

The New York Times

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, please [click here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytreprints.com for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#) »

August 22, 1995

M. W. Chenault, 44, Gunman Who Killed Mother of Dr. King

By WOLFGANG SAXON

Marcus Wayne Chenault Jr., who killed the mother of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at a Sunday service in Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta in 1974, died on Saturday at a hospital in the Atlanta suburb of Riverdale. He was 44.

Mr. Chenault was serving a life sentence at the state prison in Jackson, Ga., when he suffered a stroke on Aug. 3. He never regained consciousness, a hospital spokeswoman said.

Within weeks of the slaying of Mrs. King and a 69-year-old church deacon, Edward Boykin, on June 30, 1974, Mr. Chenault was tried, convicted and sentenced to die in the electric chair. He said he had acted out of hatred for Christianity and because his god had told him to. His lawyers said he was insane.

The sentence was upheld on appeal but he was resentenced to life in prison two months ago, partly because of the King family's strong opposition to the death penalty.

Mr. Chenault, the son of a middle-class black family in Dayton, Ohio, had just been welcomed to the church for a morning service when he rose from his seat in the front pew, drew two pistols and started firing.

Alberta King, 70, was fatally struck at the church's new organ as she was playing "The Lord's Prayer." Mr. Boykin was standing nearby when he was shot. One woman among the 400 worshippers was wounded.

At his arraignment, Mr. Chenault told a magistrate that he had come to Atlanta "on a mission," and said he decided months earlier that black ministers were a menace to black people and must be killed.

He also told the police that his mission was to kill the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr., but he shot Mrs. King instead because she was close to him. Their son Dr. King, the civil rights leader, was assassinated by an escaped convict, James Earl Ray, in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

Photo: Marcus Wayne Chenault Jr. (Associated Press, 1974)

[Copyright 2016 The New York Times Company](#) | [Home](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [XML](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#)
| [Back to Top](#)