

A black and white photograph of a young child with curly hair, wearing a dark jacket, looking upwards. The child is holding a small object in their hand. The background is dark and textured.

King Aides Uphold Conspiracy Theory

"Two close associates of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said yesterday that the murder of the civil rights leader was part of a conspiracy and not the action of only one man.

But they differed on what role James Earl Ray may have had in the April 4 shooting in Memphis. Ray has been charged with killing Dr. King and is awaiting trial.

The Rev. James L. Bevel, head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, nonviolence direct action program, said he believed Ray was incapable—both mentally and physically—of carrying out the assassination of Dr. King.

"We've allowed King to be killed under the guise of law and order and now we're going to allow Ray to be lynched under the guise of justice," Mr. Bevel said at a news conference in Philadelphia.

But in Atlanta, the head of the SCLC, the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, said he knew of no evidence that might acquit Ray.

Mr. Abernathy said "I felt that Mr. Bevel was merely seeking to state what I have seen is guilty in the death of Martin Luther King. I do not believe he was saying Mr. Ray did not pull the trigger."

During the news conference Mr. Abernathy repeatedly used the word "conspiracy" in referring to the King assassination.

He said Negro leaders in Memphis believe that persons other than Ray were aware of the plan to kill Dr. King. He cited as reasons the orders to remove two Negro firemen and a Negro policeman from the immediate area of the Lorraine Motel on the day of the assassination. However, Mr. Abernathy said the information is second-hand and he could not vouch for its validity.

Mr. Bevel has offered to act as a lawyer for Ray, but this has been refused because he is not a member of the bar. He said yesterday that he planned to appeal this ruling against him by Memphis Judge Preston Battle.

Mr. Bevel described Ray as "an innocent, mentally deranged man" who has never been involved in any sort of racial conflict and "is not a racist."

He said he conferred with Ray for an hour last week in the Shelby County jail and became "even more thoroughly convinced that Ray is not the assassin of Dr. King."

"It is apparent to me," Mr. Bevel said, that Ray "doesn't have the kind of mind that could do two or three days planning for such a thing."

He added that Ray "is not very well coordinated physically. He would not have the dexterity to fire a gun accurately for 100 yards."

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