remain unbiased. Here's the kicker: I've never said that beyond any doubt James Earl Ray did not kill Martin Luther King. That was my whole reason for wanting to talk to Assistant District Attorney General Campbell. If the prosecution had/has evidence proving beyond a reasonable doubt that James Earl Ray killed Martin Luther King, so be it. Still waiting. Get the picture?

What about you, Jerry? Have you ever challenged Posner?

Jerry Ray: "Posie was scheduled to appear on *CNBC's Equal Time*, a show hosted by Bay Buchanan, sister of former presidential candidate Pat Buchanan. When he found out I was gonna be on the show, he cancelled. It doesn't take an Einstein to figure out why: I would have proved him to be the liar he is. I don't have much education, and he's a Wall Street lawyer and big-time writer, but I've got the truth on my side, and that's what counts. I'll meet him, or any of the others, for that matter, G. Robert Blakey, David Garrow, who-