

Levi Orders the F.B.I. Files on Dr. King Reviewed in a Broadening of Inquiry

By JOHN M. CREWDSON

WASHINGTON, April 29—Attorney General Edward H. Levi has ordered an Internal Justice Department review of some 2,500 files compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation on the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., both before and after his assassination in 1968.

In a statement released today, Mr. Levi said that his order for an expanded investigation issued last Monday, had been based on a recommendation from lawyers in the department's civil rights division who have spent the last five months studying both the King assassination and the F.B.I.'s campaign to harass and discredit him in the six years before his death.

The initial finding conveyed to Mr. Levi by J. Stanley Pottinger, head of the civil rights division, was that no evidence had been found to suggest either that the F.B.I.'s harassment program contributed to the civil rights leader's harassment program contributed to the civil rights leader's death or that the bureau's investigation of his murder was less than thorough.

Mr. Pottinger said at a news conference later that he believed it was "possible" that

evidence to contradict this finding might turn up in the 2,500 files, believed to contain more than 200,000 documents, in F.B.I. field offices around the country.

Interviews With Agents

The expanded investigation, which will be conducted by the Justice Department's new office of professional responsibility, will also include interviews with present and former agents involved in the harassment campaign of the assassination investigation, a department spokesman said.

Mr. Pottinger's conclusions were based only on an examination of the 96-volume central, or "core" file, here, summarizing the bureau's investigation that led to the arrest of James Earl Ray, who pleaded guilty to Dr. King's murder but has since attempted to renounce that plea.

The core file also contained some details of what Mr. Levi termed "a systematic program of harassment of Dr. King in order to discredit him and harm both him and the movement he led."

The Attorney General said he had ordered that the new, broader investigation provide conclusive answers to the questions addressed by Mr. Pottinger and

furnish him with any evidence there might be that "the nature of the relationship between the bureau and Dr. King calls for criminal prosecutions, disciplinary proceedings, or other appropriate action" by the Justice Department.

Senate Panel Disclosures

Mr. Levi ordered the Pottinger inquiry last fall, after disclosures by the Senate intelligence committee that the F.B.I. bugged Dr. King's hotel rooms, sent tape recordings of his sexual activities to his wife, Coretta, mailed him an anonymous note that he interpreted as a suggestion that he commit suicide and sought to replace him as head of the civil rights movement with a black leader of the bureau's own choosing.

Mr. Pottinger's report to Mr. Levi containing the recommendation for an expanded inquiry reportedly also suggested that the Attorney General appoint an independent commission of prominent American citizens to review the full F.B.I. record, along the lines of the commission, under the late Chief Justice Earl Warren, that investigated the Assassination of President Kennedy.

No explanation of why Mr. Levi chose to keep the King investigation inside the Justice



Associated Press

Edward H. Levi

Department was immediately forthcoming, however.

The Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, who succeeded Dr. King as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, said in Atlanta today that he continued to lack faith in the bureau's investigation of Dr. King's death.

Mr. Abernathy said he would "not be satisfied" until President Ford assigned the task of producing a final verdict on Dr. King's death to "a special committee of distinguished American citizens who owe no allegiance to anyone except to their country and to justice and to truth."