



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1977

AG
202-739-2028

The FBI conducted a thorough investigation of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a Department of Justice task force concluded in a report released today by Attorney General Griffin B. Bell.

The 149-page report was submitted by the task force of the Office of Professional Responsibility following an eight-month intensive review of FBI files and interview of witnesses. The purpose of the study was to examine FBI activities involving Dr. King and to evaluate the effectiveness of the assassination investigation.

The report concluded that the FBI had conducted a painstaking and successful investigation of the 1968 assassination in Memphis, Tennessee.

The task force also found no evidence of FBI complicity in the murder.

The only new evidence that was developed related to details that did not affect the ultimate conclusion that James Earl Ray was the properly convicted murderer.

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The task force of five attorneys and two research analysts reviewed more than 200,000 documents from FBI Headquarters and Field Office files and interviewed some 40 witnesses in its study of the King case.

On April 26, 1976, then Attorney General Edward H. Levi directed the Office of Professional Responsibility, headed by Michael E. Shaheen, Jr., to review Department files to determine:

(1) Whether the FBI investigation of Dr. King's murder on April 4, 1968, at Memphis, Tennessee, was thorough and honest;

(2) Whether there was any evidence of FBI involvement in Dr. King's death;

(3) Whether any new evidence had come to the attention of the Department bearing on the assassination which should be dealt with by the proper authorities; and

(4) Whether the relationship between the FBI and Dr. King called for criminal prosecution, disciplinary proceedings, or other appropriate action.

After reviewing the murder investigation, the task force turned to the pre-assassination security investigation of Dr. King. The task force found that there may have been an arguable basis for the FBI to initiate a security investigation on Dr. King, but continued that the security investigation should have been ended in 1963 and not continued until his death five years later.

The FBI's COINTELPRO-type harassment of Dr. King and efforts to drive him out of the civil rights movement were found to have been clearly improper.

Mr. Shaheen's report concluded that any criminal action against FBI participants in the harassment campaign was barred by the statute of limitations. The task force recommended no disciplinary action because the chief FBI officials responsible for the harassment are dead or retired.

The task force submitted recommendations for tighter supervision of the FBI's domestic intelligence activities and endorsed the Department's new guidelines in this area. The task force also proposed outright prohibition of COINTELPRO-type activities against domestic intelligence subjects.

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : ALL AGENTS

DATE: 3/11/77

FROM : SAC (66-2189)

SUBJECT: DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE TASK FORCE REPORT
ON FBI INVESTIGATIONS INVOLVING
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Re Bureau airtel to Albany, 3/1/77.

Referenced report was prepared by the Department of Justice Task Force which conducted a review of our security investigation as well as our investigation regarding the assassination of Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. Director KELLEY was satisfied with the results of the Task Force report and has responded to inquiries regarding that report in the following manner:

"I noted with great satisfaction the conclusions of the task force that the FBI's assassination probe of the Martin Luther King slaying was 'credible and thorough'; that there was no evidence of a conspiracy; and that the report clearly indicates no complicity on the part of the FBI in this assassination.

"There are portions of the report which describe objectionable actions on the part of the FBI.

"Guidelines, procedures and our determination to be completely observant of civil rights and the dignity of man will prevent a recurrence of these activities."

If requested to comment regarding any of the conclusions of the Task Force or concerning the contents of its report, you should feel free to quote my above-cited statement. However, you should not expand on my statement or volunteer observations of your own.

* * In addition, you should not hesitate to refer news media representatives who make inquiries about matters covered in the Task Force report to the Press Services Unit (Ext. 3691) of the External Affairs Division.

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* The Directors
* * SAC will handle this

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Should you receive inquiries regarding the availability of copies of the Task Force report, you should state that the report was released by the Department of Justice and that the FBI has been advised that copies of the report are being printed and will be available for purchase through the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 20402.

A copy of referenced report is maintained in MEfile 66-2189 for those of you who wish to peruse it at your leisure. Said report contains 200 pages.