

FBI acts in King case under review

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WASHINGTON (AP)—The Justice Department on Thursday launched a full review of the FBI investigation of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, although Atty. Gen. Edward H. Levi said a preliminary inquiry turned up no evidence that the probe was less than thorough.

Levi said he will assign a team of department lawyers to review some 200,000 FBI documents dealing with the assassination of King and also the FBI campaign to harass and discredit him as a civil rights leader.

The team of four to six lawyers will review any other relevant documents

and conduct interviews in a month-long investigation, said Asst. Atty. Gen. J. Stanley Pottinger.

Levi announced his decision after studying the conclusions Pottinger drew from a preliminary review of about 3,500 FBI documents.

Pottinger had recommended the appointment of an outside commission, including civil rights leaders, to pursue the investigation.

But Levi rejected the approach because he "believes this department has a very serious responsibility to insure that any alleged wrongdoing, whether inside or outside the department, is dealt with by the attorney general," Pottinger told a news conference.

Levi's decision to keep the investigation within the department was attacked immediately by the Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, who succeeded King as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

"I will not be satisfied until the

President ... appoints a special committee of distinguished American citizens who owe no allegiance to anyone except to their country and to justice and to truth," Abernathy said in Atlanta. "I do not have any faith whatsoever in the investigation as conducted by the FBI in the tragic assassination ..."

Levi instructed Pottinger, head of the Civil Rights Division, to undertake the preliminary review after the Senate Intelligence Committee disclosed details of the FBI harassment of King until the assassination of April 4, 1968, on a motel balcony in Memphis, Tenn.

The harassment was ordered by the late J. Edgar Hoover, then FBI director. Pottinger said nine FBI officials were involved in planning and directing the harassment. He said all are now dead or retired, but he declined to name them.

James Earl Ray was arrested for killing King, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 99 years in prison. He has since gone to court in an effort to withdraw his plea and go to trial.