

Judge's Order to FBI on King Tapes

Washington

A federal judge yesterday ordered the FBI to turn over all tapes and transcripts gathered in the wiretapping of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to the National Archives and directed that they be kept there under seal for 50 years.

A suit for damages had been brought by Bernard Lee, former assistant to the slain civil rights leader, and by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which King headed until his death in 1968.

They charged that the FBI tape-recorded King's conversations in a room at Washington's Willard Hotel between 1963 and 1968. Both Lee and the SCLC asked for monetary damages and that records of the overheard conversations be destroyed or impounded.

But U.S. District Judge John Lewis Smith Jr. said the damage claims were barred by the three-year statute of limitations, and he dismissed that part of the complaint.

He ordered that within 90 days the FBI gather "all known copies of the recorded tapes and transcripts thereof and deliver under seal to the court an inventory." The tapes and documents themselves are to be turned over to the National Archives and Record Service.

The Select Senate Committee on Intelligence has reported that from late 1963 until King's death in 1968 the FBI put the civil rights leader under extensive surveillance as part of a campaign to discredit him.

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