

CARL T. ROWAN

New Doubt on King's Death

I have never been the sort of person who sees an evil conspiracy behind every death of every controversial person.

I have written nary a column supporting those who scream that Lee Harvey Oswald was not the sole killer of President Kennedy. I have not given speeches supporting James Earl Ray's claim that he is not responsible for Martin Luther King's murder and that he deserves a new trial.

As one who once sat on the Forty Committee, which approved delicate CIA operations, and who never heard a word about the CIA killing anybody, obviously I've never grabbed TV time with a claim that the United States was operating a sort of Murder Inc., in the Caribbean or anyplace else.

Yet, I confess that I'm shaken by the rash of recent stories alleging that the CIA handed out contracts to the Mafia for the murder of assorted people, presumably all foreigners. The Watergate revelations have thrown an aura of semi-believability around what used to seem to be ridiculous claims that G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt (two ex-CIA operatives) were in Dallas the day Kennedy was killed and were near the scene of the crime. I listen with an eerie tingle when someone reminds me that Alabama Gov. George Wallace has speculated that someone with money, who stood to benefit politically from ending his third-party campaign, had to be financing and directing Arthur Bremer, the man now imprisoned for almost killing Wallace.

The terrible truth is that, after Watergate, few people doubt any story of political madness, however implausible it may have seemed a year or two ago.

A top FBI official confided to me several years ago that the late J. Edgar Hoover was livid when Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Hoover talked with a few aides about the fact that King had tried, as a teen-ager, to commit suicide. Either Hoover, or one of his minions, decided that the "suicidal tendency" might be reactivated if the FBI sent to King's

wife a surreptitious recording made of a party in King's suite in a Washington hotel.

Mrs. Coretta King has now admitted that such a tape was received, but she is quoted as saying that neither she nor her late husband felt that it was damaging to them. So King did not commit suicide.

Meanwhile, in 1964, Hoover told President Lyndon B. Johnson (who then told civil rights leaders like Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and Whitney Young of the National Urban League) that one of King's most influential advisers was a secret Communist.

"We've followed him regularly to Mexico where he meets secretly with a top Soviet intelligence official, but we've never been able to get a photograph of King's friend with the Russian spy," I was informed by an FBI official.

Told of this, Johnson asked certain civil rights leaders to convince King that if he continued to be influenced by this so-called Soviet spy, he would wreck the civil rights movement. King agreed to ditch the alleged spy, but a few weeks later Johnson, I and other top government officials were treated to FBI stories (maybe valid, maybe not) that King was now seeing the alleged Communist secretly.

You sit remembering that many people detested King for what he was doing to break up the old Jim Crow order. After the FBI launched its whispering campaign, many Americans believed he was a "Commie" out to destroy this country. Other segments of this society despised him for the harsh things he was saying about U.S. military involvement in Indochina.

You remember those things and are forced to wonder if King's assassination was merely the deed of one man. The more one hears these stories of nefarious schemes and gross abuses by the dirty tricksters of the intelligence community, the easier it becomes to doubt.

How poisoned the atmosphere becomes.