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Being in New York all last week, I've

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Memphis, Tenn., Saturday Morning, February 19, 1977

gotten behind on my ~~clipping~~ clipping.

Best, *Phil*

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Inquiry Finds No Conspiracy In King Death

By MORRIS CUNNINGHAM

From The Commercial Appeal
Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — James Earl Ray killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the evidence indicates he acted alone, a Justice Department task force concluded Friday after an exhaustive, eight-month inquiry.

A 201-page report found the Federal Bureau of Investigation "thoroughly" and "honestly" investigated King's April 4, 1968, murder in Memphis, and was not itself implicated in the crime.

"We found no evidence of any complicity on the part of the Memphis Police Department or of the FBI," the report said.

Ruling out a conspiracy, the report said "the sum of all of the evidence of Ray's guilt points to him so exclusively that it most effectively makes the point that no one else was involved.

"Of course," the report added, "someone could conceivably have provided him (Ray) with logistics, or even paid him to commit the crime. However, we have found no competent evidence upon which

to base such a theory.

"... we found that conspiracy leads ... had been conscientiously run down by the FBI even though they had no possible relation to Ray's stories or to the known facts," the report asserted. "The results were negative."

The study was ordered last year by then Atty. Gen. Edward H. Levi after reports surfaced of the FBI's persistent surveillance and harassment of King in the years preceding his murder.

It was directed by Michael E. Shaheen Jr., 36, who grew up in Como, Miss., and once was a law clerk for U.S. Dist. Judge Robert M. McRae Jr. in Memphis.

The task force's report which came after checks into 200,000 documents and interviews of 40 witnesses, was so sweeping that it further undermined a faltering House attempt to investigate King's death along with the assassination of President Kennedy. Shaheen, reached by The Commercial Appeal, declined to comment on this aspect of the report's prospective impact.

The report named the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover as the force behind the FBI's years-long "illicit surveillance" of King that it said included "a series of illegal surreptitious entries."

In several instances the report omitted names and other details, such as when it referred to "advisers" to King with Communist connections and FBI bugging King's hotel rooms.

Asked about these instances, Shaheen

said the reason was to "protect the rights of privacy."

"The flames of Director Hoover's antipathy for Dr. King were fanned into open hostility in late 1962 when Dr. King criticized the bureau's performance during an investigation of a racial disturbance in Albany, Ga." the report said.

"The controversy was publicly rekindled in early 1964 when the director testified before a House appropriations subcommittee that he believed Communist influence existed in the Negro movement. King countered by accusing the director of abetting racist right-wingers."

The report said that in October, 1963, Hoover received from then Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy authority "for technical surveillance of Dr. King's residence and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference office in New York City . . . and it was instituted almost immediately." Other surveillance followed.

However, despite past differences, the FBI pitched in and carried out an honest and thorough investigation of King's murder. It led to Ray's apprehension, guilty plea, and the 99-year-sentence he now is serving in Tennessee's Brushy Mountain Prison.

The report traced in detail the murder in Memphis and the course of the investigation that followed and culminated in the arrest and trial.

While in general commending the FBI's work in the case, the report at the same

(Continued on Page 7)



Michael E. Shaheen Jr. X

(Continued from Page 1)

time was critical on some specific points. One was the failure to learn more about Ray, his previous life-style and source of funds.

"In light of the fact that a good deal of mystery still surrounds James Ray and the assassination, particularly the means by which he financed his life-style and travels, we concluded that on the basis of the information which was uncovered, the bureau should have pursued this line of the investigation more thoroughly," the report said.

It said the FBI learned that Ray was aided by a family member during the manhunt, and also had had contacts with two brothers and a sister while in Missouri State Penitentiary prior to King's murder.

The report said it is possible that Ray received funds from family members. However, it noted the FBI's opinion that Ray financed himself with proceeds from a series of robberies.

As to Ray's motive in shooting King, the report found justification for a belief that Ray hated blacks.

The report dealt in detail with the recall, shortly before King was killed, of Memphis police Det. Edward E. Redditt from a two-man police detail that had King under surveillance at the Lorraine Motel on April 4, 1968. Redditt was recalled from the assignment, and placed under guard himself, after police reported receiving a threat against his life. Patrolman Willie B. Richmond remained on guard near the motel, heard the shot that killed King, and sounded an alarm.

The task force found some instances where the FBI failed to cooperate fully with the Justice Department and U.S. Atty. Gen. Ramsey Clark during the course of the manhunt and apprehension of Ray, but attached no significance to it.

It said the FBI prepared and filed the criminal complaint rather than leaving it to the Justice Department to do.

"The bureau selected Birmingham as the venue in which to file the complaint in preference to Memphis because the bureau 'could not rely on the U.S. attorney at Memphis (the late Thomas L. Robinson), and 'would lose control of the situation'," the report said.

At one point Clark complained to the FBI of being "kept in the dark," whereupon the assistant to Hoover to whom he was talking "accused the attorney general of falsifications" and hung up, the report recounted.

The report's major criticism of the FBI, however, was restricted to the repeated electronic surveillance, including illegal break-ins, of King in the years preceding his murder.

"We believe the persistent controversy between Dr. King and Director Hoover was a major factor in the bureau's determination to discredit Dr. King and ultimately destroy his leadership role in the civil rights movement," the report said.

However, the report said that in the light of presidential directives and Hoover's views, "it was understandable that a security investigation should be initiated into the possible influence of the Communist Party, U.S.A., on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Two of King's close advisers, at the outset of the security matter, were reported to be Communist Party members by sources relied upon by the bureau.

"The security investigation continued for almost six years until Dr. King's death. It verified, in our view, that one alleged Communist was a very influential adviser to Dr. King (and hence the SCLC) on the strategy and tactics of King's leadership of the black civil rights movement of the early and mid-sixties. Another had no such weight although he seemed to be of use to King."

"King himself never varied publicly or privately

from his commitment to nonviolence and did not advocate the overthrow of the government of the United States by violence or subversion," the report said. "To the contrary, he advocated an end to the discrimination and disenfranchisement of minority groups which the constitution and the courts denounced in terms as strong as his. We concluded that Dr. King was no threat to domestic security."

The task force recommended corrective measures to prevent a repetition of the harassment of King but said "because the five-year statute of limitations has long since run, we cannot recommend criminal prosecution of any bureau personnel, past or present, responsible for the possible criminal harassment of Dr. King."