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## Nation and World

# Jury: King victim of murder plot

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — A jury hearing a lawsuit filed by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s family found Wednesday that the civil rights leader was the victim of a vast murder conspiracy, not a lone assassin.

The King family had sued Loyd Jowers, a retired businessman who claimed six years ago that he paid someone other than James Earl Ray to kill King in Memphis in 1968. The family's lawyer claimed that the FBI, CIA, the Mafia and the military were involved.

The family wanted the jury to find evidence of a conspiracy and lend support to their call for a new investigation into the killing. Prosecutors have long said that they are convinced Ray fired the fatal shot and that they could find no evidence anyone else was involved.

The Kings asked for only a token amount in their wrongful-death lawsuit. After three hours of deliberations, the jury of six blacks and six

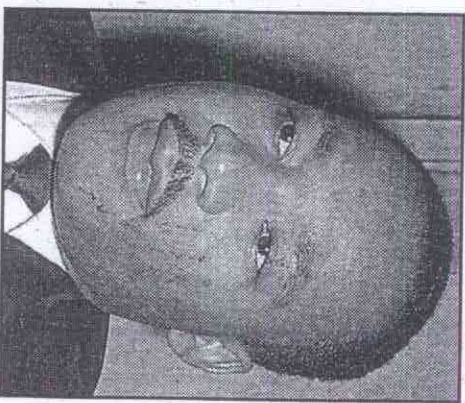
writes awarded the family \$100 in damages.

"I'm just so happy to see that the people have spoken," King's son Dexter said. "This is what we've always asked for."

Ray confessed to shooting King and was sentenced to 99 years in prison. He spent the rest of his life claiming to be innocent and trying to get a trial. He died of liver disease last year.

Ray's guilty plea was upheld eight times by state and federal courts. A congressional committee concluded in 1978 that Ray was the killer but that he may have had help before or after the assassination. The committee did not find any government involvement.

William Pepper, the Kings' lawyer, told the jury that Mr. Jowers, 73, was part of a conspiracy involving the Mafia and federal agents to kill King because of his opposition to the Vietnam War and plans for a huge march on Washington.



**Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.**

In his closing argument, Mr. Pepper said the order to kill King came from the head of organized crime in New Orleans to a Memphis produce dealer who got Mr. Jowers to handle

the payoff and murder weapon. An Army sniper squad was in place to shoot King if the Mafia hit failed, Mr. Pepper claimed.

Later, the FBI, CIA, the media, Army intelligence and state and city officials helped cover up the assassination, said Mr. Pepper, who also represented Ray in his efforts to get a trial. Mr. Pepper told the jurors they could rewrite history.

Lewis Garrison, Mr. Jowers' lawyer, told the jury that while they could reasonably conclude King was the victim of a conspiracy, his client's role was minor at best.

In 1993, Mr. Jowers said on ABC-TV that he hired King's killer as a favor to an underworld figure who was a friend. He did not identify the purported killer, but said it wasn't Ray.

Mr. Jowers, who has never repeated the claim but has not recanted it either, was sick for much of the trial and did not testify.