

1
SL: 44-775
HGS:jfb

RE: RAY FELLOW PRISONERS
ROBERT POWELL

AT FARMINGTON, MISSOURI, AND DOE RUN, MISSOURI

The following investigation was conducted by Special Agent HOWARD G. SLACK on April 25, 1968, in order to locate ROBERT POWELL, former inmate at the Missouri School for Men. This investigation was predicated on receipt of a communication from the Kansas City Division which advised that JAMES R. RUSSELL was a fellow inmate of JAMES EARL RAY. RUSSELL advised that ROBERT POWELL was also a fellow prisoner of RAY.

Mrs. OPEL POWELL, Doe Run, Missouri, was interviewed at her residence and advised that she is the mother of ROBERT POWELL, who was released from prison in February, 1968. Mrs. POWELL stated she did not know her son's address but believed that he was employed in St. Louis.

Mrs. POWELL viewed a photograph of JAMES EARL RAY but stated she had never seen him nor had her son mentioned his name.

On April 29, 1968, ROBERT LYNN POWELL advised he was in prison at Jefferson City, Missouri, from January 16, 1967, to February 1, 1968. He stated that he knew JAMES EARL RAY only slightly since they both had worked in food service in prison. POWELL advised that he may have talked to RAY but they were not friends. POWELL further advised that he did not know of any background information concerning RAY and he had no information concerning RAY's escape from the prison and did not know whether or not RAY used narcotics. POWELL stated that RAY was somewhat of a loner and no one was very close to him. POWELL stated that he had no idea of RAY's present whereabouts.

161

1Date May 8, 1968

JAMES EDWARD "TED" RICHARDSON, Missouri State Penitentiary (MSP) #49632, was interviewed at his place of employment, the Jefferson Cleaning Shop, 1650 South Jefferson. His residence is in the rear of this establishment. RICHARDSON furnished information that he was born [redacted] at Chillicothe, Missouri, and entered the MSP on a murder charge from Trenton, Missouri, in May, 1935. He was sentenced to "death row" at that time but his death sentence was later commuted. He was released from MSP on March 30, 1965, and has resided in the St. Louis area since that time.

He described RAY as one of the "nuts" or "cowboys" who according to RICHARDSON were small time hoodlums who would be involved in most any type of petty thievery or gangsterism going on inside the institution.

RICHARDSON stated he knew subject RAY only casually since he worked more than 20 years in the hospital in the institution under Doctor HUGH W. MANLEY. RICHARDSON stated he read some publicity concerning RAY escaping shortly after it occurred but had heard nothing indicating that subject RAY had been in St. Louis or made any contacts in the St. Louis area since that time.

He described RAY as one of the inmates who used narcotics or medicine of any kind whenever obtainable. He stated that his most frequent encounter with RAY was upon the occasions of RAY's reporting to the hospital for sick call.

On 5/6/68 at St. Louis, Missouri File # SL: 44-775
by SA CLETIS B. BIDEWELL/mjb
SA WILLIAM H. WARFIELD Date dictated 5/6/68

This document contains neither recommendations nor conclusions of the FBI. It is the property of the FBI and is loaned to your agency; it and its contents are not to be distributed outside your agency.

/ 62

1

SL 44-775
HRD:paw

Fellow Prisoner: DONALD DEAN RIGGER

AT MOBERLY, MISSOURI

The following investigation was conducted by
SA WILLIAM R. DUNCAN on April 26, 1968.

Inmate DONALD DEAN RIGGER, Number 03959, Missouri Training School for Men, Moberly, Missouri, advised that he had been convicted in December of 1951, and had been an inmate at the Missouri State Penitentiary, Jefferson City, Missouri, from December, 1951, through August of 1967. While there, he worked in the kitchen at the Penitentiary with RAY. RIGGER stated that no one was really friendly with RAY.

RIGGER stated that prior to his apprehension he had jumped bond and had been in Salpillo Coahuila, Mexico. Following his apprehension, he received mail from Mexico. RAY was aware of this and asked questions of him concerning the economy in Mexico. He indicated particular interest in the Mexican Army structure. RIGGER explained it was generally understood by inmates that if they could get into the Mexican Army they could effectively lose their identities.

RIGGER stated that in his estimation the person who was most closely associated with RAY was inmate DONALD JOHNSON, who, to the best of his knowledge, is currently employed in the bread room at the Missouri State Prison in Jefferson City, Missouri.

RIGGER was unable to offer any suggestions as to the present whereabouts of subject.

163

1

SL 44-775
HRD:paw

FELLOW PRISONERS

AT MOBERLY, MISSOURI

The following investigation was conducted by
SA WILLIAM R. DUNCAN on April 25, 1968.

JAMES R. RUSSELL, inmate, Missouri Training School for Men, Moberly, Missouri, advised he had been committed to the Missouri State Penitentiary, Jefferson City, Missouri, in November of 1965, and had remained confined there until January, 1966, when he was transferred to Moberly, Missouri. He was released in February, 1967, but went back to Jefferson City as a parole violator in June of that year. He was in the same cell with ROBERT POWELL, also known as BOB POWELL, from August, 1967, to January, 1968.

RUSSELL stated he knew JAMES EARL RAY by reputation only, but did not know him personally. RUSSELL was in the prison kitchen at Jefferson City and also worked with POWELL. He said POWELL mentioned that RAY, because of his escape, was the cause of prison officials cutting down the size of the boxes used to hold bread from the main kitchen. It was his belief that POWELL was released in February, 1968, and was thereafter employed by the American Car Company in St. Louis. To his understanding, POWELL is now in the Los Angeles area. He was of the opinion that POWELL's sister, FRANKIE, who is a student at Farmington, Missouri, High School, might be aware of POWELL's current residence.

RUSSELL stated he recalled a Negro penitentiary guard named BILLY BOB TURNER, but stated he had never heard anyone say that TURNER should be dead.

169

1
SL 44-775
CBB/WHW: amb

RE: FELLOW PRISONER - JOHN PAUL VELANTI

The following investigation was conducted at St. Louis, Missouri, by SAs CLETIS B. BIDEWELL and WILLIAM H. WARFIELD on May 3, 1968:

OPAL HIGHLEY, owner of the property 1630 through 1636 South 18th Street, advised that one JOHNNY VELANTI resides in an upstairs apartment at 1630 South 18th. He has resided there for approximately eight or nine months and is employed as a radio broadcaster at the Lady of the Snows FM Radio Station, WMRY, Belleville, Illinois. She advised that VELANTI worked from about 11:00 a.m. until sometime around 8:00 p.m. but frequently did not return home until around midnight.

Efforts to interview VELANTI on that date were negative. Appointment was made with VELANTI for an interview on the morning of May 4, 1968, at the St. Louis FBI Office.

165

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

1

Date 5-7-68

JOHN PAUL VELANTI, 1632 South 18th Street, St. Louis, Missouri, was interviewed at the St. Louis Office of the FBI and furnished the following information:

He viewed photographs of JAMES EARL RAY as depicted on Wanted Flyer #442-A dated April 19, 1968. He advised that none of these photographs resembled RAY as he recalls him. He advised that the picture of RAY in the bow tie particularly does not resemble him. He viewed a photograph of RAY taken by the St. Louis Police Department October 10, 1959, and stated this is a very good likeness of RAY as he recalls him.

He advised that as a result of his employment as a radio announcer he has frequently broadcast news releases regarding RAY but failed to recognize RAY as a fellow inmate at the Missouri State Penitentiary until viewing his photograph in a newspaper.

He described RAY as a quiet type who was seldom noticed. RAY did not gamble, play sports, or do anything to attract attention to himself while at the Missouri State Penitentiary. He does not recall having ever spoken with RAY or having been in the same dormitory as RAY. However, he does recall RAY's face from having seen him at the penitentiary. He advised that RAY's escape attempts attracted no attention to RAY inasmuch as there were frequent such attempts by numerous inmates.

VELANTI advised that he was in the Missouri State Penitentiary at Jefferson City, Missouri, from February 13, 1960, to December 19, 1964, at which time he was transferred to the Moberly Minimum Security Prison at Moberly, Missouri. In December, 1966, he was transferred to the honor camp at Fordland, Missouri. He was released on parole March 21, 1967. He was sentenced to the Missouri State Penitentiary February 11, 1959, to serve a 20-year sentence for armed robbery.

While in the Missouri State Penitentiary VELANTI advised that at one time or another he lived in all of the halls. However, he does not believe he was ever housed in the same hall as RAY.

166

On 5-4-68 at St. Louis, Missouri File # SL 44-775

by SA WILLIAM H. WARFIELD
SA CLETIS B. BIDEWELL WHW:amb Date dictated 5-4-68

This document contains neither recommendations nor conclusions of the FBI. It is the property of the FBI and is loaned to your agency; it and its contents are not to be distributed outside your agency.

2

SL 44-775

While at the Missouri State Penitentiary he never heard of money being offered for the death of Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING or anyone else. He advised that it was common knowledge that anyone could "pick up a few bucks by killing guys like that." He suggested that organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan or other southern organizations commonly referred to as the Klan resisting the present integration movement might pay for the death of KING or other Negro leaders.

VELANTI recalls that ORVILLE GANN, also known as PAPPY, who presently resides at the Dismas House, St. Louis, Missouri, lived in F&G Hall at the Missouri State Penitentiary with RAY. VELANTI believes that he has seen GANN speaking with RAY at the penitentiary. VELANTI has not seen GANN since he was released but has heard that GANN was released from the penitentiary approximately one month ago. He recalls JOHNNY JOHNSON, FRANK MAYBERRY, KENNY HURT, and NONEY EDEN as fellow inmates at the Missouri State Penitentiary. He believes the true name of NONEY EDEN to be JAMES EDEN. He explained that EDEN is tongue-tied and was nicknamed NONEY for his inability to pronounce bolcna. He is unaware of EDEN's present whereabouts.

VELANTI advised that the name COOLEY (phonetic) and Cooley's Organization have no meaning to him. He advised that COOLEY may apply to a Negro inmate at the Missouri State Penitentiary whose true identity is unknown to him.

The following description and background information was obtained through observation and interview:

Name	JOHN PAUL VELANTI
Address	1632 South 18th Street, St. Louis, Missouri
Employment	Announcer at WMRV, FM, 9500 West Route 460, Belleville, Illinois
Date of birth	
Place of birth	Portsmouth, Virginia
Height	5'9"
Weight	180
Hair	Black, slightly receding
Eyes	Brown

167

3
SL 44-775

Tattoos	Butterfly and snake on left outer forearm; "Bayou Kid" and alligator riding a pig on right outer forearm
Admitted convictions	1949, sentenced to five years Louisiana State Penitentiary, burglary, served three years and five months; 1956 to 1957, U. S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas, imper- sonating a Federal Agent; February 11, 1959, sentenced to 20 years Missouri State Penitentiary, Jefferson City, Missouri, armed robbery; Served at Missouri State Peni- tentiary February 13, 1960, to December, 1964; December, 1964, to December, 1966, at Moberly, Missouri; December, 1966, to March 21, 1967, honor camp at Fordland, Missouri, parole officer - Mr. HICKMAN, 1500 Big Bend, Richmond Heights
Military service	U. S. Army, 1952 to 1959, Serial Number RA 18 426 869
Relatives	Brother, ANTHONY VELANTI, age 45, unknown address, New Orleans, Louisiana. Advises he has numerous brothers and sisters who are unknown to him due to the fact that he was reared by foster parents: Foster father, ROBERT DUTTON JACKSON, Deltaville, Virginia, deceased: Foster mother, LAURA JACKSON, nee DANIEL, Deltaville, Virginia
Education	Public schools at Deltaville, Virginia
Religion	Catholic.

168