King Assassin Wins Fight to Call Witnesses

■ **Law:** A judge rules that James Earl Ray can also present evidence to try to prove his innocence. Process will not overturn conviction in 1968 murder.

From Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn.—After 25 years, the confessed killer of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. won a judge's permission Friday to call witnesses and present evidence in court to try to prove his innocence.

James Earl Ray has been trying unsuccessfully to take back his guilty plea and go to trial since shortly after he confessed in 1969 to murdering the civil rights leader on April 4, 1968.

Criminal Court Judge Joseph Brown rejected Ray's latest plea for a trial but agreed to let his lawyers question witnesses and present other courtroom evidence to prepare an appeal of that rejection.

"What's it been going on? A quarter of a century so far? A few more months won't hurt one way or the other," Brown said. "Let the historical record be cleared up."

Such a process will not overturn Ray's conviction or free him from prison, where he is serving a 99-year sentence. But it will give him his first chance since his guilty plea to compel witnesses to testify and to have that testimony under oath.

Brown said he hopes to help clear up questions, including claims of a conspiracy, that have festered since King was shot and killed while standing on a balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis.

The U.S. House Committee on Assassinations looked into King's murder and concluded in 1978 that Ray was the killer but may have been helped by others.

Brown said he was bound by state law to uphold Ray's conviction and reject his plea for a trial. There was no evidence that Ray's confession was other than freely given, the judge said.

Ray, 66, contends he was duped into taking part in the assassination.

Prosecutor John Pierotti said his investigators have found no evidence to support Ray's claim of new evidence proving his innocence.

Television Interview Shows

Guests scheduled for Sunday's television interview shows:

MEET THE PRESS
NBC, 7 a.m., Channel 4
(VCR Plus No. 63456)
■ Sens. Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D-Del.) and Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah); Reps. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Bill McCollum (R-Fla.)

THIS WEEK WITH DAVID BRINKLEY
ABC, 11 a.m., Channel 7
(VCR Plus No. 61814)
■ To be announced

LATE EDITION
CNN, 2 p.m.
(VCR Plus No. 345982)
■ Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole (R-Kan.); Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.)

FACE THE NATION
CBS, 4 p.m., Channel 2
(VCR Plus No. 807)
■ Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.)