

The Carolina Times

THE TRUTH UNBRIDLED

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA — SATURDAY, MAY 9, 1998

TELEPHONE (919) 682-2913

PRICE: 30 CENTS

Black College Sports Page
See Page 12

Elna Spaulding Awards
Given at Banquet
See Page 9

Durham Man Breaks Mold
In Operetta
See 'Insights' Front



Dr. Percy Murray, professor of history, was named 1997-98 Teacher of the Year at the school. The presentation was made to Dr. Murray during ceremonies for Dr. Molly Broad as part of her installation as president of the University of North Carolina system. (Photo by Lawson)



Ms. Erline Williams, social worker with Family Planning for the Durham County Health Department, explains family planning information with youth and parents during a health fair held at the department. See story on page 3. (Photo by Lawson)

King Conspiracy Probe Must Take New Direction After Ray's Death

By Woody Baird

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — With King dead, believers of a conspiracy in Martin Luther King's assassination must find a forum, other than the courts, to voice arguments heard.

Though he pleaded guilty to killing King, Ray managed for almost 40 years to keep his claims of innocence before the public, largely through court appeals and other petitions.

His supporters, including the family, hoped to get his guilty plea thrown out so Ray could go to something he voluntarily decided against three decades ago, avoiding the possibility of execution.

Ray died in Nashville from heart disease and the legal efforts to overturn his guilty plea died with him.

His widow, Coretta, who says her husband was the victim of a murder conspiracy and not a gunman, vowed to continue fighting for a fuller investigation of assassination in Memphis in 1968.

She met with Attorney General Reno seeking that investigation, but the form such an unusual inquest was not immediately clear.

King apparently wants an investigation modeled along the lines of the truth and reconciliation commission in South Africa.

The idea is to gather testimony from people who may have information about the murder but are reluctant to come forward for fear of prosecution.

Ray alive, conspiracy advocates concentrated primarily on his efforts, but the courtroom was a really tough environment for the wide-ranging claims of conspiracy heard.

The court is not the place for open-ended investigation. It might come up in court, but the forum for just investigation said Barbara Kritchevsky.

a law professor at the University of Memphis.

To get a trial, Ray had to first have his guilty plea thrown out and there was no evidence it was coerced or he was unaware of what he was doing when he gave it.

The plea has been upheld eight times by state and federal courts, with the U.S. Supreme Court refusing to hear Ray's arguments.

Mrs. King and son Dexter told a Memphis judge in February they wanted a trial for Ray. Dexter King later met with Ray in prison, saying he believed Ray's claim he was an unknown pawn of other conspirators.

Since shortly after he pleaded guilty in 1969, Ray has claimed he was set up by a shadowy underworld figure he knew only as Raoul.

Ray said the rifle found near the murder scene with his fingerprints on it was put there to frame him.

Throughout Ray's fight to take back the guilty plea, authorities held that his guilt was obvious and his conviction sound.

The King family and other Ray supporters often say he was denied his day in court, but prosecutor John Campbell said Ray had lots of days in court and at the highest levels of the judicial system.

"He's had more days in court than most criminal defendants," Campbell said. "And it doesn't make any difference whether he pled guilty or was found guilty, he'd still be trying to say he was set up." Ray also got to tell his side of the story to a congressional committee. It concluded in 1978 that Ray was the assassin, though he may have had some help from others before or after the killing.

Prosecutors, too, say they have no way of knowing if Ray acted alone but there is no evidence to charge anyone else in the murder.

If Ray did have help, Campbell said, it was likely from a few close associates, not a wide-ranging conspiracy.

Defense lawyer William Pepper, meanwhile, contends King was the victim of a conspiracy reaching to the highest levels of government and organized crime.

Authorities say Ray's motives for killing King are still unclear, though he may have hoped to col-

lect a \$50,000 bounty offered by a small group of racial bigots in St. Louis. The people who allegedly led that group are now dead.

King was killed by a single rifle shot while in Memphis to help lead a strike by sanitation workers, Ray

escaped from a Missouri prison the year before the shooting, and authorities say he stalked King to other southern cities before catching up with him in Memphis.

Ray, a lifelong ne'er-do-well with an eighth-grade education, was an admitted career criminal. He often is described as a petty thief unlikely to commit a crime of violence.

But Campbell said that description is inaccurate. Ray was serving a 20-year sentence for robbery when he broke out of the Missouri prison.

"Most of his crimes were robberies, and armed robberies at that," Campbell said. "He was a career criminal who died in prison."

Lyons: 'It's Been a Living Hell'; National Baptist Leader Sums Up Legal Ordeal

By Kendall Wilson
Special to the NNPA from the Philadelphia Tribune

"It's been an absolute nightmare...a living hell!"

That is the way the Rev. Dr. Henry J. Lyons, the embattled president of the National Baptist Convention USA Inc., summed up his stormy ordeal over the past nine months.

"But I've been able to cope, despite the constant flow of ongoing issues. It hasn't been easy. It's been a living hell trying to stay focused and keeping the National Baptist Convention afloat. But I've prayed each and every day and night."

"We all agree that there are two sides to every issue and you've only heard one side. My lawyers would kill me if I told my side, but I want you to know that I anxiously wait for that day, that day in court when the truth will be known and my name will be cleared."

A federal grand jury has indicted Lyons on racketeering and theft charges.

Lyons said he was disappointed and hurt that dozens of protesters, including members of Mt. Olivet Tabernacle Baptist Church in Philadelphia and their supporters blocked the entrance to the church and prevented him from addressing the Recognition Services of the Independent Ministers Conference of Pennsylvania and Vicinity.

He was able to deliver his address an hour later when the Rev. M. Lorenzo Shepard, pastor of Mt. Olivet and a founding member of the new ministers' group, was able to come up with a conference room several blocks away.

Carey Sims, chairman of the Mt. Olivet Deacons Board, said it was the will of the congregation that Lyons not be allowed to appear at the church. Protesters used a van to block the front doors.

"This was their vote," he said. "They did not feel it would be in the best interests of the church at this time."

"We didn't think he should be here, especially with all the controversy surrounding him," said one member. "The group should have selected a site where he was more welcomed."

Lyons admitted that he made "some mistakes" which led to his indictment by a federal grand jury, but continues to profess his innocence and said he is looking forward to his "day in court."

"You've all heard only one side of the story," Lyons said. "I'm only asking we wait until I have my day in court. I'm hurt by this, but I understand that the people who are doing this really don't know me. If they did, this wouldn't have happened."



Northgater entertains Herbert Brandon and Dee Marie Wigfall at the Health Fair. See story on page 3. (Photo by Lawson)