

Man: King probe will be fruitless

8/28/98
By CHRISTOPHER SCINTA
News-Post Staff

U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno announced this week the Justice Department will investigate whether there was a conspiracy to kill civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. However, Frederick resident Harold Weisberg said the new probe likely will be fruitless, because it's starting on the wrong foot: Assuming the man convicted of the crime is guilty.

Mr. Weisberg worked as an investigator for James Earl Ray's defense when he was convicted of shooting Dr. King, and has authored books about the crime. He believes Ray is innocent.

"It's a cleverly connived, intended whitewash that's going to fool the people again," he said.

Mr. Weisberg said investigating the assassination of Dr. King for a conspiracy isn't a waste of time or

money. It wouldn't even have to be done outside of the Justice Department if they had handled the investigation fairly. But he added the result would be totally ruinous to the FBI, which has withheld information.

"The crime was never really investigated, but that doesn't mean they don't have evidence," Mr. Weisberg said.

Jim Lesar, president of the Assassination Archives and Resource Center in Washington, who was also involved with Ray's case, said the investigation should definitely be broadened, specifically to include ballistics evidence.

"Ray did not shoot Dr. King," he said. "... People generally believe some form of the official theory, even though the evidence states, pretty clearly I believe, it's not true."

After writing several letters to Ms. Reno and other people within

the Department of Justice explaining that a broader investigation was needed, Mr. Weisberg received no response.

During hearings, after Ray had confessed to the murder, Mr. Weisberg said evidence was introduced proving it would have been physically impossible for Ray to shoot Dr. King with the 30.06 caliber rifle labeled as the murder weapon.

"Ray and a large portion of the rifle would've had to have been inside the bathroom wall," Mr. Weisberg said.

If the FBI really intended the reform it promised, it would look deeply into the case from more than just the conspiracy angle, but they don't really plan to change, Mr. Weisberg said.

Government officials said the FBI won't participate in the probe, to avoid an appearance of prejudice. The investigation instead will be conducted by attorneys from the Justice Department's civil rights and criminal divisions, The Associated Press reported Thursday.

Mr. Lesar said the investigation should include questioning Judge Joseph Brown, the last judge to hear arguments for Ray to receive a new trial. Judge Brown's ballistics expertise and knowledge of the case would shed new light, Mr. Lesar said.

After suing the government under the Freedom of Information Act, Mr. Weisberg, the 85-year-old author, received about 80,000 pages of documents concerning the case which he says show Ray to be an innocent man.