

RAY GUILTY - 99 YEARS

Hints Conspiracy in Dr. King Slaying

# Jury Acts Quickly; Ray Life Spared

Examiner News Services

MEMPHIS — James Earl Ray pleaded guilty today of the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King in exchange for his life, but kept alive the theory of a conspiracy.

A 12-man jury heard an hour and 55 minutes of token evidence and then, by prearrangement, convicted Ray and sentenced him to 99 years in prison.

Ray, pleading guilty to the slaying, told the court he did not agree "with the theory there was no conspiracy" in the killing of Dr. King.

Judge W. Preston Battle excoriated critics of Memphis, announcing, "We have not done too badly here for a decadent river town."

He said if Ray had any help, or was hired, in the slaying of the Nobel Peace Prize winner the conspirators could never "lie down to pleasant dreams."

## Heavy Guard

Ray was expected to be spirited away under heavy guard later today to the state prison in Nashville 200 miles away, where a special, isolated cell awaited him. It was his 41st birthday.

He will be eligible for parole when he is 71. But Ray, once nicknamed "The Mole," fancies himself an escape artist. He is a fugitive from the Missouri state prison.

The state, after assuring the surprised jurors that "we'll put on some proof," produced five witnesses.

Ray's attorney, Percy Foreman, said "I never expected, hoped or had any idea when I entered this case that I would be able to do anything other than save this man's life." He implied that Ray would likely have been sentenced to die if he had gone on trial as scheduled

April 7 pleading innocent.

## Unanswered Question

It appeared likely the question of whether Ray was part of a conspiracy would go forever unanswered.

Judge Battle, before turning the case over to the jury, said, "It has not been established at this time that there was any conspiracy. This is not conclusive evidence that there was no conspiracy.

"If there was a conspiracy

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no member of such a conspiracy can ever live in peace or lie down to pleasant dreams because there is no statute of limitations in capital cases in this state."

Of the five witnesses who testified, most described King's death and placed Ray in Memphis. The longest testimony came from Robert G. Jensen, FBI agent in charge of the Memphis office.

He recounted the search for Ray, telling how a pair of pliers, a hammer, an undershirt and undershorts found in Memphis led to Ray and his eventual arrest in London June 8.

## Tell of Rifle Shot

Other witnesses told of the single rifle shot that felled King as he stood with friends on the second floor balcony of the Lorraine Motel at dusk

## Case Isn't Closed, Says King Widow

ATLANTA — (AP) — Mrs. Martin Luther King said today James Earl Ray's guilty plea in the slaying of her husband "cannot be allowed to close the case, to end the search for the many fingers which helped pull the trigger."

Mrs. King said, however, that for her family, "there is a sense of emotional relief" in the sentencing of Ray.

1st April 4. The shot, the state claimed, was fired by Ray from the bathroom window of a flophouse across the street.

"The shot had cut his necktie right off," recalled the Rev. Samuel Kyles.

Both Foreman and Memphis prosecutor Phil Canale told the jurors there was nothing to the theory that Ray was part of a conspiracy.

"There have been rumors

that James Earl Ray was a hired dupe for others to kill Martin Luther King," noted Canale. "We have no evidence that any conspiracy was involved."

Foreman said "it took me a month to convince myself of this fact . . . that there was not a conspiracy."

"If at any time there is evidence that such a conspiracy is involved," said Canale, "we will take prompt action."

At that point Ray arose, to the surprise of the jammed, heavily guarded courtroom.

"Your Honor," he said, "I'd like to say something. I agree with all these stipulations but I don't agree with the theory that there was no conspiracy."

## Questioned on Plea

Battle quickly asked Ray if he was trying to change his guilty plea. "No sir," said Ray, and he spoke no more about conspiracies.

Ray waived all rights for appeal, for a new trial, or any other legal maneuvers, and said he had been prom-

ised nothing but the 99-year sentence. He told the judge there had been no pressure on him to plead guilty.

Judge Battle said, however, that Ray still had the right to file an appeal or mo-

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tion to overturn his conviction.

"This is a compromise and settlement on a plea of guilty to murder in the first degree and 99 years in the penitentiary," said Battle. "Is this what you want to do?"

"Yes, I do," said Ray.

When Ray made the comment about the conspiracy theory, Foreman stood, turned to his client, and said, "You're not required to agree or withdraw or anything, Jim."

"You change none of your answers?" asked Battle.

"No, sir," said Ray.

Ray entered the courtroom at 9:45 a.m. and Battle followed a minute later. By 9:50 the jury had been called and by 10:17 they had taken their oaths.

Ray's first defense attorney, Arthur Hanes, whom he fired just before his trial was to begin in November, had planned to argue that Ray was the unwitting dupe of a plot to kill King.

After the trial Canale said "there was some indication he (Ray) was a racist" and that was the motive for the killing. Asked to elaborate, Canale would refer only to "some of the things in Ray's background."

There is nothing in Ray's background known to the public to indicate he was a racist.



**PLEADS GUILTY TO KING ASSASSINATION**  
James Earl Ray is sentenced to 99 years