

# James Earl Ray Loses Bid for Trial

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MEMPHIS, Feb. 27—James Earl Ray today lost a bid to stand trial in the 1968 assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. when a federal judge rejected claims that Ray was browbeaten by his lawyers and prison officials into pleading guilty to the murder.

In the long-awaited, 38-page ruling, U.S. District Court Judge Robert M. McRae Jr. said:

"Although the circumstances include conduct on the part of Ray's retained attorneys that should have been performed differently, the total circumstances do not reflect a violation of the constitutional rights applicable to one who voluntarily pleaded guilty on the advice of competent counsel of his own choosing." The judge did not specify what the lawyers should have done differently.

Ray's present attorneys said they will appeal the ruling immediately to the Sixth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The ruling comes after an exhaustive eight-day hearing

by Judge McRae into the Ray case last fall. It also follows almost six years of complex legal maneuvering by Ray and an assortment of attorneys in numerous state and federal courts.

Throughout, Ray has contended that his original attorneys, former Birmingham, Ala., Mayor Arthur Hanes Sr. and noted Houston criminal lawyer Percy Foreman, schemed with Southern author William Bradford Huie to keep Ray publicly silent about the King assassination. Ray said the original lawyers forced him to remain silent and plead guilty without trial in order to give Huie exclusive details on the murder.

Huie in turn was to split the profits from lucrative book and magazine contracts with Hanes and Foreman, Ray claimed.

Ray further claimed that jail officials in Memphis harsh conditions on him further undermining his will to resist pleading guilty.

Judge McRae rejected all of Ray's arguments today.

"The guilty plea of Ray was not coerced by impermissible pressure by Foreman (who

had succeeded Hanes as Ray's attorney just prior to the guilty plea)," McRae wrote. "On the contrary, the matter was discussed on numerous one month at the least."

Ray never challenged in public or private the written stipulations "that named him the murderer" at the guilty plea, McRae said.

Though Ray argued that the plea was calculated to enhance the income from Huie's literary efforts, McRae said testimony at last fall's hearing by book and magazine executives showed that just the opposite happened.

The now defunct Look magazine,