

James Earl Ray, King's assassin, near death

Blacks still doubt that he acted alone

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., lay in a coma yesterday as civil-rights leaders held out hope for a deathbed confession confirming their suspicions he did not act alone.

Ray, serving a 99-year prison sentence for the 1968 slaying, was in the last stages of cirrhosis of the liver despite never drinking nor smoking, said his brother Jerry Ray. The 68-year-old convict was in critical condition.



James Earl Ray is in a coma in a Nashville hospital.

Jerry Ray said he gave doctors permission not to resuscitate his brother if his heart stopped. "I think he'll be gone in 24 hours," Jerry Ray said.

There has long been speculation that Ray did not act alone, and civil-rights leaders said they hoped that before he dies, he tells everything he knows about the assassination.

"I think he would do a lot for his soul and his salvation if he confessed all that he knows before his lips are sealed forever," said the Rev. Joseph Lowery, who founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with King.

"I don't think he had the intelligence to plan, orchestrate and execute any such action. . . . He may or may not know exactly who used him, but I think he knows more than he has revealed."

King was shot by a sniper on April 4, 1968, on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, where the civil-rights leader had gone to support a strike by sanitation workers. The assassination touched off race riots in more than 100 cities.

Ray pleaded guilty but recanted three days later and spent much of his time since then filing a series of appeals. He claimed that he was set up by a man named Raoul he met in Montreal.