

Ray Contends He Was Miles From Murder

By MARTIN WALDRON
Special to The New York Times

MEMPHIS, Oct. 29—James Earl Ray testified today that he did not assassinate the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., that he was more than a mile away at the time of the murder—and that he had witnesses to prove it.

Mr. Ray has not yet finished giving his account of his involvement in the murder of the civil rights leader on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, but he admitted involvement today and will be on the witness stand answering questions about it again tomorrow.

He said that his involvement had been peripheral.

"I personally did not shoot Dr. King, but I believe I may be partly responsible for his death," the 47-year-old convict testified.

Seeks Regular Trial

Mr. Ray is seeking a full-scale trial for the murder. He pleaded guilty in March, 1969, and was sentenced to 99 years in prison after a one-hour court proceeding.

He said on the witness stand today that he had pleaded guilty because he thought his attorney, Percy Foreman of Houston, might "fake" a defense if he insisted on a trial and that he might end up being sentenced to the electric chair.

He said that Mr. Foreman had seemed intent on getting him to plead guilty.

Mr. Ray's acknowledgement that he may have been "partly responsible" for Dr. King's death, came, he said, in a letter he wrote to Senator John O. Eastland of Mississippi five years ago agreeing to cooperate with a proposed investigation of Dr. King's murder. Mr. Eastland, a Democrat, is chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Asked by one of his attorneys, James Lesar of Washington, if by that he meant that he had assumed that the .30/06-caliber rifle found near the scene of the ambush had been used in the murder.

"I didn't make no strong assumptions in that area," Mr. Ray testified. He did not say what his responsibility had been, but added, "The man who made the rifle may have been responsible in part."

Much of the evidence that he has given to Federal District Judge Robert E. McRae Jr. has been couched in such cautious language.

Previous Jail Record

Before being sentenced in Dr. King's death, Mr. Ray had served three prison terms and was in the midst of a fourth when he escaped from prison about a year before Dr. King's assassination.

Mr. Ray's involvement in the murder, which set off riots in black sections of cities in the



Associated Press

James Earl Ray, right, being taken to court yesterday in Memphis by Federal marshals

United States, is being pieced together indirectly.

Mr. Ray said in his testimony today that he left California in March, 1968, to go to New Orleans. He had been in California for several months, taking dancing lessons, going to bartender school and having his nose bobbed, according to his account. He said he wanted his features altered so that he could get a merchant seaman's license. He said he knew that the Federal Bureau of Investigation would be circulating a photograph of him and he did not want to resemble it.

He said that, when he got to New Orleans, "I stopped there for maybe an hour or so. Then I left New Orleans. I had to go to Birmingham. I was supposed to meet a party in New Orleans but he had gone to Birmingham."

The 'Party' in Birmingham

Mr. Ray has contended that the "party" he met in Birmingham, Ala., was a "blond Latin" named Raoul whom he had met the year before in Canada and who had persuaded him to smuggle items from Canada into the United States.

He has said that Raoul kept him supplied with money for more than a year.

In questioning by his attorneys this morning, Mr. Ray said that he had been shown "10 or 12 pictures" of "Latin-appearing" individuals while he was awaiting trial in 1968.

One of these photographs, he said, was of a man who had been arrested in Dallas for questioning on the day that President Kennedy was assassinated there in 1963.

"I was asked if I would identify the man if he was brought to Memphis," Mr. Ray said. "I said no, although he did look similar to the party I was involved with."

The man arrested in Dallas

was not charged, and his name was not mentioned in the courtroom today. He was identified as "an anti-Communist Cuban."

In addition to outlining some of the events in which he was involved leading up to the assassination, Mr. Ray dropped hints about the group of people he is now ready to contend "framed" him.

He indicated on two occasions that the slaying of Dr. King might be traced to Louisiana.

The first time he indicated

this was when he was being examined by Mr. Lesar. Mr. Ray said that the investigation for his defense in 1968 was incompetent. "No one went to Los Angeles or to New Orleans, where I think much of the evidence lies," he said.

Evidence Bar Denied

WASHINGTON, Oct. 29 (UPI)—The Supreme Court rejected today Tennessee's efforts to block the production of evidence in the current proceedings involving Mr. Ray's request for a trial.