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JUDGE SAYS BEVEL CAN'T DEFEND RAY

Court Rejects Legal Role for Ex-Aide of Dr. King

MEMPHIS, Jan. 24 (AP)—Judge W. Preston Battle of Criminal Court told the Rev. James Bevel today he may not help defend James Earl Ray against a murder charge in the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This, the judge said, is because Mr. Bevel is not a lawyer.

Mr. Bevel, who had been associated with Dr. King, says he has evidence that would acquit Ray. He and Percy Foreman, Ray's chief defense lawyer, conferred with the judge earlier in the day.

After the meeting the judge said Mr. Bevel, an official of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which was founded by Dr. King, had asked court permission to associate himself with Ray's legal defense. Judge Battle said he had rejected the request because Mr. Bevel was not a lawyer. He said he had explained that a law degree was required to practice law in Tennessee.

Addresses Church Leaders

Mr. Bevel told a meeting of church leaders last night that he could prove "within 30 minutes" that it would have been impossible for Ray to have assassinated Dr. King as he stood on a balcony of the Lorraine Motel here last April 4.

A sniper's bullet cut down the civil rights leader shortly after he arrived here to head a march in support of the city's striking sanitation workers.

Mr. Bevel declined to disclose the nature of the evidence that he said would free Ray. Ray's trial is scheduled to start March 3.

Mr. Bevel made the statement after he and Mr. Foreman conferred with Ray in the prisoner's top-security cell in the Shelby County Jail. He was the first person, other than Ray's lawyers and his two brothers, to be permitted to visit Ray.

Sheriff William N. Morris, in charge of the prisoner's security, said he had given permission for the visit at Mr. Foreman's request and after receiving Judge Battle's approval.

Mr. Bevel offered his aid to Ray last Saturday in a telegram sent from his Philadelphia home. He came here Thursday.

He told the church group, which included officials of the National Council of Churches, that he could prove "beyond a doubt" Ray was innocent.

"People should do justice," he said. "Murdering Ray has no relation to justice. Folks are so interested in justice that they are going to let the state lynch a man."

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