

Memphis Jury Sees Conspiracy in Martin Luther

By EMILY YELLIN

MEMPHIS, Dec. 8 — A jury in a civil suit brought by the family of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. decided today that a retired Memphis cafe owner was part of a conspiracy in the 1968 killing of Dr. King.

The jury's decision means it did not believe that James Earl Ray, who was convicted of the crime, fired the shot that killed Dr. King.

After four weeks of testimony and one hour of deliberation, the jury in the wrongful-death case found that Loyd Jowers as well as "others, including governmental agencies" had

been part of a conspiracy. The jury awarded the King family the damages they had sought: \$100, which the family says it will donate to charity.

The family has long questioned Mr. Ray's conviction and hoped the suit would change the legal and historical record of the assassination.

"This is a vindication for us," said Dexter King, the youngest son of Dr. King.

He said he hoped history books would be rewritten to reflect this version of the assassination.

Mr. Jowers, 73 and in failing

health, owned Jim's Grill in 1968, a restaurant opposite the motel where Dr. King was shot and just below the second-floor rooming house from which, according to James Earl Ray's confession in 1969, Mr. Ray fired the single shot that killed Dr. King. Mr. Ray, who recanted his confession, hinted at a conspiracy. He died in prison last year while serving a 99-year sentence.

Mr. Jowers, in a 1993 television interview, said that he had hired a Memphis police officer to kill Dr. King from the bushes behind his restaurant. Mr. Jowers said he had been

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paid to do so by a Memphis grocery store owner with Mafia connections.

In an unlikely alliance, the King family was represented in the case by William Pepper, who had been Mr. Ray's lawyer. The King family maintains that Mr. Pepper's version of the assassination is the one that gets at the real truth behind Dr. King's death, not the official version with Mr. Ray as the gunman.

Mr. Pepper said federal, state and Memphis governmental agencies, as well as the news media conspired in the assassination.

Mr. Jowers's lawyer, Lewis Garri-

son, had said since the trial began that he agreed with 80 percent of Mr. Pepper's conspiracy theories and disagreed only on the extent of his client's involvement. In his closing argument today, Mr. Garrison repeated what he had said through the trial that his client participated in the conspiracy but did not know that it was a plot to kill Dr. King.

One juror, David Morphy, said after the trial, "We all thought it was a cut and dried case with the evidence that Mr. Pepper brought to us, that there were a lot of people involved, everyone from the C.I.A., military involvement, and Jowers was involved."

John Campbell, an assistant district attorney in Memphis, who was

not part of the civil proceedings but was part of the criminal case against Mr. Ray, said, "I'm not surprised by the verdict. This case overlooked so much contradictory evidence that never was presented, what other option did the jury have but to accept Mr. Pepper's version?"

And Gerald Posner, whose recent book, "Killing the Dream" made the case that Mr. Ray was the killer, said, "It distresses me greatly that the legal system was used in such a callous and farcical manner in Memphis. If the King family wanted a rubber stamp of their own view of the facts, they got it."

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