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# The King Verdict

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**N**ORMALLY, A JURY verdict—even one that seems uncomfortably at variance with the public record—is due a considerable amount of deference. The decision last week by a jury in Memphis, however, that the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was the result of a vast governmental conspiracy should alter no one's view of the assassination. It's not that the jury misbehaved; based on the evidence presented in court, it was an open-and-shut case. Rather, the problem is that nothing approximating the real history of the assassination was ever presented to the jury.

The King family, having publicly embraced the claim of innocence of the real killer, the late James Earl Ray, was represented in the litigation by Mr. Ray's lawyer, a conspiracy theorist named William Pepper. The supposed defendant, Loyd Jowers, was the peddler of a long since discredited tale about being a part of a conspiracy to kill Dr. King. His defense was not based on historical truth—that there was no government conspiracy—merely that his own involvement in this alleged conspiracy was limited.

In other words, the King family sued for \$100 in damages a man who did not even contest their false thesis. The litigation in Memphis, therefore, involved no party that

would go to bat for history. Meanwhile, the judge admitted a pile of hearsay evidence, even some "testimony" that had been given in a mock trial staged a few years back by HBO. Both judge and jury are reported to have nodded off during the proceedings. The inevitable result of such a sham trial is a jury verdict that—to those who have not studied the peculiar circumstances that gave rise to it—may give to a wild conspiracy theory the imprimatur of a legal finding. It should not be allowed to do so.

The deceit of history, whether it occurs in the context of Holocaust denial or in an effort to rewrite the story of Dr. King's death, is a dangerous impulse for which those committed to reasoned debate and truth cannot sit still. That it has, in this case, been perpetrated by Dr. King's nearest family in a court of law makes it, in addition, a mystifying act of self-deception and an abuse of the legal system. That the King family has a movie deal with filmmaker Oliver Stone gives the whole affair, to add insult to injury, a commercial feel. The case, in short, had nothing to do with law, and it had nothing to do with truth. The more quickly and completely this jury's discredited verdict is forgotten, the better.