

Dixie Living

The Atlanta Journal  THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

SUNDAY, JUNE 30, 1991

Keeping the Dream

SOME SAY THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT DIED ON THE BALCONY OF MEMPHIS'S LORRAINE MOTEL. NOW A MUSEUM IS TRYING TO BRING IT TO LIFE FOR NEW GENERATIONS.



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. didn't die for a museum, says opponent Jacqueline Smith.

By Keith L. Thomas
Staff writer

Y MEMPHIS, Tenn.
ou want to be here. But you really don't.
The cold concrete walkway outside Rooms 306 and 307 of the Lorraine Motel is just a narrow path covered with footprints left in the chalky construction dust.

Run-down buildings, junk-strewn lots, "For Sale" signs and old black men with the blues stretch beyond the second-story railing. Hidden slightly by tree branches and bramble, the roof of a red brick building juts at an angle across the street. What once was Bessie Brewer's flophouse, where James Earl Ray fired from a bathroom window, is for sale. It seems close. Maybe a stone's throw away. Just a stone's throw from the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, where a bullet struck Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the evening of April 4, 1968.

The place, some say, where the civil rights movement died.

A place that makes your stomach ache. The kind of place you have to see, have to feel at least once.

Even if you don't want to.

OPENING National Civil Rights Museum

A week of concerts and symposiums culminating in a grand opening Thursday with civil rights figures including Rosa Parks, Julian Bond and the Rev. Jesse Jackson. 450 Mulberry St., Memphis. 901-521-9699.



Johnny Crawford/Staff

The Lorraine Motel in Memphis is now the National Civil Rights Museum. "We just couldn't let the site go," says the Rev. Joseph E. Lowery. "Some of our most precious blood was shed there."

And that's the whole point.

Come Thursday, the Fourth of July, a laser beam will stream from the balcony of the old motel tracing the path of the bullet that killed Dr. King. The balcony will become the central exhibit of the National Civil Rights Museum, a tribute to his life and the civil rights movement. The old 32-

room, L-shaped motel has been gutted, remodeled and transformed into the \$9.25 million museum, which will be dedicated with a week of ceremonies that start today.

The dedication includes a who's who of civil rights: the Rev. Jesse Jackson, the Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, NAACP president Benjamin Hooks, Rosa Parks, former Geor-

Please see LORRAINE, Back page ▶