

King assassination probe reopened

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Janet Reno reopened the investigation of the 30-year-old assassination of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., focusing on two allegations of a conspiracy beyond James Earl Ray.

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.

In meetings last spring with Ms. Reno and President Clinton, Mrs. King and her sons had sought a national commission, armed with power to grant immunity in return for testimony.

The family has expressed doubts

about the official version that James Earl Ray, acting alone, shot Mr. King on the balcony of a Memphis, Tenn., motel April 4, 1968. Ray died in prison this year serving a sentence for killing Mr. King, but he had long ago disavowed his initial confession and spent years futilely seeking a new trial.

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

The family and other civil rights leaders are suspicious of the FBI, which has defended the official version blaming Ray. In the 1960s, the FBI under then-Director J. Edgar Hoover secretly harassed and spied on Mr. King and other civil rights

leaders.

The two allegations to be reviewed have not been examined by previous federal inquiries that blamed Ray. They 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, Mr. Wilson said that after the assassination, he took papers from Ray's car that might support claims of a conspiracy. Mr. Wilson claimed to have found an envelope containing two pieces of paper with the name "Raul" written on them. In 1968, he worked for the FBI in Atlanta, where Ray's car was found. Ray contended he was set up by

a shadowy gunrunner named Raoul, a man whose existence has never been verified. The FBI discredited Mr. Wilson's story.

Mr. Jowers claimed on ABC's PrimeTime Live in 1993 that he hired Mr. 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 after a seven-month investigation, Memphis District Attorney General Bill Gibbons reported he could find no evidence linking Mr. Jowers to the murder.

Mr. Gibbons noted that since the television broadcast Mr. Jowers has twice changed his story.