

*A Letter to the American People
(and Myself in Particular)
On the Unspeakable*

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I am writing this letter to the American people --- and to one of us in particular, myself --- because I think we are living in denial of the martyrdoms of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and John and Robert Kennedy.

Two prophets, a president, and a president-to-be were martyred between November 1963 and June 1968, four and a half years that raised some of the greatest hopes in American history. Has our downward spiral ever since as a people, from hope to despair, from faith in change to an acceptance of systemic evil, been because we haven't recognized the truth of those martyrdoms, bound up as they were with unspeakable forces that continue to threaten us all?

Martin, Malcolm, JFK, and RFK were martyrs, "witnesses" to a transforming truth each was willing to die for. Have the deeper changes they envisioned for the U.S. and the world failed to occur because we failed to return their witness? But as the King family and others have challenged the government disclaimers of those executions, has the dam of our collective denial begun to break? Will we finally recognize our martyrs, simultaneously naming the unspeakable, and thereby see the gifts of their lives re-born in us as a people?

Beginning in the sixties, we as a people developed a profound skepticism about our government's explanations of our political assassinations, as we were given one lone-nut explanation after another for the murders of John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy. Yet with the powerful encouragement of our media we have become agnostics, saying "the truth will never be known," when it comes to accepting personal responsibility for the possibility, even the likelihood, that those murders were carried out and covered up by our government.

We are in denial. While in a post-Vietnam War, post-assassinations era we may question whether our government intelligence agencies are reliable sources, we in fact continue to rely on them for basic information and security. Yet it is public knowledge that those same agencies throughout the Cold War carried out covert action campaigns to overthrow foreign governments and assassinate their leaders whenever they were thought to be dangerous to the interests of a power elite in the United States. How likely is it that those same powerful forces, driven by a theology of absolute good versus absolute evil, did not in fact "find it necessary" to employ their covertly honed assassination and disinformation techniques in the United States itself? How willing are we --- am I --- to acknowledge even as a possibility what international observers regard as simple U.S. history?

Perhaps most critically, as the next presidential election rolls around, what could be the consequences to a candidate, identified for whatever reasons as "dangerous to national security," from our continuing denial and refusal of responsibility as a people for our legacy of assassination politics?

Here is another question, one of evidence, for you the American people, and for myself, one citizen in

your midst: What are we to make of the November 10, 1998, *Washington Post* article that tells how John Kennedy apparently had two brains?

The article cites the conclusion of a report by the military analyst for the Assassination Records Review Board:

The central contention of the report is that brain photographs in the Kennedy records are not of Kennedy's brain and show much less damage than Kennedy sustained when he was shot in Dallas and brought to Parkland Hospital there on Nov. 22, 1963. The doctors at Parkland told reporters then that they thought Kennedy was shot from the front and not from behind as the Warren Commission later concluded.

"I am 90 to 95 percent certain that the photographs in the Archives are not of President Kennedy's brain," [Douglas] Horne, a former naval officer, said in an interview. "If they aren't, that can mean only one thing --- that there has been a cover-up of the medical evidence...The second brain was consistent with a shot from behind. The first one was not."

In 1998 I interviewed a former official in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations whom I admire greatly concerning the assassinations of Martin Luther King and John and Robert Kennedy. At one point in that interview with former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, I raised the question whether the official photos and X-rays of President Kennedy's body corresponded to the President's wounds which the doctors at Parkland Hospital in Dallas saw immediately after he was shot.

Ramsey Clark responded that there was no question in his mind that the photos and X-rays were of Kennedy. Then admitting just a scintilla of doubt, he made the following statement:

"But if they're not [authentic], then you have something of a magnitude beyond common experience that would reflect so devastatingly on our society as a whole and its corruptibility that you don't know how to deal with it."

I think Ramsey Clark summarized beautifully a problem that is not unique to him but one we have as a people when we stop short and look into the abyss of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The cover-up of the President's assassination is marked by one act of criminal government malfeasance after another: the deliberate burning of the autopsy notes, the counterfeit photos and X-rays, the government's cleaning and refitting of the bullet-pocked and brain-tissue-splattered presidential limousine thus eliminating vital forensic evidence, the Warren Commission's magic bullet charade, Army Intelligence's arrogant destruction of its Oswald file...What the cover-up reveals as much as the murder itself is precisely what that brother who once headed our Justice Department said: "something of a magnitude beyond common experience that would reflect so devastatingly on our society as a whole and its corruptibility that you don't know how to deal with it."

Since I began researching the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and John and Robert Kennedy, I have been shocked by the obvious signature that is written across all four of them. It is the signature of what President Eisenhower identified as the military-industrial complex of our government. We can read that signature at once in Dallas in the identity of the scapegoat Lee Harvey Oswald.

On November 23, 1963, Fidel Castro gave a speech on Cuban radio and TV in which he analyzed the

wire service reports the day before that had instantly identified Oswald as the assassin. Castro asked brilliantly obvious questions about Oswald that have been suppressed in our own media for decades.

He asked:

Can anyone who has said that he will disclose military secrets [as Oswald said to the Soviet Union] return to the United States without being sent to jail?

How strange that this former marine should go to the Soviet Union and try to become a Soviet citizen, and that the Soviets should not accept him, that he should say at the American Embassy that he intended to disclose to the Soviet Union the secrets of everything he learned while he was in the U.S. service and that in spite of this statement, his passage is paid by the U.S. Government...He goes back to Texas and finds a job. This is all so strange!

Fidel Castro recognized "CIA" written all over Lee Harvey Oswald and the press releases on him that were being sent around the world within minutes of the assassination. The whole Dallas set-up was obvious to someone as familiar with CIA assassination plots as Fidel Castro was.

When Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested in Dallas after the assassination, he was carrying a Department of Defense ID card that is routinely issued to U.S. intelligence agents abroad. The FBI later obliterated the card by "testing" it but writer Mary La Fontaine discovered a copy of it in 1992 in a Dallas Police Department photo. Oswald had been a radar operator for the CIA's U-2 spy plane while he was a Marine stationed at Atsugi Naval Air Station in Japan. The Atsugi base served as the CIA's center for its Far East operations. His fellow Marines David Bucknell and James Botelho said that when Oswald "defected" to the Soviet Union, he did so under the direction of U.S. intelligence. The professed traitor Oswald was given a U.S.-government loan to assist his return from the USSR. When he settled in Dallas, his closest friend and mentor was longtime U.S. intelligence operative George DeMohrenschildt.

The more one investigates the assassination of John Kennedy, the more one becomes immersed in the depths of U.S. intelligence. The American intelligence community was the sea around Lee Harvey Oswald, Jack Ruby, and the host of anti-Castro Cuban exiles and gun runners with whom Oswald and Ruby worked closely.

John F. Kennedy was murdered because he was turning, in the root biblical sense of the word "turning" --- *teshuvah* in the Hebrew Scriptures, *metanoia* in the Greek, "repentance" in English. John Kennedy was murdered because as president of the United States he had begun to turn away from, to repent from, his own complicity with the worst of U.S. imperialism. As a result of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy was exploring a policy of peace with the USSR and Cuba. He and Nikita Khrushchev had signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty. Quiet contacts were being made through the United Nations for Kennedy to negotiate with Castro on a new U.S.-Cuban relationship (a story told by Cuba's then-UN ambassador Carlos Lechuga in his book *In the Eye of the Storm* and U.S. diplomat William Attwood in *The Reds and the Blacks* and *The Twilight Struggle*).

Kennedy's best statement on his turn toward peace was his June 10, 1963, American University address. It anticipates Dr. King's courage in taking a stand against the Vietnam War in his April 4, 1967, Riverside Church address. I believe they are parallel in meaning. John Kennedy's American University address was to his death in Dallas as Martin Luther King's Riverside Church address was to his death

in Memphis.

When President Kennedy said at American University that the peace he sought was "not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war," the priests of our national security state saw him as a heretic. When he went on in that electrifying speech to ask Americans in 1963 "to reexamine our attitude toward the Soviet Union" and "to reexamine our attitude toward the Cold War," those statements at the height of the Cold War were as courageous as Martin Luther King's denunciation of his government at the height of the Vietnam War.

By the Fall of 1963 John Kennedy had also decided to withdraw from Vietnam. Robert McNamara in his memoir *In Retrospect* has described the contentious October 2, 1963, National Security Council meeting at which Kennedy decided, against the arguments of most of his advisors: 1) to withdraw all U.S. forces from Vietnam by the end of 1965; 2) to withdraw 1,000 U.S. troops by the end of 1963; 3) to announce this policy publicly "to set it in concrete," which McNamara did at a press conference when the meeting was over. Ken O'Donnell in *Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye* supplements McNamara's account by adding: "When McNamara was leaving the meeting to talk to the White House reporters, the President called to him, 'And tell them that means all of the helicopter pilots, too.'"

After JFK's assassination, his withdrawal policy was quietly voided. In light of the future consequences of Dallas, it was not only John Kennedy who was crucified on November 22, 1963, but 58,000 other Americans and over three million Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians.

Malcolm X's assassination on February 21, 1965, at the Audubon Ballroom in New York was quickly attributed by the police and the media to the Nation of Islam. In the year since Malcolm X had left the Nation of Islam, tensions between its leader Elijah Muhammad and his former star disciple had increased dramatically. When Malcolm X was killed, the wounded, captured assailant Thomas Hayer was in fact an NOI member. So, too, were the two men who were arrested later and also charged with Malcolm X's murder. All three were convicted, but the latter two claimed with Hayer's support that they weren't even in the Audubon Ballroom that afternoon.

Their lawyer William Kunstler, in supporting their claim, pointed out the deeper forces at work in Malcolm's death. He said the crime "was committed by members of the Newark mosque, including Thomas Hayer, and it was undoubtedly the result of terrible, terrible hostility which was engendered by the FBI telling [both Malcolm and Elijah Muhammad] in anonymous letters that they were going to kill each other [and which] created this terrible, terrible tension that led these five men at the Newark mosque to eliminate Malcolm X; and even though they fired the guns, three of them, the FBI was the real hand on the trigger" (in *Malcolm X As They Knew Him*, edited by David Gallen).

The key to understanding Malcolm's assassination is the last year of his life. He spent over half of it outside the United States, on four separate trips abroad. In his *Autobiography* Malcolm tells the well-known story of his transforming April 1964 Hajj to Mecca, where he experienced a profound unity of worship with Muslims of every race, including those "whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white." The *Autobiography* says little, however, of Malcolm's July 9 to November 24, 1964, travels through Africa, an equally important story he was saving for a book he didn't live to write.

The purpose of Malcolm's tour of Africa was to internationalize the plight of Afro-Americans in the U.S. Malcolm went first to Cairo, where he attended the African Summit Conference and appealed to the delegates of 34 African nations "to help us bring our problem before the United Nations, on the

grounds that the United States is morally incapable of protecting the lives and the property of 22 million African-Americans."

Malcolm wanted to unmask the U.S. government at the United Nations. He was taken seriously in that purpose by African heads of state and by his own government. U.S. intelligence agents followed him closely, as can be seen from CIA and FBI documents. Malcolm was acutely aware of the surveillance, which was made obvious by the agents in order to intimidate him.

At the Cairo conference Malcolm collapsed with stomach pains and was rushed to a hospital. His stomach was pumped, and he survived. The doctors told him he had consumed "a toxic substance" at dinner. They ruled out food poisoning. Malcolm thought he had been poisoned by the same forces that were shadowing him. He then wrote an open letter to friends in Harlem in which he said:

You must realize that what I am trying to do is very dangerous, because it is a direct threat to the entire international system of racist exploitation ... Therefore, if I die or am killed before making it back to the States, you can rest assured that what I've already set in motion will never be stopped...Our problem has been internationalized (Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*).

Malcolm continued his human rights campaign for African-Americans for four and a half months throughout Africa, speaking before huge crowds in nation after nation, dogged everywhere by the CIA. Malcolm's friend, the writer Louis Lomax wrote: "By then the CIA was following Malcolm's every move; agents were aboard every flight he took, other agents watched his hotels and even kept him under surveillance during meal time" (Louis E. Lomax, *To Kill a Black Man*). Malcolm told his sister, Ella Collins, that he narrowly avoided another poisoning in Ethiopia.

On February 9, 1965, twelve days before his assassination, Malcolm X was barred from visiting France on another speaking trip. When his plane landed, the French government without explanation ordered him to leave the country. Malcolm believed the State Department was responsible. After Malcolm's death, journalist Eric Norden discovered the reason why France had barred Malcolm. Norden was told by a North African diplomat that "his country's intelligence apparatus had been quietly informed by the French Department of Alien Documentation and Counter-Espionage that the CIA planned Malcolm's murder, and France feared he might be liquidated on its soil." The diplomat then commented in elegantly modulated French: "Your CIA is beginning to murder its own citizens now."

On the day before his assassination, Malcolm X phoned Alex Haley and told him why he was going to stop saying that it was the Muslims who were about to kill him. He said: "I know what [the Muslims] can do and what they can't, and they can't do some of the stuff recently going on."

Malcolm then made a final remark that Haley thought "an odd, abrupt change of subject" but which may have been no change of subject at all: "You know, I'm glad I've been the first to establish official ties between Afro-Americans and our blood brothers in Africa." Malcolm knew that was the real reason his life had been targeted. And he had no regrets.

But there may have been a second reason. Continuous FBI and CIA surveillance had discovered that Malcolm was exploring an even more startling alliance than his ties with African leaders, a collaboration with Dr. Martin Luther King.

On February 14, 1965, Malcolm and Martin conferred on the phone. Their conversation was described

by William Kunstler: "There was sort of an agreement that they would meet in the future and work out a common strategy, not merge their two organizations, but that they would work out a method to work together in some way. And I think that that quite possibly led to the bombing of Malcolm's house that evening in East Elmhurst and his assassination one week later."

As those who were monitoring their communications knew, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were moving toward an alliance that would have shaken the system to its foundations. Both were targeted.

The FBI had been plotting Martin Luther King's assassination ever since its failure in 1964 to destroy his reputation and drive him to suicide. In November 1964 J. Edgar Hoover had authorized his assistant William C. Sullivan to send anonymously to Coretta Scott King an audiotape of a bawdy party King had attended. Accompanying the tape was a letter addressed to Martin Luther King. Sullivan later testified before the Senate's Church Committee on intelligence activities that the FBI had hoped, first, to break up King's marriage and thereby reduce his status. By circulating the tape as widely as possible to media contacts, they also hoped to destroy his reputation, and ultimately, his spirit.

A further intention, King's death, is revealed by the FBI's anonymous letter to him. It concludes:

King, there is only one thing left for you to do. You know what this is. You have just 34 days in which to do (this exact number has been selected for a specific reason, it has definite practical significant [sic]). You are done. There is but one way out for you. You better take it before your filthy, abnormal fraudulent self is bared to the nation.

The FBI mailed the package to the Kings on November 21, exactly 34 days before Christmas 1964, the deadline they had chosen for King to take "the one way out".

The package sat around in an office and was not opened by Coretta King until January 5, 1965. When she, Martin, and several friends listened to the tape and read the letter, they knew at once from other FBI efforts that the source was J. Edgar Hoover and that the purpose was to destroy Martin Luther King by any means possible.

However, King was not driven by such methods to the personal breaking point or public ruin that his enemies desired. So the FBI took further steps.

Clifton Baird was a Louisville, Kentucky, police officer in 1965 when he was asked to help kill Martin Luther King. On September 18, 1965, Baird gave a ride home in his car to fellow Louisville officer Arlie Blair after their 3-11 pm shift. Baird parked his car in Blair's driveway, and the two men talked. Alarmed at what Blair was saying, Clifton Baird secretly turned on a microphone hidden under his seat that was connected to a recorder in a rear speaker.

What Baird taped was an offer to engage in a conspiracy to kill Dr. King. He later shared the information with author William F. Pepper who included it in his book on the King assassination *Orders to Kill*. Blair told Baird that an organization he belonged to was willing to pay \$500,000 for the death of King. Would Baird be willing to participate? Baird said he definitely would not. He urged Blair to stay away from it, too.

The next day at a Louisville police station, Clifton Baird saw Arlie Blair conferring with a group of police officers and FBI agents. The FBI agents had, over a period of sixteen years or more, developed

a close relationship with members of the Louisville police force. When the group went into a room and closed the door, Baird overheard them discussing the offer in heated terms and referring to him as "a nigger lover".

On September 20, 1965, Baird taped a second car conversation with Blair. Blair again brought up the \$500,000 bounty for King, which Baird had now connected with the FBI. Baird also realized then the reason behind a puzzling FBI investigation into his alleged involvement in a "dynamite ring" in Western Kentucky. The investigation was being held over his head to force him to join the conspiracy. Baird suspected he was being groomed to become its patsy -- "like James Earl Ray," he told Pepper.

After Baird refused to cooperate with the FBI plot and was exonerated from any bombing involvement, four local FBI agents he knew followed and harassed him for the next couple of years. He thought he "was being watched and warned to keep quiet." After King's assassination, the pressure ceased.

Thank God for Clifton Baird. By blocking the Louisville assassination plans at considerable risk to himself, Clifton Baird may have added as much as two years to the life of Martin Luther King. In the root sense of the word, Clifton Baird was like Dr. King a "martyr," one who lived and spoke the truth at the risk of his life.

Myron Billett was another witness to the truth. By undergoing a conversion in his own life, Myron Billett was able to reveal that in January 1968 FBI and CIA agents offered a New York Mafia leader a \$1 million contract to kill Martin Luther King.

My lens for seeing the life of Myron Billett is the testimony of Rev. Maurice McCrackin, the much loved Cincinnati minister and prophet of peace who died on January 30, 1997. Maurice McCrackin told me he met Myron Billett in the late seventies while McCrackin was visiting prisoners at Ohio State Penitentiary in Columbus, Ohio. Billett, a former Mafia member, was serving a sentence for manslaughter. McCrackin became his best friend. When Billett was released from prison for health reasons, McCrackin baptized him. He then ministered to his friend through the eighties. As a repentant Christian, Billett renounced his mob past and broke silence concerning his criminal involvements. He told the following story to Maurice McCrackin, William Pepper, members of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, and on a 1989 BBC documentary shortly before his death.

Myron Billett was a messenger and go-between for Chicago Mafia don, Sam Giancana. In January 1968 Giancana asked Billett to make the arrangements for "a very important meeting" between New York Mafia leader Carlo Gambino and some government representatives. Billett set up the meeting at a motel in Apalachin, New York, the site of an early 1960s mob summit.

Billett said that at the meeting (which he attended) the three representatives of the CIA and FBI asked Carlo Gambino if he would accept a \$1 million contract to assassinate Martin Luther King. Billett recalled the exact words of Gambino's reply: "In no way would I or the family get involved with you people again. You messed up the Cuba deal. You messed up the Kennedy deal."

The CIA and FBI men said they would make "other arrangements" and departed.

After Dr. King was assassinated on April 4, Sam Giancana gave Myron Billett \$30,000 and told him to start running: They both knew too much and were going to be killed. Giancana was in fact murdered in his Chicago home in June 1975, just before he was scheduled to testify before the Church

Committee concerning assassination plots. His killing took the form of a symbolic warning to other possible assassination witnesses. Giancana was shot seven times in a circle around his mouth.

Like Clifton Baird, Myron Billett said he had been shadowed in obvious ways, apparently designed to intimidate him. But Myron also continued to speak the truth. Maurice McCrackin said of him: "There's no finer person and more caring spirit I've known than Myron. He was very gentle and always the same. It was just remarkable looking at him and realizing what he'd been part of."

The final chapter of Martin Luther King's life began on January 14, 1967, the day on which King committed himself to deepening his opposition to the Vietnam War. He was at an airport restaurant on his way to a retreat in Jamaica. While looking through magazines, he came across an illustrated article in *Ramparts*, "The Children of Vietnam". His coworker Bernard Lee never forgot King's shock as he looked at photographs of young napalm victims.

He froze as he looked at the pictures from Vietnam. He saw a picture of a Vietnamese mother holding her dead baby, a baby killed by our military. Then Martin just pushed the plate of food away from him. I looked up and said, "Doesn't it taste any good," and he answered, "Nothing will ever taste any good for me until I do everything I can to end that war."

On April 4, 1967, Dr. King shocked his government and scandalized the media by his uncompromising speech against the Vietnam War at New York's Riverside Church. Three decades later, we can sense the power of his words then by applying them to a currently unacknowledged evil.

In the following passage from King's Riverside Church address, for the "Vietnam War" let us substitute the "sanctions against Iraq," an analogous crime today in which our government and the United Nations systematically kill 6,000 to 7,000 Iraqi children per month.

Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of [Iraq]. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted...I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in [these deadly sanctions] is ours. The initiative to stop [them] must be ours.

When Martin Luther King applied these words to our government's crusade against not Saddam Hussein but Ho Chi Minh, he was exposing the hypocrisy of a murderous system. When King walked "among the desperate, rejected and angry young men" of our ghettos, he urged them to choose nonviolent action. When they replied angrily, "What about Vietnam?" he said, "I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today --- my own government."

In his King biography *Bearing the Cross*, David Garrow cites J. Edgar Hoover's ominous response to King's indictment, a private communication to President Lyndon Johnson: "Based on King's recent activities and public utterances, it is clear that he is an instrument in the hands of subversive forces seeking to undermine our nation."

The perception by government leaders that Martin Luther King was their worst domestic enemy deepened from mid-1967 on, as King announced the plans for a Poor People's Campaign in

Washington, D.C. An interracial army of poor persons would come together in the nation's capital in late April 1968. They would then engage in wave after wave of mass civil disobedience to dislocate the functioning of the city.

The crowds of poor Americans from around the country would tie up Washington until Congress passed a comprehensive anti-poverty bill. The absolute minimum in legislation, King told reporters, was a full-employment commitment, a guaranteed annual income, and a half million units of low-income housing per year.

Policymakers feared King would succeed in bringing the nation's capital to a crunching halt until they made a commitment to eliminate poverty in the United States. The dreamer of 1963 had become the nightmare of 1968 to the White House and the Pentagon.

The intelligence community also knew, from listening electronically to King's every word, that he had an even broader vision of the Poor People's Campaign. With the Vietnam War at its peak in the Spring of 1968, King told his staff, "After we get [to D.C.] and stay a few days [we'll] call the peace movement in, and let them go on the other side of the Potomac and try to close down the Pentagon."

In his Canadian Broadcasting Corporation lectures at the end of 1967 (later published as *The Trumpet of Conscience*), King's vision went beyond even these overwhelming concerns. He saw the next step as a global nonviolent movement using escalating acts of massive civil disobedience to disrupt the entire international order and block economic and political exploitation across borders.

The power structure knew the breadth of this prophet's vision and that Memphis was a last chance to stop him before he led the Poor People's Campaign into Washington.

Imagine playing chess with an opponent who always knows what your next move will be. Memphis police sources have described the extent of federal electronic surveillance of Dr. King on his March 18, 1968, visit to Memphis when he stayed at the Holiday Inn Rivermont Hotel. Every room in his suite was bugged, even the bathroom. With this total electronic surveillance as well as undercover agents placed within the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the federal government planned its moves with confidence.

When Dr. King returned to Memphis on March 28, the march he was about to lead had been targeted by the government. Memphis minister Samuel "Billy" Kyles, who was close to police sources, said in 1993 that the FBI had hired provocateurs to disrupt the march. Rev. James Lawson, who had invited King to Memphis, witnessed the provocateurs' actions and a curious police response to them. He noticed a group of youths on the sidewalk between the marchers and the police. Although Lawson knew the young black activists of Memphis, he recognized no one in this group. He saw them begin to break windows, while the police watched them impassively. Lawson realized he was witnessing a violent scenario being played out to justify police violence against the marchers.

The government-sponsored violence in the March 28 march is what forced Martin Luther King to return to Memphis on April 3. As those monitoring his moves knew, King had to prove he could lead a peaceful march in Memphis before he could lead the Poor People's Campaign to Washington.

On the day after the disrupted march, the FBI's Domestic Intelligence Division issued a memorandum. It recommended that an FBI-authored article be given, "on a highly confidential basis," to a "cooperative news media source". The FBI article read in part:

The fine Hotel Lorraine in Memphis is owned and patronized exclusively by Negroes but King didn't go there from his hasty exit [from the march]. Instead King decided the plush Holiday Inn Motel, white owned, operated and almost exclusively white patronized, was the place to 'cool it.' There will be no boycott of white merchants for King, only for his followers.

Six days before King's assassination, the FBI was applying pressure to move him from the Holiday Inn Rivermont, where he had stayed on his last two Memphis visits, to "the fine Hotel Lorraine" where he would be killed. King co-worker Hosea Williams testified in the 1993 HBO television trial of James Earl Ray that when he arrived with Dr. King on April 3, they were looking forward to staying at the Rivermont Holiday Inn, and that he was surprised that they were taken to the Lorraine Motel. He said that neither he nor anyone else in the entourage was familiar with the Lorraine and no one understood why the change was made. Williams also said that Dr. King was "initially" given a room on the ground floor but for some reason, his room was changed.

The owners of the Lorraine Motel, Walter and Lorraine Bailey, had been asked by "an SCLC representative" (whom the SCLC said later they knew nothing about) to change King's room. They were instructed to move King from the priority suite they had assigned him, on the ground floor facing an inner courtyard, to a second floor room with a balcony overlooking a swimming pool in front of the motel. When Lorraine Bailey learned on April 4 that Dr. King had just been shot on the balcony, she groaned, "My God, what have I done?" and suffered a stroke. She never regained consciousness and died five days later at the same hospital where King had been taken, St. Joseph's, just as his funeral was beginning in Atlanta.

In the last year of his life Martin Luther King denounced and unmasked the mighty in their prosecution of the Vietnam War. He called his own government "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." He proclaimed good news to the poor by organizing the Poor People's Campaign that he hoped would shut down Washington, D.C., until the government agreed to eliminate poverty in America. He took on the lot of poor Memphis sanitation workers in a dramatic strike on the eve of the Poor People's Campaign. Because he had become a prophet of poor people's resurrection, Martin Luther King was executed by the system.

When Robert F. Kennedy was shot to death at 12:15 am on June 5, 1968, at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, in a sense everyone already knew the story.

A lone fanatic, in this case Sirhan Sirhan, had gunned down not a president but a man who had just won the California Democratic primary, very likely a president-to-be, and a president-to-be who even more than his brother was "turning" in the biblical sense. Turning away from, repenting from, his obedience to the same forces that had killed his brother. Turning away from military and corporate power. Turning toward the people. Turning toward farm workers. Turning toward blacks. Turning toward the poor of all colors. Turning toward those trapped on both sides of the lines in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. A man turning toward that impossibility which his brother John showed a few signs of becoming and he a few more, a prophetic president. To be a prophetic president of a state sanctioning a military industrial complex was impossible, unless one turned toward the ultimate witness of truth. And as Bobby Kennedy turned in that direction, he received its reward not surprisingly before he could become president.

But this time, unlike Dallas, it did seem to be an open-and-shut case.

Everyone knew Sirhan Sirhan had appeared suddenly before Robert Kennedy in the hotel pantry. Everyone knew that Sirhan had fired his pistol from an outstretched arm several feet in front of Kennedy. And we knew that Bobby Kennedy had died of three gunshot wounds, and that five other persons in the pantry had been wounded from the eight bullets Sirhan had fired. It all added up.

An open-and-shut case.

It was so simple a way of disposing of so obvious a target as Robert Kennedy that one almost wondered if the forces behind the Grassy Knoll hadn't learned how to be a bit more circumspect. So that a Warren Report wouldn't even be needed. And it wasn't. In the case of the lone nut killing Robert Kennedy we the American people accepted the Los Angeles Police's verdict that it was an open-and-shut case.

Lost in the relief that we finally knew who was killing whom were a few unanswered questions.

The famous coroner Dr. Thomas Noguchi in the most thorough autopsy of his career came up with some troublesome findings in the assassination of Robert Kennedy. He concluded that Kennedy had been shot dead from behind by a gun held one inch from the edge of his right ear, three inches behind the head. All three bullets which struck Kennedy had entered from behind him at a steep upward angle, causing powder burns from shots fired one to three inches away.

Yet every witness of the shooting placed Sirhan Sirhan several feet in front of Kennedy when firing his gun. The witnesses were equally clear that Kennedy never turned his back to Sirhan.

Another question arose from the three bullet holes found in the pantry ceiling, the two bullets dug out of the center divider of the swinging doors, and the total of six people who had been shot --- in Kennedy's case three times. Sirhan's gun held eight bullets, and he had not re-loaded. These numbers didn't add up.

Most disturbing of all was the testimony of Don Schulman, a runner for a TV station, that he had seen a security guard fire three times. The recently hired security guard walking just behind Kennedy, Thane Cesar, admitted pulling his gun but denied firing it.

And so it goes, with the questions piling up in Los Angeles as in Dallas, Harlem, and Memphis. In some respects the cover-up by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) task force, called "Special Unit Senator" (SUS), outdoes them all. In his book *The Robert F. Kennedy Assassination*, Philip Melanson describes the systematic intimidation by SUS interrogators of a series of key witnesses who had been prepared to offer evidence of a conspiracy before they were broken down. The two LAPD officers who ran Special Unit Senator were Manuel Pena and Enrique "Hank" Hernandez. Both had extensive CIA backgrounds in training Latin American security forces. Until shortly before Senator Kennedy's assassination, Manuel Pena had been on loan from the LAPD to the CIA as an instructor for national police and intelligence services in Latin America. Special Unit Senator's second-in-command, Hank Hernandez, stated in his own resume that in 1963 he had played a key role in the CIA's "Unified Police Command" training in Latin America. Pena and Hernandez coordinated an investigation which not only threatened and discredited conspiracy witnesses but by the department's own admission destroyed 2,400 photographs, negatives, and X-rays of assassination evidence before Sirhan's trial. Then Assistant Police Chief Daryl Gates defended the further destruction of the door frame wood and ceiling tiles which showed bullet holes on the grounds that they would not fit into a

card file.

Robert Kennedy was assassinated within seconds after moving decisively toward the presidency by winning the California Democratic primary. Kennedy was committed to ending the Vietnam War, which after his death would continue for seven more years under Presidents Johnson, Nixon, and Ford. He was also dedicated to abolishing poverty by a uniquely reconciling coalition of blacks, whites, Hispanics, and Native Americans. In the Spring of '68, Robert Kennedy was walking and talking a radical transformation of the USA, in harmony with the vision of the already gunned-down Martin Luther King. It is astonishing that such a man almost became president, unsurprising that he was assassinated the moment he became the key candidate. Not incidental is the fact that as president he would have had the power to re-open the national security lid of the can of worms around JFK's murder.

Parallels between the JFK and RFK cover-ups are striking. The Warren Commission's inquiry was steered by Allen Dulles, the CIA head whom John Kennedy had fired after the Bay of Pigs. In the view of international observers, investigator Dulles played an unacknowledged dual role. He was also the chief suspect. Two CIA-affiliated police officers controlled the Los Angeles investigation of Senator Kennedy's murder. As in the Warren Commission, the fox was again in charge of solving the henhouse killing.

Is the history of our assassination politics really all that mysterious?

In this land of denial, how can we learn to see and speak the truth? Is it a question of where our hearts are?

As I near the end of this letter to you the American people and to myself, one more American trying to overcome my denial, I want to go back to the event that began this series of public executions, the killing of President Kennedy.

As muck-raking biographers have made every American aware, John F. Kennedy was no saint. But he was a martyr. "Martyr" means witness, especially a witness to truth at the cost of one's life. In the last year of his life, John Kennedy was turning toward peace at the risk of his life. In his conflicts with the CIA and the military-industrial complex, he faced the magnitude of that systemic evil from which we recoil in the face of his execution. After his death he was quoted in The New York Times as having said that he wanted "to splinter the CIA in a thousand pieces and scatter it to the winds" (Times, April 25, 1966, p. 20). The system made certain that intention was never fulfilled. Like Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Robert Kennedy after him, John Kennedy was a martyr for peace and justice.

Are we aware that a month after John Kennedy's assassination, President Harry S. Truman repeated President Eisenhower's warning about the military-industrial complex with a more specific focus on the CIA? This is what President Truman said in Independence, Missouri, on December 21, 1963, while the country was still in shock from Dallas:

I think it has become necessary to take another look at the purpose and operations of our Central Intelligence Agency --- CIA...

For some time I have been disturbed by the way the CIA has been diverted from its original assignment. It has become an operational and at times a policy-making arm of the Government. This has led to trouble and may have compounded our difficulties in several

explosive areas.

We have grown up as a nation, respected for our free institutions and for our ability to maintain a free and open society. There is something about the way the CIA has been functioning that is casting a shadow over our historic position and I feel that we need to correct it.

President Truman's warning about the CIA appeared in an early edition of the *Washington Post* on December 22, 1963, one month after the assassination. It was then buried, like John Kennedy, but with little notice. The pioneer Kennedy researcher who re-discovered it later, Raymond Marcus, says: "According to my information, it was not carried in later editions that day, nor commented on editorially, nor picked up by any other major newspaper, nor mentioned on any national radio or TV broadcast."

Why do you think this extraordinary statement by an ex-president after the assassination of another president was buried as soon as it was made? "There is something about the way the CIA is functioning that is casting a shadow..." Why were these words lost to our public consciousness? Was it because someone recognized the explosive implications of their timing, namely that in the wake of Dallas, President Truman was warning the nation that the CIA may have been behind the assassination of President Kennedy?

This warning about evil in our system became part of the unspeakable. It exists only in our subconscious.

Harry Truman's statement, Fidel Castro's comments already quoted, and a series of similarly buried texts have been brought together in a great book on the JFK assassination, *History Will Not Absolve Us*, by E. Martin Schotz. Schotz's book is the equivalent of "The Emperor's New Clothes" as applied to the murder in Dealey Plaza, except there the emperor is the empire --- or more specifically, its intelligence agents. As this book shows, there is no mystery involved in President Kennedy's assassination. To any knowledgeable observer -- and there have been many outside the United States -- the truth of the assassination has been obvious from the beginning.

The only mystery is: How could we be so blind for 35 years? What kind of people are we who can live so unconsciously with government forces that assassinate our leaders while the whole world watches? This is an Orwellian control of our consciousness that goes far beyond anything George Orwell ever wrote. The mystery is not any of these assassinations. The mystery is us.

So when a sense of the monstrous evil we have repressed surfaces unexpectedly, as it did, for example in the *Washington Post* article on John F. Kennedy's "two brains," how do we respond? When we're confronted, as former Attorney General Ramsey Clark put it so eloquently, by "something of a magnitude beyond common experience that would reflect so devastatingly on our society as a whole and its corruptibility that you don't know how to deal with it," how do we deal with it? As that corruption with a magnitude beyond experience sits there silently in the darkness gazing back at us, how do we respond with the force of truth?

Not, I think, by withdrawing into the million private rooms of American consciousness that offer salvation from the pain of conscience. Nor can we deal with that unimaginable but real corruption by playing out our avoidance at the other end of the American psyche, the end represented by myself, by becoming social activists who skim across the political surface confronting one issue after another

without ever looking at evil dead center, as it came out of the depths into the noon light of Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963.

What is radically threatening about the assassination of John Kennedy, inextricably linked with the killings of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy, is that here we are faced with a total system of evil that envelops us and our society. We have denied its gross reality for three and a half decades for the sake of sheer psychic and personal survival. In a painful part of our being, each of us knows the truth. But lacking a faith in what Gandhi called *satyagraha* (truth-force), we recoil from the enormity of the evil we need to face as part of that truth.

Here is a question for our souls: Was Gandhi right in proclaiming the transformation of every possible conflict by the force of truth and love? Or is the truth in this case overwhelmed by a corruption of such magnitude that we cannot possibly know how to deal with it?

May I suggest the possibility, to you and to myself, that we are ruled behind the scenes by a benevolent fascism? We consent to it by a tacit agreement.

Our rulers will allow us to do virtually anything we want in protest to their rule, just so long as we do not overcome our despair as a people. We'll begin to break the chains of our agreement only when we embody the kind of vision for which Martin Luther King died, a global Poor People's Campaign of massive nonviolent civil disobedience to poverty and militarism. When we regain our hope as a people, we can expect more executions. But hopefully we'll be better prepared next time around, by recognizing the power of lived truth, *satyagraha*, to transform this and any system.

I believe the key to our hope, as it was to Martin Luther King's hope, is compassion, love for our enemies. As King said often, it may be impossible to like people who are bombing one's home, or people such as J. Edgar Hoover who were trying to destroy him in any way possible. But God knows, especially in this nuclear age, that it is necessary to *love* our enemies, however unlikeable they may be. And love means here something at a more realistic and transforming depth than liking people who are trying to kill us and our loved ones. That transforming kind of love will include both nonviolent resistance and respect. We can recall the prophecy King gave us: Nonviolence or nonexistence. In the nuclear age, unless we can both respect and resist, we are choosing nonexistence for the entire human race.

The rulers of our military-industrial system who assassinated Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and John and Robert Kennedy are not demons. They are only what we allow them to be, humbugs. We all remember what happened to the most famous humbug of all, the Wizard of Oz. A little dog named Toto tipped over his screen, and the terrifying Oz was then revealed as a little old man with a bald head and a wrinkled face. In fact he looked a bit like me. When we take off our green glasses so our emerald empire doesn't look like anything special and tip over the screens of all the wizards, that's all the rulers of our military-industrial complex are: a bunch of little old men like me, with bald heads and wrinkled faces. When we stop obeying them en masse and throw away our green glasses, we can tip their screens at will. Then they'll stop being humbugs. But until that point of mass enlightenment, those who first deny their power of illusion can expect to receive more serious consequences than did Toto.

To say that the captains of our system are humbugs rather than demons is not to deny the demonic in the system. It is rather to shift the responsibility for it, as Jesus taught, from our enemies to ourselves. As scripture scholar Walter Wink has said, what we do not see is that the demonic has been installed

at the heart of our national policy. That means it is dependent on our cooperation with it. The demons of our national security state, from the controlling threat of CIA assassinations to a nuclear policy to annihilate the world "if necessary," derive their power from our silence and cooperation. The humbugs who think they're at the top are beside the point. The point of the demonic is ourselves. It is a point with a question mark: Whom do you serve? When we make the system our god, we let ourselves be possessed by its policies.

Yet resisting the system does not necessarily mean we understand it. For forty years I have resisted what I felt were demonic policies --- the Vietnam War, the nuclear arms race, the Persian Gulf War, the economic sanctions against Iraq, and the poverty and homelessness of the U.S.A. --- but I have still been in denial of evil. Only through a growing realization of the truth of the murders of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and John and Robert Kennedy, have I begun to understand the depth of evil we share responsibility for.

I ask myself: Why have these U.S. government assassinations of our sixties' leaders become so important to me three decades after they were carried out?

After living with my wife Shelley and our son Tom beside the fence of the Trident submarine base near Seattle for ten years, seeing the White Train filled with nuclear warheads roll by a few feet away, I don't like to think of myself as naive. But I have been extremely naive about how the executions of Martin, Malcolm, and the Kennedys controlled not only the sixties but all the years since then. I have been living in denial of the depth of systemic evil below the particular evils I resisted.

On the back cover of his album *John Wesley Harding*, Bob Dylan wrote a parable about our willingness to seek the truth. Three kings, followers of the star, entered the room of Frank, a man who knew the truth. One of the kings asked Frank if he would please open it up for them.

Frank, who all this time had been reclining with his eyes closed, suddenly opened them both up as wide as a tiger. "And just how far would you like to go in?" he asked and the three kings all looked at each other. "Not too far but just far enough so's we can say that we've been there," said the first chief.

Just how far would we like to go in? Just how far would we like to go into the truth of Dallas, Harlem, Memphis, and Los Angeles? Just how far would we like to go in when we sense the depths covering the truth on the ocean floor of our psyche? Just how far would we like to go in when we realize that our martyrs' journey could become our journey, and their final truth our truth? Just how far would we like to go in?

Not too far but just far enough so's we can say that we've been there.

Two weeks before his assassination in El Salvador, Archbishop Oscar Romero made a prophecy of resurrection that has been vindicated by his people. He said, "I have often been threatened with death. Nevertheless, as a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I shall arise in the Salvadoran people."

As we know, Martin Luther King made a similar prophecy of resurrection the night before his death in Memphis:

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not

concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

However, there is a difference between Salvadorans as a people and Americans as a people. When Oscar Romero was shot down in El Salvador, his people didn't say, "Oh, there goes another lone nut killing a prophet." The Salvadoran people recognized the covert forces behind their prophet's murder, which equally threatened them. Because the people identified and resisted those forces of death, the nonviolent spirit of Oscar Romero was able to be re-born in them.

In our American context, Vincent Harding, who walked with Martin Luther King, has conveyed the confession of a man who was "one of King's closest and best-known coworkers":

"In a way, it was probably best for many of us who worked with Martin that he was killed when he was, because he was moving into some radical directions that very few of us had been prepared for." The man paused, then he added, "And I don't think that many of us on the staff would have been ready to take the risks of life, possessions, security, and status that such a move would have involved." Then another pause, and the final reflection: "I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have been willing."

Just how far would we like to go in?

Not too far but just far enough so's we can say that we've been there.

Let me end this letter to you, the American people, and to myself, one lone American struggling to overcome my denial of evil, with a vision from the prophet Ezekiel.

As a source of the prophetic tradition that we received from Martin Luther King, Ezekiel spoke the first transforming word of resurrection. Ezekiel's Chapter 37 was the earliest biblical text on resurrection, his vision of the valley of dry bones. It came to the prophet at a terrible time, when he and his people were in exile in Babylon. Ezekiel's vision was about the resurrection of that dead people, whose dry bones would some day be given life by their return to the promised land.

I want to re-read Ezekiel's text in terms of our own history and over against our temptation to despair, as a prophecy for all of humanity but especially us Americans. Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones as applied to us means our resurrection as a people. That resurrection can begin when we recognize that a violent system has murdered our leaders and millions of people with them. The system has covered up those murders with lies. Our resurrection can't begin until we acknowledge the truth of our death.

Just how far would we like to go in?

The hand of the Lord came upon us, and the spirit of the Lord set us down in the middle of a valley full of bones.

He led us around them. We were forced to look at these dry bones.

We saw the bones of Malcolm, the bones of truth and justice, blown apart by the system in New York.

Around them were the millions of bones from American ghettos and African nations, lying together in death as Malcolm had tried to unite them in life.

We saw the bones of Martin, the bones of the beloved community, blasted by the system in Memphis. They were with the countless bones of the poor of the world, strewn about by death as they sought the promised land.

Next were the bones of Robert, the bones of a compassionate country, shot to pieces by the system in Los Angeles. Beyond them we saw millions of bones stretching across the valley floor on both sides of the tracks that RFK had bridged.

Then we came upon the bones of John, the oldest and most wasted of these bones, the bones of world peace, shattered by the system in Dallas. His bones lay in the midst of a vast array of bones of Vietnamese, Americans, Laotians, and Cambodians. Beyond them we saw the bones of Cold War victims killed by the system after JFK's peacemaking was terminated and covered over.

The spirit of the Lord led us all around these bones that we have avoided and denied. He said to us, "Humans, can these dry bones live?"

We answered, "Oh Lord God, you know."

Then he said to us, "Humans, these bones are the whole house of humanity. They have said, 'Our bones are dried up by a murderous system, and our hope is lost. We are cut off from every vision.'

"But prophesy to these bones: Oh dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. I will breathe truth and compassion into you, and you will live."

So we prophesied as we had been commanded. And as we prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. We looked, and there were sinews of justice on them, and the flesh of peace had come upon them, and the skin of nonviolence had covered them. The breath of truth and compassion came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, the vast multitude of humanity.

Can we live such a prophecy of resurrection?

Just how far would we like to go in?

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Return to Main Page