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# James Earl Ray keeps pressing for trial as health improves

By Woody Baird

ASSOCIATED PRESS

It's been a busy year for the confessed assassin of Martin Luther King Jr.

King's widow came to James Earl Ray's defense and her son Dexter met with him in prison, emerging to say he believes Ray is innocent.

Scientists retested the rifle owned by Ray that authorities say was used to murder King. State prosecutors set up an investigative team to look anew at the April 4, 1968, assassination in Memphis.

And Ray was hospitalized with liver disease.

Last December, he was unconscious when taken from the Nashville prison where he is serving a 99-year term. Doctors discovered Ray had cirrhosis of the liver believed caused by hepatitis, which he apparently contracted during a blood transfusion after being stabbed in prison in 1981.

The 69-year-old Ray's health improved but he was in and out of the hospital throughout the year. A doctor who examined him last summer said Ray would die — perhaps before the end of the year

— without a liver transplant.

Ray says he has changed his diet and is feeling better, and now 1998 promises to be another busy year for him.

Though his plea has been upheld eight times by state and federal courts, Ray continues to push for a trial, insisting he was framed.

Last February, during arguments over new ballistics tests on Ray's rifle, King's widow, Coretta Scott King, showed up at a Memphis courtroom with son Dexter to request a trial for Ray.

Dexter King visited Ray the following month.

The Kings say a trial for Ray, which is possible only if his guilty plea is overturned, might help prove whether King was the victim of a conspiracy.

Ray's gun was found at the murder scene and had his fingerprints on it. He avoided a possible death sentence by pleading guilty, but Ray has long argued he got bad legal advice and was coerced into admitting guilt.

## 'X-Files stuff'

Prosecutors are growing tired of Ray's appeals.



In 1997, James Earl Ray has gained support in his quest for a trial from Martin Luther King Jr.'s widow and son.

"James Earl Ray is the convicted killer of Dr. King. That conviction has been upheld numerous times, and he's exactly where he belongs," said Bill Gibbons, the chief state prosecutor in Memphis.

Ray's lead lawyer, William Pepper of London, weaves a complicated conspiracy theory that includes an organized crime connection and cover-ups and complacency at the highest levels of government.

"We're getting into X-Files stuff now," said John Campbell, another prosecutor. "In my mind, if there was a conspiracy, it's going to be a very small, close-knit kind of thing."

The U.S. House Committee on Assassinations concluded in 1978 that Ray killed King but may have

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FBI/DOJ

had help before the murder or later when he fled to Canada and London, where he was captured four months after the killing.

The committee turned up evidence that a group of bigots in St. Louis had put a \$50,000 bounty on King's head and Ray may have known about it. But that was never proven.

In part because of the King family's support for Ray, authorities have assembled a team of investigators to look again into the assassination.

Gibbons said he expects a report early next year.

"We pursue any credible leads regarding anybody else's involvement. I say 'credible' because we get all kinds of bizarre phone calls and letters involving all kinds of theories," he said.

Gibbons said he has offered to meet with the King family to explain the evidence against Ray. They have declined.

### Role of TV interview

Much of the recent interest on Ray stems from a national television interview given in 1993 by former Memphis restaurant owner Loyd Jowers.

Jowers said a former Memphis produce dealer with ties to organized crime in New Orleans asked him to hire an assassin to kill King. Jowers said the killer was not Ray.

Prosecutors say they have no evidence to support Jowers' claim and no idea why he would make it. His lawyer has refused to let authorities interview him.

Ray brought the rifle to Memphis and used an assumed name to rent a room at a flophouse from which authorities say the fatal shot was fired. But he insists he wasn't the person who pulled the trigger.

Ray's lawyers spent much of the past year in court seeking new ballistics tests they hoped would prove Ray's rifle was not the one used to kill King.

After much legal wrangling, Criminal Court Judge Joe Brown allowed the tests.

The .30-06 hunting rifle was fired in May at a lab at the University of Rhode Island. The test results came back inconclusive, just as previous ones did in 1968 and 1978.

### Request for more tests

Ray wants another round of tests. That request is pending before Brown, who also must rule on

a state petition arguing he should step aside because he is biased toward Ray.

In August, the state Court of Criminal Appeals cleared the way for Brown to order more tests on the rifle but admonished him for overstepping his authority.

The court said Brown had no business accusing prosecutors of failing to properly investigate allegations of a murder conspiracy.

"A judge is a fair and impartial adjudicator, not an investigator. ... Judge Joseph B. Brown Jr. has crossed this line," the court said.

Ray long has claimed he was set up by a shadowy gunrunner he knew only as Raoul. Prosecutors say they have no reason to believe that.

Conspiracy advocates continue to insist a small-time crook like Ray could not have pulled off the murder and the flight from police without help.

"James Earl Ray did not do it, did not plot it and did not know about it on April 4, 1968," said the Rev. James Lawson, a Los Angeles pastor and former King associate.

Lawson is helping to raise \$250,000 for a liver transplant in hopes it will prolong Ray's life long enough for a trial to be held.

Tennessee hospitals say Ray is too old for such an operation.

Lawson and other Ray supporters say the state is being unfair.

"In a way, the state needs to take responsibility for this," Lawson said. "He did not get a death sentence. He got a life sentence."

## Confessed slayer of rights leader has eventful year

Here are some major events during the past year involving James Earl Ray, the confessed killer of Martin Luther King Jr.:

■ **Dec. 22, 1996:** An unconscious Ray admitted to a Nashville hospital with liver disease. He returns to prison eight days later but is hospitalized seven more times in the next 11 months.

■ **Feb. 20, 1997:** Coretta Scott King and son Dexter say they want a trial for Ray.

■ **March 27:** Dexter King meets with Ray in prison and emerges saying he believes Ray is innocent.

■ **April 9:** The Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals says Ray has exhausted his appeals in state courts. But the court also rules a judge has the authority to order new scientific tests on crime evidence under his control.

■ **April 16:** Criminal Court Judge Joe Brown orders new ballistics tests on Ray's hunting rifle, which authorities say is the murder weapon.

■ **May 14:** The rifle is fired for the first time in two decades by firearms experts at the University of Rhode Island.

■ **June 9:** Davidson County Chancellor Irvin Kilcrease denies Ray's request to go to Pennsylvania for medical tests for a possible liver transplant.

■ **July 11:** Rifle test results are inconclusive. Similar results were reached by the FBI in 1968 and a U.S. House committee 10 years later.

■ **Aug. 11:** Brown orders new hearings to see if more tests are warranted. Defense lawyers say the rifle was not cleaned properly before it was fired. Prosecutors say more tests would be a waste of time.

■ **Aug. 18:** Criminal Court Judge John Colton moves to start his own investigation of the King murder by appointing a special master with authority to take sworn testimony.

■ **Aug. 18:** Court of Criminal Appeals issues an emergency order telling Brown and Colton to temporarily hold off on any more orders in the case.

■ **Aug. 29:** Appeals Court clears way for Brown to order more rifle tests but admonishes him and Colton for overstepping their authority in trying to investigate the King murder.

■ **Sept. 3:** Prosecutors accuse Brown of bias and ask him to remove himself from case.

■ **Sept. 18:** Criminal Court Judge Cheryl Blackburn rejects Ray's request to be temporarily freed from prison to seek medical care.

■ **Oct. 30:** Ray hospitalized but returns to prison two days later.

■ **Nov. 26:** Ray's supporters hold a news conference to raise the \$250,000 they say is needed to pay for a liver transplant.

— Associated Press

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12/31/97

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Ray's request to live w/ brother denied by

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**Ray's request to live with brother denied by state**

NASHVILLE — The state has denied James Earl Ray's request to move in with his brother. The convicted killer of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. has terminal liver disease.

Ray asked in October for a medical furlough, granted to inmates who are in "imminent danger of death." His request was denied on Dec. 5, department spokesman Pam Hobbins said on Tuesday.

She cited "security reasons and concerns" for the denial, but declined to elaborate or say whether Ray is in immediate danger of dying.

Ray's brother, Jerry Ray, said from his trailer in Smartt, a rural community about 60 miles southeast of Nashville, that his brother expected the request to be denied.

"I've got a two-rooms space for him at my house, furnished with cable TV and everything, for his final days to enjoy himself," Jerry Ray said. "If he got outside, there's always the possibility he could get a liver transplant and save his life."

Ray, who is serving his 99-year sentence at a medical prison, has been in and out of a local hospital over the last year. It's been a few weeks since his last hospital visit and he's feeling better, his brother said.

—The Associated Press

Media Summary / JKH

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# State moves to oust judge for Ray 'bias'

By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

State attorneys Friday asked an appeals court to reverse Criminal Court Judge Joe Brown's decision to continue hearing the James Earl Ray case.

Tennessee Atty. Gen. John Knox Walkup's appeal to the state Court of Criminal Appeals seeks appointment of an "unbiased and impartial judge" to oversee proceedings on Ray's efforts to prove he was framed for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1968 assassination in Memphis.

Prosecutors asked Brown in September to recuse himself, a motion the judge denied this month. Prosecutors claim Brown "has personal antagonism" toward them, while Brown counters that the state has waged a campaign to discredit him.

The state's appeal also seeks to halt Brown's Jan. 16 order allowing the retesting of the rifle prosecutors believe Ray used to shoot King.

Test firings last spring could not establish whether the Remington .30-06 hunting rifle was used to kill King. The rifle had Ray's fingerprints on it, and the bullet removed from King's body came from that type gun.

Ray, 69, pleaded guilty in 1969 but claims he was coerced. He is serving a 99-year sentence.

No hearing date has been set on the state's appeal. Ray attorney Wayne Chastain, meanwhile, has filed a motion asking Brown to allow him to take testimony from several prosecutors.

Chastain asserts in the motion that prosecutors have made "slandorous remarks" about Ray's defense team and may have improperly leaked sealed documents to the media, charges prosecutors deny.

(Indicate page, name of  
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Edition: *The Commercial Appeal*

Title: *State moves to oust judge  
for Ray 'bias'*

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Submitting Office: *ME*

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# Judge refuses to step down from Ray case

## Brown also orders new rifle test-firing

By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

Criminal Court Judge Joe Brown rejected Friday a prosecution motion that he step down from the James Earl Ray case, instead ordering new test-firing on the rifle allegedly used to kill Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Prosecutors said they will consider filing an appeal early next week.

Brown's long-awaited ruling came in answer to a state mo-

tion Sept. 3 that Brown recuse himself. Prosecutors had asserted that Brown was "totally lacking" in impartiality while presiding over hearings on Ray's claim he was framed for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1968 murder in Memphis.

Brown said Friday he has done nothing wrong, alleging instead that prosecutors have acted inappropriately.

"I've done in good conscience what I felt needed to be done," Brown told a reporter.

In his written order, Brown said prosecutors had a "smug-

ness and arrogance" and "political purposes," alleging the request for recusal was not made with "clean hands."

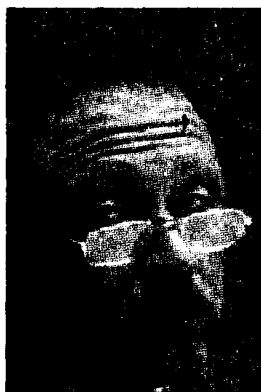
"The state's conduct suggests to this court that the instant motion is simply the latest of its effort to forum shop," the order said. The state has "engaged in an entirely un-

precedented public and media campaign to personally discredit the court itself and secure reassignment of the case," Brown's ruling read.

"We will appeal," Dist. Atty. Gen. Bill Gibbons said as he left the Criminal Justice Center. "That's all I have to say."

Lead Ray prosecutor John Campbell, however, said prosecutors will discuss the matter Tuesday with state Atty. Gen. John Knox Walkup's staff before deciding on a possible appeal.

Campbell denied that the state has acted inappropriately, but said he cannot comment until the state has a chance to



Joe Brown

answer Brown's allegations in writing in a possible appeal.

Campbell did question why it took Brown four months to answer the motion — "I don't know why it took so long."

Brown's delay on the motion effectively halted defense efforts to test-fire the rifle a second time. Tests last spring were inconclusive in proving the rifle as the murder weapon, and efforts to retest came as doctors said Ray, 69, had just months to live.

Serving a 99-year sentence, Ray suffers an advanced liver disease but so far has survived a doctor's August prognosis that he had three to six months

to live.

Brown originally said he would answer the motion within two days of its filing.

Prosecutors moved to remove Brown days after the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals found Brown had exceeded his authority in seven respects, including receiving documents in his office (bypassing the clerk's office) and improperly sealing documents, "thereby creating the appearance of secrecy."

Although the appeals court ruled that Brown could retain

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## Ray stable after hernia surgery

NASHVILLE (AP) — James Earl Ray, the convicted assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was in critical but stable condition, awake and alert, at a hospital early today — two days after surgery for a hernia.

Ray, 69, had the surgery Thursday after a routine checkup at Columbia/Nashville Memorial Hospital.

The surgery is believed to be unrelated to Ray's terminal liver disease.

Ray, who is serving a 99-year prison sentence for the 1968 slaying in Memphis, has been in and out of the hospital during the last year.

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Title: *Ray stable after hernia surgery*

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control of the case, Brown failed to act on the prosecution's motion.

Brown Friday denied suggestions by some that he did not act sooner because he feared formal judicial misconduct charges. Brown said the appeal court findings against him were errant, in part a result of misrepresentations by the state.

Brown said he has had court

transcripts typed up to prove he has done nothing wrong and cited that as largely responsible for the delay.

Defense attorney Wayne Chastain said he was "gratified" by the decision, saying he hopes testing can resume soon. He said he had no schedule and would need to speak with lead defense attorney William Pepper of London.

"I hope we can do it in time before Ray dies," he said.



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## Temporary halt placed on test-firing of Ray rifle

By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

The Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals on Tuesday temporarily halted further test-firing of the rifle prosecutors say James Earl Ray used to kill Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The ruling also gives Ray's attorneys until Feb. 20 to respond to a prosecution request to remove Criminal Court Judge Joe Brown from the case for alleged partiality. The action is a response to state Atty. Gen. John Knox Walkup's request to replace Brown with an "unbiased and impartial judge."

Prosecutors contend Brown has exhibited "personal antag-

onism" toward them. Brown counters that the state has campaigned to discredit him.

Brown last year oversaw inconclusive test-firing of the rifle that had Ray's fingerprints on it when police found it near the scene of King's 1968 murder in Memphis. Ray, now 69, pleaded guilty in 1969, but now says he was framed..

After hotly contested hearings, prosecutors asked Brown in September to recuse himself, which he rejected last month. He also ordered new test-firing. Ray attorney Wayne Chastain said Tuesday the defense will seek new tests and try to keep Brown.

To reach reporter Marc Perrusquia call 529-2545 or E-mail perrusquia@gomemphis.com

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

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FBI/DOJ

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# Ray finally has talk with Memphis police

By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

James Earl Ray submitted Thursday to the first police interview he's ever given in connection with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Investigators questioned Ray at a Nashville prison in connection with Dist. Atty. Gen. Bill Gibbons's inquiry into lingering conspiracy claims surrounding King's 1968 murder in Memphis.

"We felt it was important to talk to Ray about some things," said prosecutor John Campbell, who is overseeing the inquiry.

Campbell declined to discuss details, but said Ray spoke for two to three hours with Memphis homicide detective Tim Cook and attorney general investigator Mark Glankler.

Ray, 69, serving a 99-year sentence, claims he was framed. He pleaded guilty in 1969. He contends he was coerced, but prosecutors say evidence against him is overwhelming.

Ray was interviewed by federal officials several times in 1977 when Congress reopened the King investigation. Ray also testified in 1978 before the House Select Committee on Assassinations, which concluded he was guilty but found a "likelihood" of a conspiracy.

Gibbons reopened a conspiracy investigation last year after King's family said they believe Ray is innocent. The investigation is expected to conclude next month.

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# Arrest sparks flareup in King murder debate

By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

Prosecutors and Criminal Court Judge Joe Brown are sparring anew over Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, this round focusing on the arrest of a man who claims knowledge of a murder plot.

James C. Green was pulled over by Memphis police this week and arrested on a fugitive charge unrelated to the King case as he was driving to meet a CBS network news crew doing a piece on the 1968 assassination.

Green, 51, of Springville, Tenn., claims — despite conflicting evidence — that he was hired to kill confessed assassin James Earl Ray moments after King was shot April 4, 1968, at the Lorraine Motel.

Amid contentions Green was arrested as part of a coverup, Brown set a \$5,000 bond to release him, a move prosecutors called unusual. But Green was held another two days and released Friday after meeting a \$50,000 bond set by General Sessions Judge Charles B. Gallagher III.

"They weren't going to let 30 years of hard work go down the toilet," said Green's attorney, Russell Larson, who asserted Green was arrested to block the TV interview.

"That's ridiculous. There's no conspiracy to silence this stuff," said prosecutor John Campbell, who is overseeing an inquiry by Dist. Atty. Gen. Bill Gibbons into lingering King conspiracy claims. Campbell said he didn't know who Green was until he was arrested.

Prosecutor Mike Boyle, meanwhile, characterized Brown's move as "very unusual."

Green, who is accused in Nevada of writing fraudulent checks, was arrested on a fugitive from justice warrant, an

instrument normally handled in Shelby County's General Sessions courts.

"It's very unusual for a Criminal Court judge to set a bond on a case pending in General Sessions," Boyle said. The \$5,000 bond also appears low, he said: "We recommend a minimum of a \$10,000 bond."

"He knows nothing about this," Brown said, dismissing Boyle's remarks.

Brown said that the bond he set wasn't too low and that he had full authority to do it.

"The law says any judge in the county can set a bond," Brown said.



James  
Green

The flareup was the latest in a series since King's family announced last year they believe Ray is innocent. Ray, 69, pleaded guilty in 1969 but claims he was coerced, despite evidence prosecutors say is overwhelming.

Prosecutors have a request pending before the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals seeking Brown's removal from continued hearings on Ray's claims. Prosecutors contend Brown is biased, and the judge says prosecutors are trying to discredit him.

Brown said Friday he set a bond for Green after he was approached by Ray defense attorney Wayne Chastain. But, like prosecutors, Brown said he had no idea who Green was.

Green, an ex-convict who runs the Doll House topless bar in Jackson, Tenn., contends organized crime figures asked him to kill Ray moments after the assassination, said attorney Larson.

Green knew Ray because

both were incarcerated at the state penitentiary in Jefferson City, Mo., Larson said.

Missouri Department of Corrections records show Green was sentenced to three years in 1965 for auto theft and spent time at the Community Service Unit in Jefferson City. Available records don't show, however, that Green served time at the maximum-security prison where Ray served from 1960 until his 1967 escape, said corrections spokesman John Fougere.

Green, released early, was arrested again on auto theft charges in Memphis in December 1967. Records indicate he remained in federal custody through at least July 1968, which, if true, would make his assassination claim impossible. Detailed records were unavailable Friday from the federal Bureau of Prisons.

Steve Glauber, a senior producer for CBS news in New York, said he was in Memphis this week with Ray's lead defense attorney, William Pepper, filming an assassination anniversary piece to air March 26. Glauber said Pepper had arranged for Green to meet with him, but then learned Green had been arrested.

Campbell said he understood Green was stopped by police because he was staying at a motel that coincidentally happened to be under surveillance by drug enforcement officers. A computer check then turned up the Nevada warrant.

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FBI/DOJ

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# Ray again seeks medical furlough

Only chance to die free may be  
'coming clean' on King killing

By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

James Earl Ray is again seeking a medical furlough, but his chances may hinge on whether he will admit he killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. or continue claiming he was framed. Shelby County prosecutor

John Campbell said Wednesday he has received a series of phone calls from defense attorney William Pepper seeking release from prison for his ailing client.

Ray, 70, who is suffering a terminal liver disease, was in a coma and near death last week but improved and was listed in serious condition Wednesday

in a Nashville hospital.

Ray pleaded guilty in 1969 to shooting King in Memphis. But he recanted shortly thereafter and has sought a trial ever since, claiming he was coerced.

Campbell said he told Pepper "my door is always open" to discuss a possible furlough, but stressed that only the Tennessee Department of Correction has authority to grant one. Correction Commissioner Donal Campbell denied Ray a furlough in December.

The state, however, "may

look at (Ray) a little differently if he just came clean and said, 'I did this,' " Campbell said he told Pepper. "That might be the only option he's got."

Pepper, who lives in Britain, was unavailable for comment, but co-counsel Wayne Chastain said Ray would rather die in prison than accept those terms.

"He's not going to confess to something he didn't do," Chastain said. "Ray has made his position clear."

State law allows furloughs of indeterminate length for in-

mates "in imminent peril of death" so they may spend their final months with loved ones and receive special care.

Ray sought a furlough last fall to live with his brother Jerry in Smartt, Tenn., about 60 miles southeast of Nashville, but his application was rejected.

Ray has survived a doctor's prognosis in early August that he had three to six months to live. Ray has cirrhosis of the

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liver resulting from hepatitis that doctors believe he contracted from a 1981 blood transfusion following a prison stabbing.

Correction spokesman Pam Hobbins said if Pepper wants to try again he will have to file an application with DOC.

Pepper, meanwhile, has been lobbying prosecutors for their support.

Campbell said Pepper at one point indicated Ray would drop any further pursuit of a trial in exchange for a furlough.

Yet, despite published reports, Pepper insisted Wednesday he would continue to

44-1987-C-793

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push for a trial, Campbell said. Defense attorneys will not appeal a recent decision to remove Criminal Court Judge Joe Brown from the case for apparent bias.

The furlough discussions apparently started in February when investigators visited Ray in prison as part of Dist. Atty. Gen. Bill Gibbons's inquiry into lingering conspiracy claims. Chastain said the investigators tried to "trick" Ray into confessing, a contention prosecutors deny.

Campbell noted, however, that Ray was denied parole in 1994 in part because he continued to deny he killed King in 1968.

Ray has maintained since virtually the day of his arrest that he was set up by a shad-

owy drug smuggler he knew only as Raoul. Prosecutors counter that evidence against Ray is overwhelming.

Ray's fingerprints were found on the murder rifle a block from the Lorraine Motel, where King was shot April 4, 1968, while standing on the balcony. Ray fled the country after the murder, and there is evidence he had stalked the civil rights leader through Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee.

Avoiding a trial and a possible death sentence, Ray signed a detailed guilty plea admitting to numerous state contentions, including he had shot King.

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*Call reporter Marc Perrusquia at 529-2545 or E-mail [perrusquia@gomemphis.com](mailto:perrusquia@gomemphis.com)*

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# Gibbons clarifies his stance on Ray furlough

By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

Dist. Atty. Gen. Bill Gibbons clarified his stance Friday on a possible furlough for James Earl Ray: He does not support Ray's release, but might not "actively" oppose it if Ray would admit killing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"We're dealing with a person who is guilty, who has shown no remorse and who's engaging in a con game," Gibbons said. "If he would show the remorse he ought to show, I would not actively oppose (a furlough), possibly."

In a letter last fall to the Tennessee Department of Correction, Gibbons opposed a medical furlough for Ray, who has cirrhosis of the liver. In December, DOC Commissioner Donal Campbell rejected Ray's request to spend his final days with his brother, Jerry Ray.

Prosecutors disclosed this week that Ray's attorney, William Pepper, has been seeking their support for a furlough.

Ray, 70, lapsed into a brief coma last week at a Nashville hospital, but his condition has improved. He was discharged Friday and returned to a prison medical facility.

Ray so far has survived a doctor's early-August prognosis that he had three to six months to live. Tennessee law allows furloughs of indeterminate length for inmates in "imminent peril" of death to spend time with loved ones and receive special care.

King's son, Dexter, told an Atlanta newspaper in comments published Friday that he considers it "cruel and unusual punishment" for Tennessee to keep Ray in prison.

"The family of the victim has said we support him having the opportunity to receive humanitarian treatment," King told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Ray pleaded guilty in 1969 to King's murder, but now claims he was coerced and framed.

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# Ex-agent didn't search Ray car, records show

By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

FBI records fail to support a former agent's claim that he found evidence in James Earl Ray's car in 1968 indicating Ray was framed for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s murder.

Former FBI agent Donald Wilson met with prosecutors Tuesday in Atlanta, where he told reporters he found two slips of paper in Ray's car listing names and dollar amounts supposedly related to a conspiracy.

Wilson, who says he was one of two agents who impounded Ray's car in Atlanta days after the assassination, said he kept the documents and didn't disclose them to supervisors because he didn't trust them.

"That's laughable," said retired FBI agent Jack T. Beverstein, 73, who helped search Ray's abandoned white Ford Mustang in Atlanta seven days after King was shot April 4, 1968, in Memphis.

FBI reports examined Tuesday by The Commercial Appeal show Beverstein and four other agents participated in the April 11, 1968, search of Ray's car.

Wilson is not mentioned in reports documenting the discovery, impoundment or search of Ray's car.

"There was no Don Wilson that I heard of," said retired agent Carl E. Claiborne, 81, who headed the search of Ray's car.

FBI reports show special agent James Joseph Dolan accompanied a Reid's Body Shop wrecker that towed the abandoned Mustang from a parking lot at Atlanta's Capitol Homes public housing development. The car was taken to the FBI garage in downtown Atlanta, where it was examined by agents Beverstein, Claiborne, Jack B. Simpson, Richard H. Davis, and Alden F. Miller.

Claiborne said Tuesday from his Knoxville home the examination occurred over five hours in a locked basement and that only he and Miller inspected the car's interior and trunk. He distinctly remembered each of

the other agents named in the report. Claiborne and Beverstein, of Valdosta, Ga., had no recollection of Wilson.

Evidence from the car — hair specimens, fibers, clothing, bed linens and soil scrapings from below the car — was delivered by agents Miller and Simpson the day after the examination to the FBI's crime lab in Washington, reports show.

Unrelated to the car search, FBI reports show that agent Donald G. Wilson helped examine copies of money orders cashed in Atlanta on April 11 and 12, 1968, in an effort to locate King's assassin.

Ray, 70, pleaded guilty to King's murder in 1969 but claims he was coerced and framed. Serving a 99-year sentence, Ray has a terminal liver disease and is seeking release through trial or medical furlough.

Wilson, accompanied Tuesday in Atlanta by Ray's lawyer, William Pepper, met with Fulton County Dist. Atty. Paul Howard, who said he lacked the resources and time to investigate, but plans to share the information with U.S. Atty. Gen. Janet Reno.

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Wilson said he has two slips of paper locked in a vault near his Chicago-area home that he took from Ray's Mustang when it was impounded in Atlanta.

One slip lists names, locations and figures that appear to be dollar amounts, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution said Tuesday, announcing Wilson's claims and the pending meeting with Howard. The slip also lists a name that appears to be 'Raul,' the newspaper reported.

Ray has long contended he was framed a mysterious figure he knew only as Raoul.

The Atlanta newspaper also said the slips list a phone number that "appears to refer to Jack Ruby," who was convicted of killing Lee Harvey Oswald, the suspected assassin of President John F. Kennedy in 1963.

"I'm here only on behalf of the King family," Wilson told reporters.

To reach reporter Marc Perrusquia call 529-2545 or E-mail perrusquia@gomemphis.com

MEDIA REP.

FBI/DOJ

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

# **James Earl Ray is conscious, no longer in coma**

James Earl Ray snapped out of a two-day coma Friday but remained in critical condition in a Nashville hospital.

"He does recognize people and where he is," said Tennessee Department of Correction spokesman Pam Hobbins.

Ray, 70, confessed assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., is battling cirrhosis of the liver. He's been admitted to Columbia Nashville Memorial Hospital at least 14 times since 1996 and has lapsed into unconscious states on at least three occasions. In early August, a doctor said that he had three to six months to live.

Ray is serving a 99-year sentence for King's 1968 murder in Memphis.

*More Domestic*

Date: 3-14-98

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MEDIA REP. 



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## Ray applies for early release

James Earl Ray filed a clemency application Wednesday seeking early release from his 99-year sentence for killing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr..

The application, which asks for a commutation of sentence, was filed by attorney Andrew Hall, said Department of Correction spokesman Pam Hobbins. The Tennessee Board of Paroles is expected to review the application in the coming weeks and make a recommendation to Gov. Don Sundquist.

Hall, who was unavailable Wednesday, had said he planned to file an application on grounds Ray is suffering a life-threatening illness.

Ray, 70, has a terminal liver disease and was in a coma earlier this month. He pleaded guilty in 1969 to King's murder in Memphis, but claims he was coerced and framed.

Ray's attorneys also have said they may seek a medical furlough, which, if granted, would allow him to spend his final days with his family.

—Marc Perrusquia

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

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(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

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By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

NEW ORLEANS - James Earl Ray launched his 29-year bid to rewrite history and get out of prison here in Lafayette Square, under towering magnolias and twisting pin oaks.

Just days after pleading guilty in Memphis to assassinating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Ray sent his brother, Jerry Ray, to the Crescent City in search of a conservative lawyer who could reverse his plea and get him a trial.

But Jerry was talking about more than that — namely that there had been a plot to kill King.

"There was definitely a conspiracy," Jerry Ray said in a March 1969 meeting with conservative publisher Kent Courtney.

A tape recording of their conversation is under a congressional seal in the National Archives until 2029, but The Commercial Appeal recently obtained a copy.

Ray, speaking in excited spurts on the tape, asks Courtney what good it would do James Ray "to tell on this person or persons? He still would be charged with the crime any-

way. They'd sentence him to life or 99 years or whatever even if the other guy did pull the trigger."

Jerry Ray may or may not have known anything about a plot, but the incident now is considered one of many early chances authorities missed to clear up questions about King's murder.

Courtney went to the FBI, but the bureau decided not to put a wire on him to find out what more Jerry Ray knew.

Had the FBI been more aggressive, many of the myths and conspiracy theories that have snowballed through the years might have been avoided, say historians and authorities familiar with the case.

Instead, as the 30th anniversary of King's death approaches, Dist. Atty. Gen. Bill Gibbons is completing his own investigation into renewed conspiracy claims.

Gibbons is expected to dispel claims advanced by Ray's attorney, William Pepper, that a former Memphis cafe owner and a New York wine importer were involved in a plot to kill King.

Ray, 70, claims he was an innocent dupe, coerced into pleading guilty and set up by a mysterious figure he knew only as Raoul. Ray has sought to overturn his guilty plea in court seven times over the years and lost each attempt. An eighth effort is pending.

Gibbons's inquiry, the third major official investigation into the assassination in three decades, is expected to reach the same conclusion the FBI and Shelby County prosecutors reached in 1968-69 — that James Earl Ray killed King.

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The Kings support James Ray's claim of innocence, and Jerry said he has encouraged them to find the real perpetrators behind the 30-year old crime.

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In a February letter to civil rights historian David J. Garrow, taunting him as a "Govt. Pimp," Jerry Ray wrote:

"I have a lot of respect & love for the King family."

Why the FBI did not pursue a possible conspiracy more aggressively remains a question for history.

Although HSCA found that neither the FBI, Memphis police nor any other government agency was involved in the assassination, some credit Hoover's widely reported animosity toward King as reason a conspiracy investigation was not pursued more intensely.

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It's also apparent, however, that HSCA investigated the King murder in a far different mood than the FBI had a decade earlier. In the intervening years, the country had been through Watergate, and mistrust of government was at a high.

"When we worked this case (in 1968), I would have almost took a swing at anybody who would have challenged the integrity of the FBI," said former Ray prosecutor James C. Beasley.

Beasley, 72 and fellow prosecutor Robert K. Dwyer, 74, say they remain convinced Ray acted alone when he shot King with a high-powered rifle April 4, 1968.

Beasley and Dwyer said the FBI helped but did not interfere when prosecutors conducted their own probe preparing for trial.

But Conrad 'Pete' Baetz, 51, a career law enforcement officer who served as an HSCA investigator, contends that if there was a conspiracy it was among the Ray family, and the plot could only have been cracked by aggressive inquiry in 1968.

"If there had been anyone else involved but his family, he would have given them up in a minute," Baetz said of James Ray.

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"They got their man," said Edward Evans, 66, a former New York City homicide detective who served as HSCA's chief investigator in the King case. "(FBI Director J. Edgar) Hoover was not really interested in doing anything more on that case."

HSCA concluded the bureau improperly absolved some well-known racists when it was shown they were not at the crime scene. The committee noted that absence from the crime scene did not preclude possible behind-the-scenes roles.

More importantly, the bureau ignored leads involving Ray's brothers despite statements by Jerry and John Ray hinting they knew more about the assassination.

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In another passage, Ray said: "It was my stupidity which got me in this."

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"Well, let's put it this way: I wasn't in it by myself, and that is all he would say to me," DeMere testified before Congress in 1978.

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Adopting an FBI theory, the House Select Committee on Assassinations asserted Ray's money could have come from an unsolved \$27,000 bank robbery in July 1967 in Alton, Ill., where Ray grew up.

HSCA investigators also discovered that Ray's brother John, a convicted bank robber, was writing a number of checks for cash that could have been funneled to the fugitive. John Ray denied the assertions.

### ■ Birmingham link

After spending the summer of 1967 in Canada, Ray relocated to Birmingham, which he had passed through once before in the 1950s. At the time, Birmingham was a hotbed of racial violence and Klan activity and the site of some 40 unsolved bombings.

After King's murder, Ray received legal assistance from former Birmingham mayor Arthur Hanes Sr., who had represented Ku Klux Klan members in criminal cases, and J. B. Stoner, who was later convicted of bombing a Birmingham church.

Investigators never established any links between Ray and the attorneys prior to the assassination.

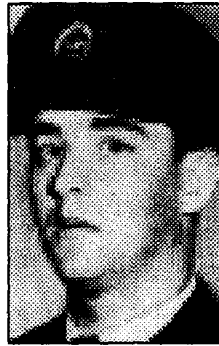
## The **ALIAS MYSTERY**



Paul Bridgman



Eric St.  
Vincent Galt



Ramon George  
Sneyd



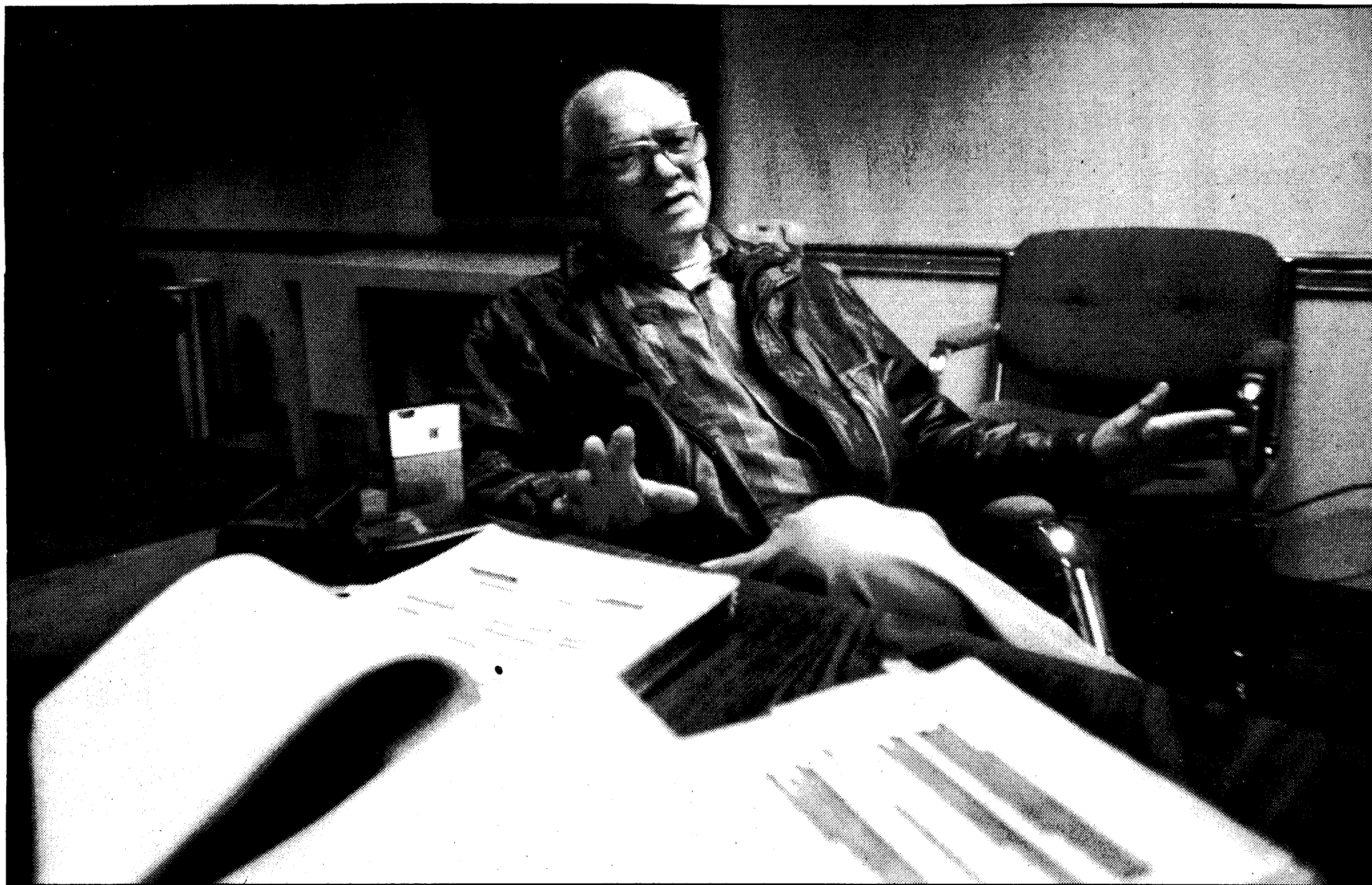
James Earl Ray

One of the more puzzling aspects of the King assassination involves the aliases James Earl Ray used as a fugitive before and after the murder. Ray appropriated the names of four Canadian citizens living within a few miles of each other in the Toronto area. One, John Willard, was the name Ray gave when checking into the South Main boarding house the day of the assassination. Three others, all living in the Toronto suburb of Scarborough, particularly troubled government investigators because they bore a general physical resemblance to Ray. One of them, Eric St. Vincent Galt, had scars on his face similar to Ray's. Prior to 1966, Galt signed his name as Eric St.V. Galt, using looping circles as periods to abbreviate St. Vincent. Investigators believe Ray misread the periods as the letters 'a' and 'o,' adopting the identity Eric Starvo Galt, his primary alias before the assassination. Although Ray could have purchased the names from a criminal alias ring unconnected to the assassination, he has remained evasive about their origin. He told congressional investigators he got the Galt name from a Chicago phone book. "There's no closure on that," says Edward Evans, former chief investigator in a congressional inquiry in 1977-78.

(The signature of Eric St. V. Galt, which investigators believe Ray misread as Eric Starvo Galt)

Source: U.S. House of Representatives' Select Committee on Assassinations, interviews.





By Marc Perrusquia

Jerry Ray, brother of confessed assassin James Earl Ray, with copies of the files the FBI kept about him in relation to the April 4, 1968, assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis. Ray was photographed in February near his home in Smartt, Tenn.

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(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

# Prosecutors' unshaken opinion: Ray killed King

By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

James Earl Ray claims he was framed, but prosecutors who put him in prison say there's no question he shot Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"We had a damn good case," said Robert K. Dwyer, 74, the lead prosecutor in 1969 when Ray pleaded guilty. "We wouldn't have had any trouble at all proving Ray guilty of killing King. None."

Ray never had a trial, stirring skepticism through the years about official explanations of King's assassination. Serving a 99-year sentence, Ray, 70, claims he was an innocent dupe set up by a mysterious figure he knew only as Raoul.

Ray's claims drew wide attention last year when King's family said they believed he was innocent.

Less attention has been given to the large body of evidence against Ray.

"Ray wanted to be Mr. Big," said former prosecutor James C. Beasley, 72, explaining why he believes Ray shot King. "That was always our theory. He wanted to be The Man."

Here is a summary of the case against Ray:

## ■ Stalking King

Eighteen days before the assassination, Ray, a Missouri prison escapee, relocated from Los Angeles to Atlanta, King's hometown. The FBI found an Atlanta map in Ray's apartment with circles drawn around the vicinities of King's home and office. Ray spent the night of March 22, 1968, in a motel in Selma, Ala., as King conducted business nearby.

Ray, who said he had passed through Memphis once before

in the 1950s, checked into a Memphis motel April 3, 1968, the day before King's murder.

Ray says Raoul directed him to Atlanta and Memphis. He said he spent a night in Selma because he "got lost."

## ■ The rifle

Ray bought a .30-06 Remington Gamemaster hunting rifle and Redfield telescopic scope for \$248 in Birmingham five days before the assassination. Moments after King was shot, that rifle was found on a sidewalk near the murder scene; Ray's fingerprints were on the scope and rifle.

Ray says Raoul gave him money to buy the rifle, to be used as a sample in a deal with gunrunners they were meeting in Memphis. Ray claims Raoul used him in drug-smuggling and other illegal activities before Memphis.

## ■ The boarding house

About three hours before King was shot, Ray checked in at Bessie Brewer's second-story boarding house on South Main. Witnesses said they heard the sound of furniture moving around in Ray's room. After the shooting, police found a chair by an open window where a dresser had been previously.

Ray says Raoul told him to check into the roominghouse, where they would meet the gunrunners.

## ■ Binoculars

Two hours before the shooting, Ray bought a pair of binoculars at York Arms sporting goods on South Main.

Ray says Raoul told him to buy a pair of night-vision infrared glasses to sell to the gunrunners, but the store didn't have any, so he bought regular

field glasses.

## ■ The bundle

Ray's rifle was found in a recessed doorway on South Main wrapped in a bedspread. The bundle contained a number of other items bearing Ray's fingerprints, including a shaving bag, a newspaper and unopened cans of beer. Also in the bundle: a transistor radio Ray bought in prison, still bearing Ray's Missouri inmate number.

Witnesses inside a nearby store said they heard a "thud," then saw a white Ford Mustang pull away from the curb, its tires "burning rubber."

Ray claims the evidence was planted.

Current prosecutor John Campbell contends a planted rifle is impossible because it would have to involve several conspirators.

Test-firings by the FBI, Congress and Ray's defense all showed that the bullet taken from King's body could have come from the evidence rifle, but there was no conclusive match.

Firearms examiners say there is nothing unusual here; some guns leave inconsistent markings on bullets.

Whoever planted the rifle would have had to know beforehand that it could not be excluded as the evidence rifle, Campbell said.

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■ **Ray's flight**

Ray drove to Atlanta, where he abandoned his Mustang, then fled to Canada. From there he caught a plane to London, where he was arrested two months after the murder.

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HSCA investigators also discovered that Ray's brother John, a convicted bank robber, was writing a number of checks for cash that could have been funneled to the fugitive. John Ray denied the assertions.

### ■ Birmingham link

After spending the summer of 1967 in Canada, Ray relocated to Birmingham, which he had passed through once before in the 1950s. At the time, Birmingham was a hotbed of racial violence and Klan activity and the site of some 40 unsolved bombings.

After King's murder, Ray received legal assistance from former Birmingham mayor Arthur Hanes Sr., who had represented Ku Klux Klan members in criminal cases, and J. B. Stoner, who was later convicted of bombing a Birmingham church.

Investigators never established any links between Ray and the attorneys prior to the assassination.

## The **ALIAS MYSTERY**



Paul Bridgman



Eric St.  
Vincent Galt



Ramon George  
Sneyd

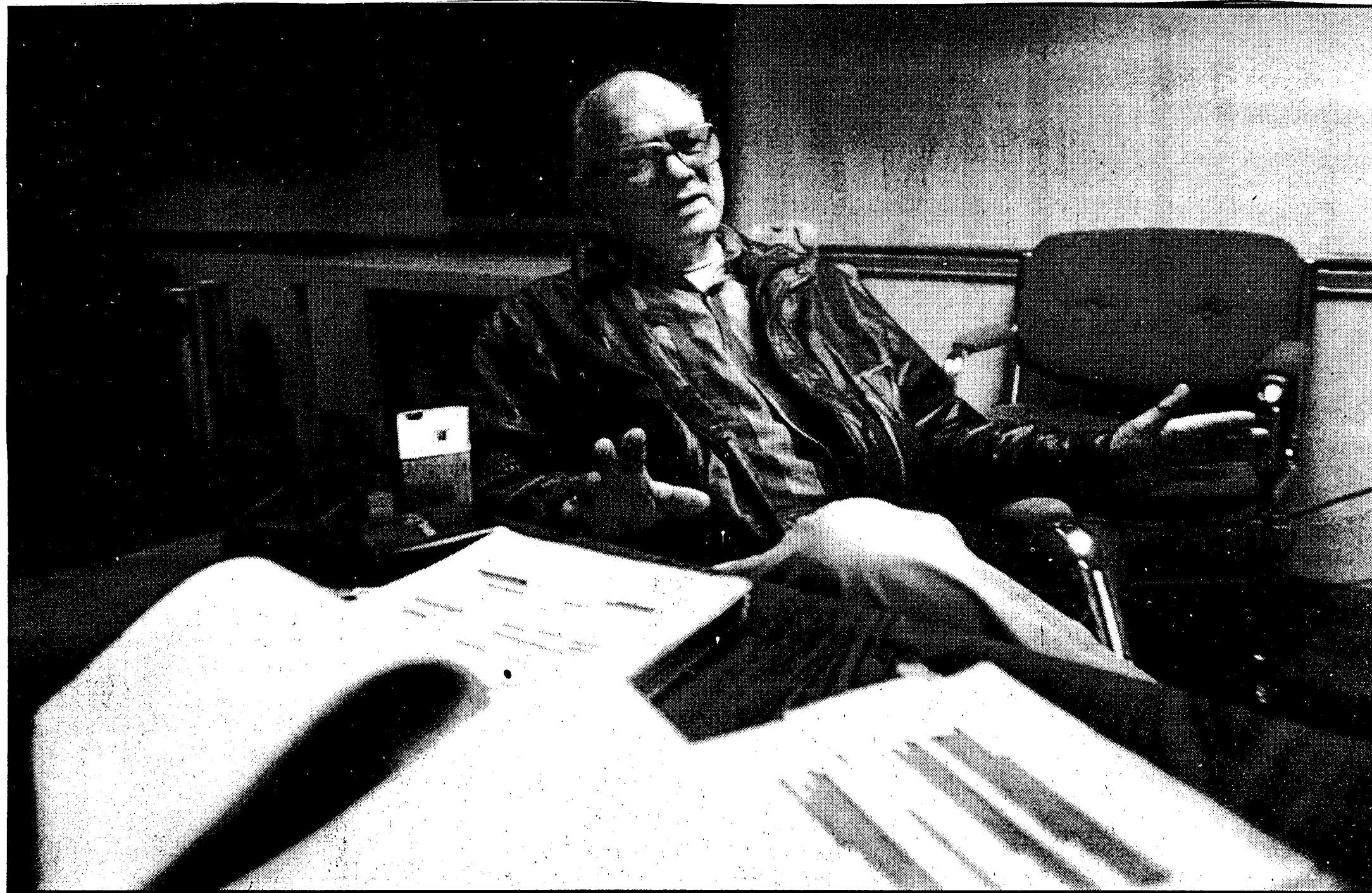


James Earl Ray

One of the more puzzling aspects of the King assassination involves the aliases James Earl Ray used as a fugitive before and after the murder. Ray appropriated the names of four Canadian citizens living within a few miles of each other in the Toronto area. One, John Willard, was the name Ray gave when checking into the South Main boarding house the day of the assassination. Three others, all living in the Toronto suburb of Scarborough, particularly troubled government investigators because they bore a general physical resemblance to Ray. One of them, Eric St. Vincent Galt, had scars on his face similar to Ray's. Prior to 1966, Galt signed his name as Eric St. V. Galt, using looping circles as periods to abbreviate St. Vincent. Investigators believe Ray misread the periods as the letters 'a' and 'o,' adopting the identity Eric Starvo Galt, his primary alias before the assassination. Although Ray could have purchased the names from a criminal alias ring unconnected to the assassination, he has remained evasive about their origin. He told congressional investigators he got the Galt name from a Chicago phone book. "There's no closure on that," says Edward Evans, former chief investigator in a congressional inquiry in 1977-78.

(The signature of Eric St. V. Galt, which investigators believe Ray misread as Eric Starvo Galt)

Source: U.S. House of Representatives' Select Committee on Assassinations, interviews.



By Marc Perrusqu

Jerry Ray, brother of confessed assassin James Earl Ray, with copies of the files the FBI kept about him in relation to the April 1968, assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis. Ray was photographed in February near his home in Smartt, Tenn.

*“It was really quite remarkable that (the FBI) didn’t pursue the brothers’ activity more than they did . . . I truly regard (King’s murder) in some ways as the crime of the century.” — Michael C. Eberhardt*



(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

# Brown ousted from Ray case; court says acts point to 'bias'

By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

An appeals panel removed Criminal Court Judge Joe Brown from the James Earl Ray case on Friday, saying Brown has "demonstrated the appearance of bias" in overseeing Ray's claims that he was framed for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1968 murder.

In a rare ruling, the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals ordered that Brown "is prohibited from participating in any further proceedings regarding

James Earl Ray." The ruling cited numerous statements by Brown that alleged political motives by prosecutors and seemed to favor Ray's efforts to get out of prison.

The three-member appeals panel ordered the Ray case to be reassigned by Shelby County presiding Judge Robert L. Childers to another criminal court judge.

Brown, 50, a Criminal Court judge since 1990, was unavailable for comment on the ruling issued late Friday afternoon.

"They had no grounds to remove him," said Ray attorney

Wayne Chastain, who opposed the state's efforts to replace Brown. Chastain said he will consider an appeal to the state Supreme Court but conceded it may "be futile."

Dist. Atty. Gen. Bill Gibbons said he believes "the Court of Appeals made the right decision, and we're very pleased with it."

Prosecutors and Brown have engaged in a series of public duels since King's family last year said they supported a trial for Ray, 69, who is serving a 99-year sentence. Ray pleaded guilty in 1969, but claims he

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801

Indexing:



was coerced despite evidence that prosecutors say is overwhelming.

Brown allowed Ray's defense last May to test-fire the Remington hunting rifle that was found April 4, 1968, with Ray's fingerprints on it about a block from where King was shot. Like previous tests by the FBI and Congress, results were inconclusive, although firearms examiners said the bullet that killed King came from that type of gun.

The controversy grew heated when Brown entertained defense motions to test the gun a

second time.

Prosecutors complained that Brown seemed to favor Ray's



Joe Brown

defense in aggressively interrogating witnesses during hearings, giving media interviews and by secreting documents in his office.

At the state's urging, the appeals court ruled in August that Brown had overstepped his powers by engaging in "a fact-finding mission" instead of maintaining judicial impartiality. Days later, prosecutors moved that Brown recuse himself, but Brown did not act for months.

Finally, on Jan. 16, Brown denied the motion that he step down and ordered new tests on the rifle. Prosecutors went back to the appeals court, which in February halted any more tests.

Friday's ruling says the prosecution "is to be afforded a hearing regarding retesting of the rifle" when the case is handed to a new judge.

In removing Brown from the

case, the higher court found he had exhibited an appearance of bias on at least five occasions, including several statements that prosecutors were motivated by politics in their dispute with him.

Among examples, the court cited a January *Prime Time Justice* television interview in which Brown said "a lot of the shenanigans" in the Ray case were due to "local politics and power plays... specifically involving a political action committee that is operating in the Attorney General's Office."

Brown made similar comments in his January ruling, suggesting prosecutors were gearing up for the county's first-ever partisan judicial races planned for this year but since rescinded.

"Judge Joseph B. Brown Jr. has demonstrated in his orders, in open court, and in a television broadcast, the appearance of bias against the district attorney general and members of his staff," the appeals court ruled.

"Of equal and grave concern

are the written findings by the trial court concerning matters of local politics," the appellate justices wrote. "A judge must consider only the evidence presented."

The court also found that Brown continued to exceed his authority by engaging in a fact-finding mission.

Chastain countered that Brown has not prejudged the merits of the case, and if he has exhibited a bias, it has only been in response to the "outrageous" behavior demonstrated by prosecutors who fought vigorously to keep the rifle from being tested.

Childers said late Friday he was unaware of the appeals court ruling, but will get a copy and review it.

Brown has contended the prosecutors are trying to discredit him, a claim Gibbons declined to respond to.

"All we ever wanted was a fair hearing," Gibbons said.

Call reporter Marc Perrusquia at 529-2545 or E-mail [perrusquia@gomemphis.com](mailto:perrusquia@gomemphis.com)

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

## Defense asks to keep Brown on Ray case

Defense attorneys Tuesday asked an appeals court to allow Criminal Court Judge Joe Brown to remain on the James Earl Ray case.

Prosecutors last month asked the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals to remove Brown, claiming he has shown bias in hearing Ray's claims that he was framed for the 1968 murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis.

Defense attorneys Wayne Chastain and William Pepper said in their response that Brown has made "an honest, unprejudiced, unbiased effort."

A decision on Brown's possible removal is expected in the next few days.

Brown allowed Ray's defense to test-fire the rifle prosecutors say Ray used to shoot King, but results last July were inconclusive in establishing or excluding it as the murder weapon. The controversy extended over several months as Brown considered allowing additional tests.

Ray, 69, pleaded guilty in 1969, but claims he was coerced.

Ray's health, meanwhile, is weakening. Ray was downgraded Tuesday to critical condition at Columbia Nashville Memorial Hospital, where he underwent a hernia operation last week.

Ray has been in and out of the hospital several times during the past year since being diagnosed with terminal liver disease.

—Marc Perrusquia

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

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Edition: *The Commercial Appeal*

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Indexing:

MEDIA REP. *AK*

FBI/DOJ



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# Reno, King to confer on probe

By James W. Brosnan  
The Commercial Appeal  
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Atty. Gen. Janet Reno will meet with Coretta Scott King, probably this week, to hear her plea for a new federal commission to investigate the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

But the Shelby County District Attorney's Office is advising the Justice Department that a new commission is unnecessary.

Last week, Mrs. King called for the new investigation, saying she did not believe James

Earl Ray acted alone and that he might not have been involved in the slaying of her husband on April 4, 1968, in Memphis. She blamed unidentified conspirators.

President Clinton called Mrs. King Monday morning and Reno followed with her own call.

"They had a nice chat and are working to set up a meeting this week," said Justice Department spokesman Bert Brandenburg.

White House spokesman Mike McCurry acknowledged that the administration previously considered the investigation to be a local matter.

"However, given the Presi-

dent's respect for Mrs. King, given his concern about her strong argument, he felt it appropriate for the attorney general to hear that argument," said McCurry.

Shelby County Asst. Dist. Atty. Lee Coffee said he told a Justice Department investigator Friday that, "There are no facts that would justify another commission to investigate the King killing again."

After a seven-month investigation, Shelby County Dist. Atty. Gen. Bill Gibbons recently dismissed claims that Ray did not kill King. The King family has spurned his offers to review the findings.

"Their heart is in the right

place. But they're totally, abysmally misinformed," Coffee said.

Coffee said he talked with an investigator in the Justice Department's internal affairs division about claims by a former FBI agent, Donald Wilson, that he found papers in Ray's car referring to the mysterious "Raoul," who Ray claims masterminded the King assassination. FBI officials have said Wilson did not search Ray's car.

Call reporter James W. Brosnan at (202) 408-2701 or E-mail brosnanJ@shns.com.

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

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Edition:

4/7/98  
COMMERCIAL APPEAL

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803

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# FBI FACSIMILE COVERSHEET

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# No King plot, Shelby DA rules in report

7-month probe  
points only to Ray

By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

A report to be released today concludes there is no credible evidence that a Memphis cafe owner and a New York wine importer were involved in a plot to assassinate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Dist. Atty. Gen. Bill Gibbons's seven-month probe into lingering conspiracy claims has found, like past investigations, that confessed assassin James Earl Ray shot King with a high-powered rifle April 4, 1968, in Memphis.

The 12-page report obtained Thursday by The Commercial Appeal does not rule out the possibility that Ray received some assistance from his brothers, John and Jerry, yet finds there is no evidence warranting charges against anyone but James Earl Ray for King's murder.

"The District Attorney's Office remains absolutely convinced of James Earl Ray's guilt in the murder of Dr. King," Gibbons said in a cover letter dated for release this morning and posted on his Internet Web site late Thursday.

"The evidence against him is overwhelming. . . . There is simply no credible evidence to support a new trial for Mr. Ray."

Gibbons's letter also urges Congress to unseal records of its 1977-78 investigation into King's murder.

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Indexing:

Ray, 70, pleaded guilty in 1969 but has contended for years he was coerced and framed by a mysterious figure he knew only as Raoul.

Teetering near death with advanced liver disease, Ray has attracted support from King's family, who say they believe Ray is innocent and should be granted a trial.

In response, Gibbons appointed a four-man task force, with representatives from the Memphis Police Department, Shelby County Sheriff's Office, Tennessee Bureau of Investigation and his office, to investigate new claims of conspiracy.

Among their findings:

■ Claims by former Memphis cafe owner Loyd Jowers that he was involved in a plot to kill King appear to have been motivated by a desire to make money.

Jowers, 71, gained attention in a nationally televised 1993 interview in which he claimed he received \$100,000 to arrange King's murder. Jowers's story gave pause to some because in 1968 he owned a cafe that overlooked the Lorraine Motel, where King was shot while he stood on the balcony.

Jowers stirred concerns again last fall when he met with King's son, Dexter, and told of a plot that Memphis police supposedly hatched in his cafe.

Gibbons's investigators interviewed six people who were in Jowers's cafe the day of the assassination and spoke with members of Jowers's family, the report said.

Ray's attorney, William Pepper, contends Jowers "came forward because he felt the noose tightening around his neck due to the efforts of private investigators hired by Pepper," the report states. "A look at the facts, however, shows that Loyd Jowers was, and is, taking a very active role in getting people to make statements that implicate him."

Gibbons's report cites a statement by Prentis B. Purdy, who was in the cafe the day of the assassination. Purdy said Jowers contacted him in 1993, after not seeing him since 1975, and asked Purdy to cooperate with Pepper's investigators.

Jowers "told him there was money to be made if he cooperated," the district attorney's report says.

A former waitress who supported Jowers's contention was paid \$600 by Pepper's investigators, and her sisters received another \$300, the report says.

Pepper and Jowers's attorney, Lewis Garrison, could not be reached Thursday, despite calls to their homes and offices.

Investigators did not speak with Jowers because they could not without his attorney's consent, the report said. Garrison has said Jowers will speak only if granted immunity, but prosecutors ordinarily "do not grant immunity in crimes of violence," the Gibbons report says.

■ A 63-year-old New York man whom Ray recently identified as the mysterious Raoul "had nothing to do with the assassination of Dr. King."

The man, an auto factory worker and wine importer who emigrated from Portugal in the early 1960s, was sued in 1994 by Pepper for alleged false imprisonment of Ray.

Gibbons's task force took detailed statements from the man, his relatives and associates and checked his work and financial records going back 30 years, the report says.

Investigators also took the man's fingerprints and compared them against prints on file in the King case, all with negative results.

■ There is no evidence supporting claims by James C. Green, 51, of Springville, Tenn., that he was hired to kill Ray on the day of the assassination.

Records indicate Green was in federal prison that day. The report notes that Congress took testimony from Green in executive session in 1978 but concluded he "was not credible."

Gibbons's report also says that, despite lingering questions, charges are not warranted against Ray's brothers, Jerry William Ray, 62, of Smartt, Tenn., and John Larry Ray, 65, of St. Louis.

The House Select Committee on Assassinations accused the Ray brothers in hearings in 1978 of being possible accessories or co-conspirators in King's murder. The congressional committee developed evidence that the brothers probably assisted Ray financially before and after King's murder, but Gibbons's report says Tennessee law in effect in 1968 would not allow them to be prosecuted for assisting him after the assassination.

"Only if the brothers had advance knowledge and aided in the murder would they be subject to prosecution as principals in the crime," the report says. "Such evidence does not exist at this time."

Congress also theorized that Ray may have been motivated by a \$50,000 bounty offered by two now deceased St. Louis businessmen. Gibbons says in his cover letter that his investigation did not examine the activities of people now deceased.

The report devotes two pages to summarizing the evidence against Ray, which includes his fingerprints on the murder rifle and a pair of binoculars.

"Barring further credible information which could lead to the indictment of someone in addition to Mr. Ray, the District Attorney's Office considers the investigation closed," Gibbons says.

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FBI FACSIMILE  
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Tribune  
Chicago, IL

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# Ray death could give new life to papers

Former FBI agent  
says they might have  
clues to King slaying

By Douglas Holt  
Times Staff Writer

Shredded in plastic, the yellowed, ink-stained slips of paper sit in a north suburban bank vault.

Their owner, former FBI agent Donald G. Wilson, 55, stepped forward last month saying the papers came from the car of James Earl Ray, the convicted killer of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Ray died of liver failure Thursday.

Wilson, who now runs Andon Music Performance Corp. in Buffalo Grove, said he found the papers in Atlanta in Ray's abandoned car days after King's 1968 assassination in Memphis. He said he concealed them out of fear he would be punished for disturbing a crime scene. After Ray confessed, Wilson said, he figured the case was closed.

But when he saw Coretta Scott King on TV last year pleading for information to spur a trial for Ray, Wilson said, he called the Kings to reveal what he says he found.

"The King family wants to know the truth," Wilson said. "I thought I might be able to help."

The papers bear the handwritten name "Raul," the name of a supposed gunrunner Ray blamed for a plot to kill King. And they include a telephone number that once rang a Dallas

nightclub owned by Jack Ruby, the man who killed Lee Harvey Oswald, President John F. Kennedy's assassin.

If authentic, they suggest a link between the assassinations of King and Kennedy. If not, as the FBI insists, they illustrate how far conspiracy theorists will go to perpetuate a hoax.

Conservatively dressed, his reddish hair tinged gray, Wilson said his purported evidence does not support the theory, espoused by the King family, that Ray was innocent. But he added: "It gives a degree of credibility to his story about the existence of this mystery character Raul."

Yet when Wilson announced last month that he had evidence relating to one of the most notorious political assassinations of the 20th Century, an FBI spokesman quickly derided his story as "a total fabrication." And in Memphis, Assistant District Atty. Lee Coffee said Wilson's documents appear a concoction of Ray's attorney, William F. Pepper.

In a pique after such attacks, Wilson retracted an offer to hand the documents over to U.S. Atty. Gen. Janet Reno. Still, when Mrs. King met with Reno earlier this month to plead for a new investigation of the murder, she urged an examination of Wilson's claims.

Wilson's tale begins on April 11, 1968, a week after King's death. Then 25, fresh out of FBI training and stationed in Atlanta, Wilson said he tagged along with another

FBI agent to Atlanta's Capital Homes housing project, where Ray's Mustang had been found.

While the other FBI agent talked with a police officer, Wilson said he noticed the Mustang's passenger door ajar. He pulled out a handkerchief, he said, opened the door and saw a small white envelope fall out.

Wilson said he reacted with "instant panic." A misstep in a major case, Wilson said he thought, could have brought the wrath of the FBI's powerful director, J. Edgar Hoover.

"Taking that split-second action had nothing to do with grand or noble reasons," he said. "This gets to the basic philosophy of the FBI: Everything was predicated on fear. Fear of Mr. Hoover."

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Wilson said he stepped on the envelope, reached down and slipped it into his pocket.

In a conference room at the bank where Wilson stores the documents and serves as an advisory board member, Wilson gingerly laid out the slips of paper allegedly from Ray's car.

One is a partial page from a 1968 Dallas telephone book. In the top margin, someone wrote, "Raul 214." To the left is an old-style telephone number, LA 8-4775, preceded by the letter J. The number once belonged to the Vegas Club,

owned by Ruby, but the club had been closed for two years when King was killed.

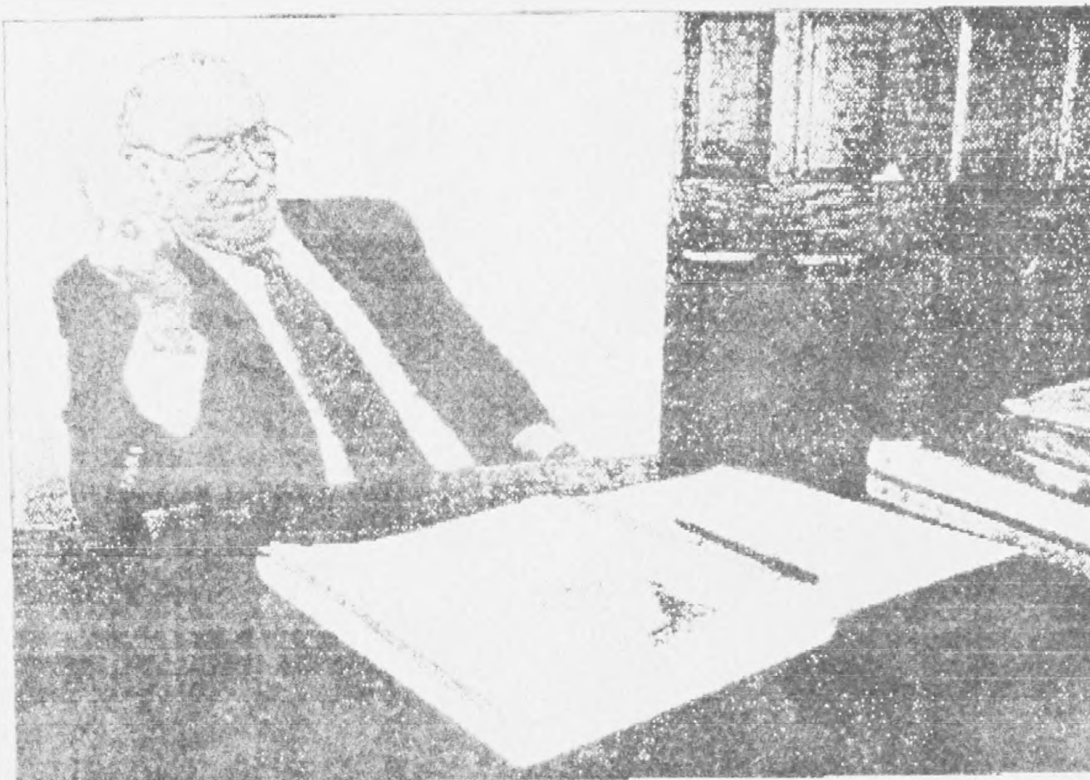
The torn page lists Hunts in Dallas, including Hunt Oil Corp, a name with its place in Kennedy legend. Oil magnate H.L. Hunt, who died in 1954, promoted a right-wing radio program in Kennedy's day, and a son, Nelson Bunker Hunt, helped fund an anti-Kennedy newspaper ad that ran the day Kennedy was killed. In 1977, the House investigated a letter purportedly written by Oswald to a "Mr. Hunt."

The second is a faint, handwritten list of five words or names followed by figures ranging from 15,000 to 175,000. There is a second, cryptic mention of Raoul. One word on the slip is "Canada," where Ray stopped before his arrest in London two months after the shooting.

The envelope also contained cards for a Texas gun shop and a Louisiana towing company, Wilson said.

The connections strike some as all too neat. Doubters include Gerald Posner, author of "Killing the Dream," a new book that deflates conspiracy theories surrounding King's death.

Ray's lawyer, Posner said, "has been trying hard to tie the King case to the Kennedy case."



Tribune photo by Bob Langer

Former FBI Agent Donald Wilson displays two papers he says he took from James Earl Ray's abandoned car in Atlanta in 1968.

Still, Posner rejects the FBI's quick dismissal of the documents without their examination.

To others, Wilson's story stokes suspicions that, as the House Select Committee on Assassinations concluded in 1979, King's death "probably" evolved from a conspiracy.

Rev. Jesse Jackson said he believes Ray was guilty. He also

thinks the murder had some tie to the government, which through the FBI sought to discredit King.

"It took 27 years to get [South African President Nelson] Mandela out of jail," Jackson said. "The next 30 years later, and the unanswered questions about Dr. King's assassination will not go away."

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

# An unfinished journey

■ A lack of closure hangs over the mission Dr. King set for himself and for us, just as it does over details of his death.

**T**HIRTY years after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, much of his extraordinary life's work, as well as the investigation of his violent and premature death, continues to fall under the heading of unfinished business.

On his own apparent deathbed, King's confessed killer, James Earl Ray, still insists he was framed for murder and coerced into pleading guilty to avoid a trial that he now seeks. He and others, including members of King's family, allege a racist plot to silence America's pre-eminent civil rights leader and cripple the movement that had transformed the nation.

The preponderance of evidence remains persuasive that Ray did kill King, and that there was no vast conspiracy. Yet the FBI — whose former director, J. Edgar Hoover, outrageously violated King's civil liberties — explored some aspects of the purported conspiracy so indifferently that troubling questions persist to this day.

If, as congressional investigators believe, Ray expected to collect a bounty for killing King, was that an element of a broader conspiracy? How broad? Did it, as some theorists suggest, involve the Memphis Police Department, the FBI itself, the CIA, the Pentagon, organized crime?

The notion seems ludicrous, but we may never know for sure. That uncertainty does a disservice to King's family, and to history.

That same lack of closure applies to the nation's civil rights movement itself, decades after King and other American heroes forced an end to legally sanctioned segregation. Although relations between the races have improved, and the economic, political and educational condition of black America has strengthened

measurably, a "color-blind" society has yet to arrive, nationally or locally.

King came to Memphis in 1968 to support striking sanitation workers, most of whom were black, in their dispute with the city. The job action had become a struggle for the respect and dignity the workers said their employer was denying them, largely because of their race.

Three decades later, race continues to obsess many Memphians, both white and black. It still affects where we live and work and worship and shop and entertain ourselves, and where our children go to school.

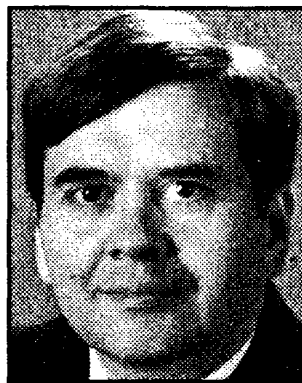
It has insinuated itself into the controversy over suburban incorporation and city annexation, and into such seemingly neutral issues as the ownership of the city's utility company.

Racial antagonism stained the city's image in January, at a time when many other Memphians sought to observe King's birthday, when a downtown rally by a couple of dozen Ku Klux Klan bigots was met by a counterdemonstration that turned violent.

Racial division was a factor in last year's seven-week boycott of County Commission business by the six Democratic commissioners, all of whom are African-American. And as in the nation generally, it underlies the acrimonious debate over affirmative action in the contracting policies of the Memphis City Schools.

Yet there's reason for optimism as well. A poll of Memphis and Shelby County residents published in The Commercial Appeal today suggests that informal racial barriers are eroding.

More city and suburban neighborhoods in which middle-income fami-



**DAVID KUSHMA**  
Editorial  
Page Editor

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lies live have been integrated, harmoniously. Workplace diversity has become common. Memphis has a black mayor, a black congressman, a black schools superintendent, a black police director.

Most of us, black and white, think race relations locally are average or good, and are improving or at least not getting worse. African-Americans in Memphis and the rest of the county tend to be more optimistic about the state of those relations than their counterparts nationwide, as measured by surveys.

Of course, racial tension is hardly a local or regional phenomenon. I can assure you that it was, and is, just as pronounced in the big Northern cities in which I've lived the longest, notably Detroit and Philadelphia. Sometimes it seems to take on a meaner edge in a colder climate.

But whether it is in-your-face or more genteel, racism continues to show itself in discrimination, division and segregation — by custom, if no longer by law. It influences such social ills as poverty, unemployment, crime, violence, family disintegration and substandard housing.

**AS MEMPHIS** and the country devote much of this week to commemorating the death of Martin Luther King Jr. and the remarkable life that preceded it, we will be reminded of the dream he articulated.

It was a dream of nonviolent change, of universal justice, of equality, of — to cite the words he spoke at the Lincoln Memorial — “that day when all God's children ... will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, ‘Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!’ ”

As he feared, he hadn't reached the Promised Land by the time he died. The rest of us can't stop trying to get there — all of us.



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# CASE CLOSED

## New report says Ray killed King — period

A NEW report by Dist. Atty. Gen. William Gibbons on the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis 30 years ago this week reaches the same essential conclusions as previous official investigations of the death of the civil rights leader:

James Earl Ray murdered King. If he did not act strictly on his own after the slaying, any help he may have gotten was indirect and occurred at a very low level. There is no hard and compelling evidence, suppressed or otherwise, of a broad conspiracy to kill King.

Ray, who pleaded guilty a year after the assassination to escape a death sentence, does not deserve a trial now. His after-the-fact claims that he was framed by someone named "Raoul," and coerced into confessing, do not stand up. Gibbons's report does nothing to lend credence to the notion that Ray merits release from prison, despite his apparently terminal illness.

"Barring further credible information which could lead to the indictment of someone in addition to Mr. Ray," Gibbons wrote, "the District Attorney's Office considers the investigation closed."

The report plausibly challenges assertions by the former owner of a cafe near the motel where King was shot to death that he was part of an assassination conspiracy. It also discredits Ray's recent identification of "Raoul."

Such findings are highly persuasive, even near-absolute, in light of the information presented in Gibbons's report and that of the House Select Committee on Assassinations two decades ago.

Yet polls suggest that most Americans, not just wild-eyed conspiracy theorists, continue to believe there was some sort of plot behind King's murder. Members of King's family now declare Ray innocent, support his bid for a trial, and seek his release from his 99-year term in prison.

A trial — then, not now — could have permitted timely public evaluation of the government's case against Ray, and his response to it. It also could have made available an exhaustive, central body of evidence for academic research. Gibbons notes, however, that King's family supported the state's decision at the time to accept Ray's plea before a jury and avoid a trial.

The congressional committee's investigation of King's murder was far broader than the review conducted by Gibbons's office, and arrived at the same basic results. Yet almost all of its research is classified, and will remain so for another 30 years or so; it was not available for Gibbons's review. Similarly, many FBI files on the King assassination remain secret, and many that have been released were censored first.

Gibbons and other investigators who are assured of Ray's guilt suggest that the release of these documents could help dispel public suspicion that attends government secrecy, and thus the willingness to embrace conspiracy theories.

"Mr. Ray has stated that if Congress would vote to release this information, it would prove his innocence," Gibbons said. "We think just the opposite."

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

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Edition: The Commercial Appeal

Title: Case Closed: New report says Ray killed King — period

Character: 44-1987-C-207  
or  
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Submitting Office: me

Indexing: *RSJ*

Legislation previously enacted by Congress created a special board to review and disclose government materials related to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Although some of those materials remain sealed because of privacy or confidentiality considerations, those that have been released have supported the official conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed Kennedy.

A similar approach could address Americans' doubts about whether their government is hiding something from them about the King assassination. It could add important information to the historical record about one of the nation's great tragedies.

There probably will remain an irreducible core of people who will accept any anti-government sentiments and allegations, however far-fetched. But as Gibbons observes, the evidence against Ray remains "overwhelming."

If government leaders can butress that conclusion among fair-minded Americans, it is surely in their self-interest — and in the interest of history and of Dr. King's memory — to do so.

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## Brother wants to sue Tenn. over Ray's medical care

James Earl Ray's brother said Monday he expects to sue the state of Tennessee for allegedly providing improper medical care to the confessed assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Ray, 70, died Thursday after a long battle with liver disease.

His brother, Jerry, said he's awaiting test results that may pinpoint when Ray first developed cirrhosis of the liver.

An autopsy showed Ray's cirrhosis stemmed from a chronic hepatitis C infection. A Pittsburgh doctor said Ray may have contracted hepatitis from a blood transfusion following a 1981 prison stabbing, but Tennessee chief medical examiner Bruce Levy said an autopsy cannot determine when the disease started.

Funeral arrangements remained incomplete.

—Marc Perrusquia

(Indicate page, name of  
newspaper, city and state.)

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Edition: The Commercial Appeal

Title: Brother wants to sue Tenn.  
over Ray's medical care

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or 808  
Classification:  
Submitting Office: ME  
RSJ

Indexing:

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# Reno hears King family's request for new inquiry

By James W. Brosnan  
The Commercial Appeal  
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Atty. Gen. Janet Reno met for two hours Wednesday with the family of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. but gave no immediate commitment to launching a new investigation into the slaying of the civil rights leader in Memphis 30 years ago.

King's widow, Coretta Scott King, told reporters afterwards, "We presented new evidence that has come to our attention concerning the assassination of my husband. She listened very sympathetically."

Asked what "new evidence," she referred to a recent press conference where a former FBI agent, Donald Wilson, said that after the assassination he found slips of paper in the car of James Earl Ray backing up Ray's story that he was set up by a mysterious "Raoul." Wil-

son said "Raoul" was written on one of the slips.

Since Wilson's press conference the FBI has said Wilson was not part of the team that searched the car. Last week a Justice Department investigator talked to the Shelby County District Attorney's Office about Wilson's story.

The House Select Committee on Assassinations and a recent seven-month investigation by the Shelby County District Attorney's Office both concluded that Ray killed King, although they left open the possibility he may have had help before or after the shooting.

While many of King's followers, like Rev. Jesse Jackson, believe there was a conspiracy involving Ray, the King family is among the few asserting that Ray did not fire the weapon.

King said she wants President Clinton to appoint a federal commission with powers to subpoena witnesses and grant immunity to investigate King's slaying.

"We feel all this evidence has to be presented to an official body to validate it," King said.

Her son, Dexter King, said Reno "did not want to commit to anything specific" but he said the family didn't expect an answer right away.

"This has not been immediately written off. Hopefully out of this there will be a fair and just response," he said.

Reno did not meet with reporters after the meeting but issued a one-paragraph statement in which she promised to "carefully review the questions and information" presented by the family.

Besides her son, Mrs. King was accompanied to the meeting by her daughter Bernice King, former congressman and UN ambassador Andrew Young and a former delegate for the District of Columbia, Rev. Walter Fauntroy.

Call reporter James W. Brosnan at (202) 408-2701 or E-mail brosnanJ@shns.com

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

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Edition: The Commercial Appeal

Title: Reno hears King family's request for new inquiry

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**King's assassin  
back in hospital**

NASHVILLE — James Earl Ray, the confessed assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., went back to the hospital Monday.

Correction Department spokesman Pam Hobbins said Ray was admitted to Columbia Nashville Memorial Hospital at 5:15 p.m. because of problems related to his liver disease. He was listed in critical condition, Hobbins said.

Ray, who suffers from cirrhosis of the liver, has been in and out of the hospital since

December 1996.

He is serving a 99-year prison sentence for King's 1968 murder in Memphis. Ray confessed to the killing but recanted three days later and has been fighting since then to get a trial.

(Indicate page, name of  
newspaper, city and state.)

Date: *April 21, 1998*

Edition: *The Commercial Appeal*

Title: *King's Assassin back in hospital*

Character:

or

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# King assassin in downswing again as condition worsens

By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

James Earl Ray was unconscious Tuesday in a Nashville hospital, remaining in critical condition from liver disease.

Ray was admitted late Monday to Columbia Nashville Memorial Hospital, making his 16th trip there since 1996.

Ray, 70, confessed assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., has cirrhosis of the liver. His health has bounced up and down in recent months, but insiders said Ray's condition is worse than ever.

"He's bad," said Andrew Hall, a Wartburg, Tenn., attorney who represents Ray in non-criminal matters. But, asked if Ray might not pull through, Hall said: "I said the last time he wouldn't make it and (he) woke up two hours later and started talking to people."

Ray has slipped into at least four unconscious states since December 1996. An unconscious state is considered a coma if it persists for 24 hours or more, said hospital spokesman Freda Herndon.

Hall said he mailed an application last week to the Department of Correction seeking a medical furlough for Ray. State

law allows furloughs of indeterminate length for inmates "in imminent peril of death" so they may spend their final time with loved ones and receive special care. The furlough request is pending.

The Tennessee Board of Paroles, meanwhile, rejected a clemency application for Ray last week. The board said it considers Ray's case a "parole matter," denying him a clemency hearing.

Ray was denied parole in 1994. His case comes up for review again in July 1999.

He pleaded guilty to King's murder in 1969 and is serving a 99-year sentence. Ray claims he was framed, although prosecutors say evidence of his guilt is overwhelming.

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Again as condition worsens

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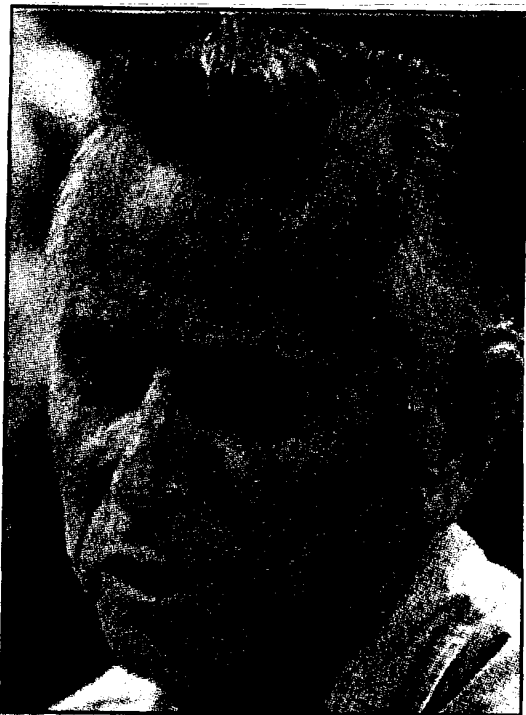
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# Ray death watch begins; King's assassin in coma

By Marc Perrusquia  
The Commercial Appeal

James Earl Ray was in a coma and hooked to a respirator in a Nashville hospital late Wednesday and was not expected to live through the night, his attorney said.

"He's totally unresponsive," said Andrew Hall, a Wartburg, Tenn., lawyer who represents the confessed assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in civil matters. "They won't let anybody in the room."



James Earl Ray

Ray's brother, Jerry, received a call about 9:30 p.m. from Columbia Nashville Memorial Hospital summoning him to Ray's bedside, said Hall.

"The hospital told him they do not expect him to live through the night," Hall said earlier Wednesday.

Hall said Ray had suffered congestive heart failure and his kidneys had ceased to function.

Ray, 70, was admitted Monday for the 16th time since 1996. Ray has cirrhosis of the liver, and the disease appears to have reached its end stages.

Although he initially pleaded

guilty in 1969 to killing King, Ray has continued to profess his innocence. Ray, serving a 99-year sentence, claims he was framed for King's 1968 slaying in Memphis.

King's family has joined the effort to seek a trial for Ray. On April 9, members of King's family asked Atty. Gen. Janet Reno to investigate "new evidence" produced by Ray's lawyer.

Jerry Ray, 62, has said Ray had asked not to be resuscitated or hooked to life-support machines.

"They're going to work on

him for a few days," said Jerry Ray. "If they can't get anything done, they'll have to let him go."

James Earl Ray requested in a will he recently drafted that his body be cremated and his ashes sent to Ireland. The Rays are of Irish descent.

Contacted at his Smartt, Tenn., home at 10:40 p.m. Wednesday, Jerry Ray said he was waiting for another call from the hospital.

"I'll stay up until I run out of beer," he said, saying he'd already had 12 beers. "I've only got two left."

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

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