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King 'Influencer' Named

By Laurence Stern
Washington Post Staff Writer

The mysterious political influence whose name the FBI secretly invoked to persuade Robert F. Kennedy to permit the wiretapping of Martin Luther King Jr. was a New York lawyer who had been a close friend and supporter of King.

He is Stanley Levison, a civil rights activist who helped King since the days of the Birmingham bus boycott with free legal and financial advice, according to a 1971 book

account whose accuracy was confirmed yesterday by a former high-ranking Justice Department official.

The issue of King's bugging and wiretapping during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations was revived last week in the Senate intelligence committee, which maintained the high classification on Levison's identity accorded it by the FBI.

A spokesman for the committee said yesterday that the identity of the King

associate who triggered the wiretap and bugging was being kept secret for "national security" reasons rather than privacy grounds.

Levison's role in the King surveillance was described in detail, however, in the 1971 book "Kennedy Justice" by New York writer Victor Navasky. The account received virtually no attention in the news media and neither the FBI nor Justice Department has previously com-

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NICHOLAS KATZENBACH
...cites FBI memoranda

KING, From A1

mented on Navasky's account.

In the wiretap requests of Oct. 7 and 18, 1963, which bore the signed approval of Robert F. Kennedy, then Attorney General, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover said the surveillance was necessary "in view of the possible Communist influence in the racial situation." Copies of the authorization released by the Senate committee last week deleted the identity of the person named in Hoover's request.

Hoover memoranda bearing the initialed approval of Kennedy's successor, Nicholas Katzenbach, also said the installation of a bug was necessary in a New York City hotel room because of the influence on King of "individuals with subversive backgrounds."

In the testimony last week on the wiretap and bugging case the suspected associate of King was described as a "secret Communist" although there was never any evidence cited publicly that King or his movement, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was ever under any form of Communist influence.

Katzenbach testified last week that as a deputy to Kennedy he recalled seeing in 1962 "one or more memoranda stating, in substance, that an important secret member of the Communist Party, known to be such to the FBI, was in close contact with Dr. King and might be influencing the actions of Dr. King's movement in ways amicable to the interests of the Soviet Union and contrary to those of the United States."

Katzenbach said that Robert Kennedy had a member of the Justice Department's civil rights division call upon King and suggest that "it was not in his interest nor in the interest of his movement to have further contact with this person." Katzenbach did not name the person.

King followed the suggestion for a while, Katzenbach testified, but then resumed his contacts. Afterward Hoover prepared "a detailed memorandum about Dr. King, referring to the fact of Communist infiltration in the movement and discussing questions of moral character," said Katzenbach.

When Hoover gave the memorandum wide circulation in the government, Katzenbach related, Kennedy became furious and ordered him to withdraw all copies.

Later, however, Kennedy authorized the wiretaps.

According to Navasky's account, the Justice Department failed to provide King with the evidence he requested to substantiate the allegations against Levison and justify the request that he cut off the association.

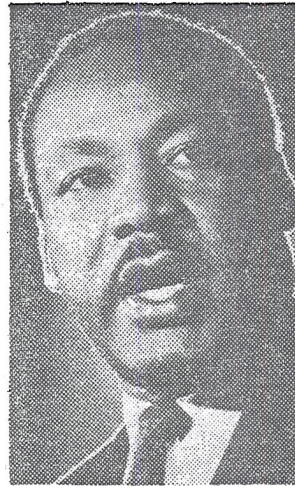
King, under prodding from the Attorney General and President, agreed to stop his association with Levison but then reconsidered and resumed the personal and working relationship. "If anybody wants to make something of it let them try." King is reported by Navasky to have told Levison.

"According to the Kennedys, when the FBI saw that King hadn't really broken with Levison, this confirmed Mr. Hoover's worst suspicions—that King was either under Communist control or a conscious fellow traveler," Navasky wrote.

In all the controversy over the responsibility for the King wiretaps and buggings there has never been any substantiation of the Hoover

allegations against Levison that furnished the FBI rationale for the surveillance. Levison, who was away from his New York home yesterday recuperating from surgery and therefore unavailable for comment, is still active in civil rights legal work in New York.

In her memoir, "My Life with Martin Luther King Jr.," Coretta King recounted that in the various crises of his life—from his indictment in Montgomery, Ala., on trumped-up tax falsification charges in 1956 to his assassination 12 years later—Levison was always on hand "to offer assistance . . . always working in the background, his contribution has been indispensable."



MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
...prodded by Kennedys