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King Family Feels Justice Was Done

But conspiracy finding in civil suit unlikely to result in criminal charges

COX NEWS SERVICE

ATLANTA — Coretta Scott King, widow of the Rev. Martin Luther King, said yesterday that she is relieved and can finally move on now that a Memphis, Tenn., jury has agreed that her husband's death was part of a wide-ranging conspiracy, not the act of lone gunman James Earl Ray.



Coretta Scott King

"My husband once said, 'The moral arch of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice,'" Coretta King said at a news conference at the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change.

On Wednesday, after a month of testimony, the civil trial jury in Memphis unanimously concluded that former cafe owner Loyd Jowers had conspired with elements of the Memphis Police Department, the federal government and organized crime to kill King on April 4, 1968. The jury awarded the family the

symbolic \$100 in damages it had sought.

Dexter Scott King said his family endured ridicule and hardship to get to this point in their lives.

"While my heart is heavy," he said, "this is sweet because we finally know what happened. Sweet because this family has been vindicated. Sweet because we can say, 'Free at last.'"

A 1978 congressional probe concluded that Ray was the likely shooter, though he was probably part of a small-scale conspiracy involving two St. Louis racists. Last year, the Justice Department opened a limited probe into Jowers' allegations and into assertions by a former FBI agent that he found papers in Ray's abandoned car that would indicate a conspiracy.

Yesterday, U.S. Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., called for a full-blown federal investigation into the assassination. Lewis, who was a top aide to King as the president of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, said he always believed there had been a conspiracy.

"We have to get the truth out about what happened to Martin Luther King Jr.," Lewis said. "Finding

the truth will set our nation free."

Jowers had told a nationwide TV audience in 1993 that a Memphis produce dealer with alleged mob ties had paid him \$100,000 to hire a hit man. The King family has said they believe Jowers' assertion that the assassin was a now-deceased Memphis police officer known for his sharpshooting skills.

Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder said yesterday that the current probe is not likely to produce any criminal charges, despite the Memphis jury's decision.

"I suspect that, given the verdict (Wednesday), this will renew interest in the King assassination, and I suspect plant in the minds of many people doubts about some of those conclusions that were reached earlier," said Holder.

The Kings say they are no longer concerned with what others may do.

"We don't care what the Justice Department says," Dexter King said. "I doubt seriously they will indict themselves. We did not do this to force their hands."

After the news conference, family members hugged each other as they walked to place roses on King's crypt.