

BELL MAY INTERVIEW DR. KING'S MURDERER

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Attorney General Still Troubled by Some Unanswered Questions

By ANTHONY MARRO

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 24 — Attorney General Griffin B. Bell said today that he was still troubled by some of the unanswered questions surrounding the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. nearly a decade ago, and that he might try to answer them by interviews with James Earl Ray, Dr. King's convicted murderer.

Mr. Bell, who said he planned no such action until the House Select Committee on Assassinations decided whether to continue its own investigation, added that he was particularly interested in learning how Mr. Ray obtained the money he had before and after the shooting of Dr. King, and whether anyone helped him obtain passports and make travel arrangements.

"I'd like to know where he [Mr. Ray] got his money," the Attorney General told a group of reporters at a breakfast meeting. "I don't think we're going to find out except from him."

The question of where Mr. Ray obtained the money he used for extensive travel and expensive purchases between the time he escaped from prison in 1967 and his arrest in London in June 1968, two months after Dr. King was slain in Memphis, was not answered by a recent Jus-

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tice Department study that was made public last week.

The study, which concluded that the Federal Bureau of Investigation's inquiry into Dr. King's murder had been thorough and professional, and that the best available evidence suggested that Mr. Ray had acted alone, said that the question of where he obtained his funds remained a "mystery," but that the F.B.I. theory that he had committed robberies was a credible one.

Mr. Bell said in response to a question that he might consider trying to arrange some "consideration" for Mr. Ray if he became convinced that Mr. Ray was telling the truth in any interview that might take place. But the Attorney General noted that, because Mr. Ray is serving a 99-year sentence in a Tennessee state prison, not a Federal penitentiary, he had no direct access to the convict.

Mr. Ray had refused to be interviewed by the Justice Department investigators who reviewed the F.B.I. inquiry, and his attorney, James H. Lesar, said today that he might advise Mr. Ray to continue to refuse interviews and insist instead on a new trial.

"I'd either want to speak to Ray myself or send one of my skilled people who know how to negotiate and interrogate," Mr. Bell said. "If we came to the conclusion he was making a clean breast, then we'd see about [some] consideration."

A Wide-Ranging Interview

Mr. Bell's comments on the assassination of Dr. King came during a wide-ranging, hour-long meeting with about two dozen reporters, at which he promised a broad campaign against all forms of organized crime, said he intended to keep the strike force concept intact, and praised the administrative abilities of Mayor Peter F. Flaherty of Pittsburgh, who is expected to be nominated to be his deputy.

The Attorney General, who said he had not met Mr. Flaherty until recently, when the Mayor stopped by for a "courtesy call," said that Mr. Flaherty's administrative abilities were much in need. "I don't believe the department has been properly managed for years," he said.

Reminded that he had said at his confirmation hearings that the deputy should have a strong background in law enforcement and not be a political partisan, Mr. Bell arched his brow in mock surprise and said: "Did I say that? I'll have to send somebody to look that up. I don't remember."

Mayor Flaherty, a Democrat, was one of the first urban leaders to endorse Mr. Carter in his campaign for the Democratic Presidential nomination last year.

In the last months of the Ford Administration, there had been several proposals within the Justice Department to de-emphasize or do away with the criminal division's strike forces, which are special units intended to prosecute organized crime. Mr. Bell said he intended to keep the strike forces in existence, but suggested that he might try to limit their autonomy.

At the same time, he said he did not plan to focus particular attention on the Mafia. "If we have a broad policy against loan-sharking and white-collar and organized crime, we will get the Mafia," he said. "But we shouldn't go after one group. We should find out what crimes they are committing and get them for those crimes."