

Documents Indicate CIA Spied on King, Wanted to Discredit Him as Black Leader

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WASHINGTON—The Central Intelligence Agency spied on Martin Luther King in the 1960s through informants, gathered records of King's telephone calls and photocopied some of his credit-card receipts and messages scrawled on business cards, according to documents in a federal lawsuit.

Many of the documents, which have been disclosed in a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit (Harold Weisberg vs. CIA, et al) and obtained by the Los Angeles Times, reflect an interest by the CIA in an alleged "Peking-line" Communist influence on King and his followers.

The documents contain also discussions of how allegedly derogatory information about King could be used to discredit him as a civil rights leader.

One CIA informant suggested that King be "removed" as a black leader. "It is 'A's' (informant's name deleted) belief that somehow or other Martin Luther King must be removed from the leadership of the Negro movement, and his removal must come from within, not from without," an internal CIA memo dated May 11, 1965, reads, adding that if whites contributed to King's ouster, it might make him a "martyr."

"'A' feels that somewhere in the Negro movement, at the top," the memo continues, "there must be a Negro leader who is 'clean,' who could step into the vacuum and chaos if Martin Luther King were either exposed or assassinated."

The disclosure of the 373 pages of files (which contain numerous deletions) is believed to provide the first documentary evidence that the CIA engaged in surveillance of King in the United States before he was shot to death by an assassin in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

It is not, however, the first disclosure of U.S. government surveillance of King, nor is it the first indication that the CIA engaged in domestic spying.

In 1975, when congressional hearings were called to investigate intel-

ligence abuses, it was disclosed that the FBI had tried to "neutralize" King's effectiveness by eavesdropping on his motel rooms with microphones and on his telephone conversations with wiretaps that were initially approved in 1963 by Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy.

Moreover, it has been disclosed that the CIA had spied on and kept files on thousands of Americans, mostly under a domestic program called Operation CHAOS, which was a violation of the agency's statutory charter. Then, in 1978, the New York Times reported that the CIA had recruited American blacks in the late 1960s and early 1970s to spy on Black Panther members in this country and Africa—and that CIA officials feared that disclosure of these activities would bring charges of racism against the agency.

In the CIA files on King, the allegedly damaging information against him had been confirmed by an unidentified "highly placed official in the Department of Justice," according to a memorandum dated June 9, 1965. The memo added that an informant had been told that an unidentified "Washington source had the entire King file in his office, including photographs and tapes."

One anonymous source is reported in the memo to have told another that "if we don't publish it, it is going to blow up underneath our noses, because it is certain to come out sooner or later."

The purported information on King, according to the same memo, consisted of:

—"Highly derogatory information on (material deleted) which have taken place within the United States and overseas."

—"A possible theft of money."

—"Association with identified Communist or pro-Soviet types on an intense personal basis, particularly (material deleted)."

The same memo reports that informant "A" said that "details of the King matter are definitely known to the editors of the New York Times and the New York Herald Tribune, but they will not break the story because they have been asked not to,

'A' stated, presumably by the President (Lyndon B. Johnson)." There is no clue in the files as to whether "A" in one document is the same informant identified as "A" in others.)

Another document, dated one month earlier in 1965, reflects a concern by its writer within the CIA that if any black leader were shown to be engaged in "illegal activities," it would cause a split between Johnson and black leaders, disrupt the civil rights movement and enable the "Communist left" to "cause extremely critical problems for the government of the United States."

The writer said that source "A" was concerned that if King were exposed by "white sources, official or otherwise," it would have "no good effect and would probably only make King a martyr," according to the same document (May 11, 1965).

"'A' was also concerned that King might possibly be assassinated before his exposure, which would have the effect of making him a martyr and would not at all be helpful to the Negro movement," the memo continues.

Last July, the House Assassinations Committee, although concluding that conspiracies were "likely" in the deaths of King and former President John F. Kennedy, cleared both the CIA and the FBI of any role in the conspiracies.

The rest of the released file on King includes photocopies of Diner's Club credit-card receipts for purchases in Miami and Chicago, handwritten phone messages to King, lists of some of his telephone calls (to men and women, a flying service, a television station, two airlines and the Urban League—all in the Miami area), plus phone numbers written on the backs of other persons' business cards.

Also in the file is a teletype summary of news media reaction in Cuba and Mexico to King's assassination.

Radio Havana is quoted as commenting: "His death shows once again that the exploited masses can only answer reactionary violence with revolutionary violence."