

Inquiry Asked on King's Slaying

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ATLANTA, Dec. 17 — The Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, president of the civil rights group that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. headed until his assassination 25 years ago, called on the Justice Department today to investigate new assertions that the real killers have never been found.

Officials in Memphis have expressed skepticism about reports in a London newspaper and on the ABC Television program "Prime Time Live" by a retired Memphis businessman who said he had hired Dr. King's assassin and that James Earl Ray, the man convicted of murder in the case, was not responsible for the crime.

In Memphis, District Attorney General John Pierotti of Shelby County said he gave "absolutely no credence" to the account by the former businessman, Loyd Jowers. But he said today that he would investigate the accusations, which he had earlier called "a

sham and a fraud upon the public."

Mr. Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, said there were enough unanswered questions about the assassination and enough lingering questions about a possible conspiracy that the report had to be investigated.

"I don't think there's any doubt there was a conspiracy," Mr. Lowery said today after sending a request to the Justice Department to investigate the case. "When you put everything together, you have to take these allegations seriously."

He said he was turning to the Justice Department because "obviously, the District Attorney in Memphis has already prejudged the investigation."

Mr. Pierotti said his office would look into Mr. Jowers's assertion that he had acted on behalf of a New Orleans crime family at the direct behest of a now-dead Memphis produce grocer, Frank C. Liberto.

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