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James Earl Ray — Assassin

THE DEATH OF James Earl Ray left the world a better place for his passing, but also left nagging questions about the murder of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. 30 years ago.

Ray, who confessed to assassinating King then recanted, died in Tennessee yesterday while serving a 99-year sentence still claiming he was the innocent dupe of a larger conspiracy.

His legacy of doubt offers rich soil for conspiracy buffs tormented by the notion that the course of history could be altered forever by a lowlife criminal with a gun.

However, Ray's guilty plea has been upheld seven times by state and federal courts and a three-year congressional probe concluded he was the triggerman who murdered King on April 4, 1968 in Memphis.

Somehow Ray convinced King's family of his innocence, and King's widow, Coretta Scott King, called for another federal investigation of her husband's murder.

The full truth of the assassination went to the grave with Ray, but conspiracy theories and rumors are sure to flourish in the absence of absolute certainty.

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