

The Martin Luther King Assassination Case is in Court — But Who's Telling?

By Lisa Pease

Recently, a radio commentator contacted CTKA to ask if someone could speak on the air about the civil trial the King family was pursuing against Lloyd Jowers. He wanted to know who Jowers was. We wanted to know why we hadn't heard a peep about this from any of the media. A search of recent news stories on the Internet turned up only one story, on the CNN Web site. The local Memphis paper, the *Commercial Appeal*, has been running daily updates, but the coverage has been paltry at best. Court TV was there for the first couple of days, but folded up shop, citing a "lack of public interest" in the case. We wonder how anyone can show interest on an event of which they are unaware! It falls to *Probe* to once again go where no major news source has gone, to bring you the latest on this very significant development.

The family of Martin Luther King, Jr. has filed a wrongful death civil suit against Lloyd Jowers because in 1993, Jowers claimed on national TV that he had been involved with the gunman who shot King and that the man was not James Earl Ray. The King family is seeking an unspecified amount in damages, but the family has made it clear that this isn't about money, but about putting evidence into the record in an effort to find who really did kill Dr. King. Dexter King told the media, "We just want all the evidence to be presented and speak for itself." The King's have long contended that Martin Luther King was killed by government conspirators, a claim that more accurately fits the evidence than the Ray-did-it-alone scenario.

This is the first time the King case has been given any kind of a real trial. In 1993, HBO presented a mock trial using many of the real witnesses, and the jury in the mock case found James Earl Ray innocent.

Ray's most recent lawyer, William Pepper, who also has been close to the King family, is representing the King family in this suit. Pepper wrote a book about the case, *Orders to Kill*, which contained an accusation against Billy Ray Eidson. Eidson, thought to be dead by Pepper but evidently very much alive, as he sued the publisher Carroll & Graf for \$15 million. The

suit was settled for an unspecified amount.

Circuit Court Judge Swearingen is hearing this case. One of his first acts was to bar the public from attending the jury selection process. He had originally barred only(!) the media, but when challenged by a lawyer for the *Commercial Appeal*, he extended the ban to ev-

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eryone. Why is the judge so nervous? What was so special about this particular round of jury selection that the proceedings could not be made public?

And why is the media so completely silent? The papers of record in this country, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*, among many others, continue to deny coverage of this important and historic event.

Jowers' claim was made, quite sensation-ally, on ABC's *PrimeTime Live* in 1993. Jowers claimed that a produce dealer named Frank C. Liberto had given him \$100,000 to arrange King's murder. William Pepper claims the man,

now deceased, was a Memphis police officer.

The first witness at the trial was Coretta Scott King, wife of the slain civil rights leader. Present have been her sons Martin Luther King III and Dexter King.

One of the few people covering this case, Marc Perrusquia of the *Commercial Appeal*, belittles the King's suit with comments such as witness accounts detailed evidence that, "for the most part, already are publicly known," implying that there is nothing new to tell. Unlike the Kennedy assassination, most people have not heard of the many discrepancies in the evidence surrounding the King assassination. Waving evidence away as "publicly known" is a tactic which attempts to reduce the impact of the information. By stating such, Perrusquia keeps other writers at bay, suggesting that retelling testimony would be rehashing old news. While the facts have been available, they have never been testified to under oath in a court of law. This brings the significance of the old facts to a heightened level.

James Earl Ray tried for 29 years to get a real trial. It is to the King family's credit that they braved a negative storm of public opinion to voice their belief, unpopular with some of their staunch supporters, that Ray was innocent in the killing of King. Coretta King even successfully lobbied President Clinton to have Janet Reno launch a new investigation based on newly-discovered evidence in that case. At this time, the Justice Department probe is still open, but the media continues its blackout on that development as well.

Whatever one believes about this case based on their knowledge (or lack) of it, we should all be able to agree that matters such as these should not be hidden behind closed doors, but exposed for the world to see. History can't be left to the Gerald Posners of the world, who are given access by those who only wish to reveal the part of the truth that presents their case in the best light. Let all the facts be known. Regardless of whatever judgment comes from Memphis, we all are the jury in this case. We must all be given enough information to judge for ourselves what really happened. ♦