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FBI King File To Be Checked

By MORRIS CUNNINGHAM

From The Commercial Appeal
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department's review of the FBI investigation into the assassination of Martin Luther King initially will be limited to checking the contents of "four drawers in a filing cabinet," and will not necessitate a return of investigators to Memphis.

John Wilson, a spokesman for the Justice Department, said Atty. Gen. Edward Levi has ordered a review of the FBI's investigatory work into the assassination — and not into the assassination itself — to determine "the sufficiency of the original investigation."

The review was ordered in light of recent Senate Intelligence Committee disclosures that the late J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI director who led the King investigation, considered the civil rights leader "dangerous" and was a party to various harassments directed at King before he

was fatally wounded on a Memphis motel balcony April 4, 1968.

At a news conference Wednesday night, President Ford said he abhors harassment of King and an effort should be made to bring to justice those responsible. He said he would consult with Levi on the matter.

The records to be reviewed, Wilson said, "fill four drawers in a filing cabinet," apparently containing paperwork and agent reports on their investigatory work.

Asst. Attys. Gen. J. Stanley Pottinger and Richard L. Thornburgh will review the files and determine whether the investigation, for any reason, should be reopened.

Wilson noted that Levi, Pottinger and Thornburgh all have joined the Justice Department since the King slaying.

The Senate hearing disclosures have led to some voicing concern that the FBI's preconceived notions may have led to shortcomings, and possibly to cover-ups, during the investigation.

The disclosures include reports the FBI bugged King's hotel rooms and sent tapes to his wife, and, at one time, sent him a letter hinting he should commit suicide. Hoover, testimony indicated, believed King to be "dangerous" and agents should act to blunt his effectiveness.

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Levi ordered Pottinger, assistant attorney general in charge of civil rights, and Thornburgh, assistant attorney general in charge of the criminal division, "to review the file and to recommend to me whether the investigation should be reopened."

Levi's action "is not in itself a reopening of the matter," Wilson said. "He has no indication that the original investigation was anything less than thorough."

The FBI, which threw heavy resources into the investigation of King's murder, early identified his probable killer as James Earl Ray and traced Ray to London, where he was apprehended.

Ray was extradited, returned to Memphis and tried for murder in Shelby County Criminal Court. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 99 years in state prison. Ray's recent petition for a new trial was denied.

Wilson said there are no plans at this time for any field investigation that might result in FBI agents once again studying the scene of the slaying in Memphis.