

Oops! I forgot to put this in with letter. But, we all know the FBI always has had a different definition of "Americanism." And is not imbued with the normal embodiments of the Constitution!!!
4A TUESDAY, JULY 13, 1999 A

www.herald.com

The Herald

THE NATION

FBI sought to discredit successor to King

By DAVID PACE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Within a month of the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the FBI began investigating King's successor, looking for the same type of "immoral activities" that the bureau had tried to use to discredit King, newly released FBI files show.

The files, obtained by The Associated Press through the Freedom of Information Act, include a memo from FBI headquarters ordering an investigation of the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy.

He had been King's right-hand man since the two led the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 that launched the civil rights movement. Abernathy died in Atlanta in 1990. He was 64.

The memo, dated April 22, 1968, asked the Atlanta FBI office to search its files for "background information" on Abernathy and to begin following all his activities "through established informants and sources." The investigation continued until 1974.

FBI spokesman Tom Brekke said the Abernathy files "should be viewed in their historical context and should in no way infer that the FBI currently initiates investigations utilizing the standards of that era."

FBI listening in

Before King's assassination on April 4, 1968, the FBI had used wiretaps to gather detailed information about his private life and extramarital affairs and had leaked it to reporters and government officials in attempts to discredit him.

The FBI files on Abernathy — previously released only to an attorney for James Earl Ray, the man who pleaded guilty to killing King — suggest that the FBI under Director J. Edgar Hoover hoped to use similar information to discredit Abernathy after he became president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. "Little information has been developed regarding promiscuous activity on the part of Abernathy," the Atlanta FBI office told

headquarters in a memo dated April 29, 1968, responding to what Atlanta called "the bureau's recent request for information dealing with immoral activities on the part of" Abernathy.

Atlanta noted that FBI headquarters in 1964 had been sent transcripts from a 1958 Alabama court case in which a woman accused Abernathy of having "normal and abnormal sexual relations" with her when she was 13. It also noted that Abernathy had contact with a woman in San Francisco in 1965 "that suggested a degree of affection between them."

"Our limited knowledge of Ralph Abernathy suggests he might have had some extramarital experiences," the Atlanta office concluded. "It by no means supports the conclusion his expertise has been extensive or may be continuing."

Allegations pursued

A month later, Hoover had the Washington field office checking out allegations that Abernathy

was "involved in illicit relations with white women" and had been "beaten by five Negroes who surprised him in bed with a white woman."

The Washington office reported back that three confidential sources, as well as the local police department and the U.S. Park Police, had been unable to confirm any aspect of the allegation. The FBI files do not provide the source of the allegation.

The FBI files, heavily censored to remove information considered by the FBI to infringe on the privacy rights of others, include several instances in which the bureau used sexual information in an attempt to undermine Abernathy.

In November 1968, FBI headquarters approved sending a detailed report on the woman's testimony in the 1958 Alabama court case to church officials in Pittsburgh, where Abernathy was scheduled to speak.

In 1970, Vice President Spiro Agnew called Hoover to complain about Abernathy's "inflammatory pronouncements." Hoover wrote

that Agnew "said he thought he was going to have to start destroying Abernathy's credibility so anything I can give him would be appreciated."

Report to vice president

The next day, the FBI sent Agnew a report that included "militant statements" by Abernathy, as well as "information about sexual immorality, Abernathy's luxurious accommodations during the Poor People's Campaign and his support of the Black Panther Party."

Abernathy had complained in 1975, when the FBI's attempts to discredit King were fully disclosed by a Senate investigation, that he had been investigated by the FBI far more than King.

His FBI files, however, do not bear that out.

While the bureau released 1,169 pages of Abernathy files, its pre-assassination file on King includes about 16,000 pages. There also is no evidence in the files that Abernathy ever was the target of an FBI wiretap.



AP File / 1958

CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS: The Rev. Ralph Abernathy, left, and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Abernathy was ostracized by many prominent civil rights leaders shortly before his death because he wrote in his 1989 autobiography that King had a weakness for women.