

Feds Reopen Case Of King's Slaying

Focus on two allegations of wider plot

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Washington — Attorney General Janet Reno reopened the investigation of the assassination 30 years ago of civil-rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., focusing on two allegations of a conspiracy beyond James Earl Ray.

The limited review announced yesterday stops well short of the national commission sought by King's widow, Coretta Scott King. Nevertheless, she welcomed the probe "as a first step towards revealing the truth."

In a brief written announcement, Reno said, "We hope this review will provide answers to new questions that have been raised about a tragedy that still haunts our nation." She promised a report on the findings.

Despite a narrow initial focus on separate allegations by a retired FBI agent and a former Memphis, Tenn., bar owner, "the evidence gathered by the inquiry will be followed wherever it may lead," the Justice Department said.

The King family has expressed doubts about the official version that James Earl Ray, acting alone, shot King on the balcony of a Memphis motel April 4, 1968. Ray died in prison this year serving a sentence for killing King, but he had long ago disavowed his initial confession.

The review will be conducted by Civil Rights Division lawyers, aided by Criminal Division attorneys, under the leadership of Barry Kowalski, who

successfully prosecuted the Los Angeles police officers who beat black motorist Rodney King.

To eliminate any appearance of prejudging the outcome, Reno and FBI Director Louis Freeh agreed that the FBI will not participate in the review, Justice officials said. The FBI has defended

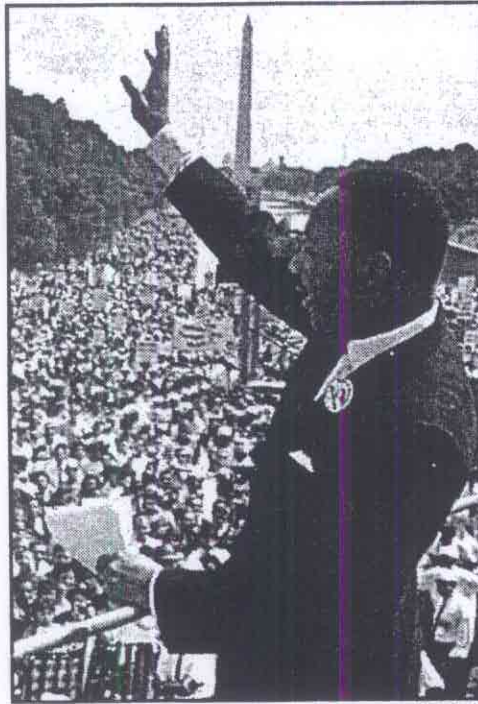
the official version blaming Ray, and in the 1960s the FBI under then-Director J. Edgar Hoover secretly harassed and spied on King and other civil-rights leaders.

The two allegations come from former Memphis bar owner Lloyd Jowers and former FBI agent Donald Wilson, both of whom suggested there may have been a conspiracy involving people besides Ray.

In March, after 30 years of silence, Wilson said that after the assassination, he took papers from Ray's car, including two pieces of paper with the name "Raul" written on them. Ray contended he was set up by a shadowy gunrunner named Raoul, whose existence has never been verified. The FBI discounted Wilson's story.

In 1968, Jowers ran Jim's Grill, a cafe near the motel where King was

shot. Jowers claimed in 1993 that he hired King's killer, and it was not Ray. He said he was paid \$100,000 by a now-deceased Memphis produce dealer with reputed organized-crime ties to arrange the King killing. Last spring, Memphis District Attorney General Bill Gibbons reported he could find no evidence linking Jowers to the killing.



AP Photo
Martin Luther King making his "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington on Aug. 28, 1963.

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