

Writing

# Relatives of Rights Worker Liuzzo File \$2 Million Claim Against FBI

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DETROIT, Dec. 28 — Relatives of slain civil rights worker Viola Liuzzo have filed a \$2 million wrongful death claim against the FBI, charging it with failing to protect her and withholding information from the family about the FBI investigation of her death.

Liuzzo, a white, part-time student at Wayne State University in Detroit and the mother of five children, was shot by a member of the Ku Klux Klan as she was driving a black civil rights demonstrator from Selma to Montgomery, Ala., in March, 1965. She was 39.

Three Klan members were convicted on a federal charge of violating her civil rights and sentenced to 10 years in prison on the basis of the testimony of a paid FBI informant, Gary Thomas Rowe Jr.

Rowe, a Klan member testified that he was riding in the car from which Klansmen fired several shots at Liuzzo, but he said he had been unable to stop the shooting.

The Liuzzo claim contends that Rowe was negligent in failing to prevent the murder and that the FBI is responsible for not instructing Rowe to deter Klan violence.

In a press conference Rowe called today to announce the claim against the FBI, family members said they had been unaware of the extent of

Rowe's FBI work until they read about Rowe's 1975 testimony before the Senate intelligence Committee.

Rowe told the committee that he would sometimes warn the FBI of planned Klan violence, but that the FBI seldom acted to stop the trouble. He said he had joined the Klan at the request of the FBI and had kept them informed of the Klan's activities over a five-year period.

Rowe wrote a book about his FBI activities, "My Undercover Years With The Ku Klux Klan," in which he criticized the FBI for not acting on his tips and stopping violence.

That book and Rowe's Senate testimony sparked an earlier legal action, a lawsuit filed in January by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of Walter and Frances Bergman, two former Freedom Riders who were attacked by Klansmen in Alabama. Rowe was with the Klansmen at the time.

Bergman, who now lives in Grand Rapids, was partially paralyzed from the beating he suffered at the hands of the Klan. He has filed suit against the FBI for \$1 million for failure to prevent the violence.

The Liuzzo's attorney said today that the family's claim against the FBI will likely lead to a similar lawsuit. The FBI and the Justice Department declined to comment on the claim.