

'Public Faith Shaken By Assassin Trials'

CHATANOOGA, Tenn. (AP) — A Tennessee newspaper editor said last night that three recent U.S. trials involving assassinations "have served to shake the confidence of the American people in the administration of justice."

John Seigenthaler, editor of the Nashville Tennessean, made the comment in response to a question at a meeting of Hamilton County Young Democrats. He referred, he said, to the recent Clay Shaw trial in New Orleans, the current Sirhan Sirhan trial in Los Angeles and the James Earl Ray case in Memphis.

Shaw recently was acquitted of conspiracy in the assassination of President John Kennedy; Sirhan was charged with the slaying last year of Sen. Robert Kennedy and Ray now is seeking a new trial after pleading guilty to first-degree murder in the slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"The conflicts and inconsistencies that came to public attention as a result of those three criminal cases have made it appear that a criminal trial is some sort of judicial skin game," said Seigenthaler, a former aide to Robert

Kennedy when the latter was U.S. Attorney General.

"It makes no sense to the average citizen to be told that an accused assassin in New Orleans is guilty if nine of 12 jurors say so, but that in Tennessee and California it takes 12 jurors. "It makes no sense to have a defendant (Shaw) accused of a part in an assassination by a district attorney who produces witnesses who are . . . disreputable . . . and then after a jury rejects the testimony . . . to have the district attorney immediately announce that the cleared man will be charged with perjury.

"It makes no sense to have a defendant in California stand up in court and say that he is guilty of cold-blooded, calculated murder and then have the court refuse to accept that plea so he can be submitted to a sort of judicial psychoanalysis . . . and then, at the same time in Memphis, have a defendant plead guilty without any search for truth and he is forthwith dispatched to the state penitentiary."

"Those of us who are interested in true reform . . . must take it upon ourselves to put the spotlight on the failures of the administration of justice," Seigenthaler added.