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FBI ordered to seal King files in archives

By TIMOTHY ROBINSON

Washington Post Wire Service

WASHINGTON — A federal judge yesterday told the FBI to file with the National Archives all of its tapes and documents growing out of buggings and wiretaps of slain civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The materials cannot be made public for at least 50 years, except by court order, according to the ruling.

U.S. District Judge John Lewis Smith Jr. issued the order on dismissing two civil suits filed against the FBI by Bernard Lee, a former assistant to Dr. King, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which Dr. King headed until his assassination in April 1968.

The suits asked money damages from the FBI for the buggings. They alleged the FBI secretly recorded King's conversations in a motel room here in 1963 and sent a copy of the tape to his wife, Coretta Scott King, as well as bugging other conversations.

In addition, the suits claimed copies of those recordings and others were played for members of the news media as part of an attempt to discredit King.

Judge Smith dismissed the suits, however, because they were not filed before the three-year statute of limitations for such action had run out.

The FBI must provide the judge an inventory of the materials within 90 days and provide the material to the National Archives in that same time period.

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