

Judge in James Earl Ray Case Is Removed

MEMPHIS, March 7 (AP) — A judge who had given James Earl Ray hope of getting a retrial in the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has been taken off the case for appearing to be biased toward Mr. Ray.

Judge Joe Brown of Criminal Court has ruled on various petitions Mr. Ray has filed over the past four years in his effort to recant his confession that he shot Dr. King in Memphis in 1968.

Prosecutors said Judge Brown, 50, a Criminal Court judge since 1990, repeatedly went beyond the narrow legal questions raised in Mr. Ray's petitions. The state Court of Criminal Appeals agreed on Friday, saying Judge Brown "continues to engage in

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a fact-finding mission."

Comments that Mr. Brown made in newspaper and television interviews gave the appearance of bias against prosecutors, the court said.

Judge Brown was unavailable for comment, a secretary said. Mr. Ray has two months to appeal the decision to the state Supreme Court, said the prosecutor, John Campbell.

Mr. Ray, who is serving a 99-year prison sentence, was captured in England four months after Dr. King was killed. He pleaded guilty in 1969 but almost immediately began trying to change his plea.

Mr. Ray, 69, suffers from terminal liver disease. He contends he was set up by other conspirators to take the blame for the murder.

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