

# NEWS DIGEST

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PAGE 2

## Jury: King victim of conspiracy

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — A jury hearing a wrongful death lawsuit filed by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s family found Wednesday that the civil rights leader was the victim of a vast murder conspiracy, not a lone assassin.

The family had sued Loyd Jowers, a retired Memphis businessman who claimed six years ago that he paid someone other than James Earl Ray to kill King. The family's lawyer claimed that the government, the Mafia and the military were involved.

After three hours of deliberations, the jury of six blacks and six whites awarded the Kings just \$100 in damages.

The family had asked for a token amount because what they wanted most was for the jury to find evidence of a conspiracy and lend support to their call for a new investigation into the killing.

Ray confessed to killing King and was sentenced to 99 years in prison. He spent the rest of his life claiming to be innocent and trying to get a trial. He died from liver disease last year.

Ray's guilty plea was upheld eight times by state and federal courts. A

congressional committee concluded in 1978 that Ray was the killer, but he may have had help before or after the assassination. The committee did not find any government involvement in the murder.

William Pepper, the Kings' lawyer, told the jury that Jowers, 73, was part of a conspiracy involving the Mafia and agents of the federal government to kill King because of his opposition to the Vietnam War and plans for a huge march on Washington.

A cover-up following the assassination in Memphis in 1968 involved the FBI, CIA, the media and Army intelligence, as well as state and city officials, said Pepper, who also represented Ray in his efforts to recant his confession and get a trial. Pepper told the jurors they could rewrite history.

Juror David Morphy said he believed the assassination was too complex to be carried out by one person.

"We all thought it was kind of a cut-and-dried case, with the evidence that Pepper brought forth, that there were a lot of people involved, everyone from the CIA, military involve-

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DAVID MORPHY  
juror

ment in it — Jowers was involved in it, we felt," he said.

Lewis Garrison, Jowers' lawyer, told the jurors that while they could reasonably conclude King was the victim of a conspiracy, his client's role was minor at best.

In 1993, Jowers said on ABC-TV that he hired King's killer as a favor to an underworld figure who was a friend. He did not identify the purported killer, but said it wasn't Ray.

Jowers, who has never repeated the claim but has not recanted it either, was sick for much of the trial and did not testify.

At the time of the killing, Jowers

owned a small restaurant, Jim's Grill, across the street from The Lorraine Motel, where King was killed. On the day of the assassination, Ray, a prison escapee from Missouri, used an assumed name to rent a room in a rooming house above Jim's Grill.

Garrison told the jury it was hard to believe that "the owner of a greasy spoon and an escaped convict" could have pulled off King's assassination.

King's widow, Coretta Scott King, testified that her family believes Ray did not act alone.

"If we know the truth, we can be free and go on with our lives," she said on the trial's opening day.

## Officials say ultimatum not directed at civilians

■ Only militants in Chechnya are being targeted, says the Russian military.

ACHKOI-MARTAN, Russia (AP) — Russian forces Wednesday concentrated their fire on Chechnya's ravaged capital, as officials gave conflicting signals about an ultimatum to trapped civilians to leave or face death.

Russian officials and commanders said the ultimatum to residents to leave Grozny by Saturday or face a massive bombardment was not directed at civilians. But they did not back off on the deadline for the attack.

The Russian military said Wednesday it is allowing civilians to walk or drive out of the city unimpeded. However, the military fires on cars that try to break past Russian lines, assuming that they carry militants, said Gen. Vladimir Shamanov, the chief of the Russian army in western Chechnya.

Russian planes and artillery con-

tinued to bombard Grozny and surrounding towns Wednesday, making it almost impossible for people to leave the city. War planes and helicopter gunships flew 150 sorties over the previous 24 hours, the military said.

The aircraft and artillery gunners are firing only on rebel targets in Grozny, Shamanov insisted. But with militants and civilians hiding in basements, it was not clear how the military could distinguish with any precision.

Russian planes dropped leaflets on Grozny earlier this week saying that a safe corridor would be open for civilians to leave, and anyone left in the city after Saturday would face a massive air and artillery attack.

The ultimatum drew strong international criticism, with U.S. and European leaders criticizing the plan as inhumane and urging Russia to back down.

Gen. Viktor Kazantsev, Russia's military commander in Chechnya, said the leaflets were aimed at the Chechen militants, not civilians. He indicated the deadline was still set for Saturday.

## Clinton evaluates past year in office

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Clinton said Wednesday he hopes U.S. and Cuban officials will not allow "politics or threats" to decide the fate of a 6-year-old Cuban boy caught in an international custody dispute. Also, he rejected cutting off American aid to Russia in retaliation for its brutal campaign against the Chechen rebels.

In an hour-long news conference, Clinton summed up the achievements and disappointments of a year that began with the impeachment trial and neared its close with demonstrators rioting in Seattle against his trade policies.

Of the failed attempt by Republicans in Congress to remove him because of his involvement with a young intern, Clinton said, "The mistake I made was self-inflicted."

As for 1999, he said he was "profoundly disappointed" that Congress rejected some of his initiatives, but overall, "I'm gratified by what was accomplished."

He cited as accomplishments an agreement under which China could enter the World Trade Organization, the start of peace talks on the future of Cyprus, a conventional forces agreement with Moscow and "debt relief for the poorest countries of the world."

Clinton also seized the opportunity to announce that Israel and Syria have agreed to resume peace negotiations. Talks are set to start next week in Washington.

Asked about the Cuban boy, Clinton said there are difficult decisions that must be made on whether Elian Gonzalez will live in the United States with his late mother's relatives or in Cuba with his biological father.

"I don't think that politics or threats should have anything to do with it, and, if I have my way, it won't," Clinton said, but he also said he did not think he should decide the boy's fate.

Discussing a variety of topics, Clinton also said the country's racial problems "will stay at the center of my concerns," even though he has yet

*"I don't think that politics or threats should have anything to do with (the fate of Cuban boy caught in custody dispute)."*

PRESIDENT CLINTON

to release the report on race that he promised more than a year ago. He said he is rewriting the draft. "I don't want to put it out unless I think it can make a difference."

Clinton promised to pursue in 2000 one legislative goal he failed to attain in 1999: tighter gun restrictions.

The president said his administration is considering a lawsuit against gun manufacturers to recover costs of gun violence in public housing in hopes of getting the industry to "stop irresponsible marketing practices."

He noted that one company was marketing a weapon by touting the fact it is difficult to get fingerprints off it. "You don't have to be all broke out with brilliance to figure out what the message is there," Clinton said.

Clinton also said he thought it would be a mistake for the United States to cut off aid to Russia because of its military campaign in Chechnya. He said most U.S. assistance finances peaceful efforts such as advancing democracy, creating an independent media and fostering student exchanges.

"I don't think our interests would be furthered by terminating that," Clinton said. Halting aid would "alienate Russia from the international community, and that's a bad thing."

But Clinton also said he has "no sympathy" for Chechen rebels, even though he has criticized as too heavy-handed Russia's efforts to stamp out the rebellion.

### World and Nation Datelines

#### ■ Washington Clinton: Israeli, Syrian peace 'within our grasp'

WASHINGTON (AP) — Israel and Syria have agreed to resume peace negotiations, President Clinton announced Wednesday, cautioning that "success is not inevitable" but that peace appeared to be "within our grasp."

Clinton said the talks, to start next week in Washington, will resume "at the point where they left off" in 1996 and that he hopes they will lead to new negotiations between Israel and Lebanon.

Syria and Israel suspended negotiations 3½ years ago amid a wave of terrorism against the Jewish state.

Clinton's announcement comes after Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's meetings in the region this week with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Syrian President Hafez Assad.

#### ■ Tennessee Boy fearing foster care hides mother's death

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — A 9-year-old boy whose mother died at home lived with the corpse for a month, fixing his own meals and attending school without fail, because he was afraid he'd be put in foster care if anyone found out.

When Crystal Wells died Nov. 3, her son, Travis Butler, covered her body with her coat and placed sheets of notebook paper over her face.

After that, Travis cut his hair, prepared meals and went to school every day until her body was discovered Monday by family friends Dorothy and Nathaniel Jeffries.

Dorothy Jeffries said Travis begged them not to call police. He told them he lived with the body on the living room floor because he was afraid of being placed in a foster home.

Police have not released a cause of death for Crystal Wells, 30, but said foul play is not suspected.

#### ■ Washington Official: Homeless need help starting on job path

WASHINGTON (AP) — America's homeless want to work, but prosperity will remain beyond their grasp without assistance, according to a government report released Wednesday.

The report released by Andrew Cuomo — secretary of Housing and Urban Development — found that 42 percent of the homeless people surveyed said their main need was help in finding a job, and 44 percent said they had worked at least part time during the previous month.

In addition, it found that 60 percent of the homeless living alone and 76 percent of those living with families managed to leave shelters for permanent housing when they received needed services, including housing subsidies, health care, substance-abuse treatment, education and job training.

Without assistance, Cuomo said, few will gain an economic toehold in America.

"What doesn't work is arresting the homeless, criminalizing the homeless from one city to another," Cuomo told a news conference at a local shelter for homeless families.

### Daily Nebraskan

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