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With Ray 170

WASHINGTON AP - The Justice Department said Monday an investigation was continuing into whether a conspiracy was involved in the slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. last April 4.

The government statement came after James Earl Ray pleaded guilty in Memphis Monday to the charge of murdering King and was sentenced to 99 years in prison.

At the brief trial, both defense and prosecution lawyers said they were satisfied a conspiracy was not involved in the civil rights leader's death.

A Justice Department spokesman, however, said the federal investigation "into the original allegations of the conspiracy is still open."

He referred to the complaint filed by the FBI in Birmingham, Ala., about two weeks after King was killed.

That complaint alleged that Eric Starvo Galt, later identified as Ray, plotted with "an individual who he alleged to be his brother" to violate King's civil rights.

Part of the conspiracy, the complaint alleged, involved the purchase of a rifle "on or about March 30, 1968" that was found near a Memphis rooming house shortly after King was slain.

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Judge's Statement 280

MEMPHIS, Tenn. AP - Criminal Court Judge W. Preston Battle said Monday there is now no evidence of a conspiracy leading to last year's assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

But, he said, if such evidence ever turns up, "no member of such conspiracy can ever live in peace or security or lie down in pleasant dreams." Tennessee, he pointed out, has "no statute of limitations in capital cases like this."

The judge made the comment in adjourning court after imposing a 99-year sentence on James Earl Ray, who three hours earlier had pleaded guilty to first-degree murder.

"Memphis has been blamed for the death of Dr. King, to me wrongfully and irrationally," the judge said. "Neither the decedent King nor his killer lived here; their orbits merely intersected here."

As for the conspiracy, the judge said, the prosecution "at this time is not in possession of enough evidence to indict anyone as a co-conspirator in this case. Of course, this is not conclusive evidence that there was no conspiracy; it merely means that as of this time, there is not sufficient evidence available to make out a case of probable cause."

Ray stood up in open court to disagree publicly with "the theory that there was no conspiracy" in King's death—a theory held by his own defense lawyer, Percy Foreman of Houston, Tex., as well as Dist. Atty. Gen. Philip Canale. Ray did not elaborate.

Foreman made it clear, too, that Ray was pleading guilty to first degree murder, "not to anything about a conspiracy."

Canale, asked his theory as to Ray's guilty plea, replied, "I think race had a lot to do with it." He declined to elaborate, but indicated later Ray might be a racist.

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