P. O. Box 308
Osceola, Arkansas
March 24, 1969

Mr. William Morris
Sheriff, Shelby County
Sheriff's Department
Memphis, Tennessee 38101

Dear Sheriff Morris:

I have enclosed an editorial and my response to the editorial in the March 13 and March 18 editions of the Arkansas Gazette. Since you are one of Memphis' and Shelby County's leading citizens, I thought you would be interested in the editorial and my response in the Gazette.

I am a freshman at the University of Arkansas and keep abreast of the news of Memphis and the Mid-South through The Commercial Appeal in our library.

Since you are one of the best sheriffs in the country, I know you must be very busy. Therefore, I thank you for reading my letter.

Respectfully,

Ralph E. Wilson, Jr.

Enclosure

P. S. I think the Shelby County Sheriff Department is one of the most efficient in the country.

REWjr

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The Great Intersection

Judge W. Preston Battle, the trial judge in the case of James Earl Ray, was very nearly as eloquent in his post-sentencing summing up, as the celebrated Percy Foreman had been in conducting the defense.

Judge Battle quoted from Shakespeare ("Hamlet") in warning that the convicted man's accomplices, if any, could never really rest easy in the absence of any statute of limitation in capital cases heard in the state of Tennessee ("For murder, though it hath no tongue, will speak with most miraculous organ.") The borrowing from Churchill was a paraphrase of the old warrior's response to Hitler's threat to wring England's neck like a chicken's: "Some chicken—some neck." "Some river—some town," quoth Judge Battle, in response to Time magazine's description of Memphis as "a decadent river town" and to all the other critics who have said that Memphis had some connection with the assassination of Martin Luther King. It was all purely accidental or coincidental, the judge said:

> "Neither the decedent [King]] nor his killer lived here. *Their orbits merely intersected in Memphis.*" [Our italics.]

In a sense of course we are all temporary sojourners and wayfarers, but Martin Luther King's and James Earl Ray's paths did not "just happen" to cross in Memphis. Both were there for a specific purpose—Dr. King in support of the striking city garbage workers, and, as we have found, Ray for the purpose of shooting Dr. King.

The garbage strike was settled after Dr. King's murder on terms that, if they had been conceded before his death, might have prevented his murder or at least insured that his murder, when it came, would come in some place other than Memphis.

This is all that the local chauvinists ever really ask in such situations—to be reassured that it could have happened "anywhere," which of course is technically correct. By this test, it would have been enough if Dr. King had been shot just outside the Memphis city limits, or just across the Mississippi state line, as James Meredith in fact had been some months before.

> "Neither the decedent nor his killer lived here. Their orbits merely intersected in Memphis."

Where have we heard this kind of talk before? Oh, yes, from the good burghers of Dallas in 1963. The decedent, John F. Kennedy, as was well known, lived at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. The accused killer, Lee Harvey Oswald was not "from" Dallas at all, but a renegade from Fort Worth (one half expected accusations of a Fort Worth C of C plot deliberately to blacken the name of "Big D"), who at the time was living all the way out in Irving.

We do not know in any of these cases, when the individual "orbits" first were set in motion, or by what kind of agency, terrestrial or extra-terrestrial. All we know is the kind of town where these orbits seem most likely to "intersect." In the case of Memphis, we will concede that James Earl Ray came from farther away than Millington, that Martin Luther King was not born on Beale Street (though he might easily have been), and that the fatal conjunction could have come some time before at Birmingham (as we heard during the progress of the case, it came very close to doing).

Now, the question is, what is it that Memphis and Birmingham have in common that brought Dr. King there so often?

Memphis

To the Editor of the Gazette:

In response to "The Great Intersection" editorial of March 13, I feel that you are unaware of the present racial situation that exists in Memphis. In fact, racial conditions are probably better in Memphis than they are in most parts of Arkansas. There are many Negroes on Memphis' police force, in its department stores, in secretarial positions, Negro radio announcers on its "white" stations, and Negroes in many other high and influential occupations in this Mid-South city.

In regard to your mention of the garbage workers' strike, these employees had higher salaries than many teachers (school) in Arkansas. I can't understand why you must pick on Memphis as a city which frequently brought Luther King there. Mr. King (to my knowledge) had never been to Memphis before the sanitation strike last spring!

You also implied that Mr. King could not have been killed "anywhere." I believe that he could have been killed in Little Rock, St. Louis, Atlanta, or anywhere else. Ray's and King's orbits DID intersect in Memphis.

To reiterate Judge Battle's words about Memphis: "Some River — Some Town." In conclusion, I hope you don't think that Memphis is a "decadent river town." If you do, just take the two hour drive or twenty-minute flight to the 22nd largest city and seventh fastest growing big city in the nation.

Ralph Wilson Jr.

Osceola.