

King's Widow Asks for Probe of James

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The widow of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. yesterday called on President Clinton to appoint a commission to examine what she said was "mounting evidence" of James Earl Ray's claim that he was set up as the patsy in the assassination of the famed civil rights leader.

Coretta Scott King, speaking to reporters near her husband's crypt at Atlanta's Martin Luther King Jr. Center, repeated her family's recent claims of Ray's "innocence," and called for a meeting with the president to discuss "new evidence" in her husband's assassination.

White House spokesman Barry Toiv said officials there were unaware of King's request and would have no immediate comment.

The King assassination has been investigated by a congressional committee and numerous local law enforcement agencies, all of which concluded that Ray was the shooter. The congressional inquiry left open the possibility that Ray may have received assistance from others, but rejected the notion of a government conspiracy. A press release accompanying Coretta Scott King's statement offered a series of alleged facts that have accumulated in the past several years—many of which have been examined in previous inquiries.

"I had hoped that the emergence of new evidence over time would lead to a trial for Mr. Ray without my family's intervention or involvement," King said. "As new evidence accumulated, we became increasingly convinced that he was in fact innocent of killing my husband. But still the authorities refused to give him a trial."

King's statement, which came just two days before the 30th anniversary of her husband's death, brings renewed controversy to the circumstances surrounding the assassination of King, who was gunned down as he stood on the

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Earl Ray's Claim of Innocence

balcony of a Memphis motel on April 4, 1968. Ray originally pleaded guilty to the crime, but tried to recant three days later.

Many people—including a series of Ray's attorneys and close associates of King—have long claimed that Ray was not the murderer, or at least that he did not act alone.

Many major civil rights leaders, including Jesse Jackson, former Southern Christian Leadership Conference president Joseph Lowery and Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) have long speculated that King's assassination grew out of a conspiracy, although they stop far short of absolving Ray. Many of those leaders suspect government complicity in King's death, noting the fact that King was hated and harassed by late FBI director J. Edgar Hoover.

There have been equally adamant attempts to debunk these theories. Just last week, the Memphis prosecutor issued a report dismissing the latest conspiracy claims made by Ray's new attorney William F. Pepper. In the report, William L. Gibbons said there was "no credible evidence" to support Pepper's allegations, which are laid out in court papers and a book he wrote several years ago. In an effort to build support for his findings, Gibbons posted his report on the Internet and called on

Congress to unseal records pertaining to its investigation.

Still, skepticism is rife among the American public. A poll taken for CBS News last month found that only one in 10 Americans believe Ray acted alone—a figure that has remained consistent in the many surveys taken in the three decades since the assassination.

In his legal attempts to win a trial over the years, Ray has offered numerous theories of the murder. Once, he asserted that it was a plot hatched by King's own

inner circle. At other times, he has told a series of stories centering on a mysterious gun runner he knew only as "Raoul," whom Ray claims framed him to take the blame for the crime.

Last month, a former FBI agent came forward with Ray's attorney to say that for 30 years he has concealed evidence confiscated from Ray's car that confirmed a conspiracy. But that evidence has been dismissed as "fabrication" by an FBI spokesman.

Despite Ray's credibility prob-

lems, his claims of innocence in King's death received renewed attention when they won the public support of the King family, which broke its silence on the case last year and called for Ray to be given a trial.

"No one has ever been brought to trial to answer for the assassination of my husband," King said.

King was joined at her news conference by three of her children; former D.C. Del. Walter Fautroy, who chaired the congressional subcommittee that in-

vestigated King's assassination; and former U.N. ambassador Andrew Young, a longtime King family confidant. "We encourage others to come forward and tell the truth," Young said, "and we want the government to facilitate this. ... Let's not continue the cover-up."

Also joining King was Lewis Garrison, an attorney for Loyd Jowers, a Memphis restaurant owner who in 1993 said he took \$100,000 to facilitate King's murder. Jowers has offered to tell his

story in court if he is granted immunity from prosecution. Prosecutors in Tennessee have denied that request. In the report released last week, Gibbons discounted Jowers's assertions, saying the restaurant owner has frequently changed his story about how the murder took place as investigators disproved various elements of it. The report went on to say that there was evidence that Jowers was telling his story in hopes of landing a lucrative book or movie deal.