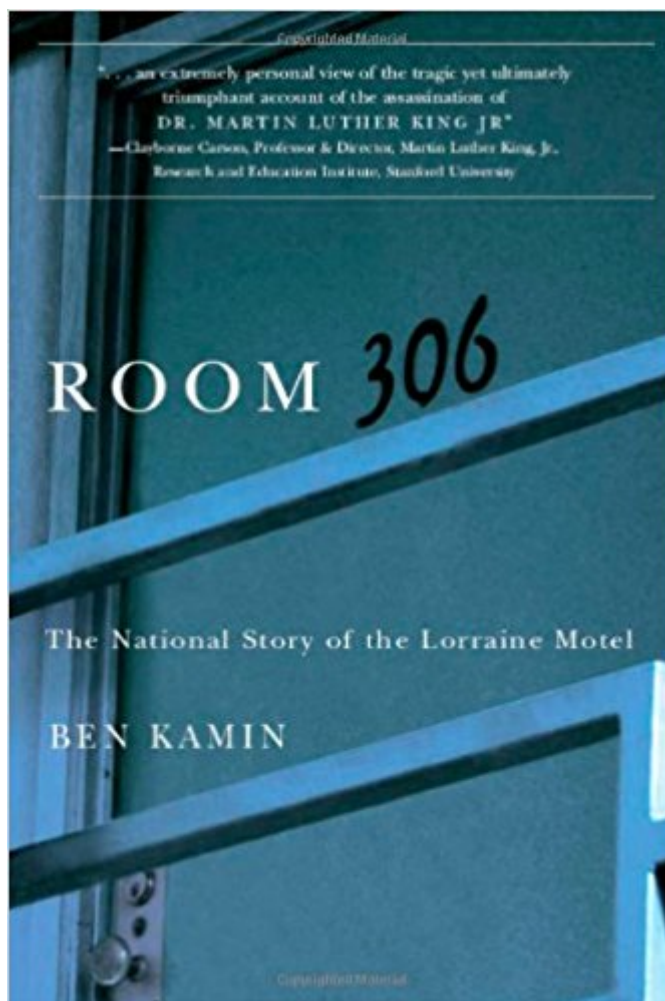


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Room 306: The National Story Of The Lorraine Motel



Synopsis

A tragic landmark in the civil rights movement, the Lorraine Motel in Memphis is best known for what occurred there on April 4, 1968. As he stood on the balcony of Room 306, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, ending a golden age of nonviolent resistance, and sparking riots in more than one hundred cities. Formerly a seedy, segregated motel, and prior to that a brothel, the motel quickly achieved the status of national shrine. The motel attracts a variety of pilgrims—white politicians seeking photo ops, aging civil rights leaders, New Age musicians, and visitors to its current incarnation, the National Civil Rights Museum. A moving and emotional account that comprises a panorama of voices, Room 306 is an important oral history unlike any other.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

. . . an extremely personal view of the tragic, yet ultimately triumphant, account of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. —Clayborne Carson, Professor & Director, Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute
With this unforgettable book, Ben Kamin again shows us why he is the singular narrator of the Memphis and civil rights saga. This is a story that has to be told, and only Kamin could have done it so patiently and faithfully. —T. George Harris, former Bureau Chief of TIME-LIFE, past Senior Editor of LOOK, founding Editor of Psychology Today and Spirituality and Health
A great contribution to the literature on the subject. Kamin does a masterful job of using the oral history tradition to bring fresh context to one of America's greatest tragic events. The reader will be enlightened, inspired, and motivated to continue the struggle for freedom

and justice. • Donald W. Murphy, former President and CEO of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center A worthy and well-timed project and a prime subject for an oral history. • Hampton Sides, author of *Hellhound on His Trail: The Stalking of Martin Luther King Jr.* and *The International Hunt for His Assassin*

Ben Kamin is a nationally known clergyman, teacher, counselor, and author of eight books on human values, civil rights, and spirituality.

Room 306: the National Story of the Lorraine Motel Ben Kamin -- from Alan Wieder's streetpixxwords.blogspot.com Skillfully crafted, *Room 306*, using oral history, tells a part of the incredible story of the Lorraine Motel, the site of Martin Luther King's assassination, and the creation of the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine. Kamin, who penned *Nothing Like Sunshine: A Story in the Aftermath of the MLK Assassination* in 2010, is creative in both his choice of topic and construction of the story. *Room 306* connects Martin King and the civil rights movement to the continuing struggles fighting class disparity and racism; and Kamin does it through the efforts in Memphis and throughout the United States to keep the good works of King and The Movement alive. Each chapter of *Room 306* is formed through an oral history of someone who was either at the Lorraine Motel the night of the assassination, or was/is directly involved in the making and administrating of the National Civil Rights Museum. Beginning with some history of King and the Memphis strike (the reason Martin Luther King was in the city) as well as a touch of MLK's relationship with Ralph Abernathy, chapters include the stories, chronologically, of Memphis pastor Billy Kyles, local lawyers Lucius Burch and Charles Newman, Kentucky legislator Georgia Davis Powers, the incredible non-violent activist James Lawson, NAACP leader Maxine Smith, D'Army Bailey, the founder of the Museum, Pitt Hyde, the funder of the Museum, and civil rights photographer, Ernest Withers. There are also chapters for Julian Bond, Clay Carson, Beverly Robertson who presently leads the Museum, and more. The essence of Kamin's book, however, is not in the list of people whose stories he tells, but rather in the connection of their humanity, however flawed, to the day that Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered, and continuing his legacy and the fight against race disparity and racism through the stories told at the National Civil Rights Museum. Ben Kamin was a rabbi in Cleveland, Ohio at one point in his life and he befriended Louis Stokes, long time Ohio representative in Congress. At one point Stokes said, "Ben Kamin can talk to anybody about anything." But more importantly for this book, Ben Kamin can listen and treat the people who let him into their lives with calm analysis that is true to their stories. There are

controversial issues within the stories told in Room 306, but Kamin is able to tell them in a poignant, yet non-judgmental way. He is gentle as he writes about Dr. King's lover, just as he is when he reports on Museum controversies. Most importantly, in the tradition of the greatest, oral historian, Studs Terkel, he allows people to tell their own stories, the stories that they want to tell. In doing so, Ben Kamin tells a human side of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and his continuing light through the National Civil Rights Museum.

If buildings could speak, what would the Lorraine Motel say about the life, death, and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.? If rooms could tell their stories, what would the "King-Abernathy Suite," otherwise known as Room 306, say to us? Buildings can't speak, and rooms can't tell stories, but the people who lived in those rooms and built those structures can. And when someone like Ben Kamin takes the time to ask, listen, and write, those stories can become part of our lives even after the tellers are gone. To write *Room 306*, Kamin spoke at length with three groups of people: the men and women who were connected with Dr. King during his final days in Memphis, the team that saved the Lorraine Motel and created the National Civil Rights Museum, and the visionaries who are bringing new life to King's story through film, theater, the museum itself, and the coveted Freedom Awards. The result is a superbly crafted blend of direct oral history, secondary sources, and Kamin's own insight. Each story is illuminated not only by the person telling it, but by the reflections of the other voices telling the same story. This is true especially in the middle section of the book. The men and women who came together to save the Lorraine Motel had very different styles and backgrounds. Their common goal -- to save the historic site and create a great museum -- kept them together just long enough to complete the project. Decades later, some of the resentments still burn, the museum's founder has become a pariah, and a legendary photojournalist has been exposed as an FBI informant. Kamin approaches these stories without kid gloves, but with respect and compassion. While he writes of courage and self-sacrifice, he gently acknowledges the human failings of his subjects. Reading *Room 306*, I felt as if I were standing in the courtyard of the Lorraine Motel, living this history along with the people who told their stories. I hadn't ever thought about visiting Memphis, but now it's on my bucket list -- and my teenage son's, though he doesn't know it yet. We're developing his homeschool curriculum for 8th grade now. As the child of an activist mother, my son asks a lot of questions about how oppression happens and how we overcome it. What better place to explore these questions than the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel? An African proverb says, "When an old man dies, a library burns to the ground." More than 44 years after King's death, most of his contemporaries are elderly and some have already died. We

owe Kamin a debt of gratitude for saving their stories. We can repay that debt by telling our children.

Room 306 The National Story of the Lorraine Motel by Ben Kamin is about a room that has been at the doorstep of modern civil rights history and provides an important foundation for everyone interested in it. When Dr. King was gunned down in front of his room, there was a feeling that the movement was also killed by that assassins bullet, the movement like the room that last the man that led it has seen a remarkable rebirth. The story of Room 306 takes us from that tragic doorstep on that desperate day and leads remarkably to our own house today. Ben Kamin has shown remarkable insight in being a guide to those who want to know where we are today and how we got here. His book is not just a reflection, it is a guide book for a long difficult journey.

Ben Kamin allows us to be invisible guests in Room 306 of the Lorraine Motel before and after April 4, 1968. I read fascinating backgrounds of the key people who are the principal players through which the story is told. Kamin's writing style is thick, meaty, and very juicy. I look forward to someday visiting the National Civil Rights Museum and see what Kamin has whetted my appetite to investigate further.

As I read this book my mouth is open. As a child, history never interested me. Most know about the assassination of Dr. King yes but to be able to read such a well written book about what preceded before this tragic event. This book is a page turner with a wealth of information told in such a way you will want to read it twice!

a necessary history---tells honestly the MLK story---well worth the reading time

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