Savannah Meadows: SLM0023

World History II TR 3:30-4:45

Wednesday, February 2, 2011 at 6p.m.

Hotel at Auburn University and Dixon Conference Center

Earl Caldwell on “Being There When Something Really

Important Happens: The Assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.”

As an African American reporter for the “New York Times” during the 1960’s, Earl Caldwell was assigned to the many riots in the South during the Civil Rights Movement. However he and his fellow reporter, Jean Roberts found it difficult to pin point the initial spark of such riots or the correct sequence of events. As Earl Caldwell’s boss became frustrated with the incomplete reports, Caldwell began praying to be placed at the right place at the right time when something really important happens.

Earl Caldwell received what he had been asking for when he was sent to Memphis, Tennessee to cover the much anticipated visit of Martin Luther King Jr. Caldwell boarded at the same motel as Mr. King, the Lorraine Motel. He even got the chance to meet Mr. King and to discuss Mr. King’s next campaign moves for a march to Washington D.C. just twenty-four before his assassination. Caldwell made plans to meet with Mr. King the next day, little did he know he would not get the chance.

On the first Thursday of April in 1968, the housekeeper rounds a corner on the second floor of the Lorraine Motel, knocking a glass coke bottle to the ground in front of Earl Caldwell’s room. As he is coaxed out of his room by the smack of glass, he is greeted by the more powerful boom of a rifle. Caldwell immediately looks to a thicket of bushes and saplings directly behind the motel where he believes the shot came from to find a white man in coveralls crouching in the bushes. As Martin Luther King Jr. falls with a fist-sized wound between his neck and jaw, Caldwell goes into reporter mode, asking all witnesses to recount what they just saw. He finds that several witnesses share his same vision of the man in the bushes, but soon finds that his detective work does not matter in the long run.

Several events in history are surrounded by conspiracy such as the assassination of JFK and 9/11. Earl Caldwell believes the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. to be one of them. Firstly, Mr. King was scheduled to stay in the Stuart Motel when he was told it would not work out and moved to the Lorraine Motel on the second floor with a balcony toward the street. Secondly, several witnesses came forward saying the shot that killed Mr. King originated from the thicket behind the motel; yet, the thicket of shrubbery was completely cut to the ground within a week of the assassination. Thirdly, a homeless man living in the thicket who got a close up look at the shooter dies with no record of his death after going to authorities with his information. Lastly, it was officially reported that the shooter was James Earl Ray and that the shot came from a slum house across the street from the motel, and Earl Caldwell’s own account of events was thrown out and reports concluded he was not present.