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Ray Pleads Not Guilty, Trial Is Set for Nov. 12

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP)—James Earl Ray pleaded not guilty today to a charge of assassinating the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. here April 4 and trial was set for Nov. 12.

Appearing publicly for the first time since his extradition hearings in London, England, Ray entered his plea through his lawyer, Arthur Hanes of Birmingham, Ala.

Security officers searched persons who entered the Shelby County Criminal Courtroom to witness Ray's arraignment.

Ray, wearing a checked blue sport coat and blue slacks, was led into the courtroom at 10:57 a.m., CDT, and the arraignment proceedings ended 12 minutes later. Ray was returned to his steel-lined, air-conditioned cell block in the county jail.

Hanes had both indictments read—one alleging murder in

the first degree and the other charging Ray with carrying a dangerous weapon.

At the end of each reading, Hanes said: "My client wishes to enter a plea of innocent."

Ray remained silent throughout the arraignment. He was seated at the counsel table between Hanes and Hanes' son, Arthur Jr. Behind them sat Sheriff William N. Morris Jr. and two other officers.

Judge Preston Battle had told Hanes a plea did not have to be entered today and asked whether the defense wanted a recess.

"We will enter a plea to the indictment," Hanes responded.

Battle also asked if Hanes wanted a period of "a few days or a few weeks" to determine when he would be ready to try the case.

Dist. Atty. Gen. Phil Canale told the court he had conferred with Hanes about having the trial in late September. But, he said, it might last until the Nov. 5 general election. Under Tennessee law, sequestered jurors cannot cast ballots.

Canale suggested the Nov. 12 date and Battle asked if it could be set earlier. Hanes said he felt the case could be completed in six weeks—the time between late September and election day.

"But I have no idea what the prosecution will put on," Hanes said.

"All right," Battle responded. "let's set the case for Nov. 12."

The courtroom was filled by about 70 persons, including nearly 50 newsmen and about a dozen plain-clothes officers. Several lawyers watching the proceedings sat on a long bench at one side of the room.

The arraignment originally had been set for 9:30 a.m., but security under which all spectators and even the judge and attorneys were searched held it up.

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