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AP Photos

At right, James Earl Ray in a prison hospital ward in Nashville last year. Memphis' chief prosecutor says he is sure Ray assassinated the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., above, in 1968.



'Convinced'

Prosecutor: Ray was lone King assassin

By Michael Dorman

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Memphis' chief prosecutor said Friday that a new seven-month investigation has left him "absolutely convinced" that James Earl Ray alone assassinated the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

"There is simply no credible evidence to support a new trial for Mr. Ray," said Bill Gibbons, the district attorney general in Memphis, Tenn., where King was shot to death April 4, 1968. "The evidence against him is overwhelming."

Gibbons' office launched the new investigation last year after King's widow, Coretta Scott King, and their son, Dexter, told a Memphis judge they believed Ray should receive a full-scale trial.

He had pleaded guilty in 1969 to murdering Martin Luther King but later recanted. John Campbell, the chief prosecutor in the case, said investigators from a special task force systematically reviewed all major conspiracy claims raised by Ray and his attorneys in reaching the results announced Friday.

Ray's long-standing claims that the assassination was carried out by a mystery man named Raoul — a supposed criminal accomplice of his — were specifically rejected in the new investigation.

Gibbons said a 63-year-old New York man Ray recently identified as Raoul actually had "nothing to do with the assassination of Dr. King." The man is an auto factory worker and wine importer who emigrated from Portugal in the early 1960s. Gibbons' task force of investigators — drawn from the Memphis Police Department, Shelby County Sheriff's Office, Tennessee Bureau of Investigation and the district attorney's office — took detailed statements from the man and checked his work and financial records for the last 30 years.

The investigators also took the man's fingerprints and compared them with prints lifted in the King assassination. All this evidence, Gibbons said, convinced them the man played no part in the assassination.

Earlier this week, a former FBI agent had stepped forward to say he had found in Ray's car after the

assassination two slips of paper with "Raul" written on them.

Gibbons said claims of another plot — involving former Memphis cafe owner Loyd Jowers — apparently were motivated by Jowers' desire to make money. Jowers claimed in a nationally televised 1993 interview that he received \$100,000 to arrange the murder. Some gave credence to the story because his cafe overlooked Memphis' Lorraine Motel, where King was murdered while standing on a balcony.

But Gibbons said the story was not credible and was sparked by hope of financial gain. "A look at the facts shows that Loyd Jowers was, and is, taking a very active role in getting people to make claims that implicate him."

The district attorney also described as baseless claims by James C. Green of Springville, Tenn., that he was hired to murder Ray on the day of the assassination. Records reflect that Green, now 51, was in federal prison on the day of the assassination.

Ray, 70, is critically ill in a prison hospital ward in Nashville, Tenn., suffering from a liver ailment. He is serving a 99-year prison sentence for the King assassination. His chief attorney, London-based William Pepper, who has spread many of the conspiracy stories Gibbons rejected, did not respond to a request for comment. Ray's brother and closest relative, Jerry Ray, said Friday: "It's the same old story. They've been saying that for years. They say they've got overwhelming evidence. That overwhelming evidence must have developed in the last few weeks."

Gibbons said that although there were lingering questions about Jerry Ray and another Ray brother, John, no charges against them were warranted.

The district attorney's report summarized the evidence against James Earl Ray — including fingerprints on the murder weapon, at the scene of the shooting and on a pair of binoculars bought just before the assassination and left at the scene.

"Barring further credible information which could lead to the indictment of someone in addition to Mr. Ray, the district attorney's office considers the investigation closed," Gibbons said.