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More inquiry needed on King assassination

There is no evidence yet that Atty. Gen. Edward H. Levi is serious about probing the FBI's handling of the search for Dr. Martin Luther King's killer. There is even less reason to believe that Levi may ultimately order an investigation into possible FBI involvement in King's assassination.

But if the Justice Department merely planned a do-nothing stall until the public furor wears down, recent public revelations about and by Stanley Levison, a former adviser of Dr. King, ought to make it clear that a thorough probe is required.

Levison (and charges that he was a secret agent of the Soviet Union) became the key to the fate of King in 1963. That was when the FBI first told President John F. Kennedy that King's speeches and actions were influenced by Levison, whom the FBI called "a secret Communist."

Levison, now 63 and reportedly in poor health, said publicly a few days ago that he "was never a member of the Communist party."

That is in total contradiction to what I personally was told by a high-ranking member of the FBI who handled internal security matters. He said that not only was Levison a security Communist, but that he traveled to Mexico periodically to meet with a Soviet master spy.

When I asked for proof,

this top-level FBI official replied, "We've been trying for months without success to get a photograph of King's adviser with this Russian in Mexico."

Nonetheless, J. Edgar Hoover told Presidents Kennedy and Johnson the same thing about Levison. It was specifically this charge, that Levison was a secret agent, which enabled Hoover to pressure Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy to approve wiretaps on King in 1963.

Hoover's irresistible argument with the attorney general was that while King had promised President Kennedy he would break off contact with Levison, "he is now meeting him secretly."

Hoover later so alarmed President Johnson with reports of Levison's "Communist influence" on Dr. King that Johnson asked me, the late Whitney M. Young, Jr., and probably other civil rights leaders to "talk to Dr. King" and warn him that he was hurting the civil rights movement by giving Hoover this kind of ammunition.

Several of us did talk to Dr. King, but he believed Levison rather than Hoover and said he had erred in ever promising President Kennedy that he would sever contact with Levison. My suspicions grow daily that the killing of Dr. King was ordered by Americans who were convinced by

Hoover that King was harming the U.S. and helping the Soviet Union. I personally expressed my fears to Dr. King that he might become a target of drastic actions, especially when he made exceptionally strong statements about U.S. "crimes" in Vietnam. When he rejected the warning, I wrote a magazine article I hoped would shake him up to the realities.

After his death, I was told the FBI was concentrating its investigation first on Mexico on the assumption that "the Communists determined that they needed to get rid of him." This, it later became clear, was a smokescreen.

So now we have the eerie — and unproven — allegations by Roy E. Frankhouser, a former paid government informer who operated inside the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi party, that the FBI tried to use the Klan to kill King in 1966. Frankhouser makes the equally inflammatory and unproven charge that James Earl Ray was "handpicked out of the FBI files" to kill King in 1968.

Frankhouser's allegations deepen the suspicions of those of us who've always wondered about Ray's mysterious escape from prison in Missouri; or how he got the passport of a Royal Canadian Mounted Police sergeant, with which

he escaped to Europe, or who bankrolled him. Or why such an effort was made to imprison Ray without a trial. Many of the principals in the King drama are dead. But a few are still around. Some of them surely can tell us a lot that we need to know. Levi ought not waste much time in asking them.