

hw: Thanks for long letter of Dec. 16.
Will digest it & be back in touch.
Happy Holidays! 011

Probe Of King Slaying To Focus On

From The Commercial Appeal
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — House investigators of the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. are focusing on convicted slayer James Earl Ray's original refusal to say that he acted alone.

A transcript of the Shelby County Criminal Court hearing of March 10, 1969, at which Ray pleaded guilty and accepted a 99-year sentence, is now claiming the attention of the House Committee on Assassinations.

In an interview Wednesday, committee

counsel Richard A. Sprague produced the transcript and noted that Ray pointedly objected to courtroom statements that the killing was not part of a conspiracy even though Ray's own lawyer endorsed the statements.

A veteran, highly regarded Philadelphia prosecutor, Sprague said that when Ray differed with his own lawyer on such a significant point he would have expected Ray to have been examined at length and even subjected to a lie detector.

"It might have been done as a part of the plea bargaining that led to the 99-year

sentence rather than the death penalty," Sprague said.

"It is of interest to me that at the time of the plea bargaining the state did not make interrogation as to the extent of his participation a part of the bargain.

"I am interested that when Ray spoke up nobody there said 'What are you taking about — does this mean there was a conspiracy?'"

At the time of Ray's guilty pleas and conviction U.S. Atty. Gen. Ramsey Clark and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover had said no evidence had been found that Ray

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Ray's Conspiracy Remarks

had not acted alone.

In the courtroom in Memphis, Sprague noted, Dist. Atty. Phil M. Canale brought up the subject, saying:

"I want to say to you as your attorney general that we have no proof other than that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed by James Earl Ray and James Earl Ray alone, not in concert with anyone else."

Ray then said he didn't accept the theories of Clark, Hoover, Canale, and his own attorney, Percy Foreman.

"I mean on the conspiracy thing," Ray elaborated. "I didn't want to add some-

thing onto it: (his agreement to plead guilty and avoid a possible death sentence) which I haven't agreed to in the past."

Sprague, as evidence of his interest in this part of the King investigation, had underlined Ray's statement in the transcript.

The committee, which has proposed a first year budget of \$6.5 million, must wait until the House convenes and votes it some money before really beginning its investigation of the killings of King and President John F. Kennedy.