

'Conspiracy' Avoided

RAY GETS 99 YEARS

# Ray Switches His Plea -- Guilty of Murdering King

## 'No Evidence of Conspiracy' -- But Killer Disagrees

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Memphis

James Earl Ray pleaded guilty to murder yesterday in the sniper slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He was sentenced to 99 years in prison.

The entire case was wrapped up quickly. Less than 3½ hours after he entered his guilty plea, Ray had been sentenced to the 99-year term, agreed to by Ray's lawyer apparently to avoid a death sentence. The sentencing came on Ray's 41st birthday.

Ray, who cannot be considered for parole for 30 years, rose during the proceedings to state that he did not agree with the theory that he alone did the killing. But prosecution and defense attorneys, as well as Presiding Judge W. Preston Battle, emphasized that there was no evidence of a conspiracy.

Chief Prosecutor Phil M. Canale told newsmen later that he believed that racial hatred was the motive and that Ray, who had escaped from Missouri State Penitentiary about a year before the assassination last April 4, apparently had lived off funds secured through robberies and smuggling of contraband between the United States, Canada and Mexico.

### SKEPTICS

That answered two major questions raised by skeptics of the one-man-crime theory. But Ray himself gave skeptics another arguing point by rising to say that he did not want to be recorded as agreeing with United States

Attorney General Ramsey Clark and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover that no conspiracy was involved.

An all-male jury of ten whites and two Negroes, empaneled as a technicality to hear a resume of the State's case and pass on a sentence, had been told to defense counsel Percy Foreman that he agreed with Clark and Hoover that there was no conspiracy.

The prosecution put on several witnesses to establish the crime and link Ray to it. Then assistant prosecutor James C. Beasley read a

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lengthy narrative of proof he said the State would have produced had the case gone to trial.

Ray stipulated that the proof was accurate. It snared the defendant in a strong web of circumstantial evidence, including testimony putting him at the scene of the crime and several fingerprints and other evidence linking him to the scene, to the murder weapon, and oth-

er items of evidence.

It was a sudden finish to a case that involved an intensive FBI investigation and work by hundreds of investigators in the United States, Mexico, Canada and Europe.

Canale said that Foreman, a famed criminal attorney from Houston, had come to him February 21 and said that Ray was ready to change his plea from innocent to guilty in exchange for not being sentenced to the electric chair.

Canale, who had planned to ask for the death penalty, said he did not see how the State could have fared better. He observed that Tennessee has not electrocuted anyone since 1960, and that no one from Shelby county (Memphis) has been executed since 1948.

The prosecutor said he had consulted local Negro leaders and representatives of Mrs. Martin Luther King Jr. and of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, of which Dr. King was president, before agreeing to the guilty plea and sentence.

He said that Mrs. King and other Negro leaders had expressed no opinion as to whether a conspiracy was involved, but said that they opposed the death penalty for anyone found guilty of the crime.

Canale promised in open court that he would investigate vigorously any information that might subsequently come out indicating that anyone else was involved in the assassination.

Asked at a press conference about the motive, Canale said, "Race had a lot to do with it." He declined to elaborate.

However, assistant prosecutor Robert Dwyer said the State had considerable infor-

mation about Ray's racist leanings, including conversations about his anti-Negro feelings in bars in Los Angeles and in Canada.

At one time, while imprisoned at Leavenworth, Kan.,

Ray refused to work on a farm because he would have had to work with Negroes,

At the conclusion of yesterday's hearing, Judge Battle said that while there had been no evidence of conspiracy, there was, "of course . . . no conclusive evidence that there was no conspiracy."

"However, if this defendant was a member of a conspiracy to kill the decedent," the judge said, "no member of such conspiracy can ever live in peace or security or lie down to pleasant dreams, because in this State there is no statute of limitations in capital cases such as this.

"And while it is not always the case, our 35 years in these criminal courts have convinced me that in the great majority of cases, Hamlet was right when he said:

"For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak with most miraculous organ."





*UPI Telephoto*

PERCY FOREMAN, RAY'S LAWYER  
A deal to save his client's life

## Ray Pleads Guilty -- Gets 99 Years



*UPI Telephoto*

MEMPHIS JUDGE PRESTON BATTLE  
A relaxed moment after sentencing Ray