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EX-AIDES OF DR. KING LINK ESCAPE TO PLOT

They Contend Ray May Be Killed
While at Large and Mystery
Will Never Be Solved

By United Press International

Black leaders who were close associates of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said yesterday they feared that James Earl Ray's prison escape was part of a conspiracy and that Dr. King's murder might never be solved.

Mr. Ray "will be killed by those who helped get him out of jail," the Rev. Jesse Jackson said in Chicago.

Mr. Jackson, who was with Dr. King when he was hit by a sniper's bullet on a motel balcony in Memphis nine years ago, said he thought there was a conspiracy behind the prison break.

"There was a conspiracy for him to escape jail last night," he asserted. "Any man under maximum security and maximum observation could not walk out of jail."

Dr. King's widow, Coretta Scott King, and his father, the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr., could not be reached for comment.

In Atlanta, the Rev. Ralph David Aber-

nathy said he was "greatly outraged over this news."

"I am firmly convinced, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that James Earl Ray has not escaped but is part of a plan," said Mr. Abernathy, who succeeded Dr. King in 1968 as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

State Senator Julian Bond of Georgia said: "A madman is on the loose."

"When he killed Dr. King, he was an escapee," Mr. Bond said. "This is terrifying."

Mr. Ray was a fugitive from the Missouri State Prison when he was picked up at Heathrow Airport in London, two months after the slaying.

Lyndon Wade, director of the Atlanta Urban League, said, "I'm just wondering if his escape is not part of a master plan to eliminate him just when he's started talking and close the doors forever."

Dr. King's associate in the 1960's civil rights fight, John Lewis, shared Mr. Wade's concerns.

"I hope that James Earl Ray is captured and that the American people will have an opportunity to know what led to the assassination of Dr. King," said Mr. Lewis, the former head of the Atlanta-based Voter education Project.

Black leaders in Memphis said the escape might mean that the full truth about the assassination would never be known.

"It's incredible that Ray, the most well known prisoner in the United States, could have escaped," said Maxine Smith, executive secretary of the Memphis chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of colored People.

"I doubt seriously if the American public will ever really know the true story," she said. "This is simply another mystery—just part of a chain of weird happenings in the whole assassination."