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PHILADELPHIA AP - The Rev. James Bevel, a close aide to the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., says Memphis police knew about the plan to assassinate him "a couple of days" before it happened, and did nothing.

Bevel, director of nonviolent education and direct action for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, said in an interview in the Philadelphia Bulletin, that there "definitely was a conspiracy surrounding" King's death.

Bevel, a 32-year-old Baptist minister who was with King when the shooting occurred last April, contended that James Earl Ray-who pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 99 years in jail-"was convicted by the same brand of justice that black Americans are subjected to every day all over the nation."

Bevel had claimed in January that Ray was "innocent of the crime" but Tennessee court officials refused to let him join the defense because he was not a lawyer.

"If America is awake, it can learn a very powerful lesson from the Ray case concerning our courts and our system of justice which is a threat to all of us," Bevel said.

"Lots of evidence and information on the ro 5\$\$auuu0

and Ray's attorney, Percy Foreman, decided to have his ^{ssed} client plead guilty because it was the one way to be certain to save Ray's life.

"As a result Ray is out of the way and the real killers are walking around freely."

Bevel said a letter outlining the assassination plot accidentally found its way into the hands of a black woman and was turned over to police. He declined to identify the woman or to elaborate on the contents of the letter.

He also said FBI agents had held up Dr. King's plane-bound from Atlanta, Ga. to Memphis for a half hour search because they knew of the plot "at least a day before the murder."

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