

Rights Leaders Ask Probe Of Dr. King Assassination

By Leon Dash

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Civil rights activists the Rev. Ralph Abernathy and comedian Dick Gregory yesterday called upon President Ford to open a new "independent investigation" into the assassination over seven years ago of civil rights leader the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

During a 10-minute press conference in front of the White House, Abernathy, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, said he wanted a new "thorough investigation into the tragic assassination of the most peaceful warrior of the 20th Century," King. ^{26 NOV}

On Wednesday night, President Ford said at a White House press conference that an effort should be made to identify agents in the Federal Bureau of Investigation who conducted a campaign of character assassination against King.

Ford stopped short of saying that the FBI agents should be fired or prosecuted for their part in the campaign, however. The activities aimed at Dr. King were conducted at the direction of the late FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover, according to a Senate intelligence report released last week.

"I certainly condemn those actions which were taken regarding Martin Luther King," Ford said. "I think it is

abhorrent to all Americans, including myself." ^{24 NOV}

U.S. Attorney General Edward H. Levi on Monday instructed Assistant Attorneys General J. Stanley Pottinger, head of the Justice Department's civil rights division, and Richard L. Thornburgh, head of the criminal division, to review the FBI's investigation of the assassination of King. Levi told the two officials to consider if the investigation should be reopened.

Gregory said he does not think any new investigation into King's assassination in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968, should be conducted by the FBI because of the recent allegations regarding their harassment of King. "I'm not that interested in the FBI investigating itself," said Gregory. He said he believes the agency has "covered up" the King assassination.

Both Abernathy and Gregory said they had presented new evidence to the Justice Department and FBI last July 3, that James Earl Ray, the convicted assassin of King, did not act alone.

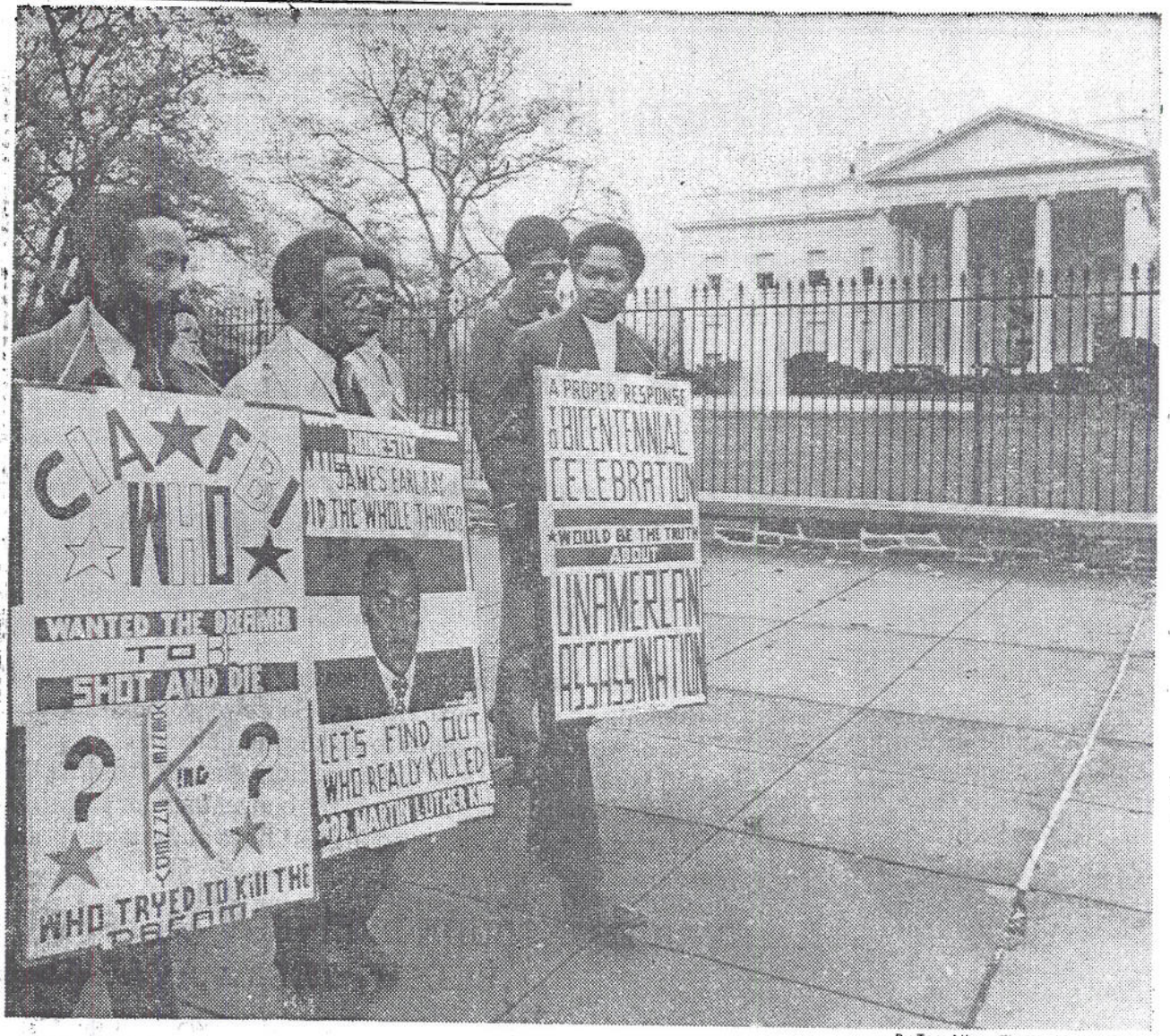
"The evidence shows that more than one person was involved in the King assassination," Abernathy said. "I am calling for a new trial for James Earl Ray" so the new evidence could be examined, he said.

Both men said that Robert Byron Watson, in federal

prison in Ashland, Kentucky, and C.H. Andrews alias R.L. Warren, incarcerated at the Mimico Correctional Institute in Toronto, Canada, have new evidence to provide in connection with King's death. They said they did not know what charges Watson and Andrews have been convicted of.

Thirty-two persons, including city councilman David A. Clarke, marched in front of the White House yesterday in support of the demand for a new investigation into King's death.

Clarke, former director of the now defunct Washington bureau of SCLC, said "I think there are enough reasons to have the investigation reopened."



From left, Dick Gregory, the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, and Marian Brown of Atlanta, Ga., picket White House. By Tom Allen—The Washington Post