



JAMES EARL RAY

... claims innocence

King Slayer Sues, Seeks New Trial

By Albert Gore Jr.

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—James Earl Ray filed a \$500,000 damage suit against state officials here today, charging that he has been "falsely imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit."

The confessed assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., now serving a 99-year sentence in the Tennessee state prison, also asked the U.S. District Court here to prevent his transfer to a federal penitentiary.

Interviewed through the bars of his tiny cell today, Ray said he was concerned about newspaper reports last week that state officials have asked the U.S. Bureau of Prisons about procedures for transferring him to federal custody.

Ray, 41, typed the rambling 15-page lawsuit himself, claiming at one point that his former attorney, Percy Foreman of Houston, had mishandled vital information that could have been used in his defense. He has repeatedly charged that Foreman coerced him into pleading guilty to the murder of King.

Immediately after his guilty plea in March of 1969, the presiding judge cut off an attempt by Ray to explain why he did not agree with those who said there was no conspiracy surrounding the assassination.

He refused to discuss the crime yesterday but claimed that he would "tell everything" if only he could get a new trial. Last April, a federal judge here turned down his request for a new trial on grounds that Ray had knowingly and voluntarily pleaded guilty.

"If I can't get to court, I'm just going to forget it," he said, adding that he saw no point in giving his version of the events surrounding King's death to the news media because, "I'd still be here."

"It would be libelous anyway. It's different proving something in the newspapers and proving it on the witness stand."

In his lawsuit, Ray charged that he gave two telephone numbers to Foreman, who in turn gave them to another lawyer to investigate. Ray claimed that one of the numbers was traced to a Baton Rouge, La., parish official who was "under the influence of a Teamsters union official."

The other number was traced to a New Orleans man who was "among other things, an agent of a Mideast oriented organization" that Ray believes was concerned about reports that King planned to announce his public support of the "Palestine Arab Cause."

Ray declined to identify the persons he believes the numbers were traced to. Asked if he had ever called the numbers, he said, "I'd rather not go into that."

Foreman told the Associated Press in Houston that he had no knowledge of the telephone numbers. "We did find one number and in checking it out found that it was a New Orleans bar," Foreman said. "I don't know anything about a Baton Rouge number but I believe we did check another New Orleans number and it turned out it had been disconnected."