

MIAMI HERALD — 1/2/97

More light needed

What an odd and remarkable convergence of circumstance, timing, and interests: James Earl Ray, the man convicted of killing Martin Luther King Jr., meeting with Dexter Scott King, son of the slain civil-rights leader.

It happened last week at a prison in Nashville where Ray is serving a 99-year sentence. But time is fleeing. Ray has a bad liver and is at death's door. He wants to clear his name before dying. And Dexter King desperately wants answers — definitive, conclusive answers that lay to rest, finally, who was responsible for this father's death. Ray swore that he didn't kill Dr. King; and Mr. King said he believed him.

That is fine for these two men whose fates are so strangely entwined.

Reason would suggest, however, that Ray not be taken at his word. He first confessed to the assassination, then changed his story. He's prone to the same pressures that cause inmates everywhere to profess innocence once they've seen iron bars and hard time.

ON DR. KING'S DEATH

The meeting between James Earl Ray and Dr. King's son left unanswered questions.

Mr. King and his family for years have been bedeviled by unanswered questions and mystery surrounding Dr. King's death. It is a testament to their long, unsatisfying search for proof that they now embrace Ray as a fellow traveler. Ray's death will close forever a window directly linked to the slaying.

In 1979, a House subcommittee concluded that Ray probably fired the fatal shot and that he may have had help. Indeed, Ray fled to Atlanta, Canada, Portugal, and England after the shooting, showing a sophistication absent from his previous forays into crime.

Some experts say that modern ballistics can clear up a crucial point, previously unresolved: whether the bullet that killed Dr. King was fired from the rifle with Ray's fingerprints that was found at the scene.

Proving that would clarify part of the record that Mr. King's and Ray's good intentions can't. More light needs to be shed on this tragic chapter in American history. If science can do it, then let it.