

Martin Luther King Jr.'s Nobel Medal, Bible Placed in Care of Court

Martin Luther King Jr.'s Nobel Peace Prize medal and personal Bible must be moved to a court-controlled safety deposit box, a judge ruled on Wednesday as the late civil rights leader's children are engaged in a fight over ownership of his estate.

Fulton County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney said once the medal and Bible are moved, "they won't go anywhere until we resolve this matter."

Under the judge's order, both items will be stored in a single bank box and the judge will hold the keys.

King, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, was assassinated four years later in Memphis, Tenn.

His two sons, Dexter and Martin Luther King III, want to sell the Nobel medal and the Bible. Their sister, Bernice King, is opposing the sale.

The King estate sued Bernice King in late January, seeking an emergency court order forcing her to return the Nobel Prize and Bible, saying she signed a 1995 agreement giving control of King's possessions to the estate.

"While I love my brothers dearly, this latest decision by them is extremely troubling," she said in a statement after the lawsuit was filed. "Our Father MUST be turning in his grave."

Currently, King's Nobel Peace Prize medal is in a bank safety deposit box and the Bible, which President Obama used in his second inauguration ceremony, is at the nonprofit Martin Luther King Center for Nonviolent Change in Atlanta, said Eric Barnum, Bernice King's lawyer.

Bernice King is CEO of the nonprofit King Center.

On Jan. 22, Dexter King and Martin Luther King III, as board members of the King estate, voted to pursue the sale of the medal and Bible.

Bernice King, the estate's third board member, voted against the sale and has refused to turn over the items to her brothers. Her lawyer, Barnum, said Bernice King views the items as "sacred."

The items have been under her care in recent years since the death of her mother, Coretta Scott King, in 2006.

William Hill, attorney for the estate, told the court on Wednesday that the estate may miss out on important sale unless Bernice King returns the items promptly. The money from the sale is needed to maintain the estate, which partially funds the King Center and hires lawyers to protect the King copyright and legacy.

"These opportunities are fleeting," Hill said.

The potential buyer has not been publicly identified nor has the asking price.

But Barnum said the estate never conducted a full inventory of the items, and that the vote to sell them might have been invalid because two empty seats on the estate's board have not been filled.

The judge said there is a "likelihood" the King estate will win the case. In the meantime while the case is pending, he wanted the items to be safely stored.

In a separate lawsuit, the King estate has accused the King Center of failing to properly care for items that belonged to King, including the Bible.

In August, the estate sued the King Center, seeking to end the

license that allows the center to use the King name and image. That lawsuit cited a “strained” relationship between the estate and the King Center, which includes a museum and the civil rights leader’s crypt.

Editing by David Adams and G Crosse

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