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Donald E. Wilkes Jr.

University of Georgia School of Law, wilkes@uga.edu

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WHAT ARE FACTS OF MLK MURDER?

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Author: Donald E. Wilkes, Jr., Professor of Law, University of Georgia School of Law.

The House Select Committee on Assassinations "found no evidence ... that [J. B.] Stoner in fact participated in the plot to assassinate Dr. King." But it did find links between Stoner and two of the Ray brothers. According to the Committee, Stoner first met James Earl Ray in the late 1968; the following year, Stoner represented Ray in efforts to withdraw the guilty plea. The Committee also said "Stoner had indicated publicly that he had information about a conspiracy to assassinate Dr. King." Before the Committee, Stoner denied having such information.

The Select Committee also found post-assassination connections between Stoner and Jerry Ray. The report states: "Jerry Ray was employed as a bodyguard for Stoner in 1969." Bynum Shaw, in a March 1972 article in Esquire, claims that Jerry Ray was Stoner's campaign manager when Stoner ran for governor of Georgia in 1970. (Stoner got 5.47 percent of the votes in the May primary.)

Gerold Frank, in his 1972 book An American Death, published a photograph of Stoner and Jerry Ray together, although Frank does not say when it was taken. Whatever the facts are in this regard, there does not seem to be any connection whatsoever between Stoner and either James Earl Ray or Jerry Ray until well after King's assassination. Still, the matter is intriguing.

The House Committee devoted nearly three full pages of its final report to the topic: "Conspiracy Allegations: Atlanta." There were three of these allegations, none of them involving J. B. Stoner or the Ray brothers. The first of the allegations came from a woman who in the opinion of the Committee "was not a credible person." The Committee deemed the allegations "not worthy of further investigation." The Committee also rejected the second allegation, which was made by a man. In the Committee's view, the man "was an unreliable witness" and "his story was false."

A different view was taken of the third of these Atlanta conspiracy allegations. The Committee described as "credible" the story of Claude and Leon Powell, two brothers who said that in the fall of 1967, at an Atlanta bar, they were told about and then met a mysterious unidentified man named "Ralph" who showed them an open briefcase stuffed with money, told them it was \$25,000, and promised them that amount plus another \$25,000 for killing Dr. King. The Powell brothers first reported their story to

the FBI in January 1976, and further investigation by the Committee appears to have supported the credibility of the Powell brothers.

If true, the story of the Powell brothers obviously might have involved an offshoot of the St. Louis-based conspiracy against King. But the Committee "was not able to link it [the Powell brothers' amazing story] to the assassination of Dr. King."

The fact remains that a conspiracy allegation found credible by the Committee indicates that the St. Louis-based conspiracy against King may have had tentacles extending to Georgia, quite independently of any possible connection through the Rays.

This, however, does not exhaust the tantalizing list of possible Georgia connections to Dr. King's assassination. There is also the matter of Joseph A. Milteer.

Milteer was the subject of four articles by this author published in The Athens Observer in February 1987. Milteer, a South Georgia racist who died in 1974, was recorded on tape in a conversation with a police informer on Nov. 9, 1963--13 days before JFK's assassination--saying things which arguably indicate that he might have had advance knowledge of a plan to kill President Kennedy.

Milteer may even have been present in Dealey Plaza when JFK was assassinated; he may even have been photographed there. Thus, as those articles showed, there might have been some sort of Georgia connection to the JFK assassination through Milteer.

Is there also a possible Milteer connection to the King assassination?

There are tantalizing hints. In the first place, Milteer was, according to Harold Weisberg in his book Frame-Up (1971), "the Georgia functionary for the National States Rights Party ..." If this is correct--and, for what it is worth, Weisberg is recognized as a leading expert on the JFK and King assassinations--then wouldn't Milteer have had dealings with J. B. Stoner? And if he did, couldn't this lead to further connections?

In the second place, President Kennedy's possible assassination was not the only topic Milteer talked about in that memorable taped conversation of Nov. 9, 1963; Milteer also spoke of what evidently was an effort to kill Dr. King. According to a transcript of that conversation, published by Weisberg, Milteer told the informer that a man named Brown had "tried to get" King, but failed: "He followed him for miles and miles, and couldn't get close enough to him."

When the informer said, "Oh[,] Brown tried to get him [King,] huh?," Milteer replied: "Yeah."

Harold Weisberg believes that the Brown referred to by Milteer was one Jack H. Brown, a Tennessee Klansman. Brown apparently died in 1965, three years before Dr. King's death, and there does not seem to be any connection between the attempts Milteer spoke of in 1963 and the assassination that occurred in Memphis in 1968. And, as the House Committee noted, there were many threats against Dr. King's life in the '60s.

Nonetheless, there is something uncanny about the way Milteer's remarks on Kennedy and King seem to presage the tragic deaths of these two remarkable men. Milteer, it will be remembered, survived JFK by 11 years and King by six, dying in 1974.

With Dr. King's assassination, as with President Kennedy's, the possibility of a Georgia connection cannot be ruled out. In both assassinations what evidence there is of a possible Georgia connection points in the direction of the extreme right. But with the passage of years it becomes increasingly difficult to detect or reconstruct any such connections.