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FBI 'Tip' Alleged in King Case

*Summary -
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Service of the Washington Star

WASHINGTON—Three years before Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was slain, an FBI agent walked into a Louisville, Ky., police station and told one or more officers that there were people willing to pay an enormous amount of money for a "hit" on the civil rights leader.

The "contract" was for either \$500,000 or \$250,000, and those who wanted King dead were either the Communist Party or the Ku Klux Klan.

That story was told to the House Assassinations Committee in three days of closed hearings last week by at least two men who were members of the Louisville police force in 1955. One policeman was so concerned he secretly tape-recorded another officer's account of how the FBI spread word of the contract.

The committee also took testimony from several FBI officials including the agent who gave the story to the police. The agent, whose name was not

disclosed, is still a member of the FBI and is stationed in the Midwest.

Robert Blakey, committee counsel, refused to comment on what transpired at the hearings or on what conclusions the committee reached.

However, it was learned that members of the committee, headed by Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, emerged with mixed feelings about the incident in Louisville.

"But what makes it sinister," said one person knowledgeable about what happened in Memphis in 1968, "is that it (the Louisville incident) might have led to what happened in Memphis in 1968." King was fatally wounded by a rifleman at a Memphis hotel and James Earl Ray pleaded guilty to the shooting. Ray now says he did not kill King and is asking for a new trial.

"Some people might say it was only a joke, but if it was, where's the punchline?" said one investigator. "Look at the possibilities."

"One, maybe it was intended to be a joke, but it was a sick one, and maybe it spread word-of-mouth to the Missouri jail where Ray was doing time. And maybe Ray really believed somebody was ready to pay \$250,000 or \$500,000 to the man who killed King. We know he spoke about it while he was in the Missouri jail.

"Two, maybe it was not a joke but part of Cointelpro, the FBI's campaign for disrupting some of the movements that were growing in the '60s.

"Or, three, maybe that kind of money really was being offered for King's death in 1965.

"Depending on what really happened, it was at best a bad, sick joke and at worst an incitement to homicide."

Committee sources referred all queries to the FBI, but they indicated

that the agent who allegedly told the policemen about the supposed contract on King has denied ever saying what the policeman alleged was said.

The incident was brought to the attention of the committee eight months ago by Rep. Gene Snyder, D-Ky. Snyder received a letter from a former policeman recounting the incident and asking to be put in touch with the assassinations panel.

At that time Snyder met with the former policeman and characterized him as a rational sort of man. The impression this policeman made on the committee was that he was a "straight arrow" who even tape-recorded another policeman's account of the blood money story the FBI man allegedly was peddling.

After receiving the letter and listening to the tape, Snyder turned everything over to the Stokes committee.

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