

No effect on King probe by Hoover 'racism'

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark said Tuesday the Justice Department did not take control of the investigation of Martin Luther King's assassination because it would have worsened relations between him and J. Edgar Hoover.

He said that although there was a "quality of racism" in the late FBI director's attitude toward the civil rights leader, the FBI investigation of the killing was vigorous and thorough.

"The FBI's reputation was on the line," Clark said. "Failure to perform would have had profound impact on public confidence in the FBI."

Clark acknowledged that except for making suggestions and keeping himself informed, he gave the FBI a free hand in setting the direction of the investigation.

He testified before the House Assassinations Committee, which has criticized both the FBI and Justice Department, saying they failed to investigate adequately the possibility of a conspiracy in the April 4, 1968, assassination of the civil rights leader.

A committee report also has concluded there was inadequate Justice Department supervision of the investigation.

Committee investigators say they have turned up indications that the brothers of James Earl Ray may have played a part in the assassination.

Ray is currently serving a 99-year prison term for the assassination. He has recanted a confession made before pleading guilty to the assassination in 1969. Clark said although the FBI investi-

gated various conspiracy theories while he was in the Justice Department, "I don't recall any presentation of evidence that ever implied the direct involvement of another person."

Clark said while he had frequent disagreements with Hoover over various

In a related development, James Earl Ray's brother, John, was arrested in St. Louis Monday night on charges of trespass and assault. Police said he was interrupted in an apparent burglary attempt.

He is scheduled to appear before the Assassinations Committee Friday. A subcommittee of the full panel voted Tuesday to ask a federal judge to order local St. Louis authorities to permit Ray to testify despite his arrest on charges unrelated to the committee investigation.

law enforcement issues, including the use of wiretaps, he does not believe the King investigation should have been handled any differently.

"I didn't think I was Sherlock Holmes and take over the investigation myself," he said.

To have asserted his constitutional authority as attorney general and taken control, Clark said, "probably would have been worse in terms of already strained relations" with Hoover and the FBI.

Clark said that while he felt Hoover had been in his job too long, it would have been too sensitive politically for a president or attorney general to remove him.

The committee has said the Justice Department failed to use investigative

techniques such as convening a grand jury or creating a strike force to make sure any conspiracy in the King killing was uncovered.

Clark said those techniques were not used in the King assassination investigation because neither would have worked.

He said that after Ray was captured in London in June 1968, he wrote a memo to Hoover, urging an investigation of the possibility that other persons were involved in King's killing.

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The former attorney general acknowledged it was possible that once Ray was caught there may have been a letdown within the FBI because public pressure was eased.