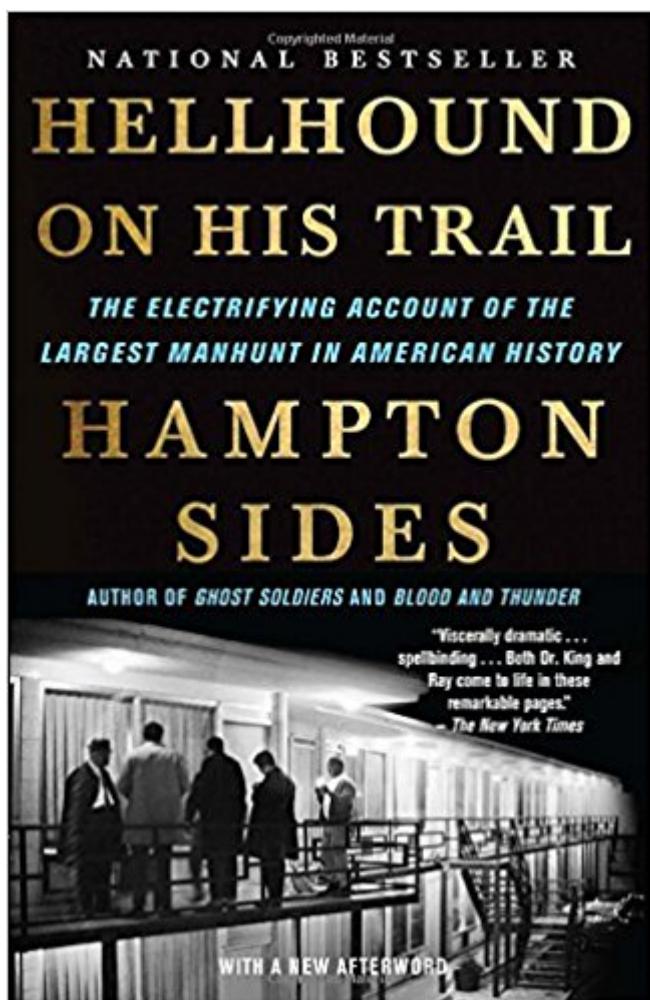


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# Hellhound On His Trail: The Electrifying Account Of The Largest Manhunt In American History



## Synopsis

NATIONAL BESTSELLER Edgar Award Nominee One of the Best Books of the Year: O, The Oprah Magazine, Time, The Washington Post, The Christian Science Monitor, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, San Francisco Chronicle With a New Afterword On April 4, 1968, James Earl Ray shot Martin Luther King at the Lorraine Motel. The nation was shocked, enraged, and saddened. As chaos erupted across the country and mourners gathered at King's funeral, investigators launched a sixty-five day search for King's assassin that would lead them across two continents. With a blistering, cross-cutting narrative that draws on a wealth of dramatic unpublished documents, Hampton Sides, bestselling author of *Ghost Soldiers*, delivers a non-fiction thriller in the tradition of William Manchester's *The Death of a President* and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. With *Hellhound On His Trail*, Sides shines a light on the largest manhunt in American history and brings it to life for all to see.

## Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, April 2010: It's bold to start an account of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. without a single mention of James Earl Ray. But in *Hellhound on His Trail*, Ray's absence is essential--in his place, Hampton Sides traces the alter egos Ray created after escaping from prison and beginning his haphazard journey toward Memphis. Sides meticulously constructs parallel portraits of two very different men--one, the larger-than-life figurehead of the Civil Rights movement; the other, a nondescript loner with a spurious and violent history, whose identity was as fluid as his motives. The narrative builds to the staggering and heartbreaking moment of King's assassination, then races on through the immediate fallout: the worldwide manhunt led by J. Edgar Hoover's FBI; Ray's nearly successful attempt to flee to Rhodesia; and the riots that erupted throughout the United States as racial tensions reached a breaking point. Sides's storytelling packs a visceral punch, and in *Hellhound on His Trail*, he crafts an authoritative and riveting account of two intersecting lives that altered the course of American history. --Lynette Mong David Grann

Reviews *Hellhound on His Trail* David Grann is most recently the author of *The Devil and Sherlock Holmes* as well as the #1 New York Times bestseller *The Lost City of Z*. Read his review of *Hellhound on His Trail*: Hampton Sides has long been one of the great narrative nonfiction writers of our time, excavating essential pieces of American history--from the daring rescue of POWs during World War II to the settling of the West--and bringing them vividly to life. Now in his new book, *Hellhound on His Trail*, he applies his enormous gifts to one of the most important and heart-wrenching chapters in U.S. history: the stalking and assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.,

by James Earl Ray. The book chronicles the terrifying collision of these two figures. In 1967, King was struggling to complete his monumental Civil Rights crusade and to maintain, amid the rise of more militant factions, the movement's nonviolent nobility. While King increasingly intuits his own death, Ray has begun to track him down. Through Sides' prodigious research, Ray emerges as one of the eeriest characters, a prison escapee and racist who wears alligator shoes and is constantly transforming himself, changing names and physical appearances. He is determined to become somebody, to insert himself into the national consciousness, through a single unthinkable act of violence. Sides illuminates not only the forces that culminated in King's assassination; he also reveals the largely forgotten story of how his death led to the largest manhunt in American history. Almost unfathomably, it is J. Edgar Hoover, the person who had long hoped for King's destruction and had even spied on him, who ultimately brings King's killer to justice. Hellhound on His Trail reconstructs this taut, tense narrative with the immediacy of a novel. Yet what makes the book so powerful--indeed what lifts it into the ranks of a masterpiece--is that the story unfolds against the larger backdrop of the Civil Rights movement and the struggle to remake the country. If Ray is able to undergo a final metamorphosis, it is King, through his life and ultimate sacrifice, who enacts the greatest transformation: changing the character of a nation.

(Photo © Matt Richman) Questions for Hampton Sides Q: How did the idea for Hellhound on His Trail come to you? What made you decide to focus on James Earl Ray? A: So many books have concentrated on either advancing or debunking conspiracy theories about the King assassination, but few have looked hard at James Earl Ray himself. Who was this guy? What were his habits, his movements, his motives? I found him to be profoundly screwed up, but screwed up in an absolutely fascinating way. He was a kind of empty vessel of the culture. He was drawn to so many fads and pop-trends of the late nineteen-sixties. He got a nose job, took dancing lessons, graduated from bar-tending school, got into hypnosis and weird self-help books, enrolled in a locksmithing course, even aspired to be a porn director. His personality had all these quirks and contradictions. He was supposedly stupid, but he somehow managed to escape from two maximum security prisons. Some claimed he wasn't a racist, yet he worked for the Wallace Campaign, called King "Martin Lucifer Coon," tried to emigrate to Rhodesia to become a mercenary soldier, and eventually hired a Nazi lawyer to defend him. He lived in absolute filth and squalor, but kept his clothes fastidiously laundered. And in the end, ironically, that's what caught him: A tiny identifying laundry tag stamped into the inseam of a pair of undershorts found near the scene of the King assassination. Q: The "Notes" and "Bibliography" sections of Hellhound on His Trail total more than 50 pages--how did you begin to tackle the wealth of information that exists about Martin

Luther King's assassination? What was your research process like? A: The research nearly gave me an aneurysm. But in the end, Hellhound is a work of narrative history, not a journalistic exposé. I don't think I unearthed any massive bombshells that will change the world forever--like, say, proving once and for all that J. Edgar Hoover actually orchestrated the whole affair. Instead, what I unearthed were thousands and thousands of tiny details that make the story come alive on the page and make it possible, for the first time, to understand the tragedy as a complete, multi-stranded narrative. The book's packed full of novelistic detail--weather, architecture, what people were wearing, what the landscape looked like, the music that was playing on the radio. To get all this stuff, I had to do the usual sort of archival work--from the LBJ Presidential Library in Austin to the London newspaper archives--and I went pretty much everywhere James Earl Ray went, following in his fugitive footsteps: Puerto Vallarta, Toronto, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Birmingham, Lisbon, London. But my real ace in the hole was a retired Memphis cop named Vince Hughes who has compiled the most fascinating, and most comprehensive, digital archive about the MLK assassination on the planet: Crime scene photos, police reports, unexpurgated FBI files, audio tapes, and many hundreds of thousands of unpublished documents that proved a real godsend. Every non-fiction writer needs to find a guy named Vince. Thank God I found mine.

Starred Review. The counterpoint between two driven men—one by a quest for justice, the other by an atavistic hatred—propels this engrossing study of the King assassination. Sides, author of the bestselling *Ghost Soldiers*, shows us a King all but consumed by the flagging civil rights movement in 1968 and burdened by presentiments of death. Pursuing him is escaped convict James Earl Ray, whose feckless life finds a belated, desperate purpose, perhaps stimulated by George Wallace's presidential campaign, in killing the civil rights leader. A third main character is the FBI, which turns on a dime from its long-standing harassment of King to a massive investigation into his murder; in Sides's telling, the Bureau's transoceanic hunt for Ray is one of history's great police procedurals. Sides's novelistic treatment registers Ray as a man so nondescript his own sister could barely remember him (the author refers to him by his shifting aliases to emphasize the shallowness of his identity). The result is a tragedy more compelling than the grandest conspiracy theory: the most significant of lives cut short by the hollowest of men. Photos. (Apr. 27) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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