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JAMES EARL RAY
May Have Defense

Former King Aide Joins

From Wire Reports

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — A former aide to the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. joined 16 other religious leaders Tuesday to demand a trial for King's confessed assassin, James Earl Ray.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson of Chicago said the group has new evidence that shows Ray was coerced into pleading guilty and may have a valid defense to the charge.

In a statement issued on the 10th anniversary of the King assassination, Jackson said he and leaders of several faiths from around the country would demand a trial for Ray. The group said it wants a

woman, a possible witness in the case, released from a West Tennessee mental institution. Grace Walden reportedly claims she saw King's assassin flee from a rooming house near the Lorraine Motel after the fatal rifle shot was fired.

The 17 ministers suggested that she was hospitalized because she refused to identify a photo of James Earl Ray as the man she saw leaving a bathroom where the fatal shot was fired. Ray pleaded guilty to the King slaying in 1969 and is serving a 99-year prison sentence, although he has attempted to retract his plea and is seeking a full

trial.

Dr. Maurice Cohen, superintendent of West Tennessee Mental Health Institute at Bolivar, said Mrs. Walden is suffering from "chronic brain syndrome, I suspect due to abuse of alcohol." He said she is also suffering from diabetes.

Cohen said she has been interviewed by investigators for the House Assassinations Committee, which is looking into the slayings of President John F. Kennedy, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and King.

He said she has also been interviewed by newspaper and television reporters and by lawyer-author Mark Lane,

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Demand for Ray Trial

whose book "Code Name Zorro" alleges that King was assassinated as part of a conspiracy in which Ray was set up to take the blame. Lane is now representing Ray.

Cohen said the congressional investigators talked to Mrs. Walden last summer for almost four hours. He said Lane interviewed her Sunday with a nurse in the room.

"When she is interviewed, she has a vivid picture in her mind of the man she saw leaving the bathroom, but she can't say how long she's been hospitalized," Cohen said.

Jackson, national director of Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity),

also said a reinvestigation of the slaying must examine the "relationship" of the Memphis police department and the FBI to the death.

"We commit ourselves to a campaign to agitate, organize and struggle until the truth regarding the murder of Dr. King is known," the group said.

"James Earl Ray was confined in a Memphis jail with lights focused upon him for 24 hours each day for almost eight months before he agreed to answer a guilty plea.

At a King memorial service Tuesday, a white Memphis labor leader also called for a trial for Ray. Tommy Powell,

president of the Memphis AFL-CIO Labor Council, was given a standing ovation when he said Ray deserved to be heard.