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Family hopes Ray stays alive for more hearings

December 25, 1996
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NASHVILLE, Tennessee (CNN) -- James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., remained hospitalized Wednesday in critical condition, while his family clung to the hope he will survive long enough to clear his name.



James Earl Ray (CNN/file)

Jerry Ray said Christmas Day he would authorize putting his brother on life-support equipment, if necessary, while attempts are made to prove he didn't kill the civil rights leader. On Tuesday, Jerry Ray signed a request refusing such medical measures.



(CNN)

In explaining the change, Jerry Ray told reporters he wanted a February 20 hearing to go forward. William Pepper, James Earl Ray's attorney, is seeking permission to test the murder weapon, which was found with James Earl Ray's fingerprints.

Pepper and Ray, who contends he was a fall guy for the real killers, believe tests on the rifle will prove it was not used in the slaying. Prosecutors say the tests aren't warranted and could damage the evidence.

"If James dies, that hearing won't happen. If James dies, he goes down in history as Martin Luther King's killer, and that makes the whole Ray family look bad," Jerry Ray said.

"The Rev. James Lawson called me from California [Tuesday]," he said. "James' attorney William Pepper called, too, and they convinced me that we had a good chance."

'Did not act alone'

Lawson, a Los Angeles pastor who had a church in Memphis in 1968, is one of several black leaders who said they do not believe Ray was the assassin.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, who was with King in Memphis when he was assassinated, believes Ray had an accomplice or accomplices. "I am convinced of two things -- James Earl Ray was involved in Dr. King's assassination, and James Earl Ray did not act alone," Jackson told CNN Wednesday.



(CNN)

Ray "did not have motivation or money" to pull off the assassination alone, Jackson said.

 (38K/13 sec. [AIFF](#) or [WAV](#) sound)

Jackson, like other black leaders, said he is hopeful for a death bed confession of "who all was involved" to "give us all a sense of relief."

 (226K/21 sec. [AIFF](#) or [WAV](#) sound)

Ray, 68, is in a coma, suffering from cirrhosis of the liver, kidney failure and internal bleeding.

He has been serving a 99-year sentence at the Riverbend Maximum Security Prison in Nashville. He was transferred to the hospital last weekend.

Ray pleaded guilty to the April 1968 killing of the civil rights leader at a Memphis motel. Arrested after an international manhunt, Ray pleaded guilty but promptly recanted and claimed he was the fall guy for others.

The [Associated Press](#) contributed to this report.

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