

# Steps to an Assassination THE FBI AND THE MURDER OF MARTIN LUTHER KING

by Mark Lane

During the last weeks, Abby Mann and I have conducted an intensive investigation into the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. While that investigation continues and pending a full report to the relevant members of the Congress, certain information should not be shared. However, the following



**ATLANTA** — Investigation continues and pending a full report to the relevant members of the Congress, certain information should not be shared. However, I believe that there is sufficient information now available to prove beyond doubt, that Dr. King's assassination was the result of a conspiracy; that persons associated with the FBI took decisive actions before the murder, which had the effect of permitting the assassin, after he killed Dr. King, to leave the scene undetected; and that those in the FBI who had said that they wanted Dr. King to die were charged by the United States government with conducting the entire investigation into his death.

**M**y concern with the murder of Dr. King was immediate. Within days after he was killed on April 4, 1968, I traveled to Memphis, Tennessee, to interview witnesses. I spent considerable time with Charles Q. Stephens, the one person the Department of Justice later developed as the key witness of substance against James Earl Ray. When I saw Stephens, the federal and local police were allegedly searching only for Eric Galt (their initial suspect), so that I could not ask Stephens if the man he saw fleeing from the scene with a rifle in his hand was in fact James Earl Ray. Yet the description that Stephens gave me precluded the possibility that he had seen Ray. Later Stephens was jailed as a material witness.

The woman who operated the boarding house from which the shot was allegedly fired and who had rented a room to the presumed rifleman never identified Ray as the man who had rented the room. My concern turned to the suspicion regarding the case against Ray as the lone killer, as the evidence seemed to indicate the unlikelihood of that proposition, particularly as Ray himself, in open court, announced that there had been a conspiracy to kill Dr. King. At that time I was still probing the facts surrounding the assassination of President Kennedy and was anxious to avoid the discrediting prefix, *assassination buff*, which by then had begun to precede my name whenever it appeared. I confess I was guided far too much by image and too little by principled commitment as I decided that someone else would surely examine and analyze the facts.

A few months ago, when for the first time those who had been close to Dr. King began to encourage a serious investigation into the facts, I went to Memphis again. What I discovered there should, and I think probably will, result in an investigation by Congress into the conspiracy to kill Dr. King and the peculiar role played by the FBI in the events surrounding that crime.

**Why the Time Is Right for a New Investigation**

Although more than 100 members of the House of Representatives have sponsored resolutions calling for an investigation by a Select Committee into the assassination of President Kennedy, a few leaders, including Phillip Burton (D-Calif.), Richard Bolling (D-Mo.), and Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. (D-Mass.), speaking, they say, on behalf of the Kennedy family, have prevented the Congress from voting on the question. Presumably we would know much less about Watergate had Richard Nixon's family suggested to the Senate that they would be discomforted by that investigation.

Can one then look toward the Congress with optimism regarding an investigation into the murder of Dr. King and the FBI covering up that crime? I think that an analysis reveals a changing set of circumstances. The power of the Congress has shifted from those who obsequiously sought to be solicitous of Ser Kennedy's concern, regardless of the expressed wishes of their own constituents. They wish to be close to the throne is no longer operating to the detriment of an open public investigation, since the New York City convention demonstrated that Sen. Kenne will not occupy that position. The power has moved, as the promise in the Congress has moved, to those who members in the House maneuver for leadership positions, to those who have support and who are relied upon by Jimmy Carter. Perhaps even more important than this is and complimentary to it is the fact that there the Black Caucus, an organized and effective force in the House that may demand investigation into the murder of Dr. King, as the facts are developed.

## Steps to King's Assassination

### 1. Witness Stripping

On April 3, 1968, an observer could have safely, although as it turned out, erroneously, predicted that during the following day four black men, employed by the city of Memphis, would have been present near the Lorraine Motel.

Floyd Newsom, a Memphis fireman, had been assigned to a fire company at Fire Station Two, just a few yards from the Lorraine Motel balcony on which Dr. King was murdered. Newsom was a vigorous and consistent supporter of the struggle of the

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sanitation workers on whose behalf Dr. King had returned to Memphis. Newsom attended the meeting at the Mason Temple on the evening of April 3, heard Dr. King's famous and prophetic last speech, and returned home at approximately eleven o'clock that night to learn that an urgent call from the Fire Department to his home demanded an immediate response. When he called back, he was ordered not to report to Fire Station Two, but to report to another station many miles away. He asked why, but was given no reason for the "temporary transfer."

The only other black fireman assigned to



*Dr. King speaking at Cardozo High School in 1967.*

whose home Dr. King was to have dinner that night, had called the police and asked that Redditt be assigned to provide security. Redditt was known to the movement in Memphis and trusted as a competent and thorough officer. Redditt was surprised that his entire detail consisted of one assistant, and frankly suspicious that Richmond had been assigned more to spy on him for the police than to assist him in protecting Dr. King.

### 2. Security Stripping

At approximately four o'clock in the afternoon *1. Arkin*, the head of the Memphis

Redditt in custody by car to his home. Redditt recalled the scene of their arrival at his house. "We were sitting there in the car with the radio on. Sitting right in front of my house. I was wondering what this was all about and what was happening at the Lorraine Motel in my absence when an announcer interrupted the broadcast to announce that Dr. King had just been shot."

The police officers remained in Redditt's house for two days. "They were watching me," he said. "They provided no surveillance, no stakeouts outside the house. If someone threw a bomb in the window, they would have been



on the temporary transfer.

The only other black fireman assigned to Fire Station Two, at the scene of the murder, was also transferred out the night before the murder. Both men were surplus employees at their new assignments and both men left their companies at Fire Station Two so unaccompanied that the fire equipment could not be dispatched until white firemen were sent in to fill the vacancies. The two firemen, Newsom and N. E. Wallace, had been the only blacks at Fire Station Two. After Dr. King was killed, Newsom, who suspected that his transfer may have been related to the murder, resigned in protest.

The Deputy Chief of the Fire Department told Newsom that his anger should not be directed at the Fire Department because the order to transfer him had originated with the Police Department. This latest information did little to allay Newsom's suspicions that the transfer of the two black firemen was a deliberate effort at "witness stripping."

The Fire Station was used on April 3 and April 4 as the command post for the Memphis police stationary security for Dr. King. Dr. King had returned to Memphis because a non-violent march that he had previously led had become violent. Those who precipitated the violence were evidently FBI-related provocateurs playing the role of militant activists within the ranks of the support group. A lengthy and cruel attack upon the demonstration by the police had followed the window-breaking violence of the provocateurs.

Dr. King's return to Memphis was greeted with numerous threats, including death threats. The Memphis police responded to this volatile situation by reducing Dr. King's stationary security (as distinguished from police officers driving around in vehicles) from ten to two officers.

The two police officers who took up positions at the fire station were Detective Ed Redditt and Patrolman W. B. Richmond. Rev. Billy Kyles, a black Memphis minister at

At approximately four o'clock in the early afternoon, Lt. Arkin, the head of the Memphis intelligence office, arrived at the firehouse and told Redditt to accompany him to the office of Frank Holloman, the Director of the Police and Fire Departments in Memphis. Redditt explained that he could not leave his post, but did so when Arkin told him that Holloman had ordered him to his office. When Redditt arrived, Holloman introduced him to a man he described as a "Secret Service agent who has just flown in here from Washington."

Holloman explained that the United States Secret Service had learned through the Mississippi State Highway Patrol that a group in Mississippi had decided to kill Redditt and that in furtherance of that objective, the Mississippi group had set out a contract to a hit-man in St. Louis, Missouri, to travel to Memphis, Tennessee, to kill him—a previous-ly unknown local Memphis police officer.

Redditt was incredulous. Was the Secret Service extending its excellent security beyond the President and the Vice-President and their families to encompass local detectives everywhere? If the hit man was even at that moment tracking Redditt down, why did the Secret Service agent spend hours to fly in from Washington with the news, when a telephone call might have saved Redditt's life?

The story appeared on its face to be flawed. Holloman was adamant. Redditt was to report at once with his family to the Holiday Inn and to remain there in hiding until Holloman told him he could leave. Redditt protested that he had an important assignment at the Lorraine Motel and that his wife's mother lived with him and was too ill to be moved. Holloman then ordered Redditt to go home and remain there with his family. Redditt explained that if a hit man was intent upon killing him, then he would rather be on the street than at home jeopardizing his family. At that point Holloman called in two armed police officers who, in a semi,

he said, "They provided no surveillance, no stakeouts outside the house. If someone threw a bomb in the window, they would have been two more casualties."

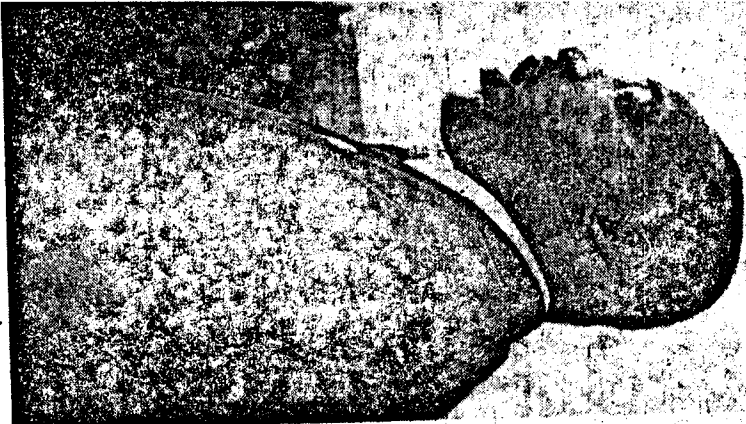
Two days later, said Redditt, "I got the word to go back to work. What about the contract on my life? I never heard another word about that during the last eight years."

This strange series of events presumably left only Patrolman Richmond on the scene. However, he told me recently that he was in the police station, far from the scene, when Dr. King was shot. Richmond, who still works for the police, refused to tell me under what circumstances he was removed from his post just before the shot was fired.

Having secured this and other information directly from the participants, I met with Frank Holloman, the only man in the history of Memphis to have been the director of the Police and Fire Departments, a position he had occupied for just a few weeks before the assassination. Holloman said that he was concerned about threats against Dr. King but agreed that he had reduced the stationary security to two men. He did call Redditt off and he did not even consider replacing him with another officer. He never thought it odd that a Federal agency sent an agent by plane to Memphis from Washington to warn him of a threat. He never even considered the possibility that the effort to remove Redditt, the head of the security for Dr. King, might have been part of an effort to assault or kill Dr. King. If one gets the impression that Holloman was an unschooled and inexperienced local boy promoted to a position too exacting and too demanding for his abilities, one gets an incorrect impression.

### 3. FBI's Illegal Tactics

To understand Mr. Holloman, one should understand the attitude of the FBI, particularly the attitude of its director, J. Edgar Hoover, toward Dr. King. During Hoover's reign, his



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interviewed Arthur Murrain, a former FBI agent who had served with the Bureau for more than 20 years. He retired in good standing and is now practicing law in New York State. For many of those years he served in the Atlanta office of the FBI. He told me that the number-two desk in that office, the intelligence squad, was charged with the responsibility of destroying Dr. King. There were eight men on that squad and their "total objective in life was to somehow or other get King, to bring him down, break him or destroy him," he told me. It was the Atlanta-based intelligence squad that arranged for the illegal wiretaps, that "sterilized" tapes so that they could not be traced to the bureau, and that suggested Dr. King should kill himself. According to Murrain, the intelligence squad "viewed King as much an enemy of the country as they viewed Khrushchev." He added, "this group in the bureau was out to get King and there was great camaraderie among them. They said to me many, many, many times that they would get King."

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Late in the afternoon on April 4, 1968, Murrain was checking out of the office for the day. With him was an FBI Special Agent who was the assistant supervisor for the Intelligence Squad. Together they heard the radio announcement that Dr. King had been shot. The agent told me that the FBI Intelligence Squad officer said, "I hope the son of a bitch salmon-colored cards to check out, the radio announcement was made that Dr. King had died. The Intelligence Squad agent literally jumped for joy" and then said, "They got Zorro, the son of a bitch. They finally got the bastard." Zorro was the code name that the FBI intelligence squad had assigned to Dr. King.

## 6. The Suspects Investigate

Later that day, while they walked to the free FBI parking lot approximately two blocks away, the intelligence squad assistant supervisor defended all of the methods employed to



Dr. King with Congressman Andrew Young of Georgia, who is now an avid Carter supporter.

not guilty and to be tried for the crime. The trial judge, Judge Battle, died before he could rule on that application. His family has said that the pressure he was under caused his death. Under the laws of Tennessee, an application for a new trial is automatically granted if the trial judge should die while the application is pending before him. But not in this case, the new judge ruled, in announcing new law.

Ray's writing or unwitting participation in the crime is of less moment to most than the discovery of all the facts, but through an examination of Ray's role one may reach the essentials. The Warren Report, widely disbelieved, was at least the result of an investigation, however flawed. But in the case of the murder of Dr. King we are presented with no facts by the government. All that is offered in this case is a coerced plea, entered by a man who insisted at the time and insists still that there was a conspiracy; a plea which was quickly withdrawn, followed by an "investigation" by members of the intelligence squad

by Yvonne Burke, together with their colleagues of good-will, can illuminate the dark corners of this mystery. Among the members of the caucus are some of those who served valiantly and selflessly with Dr. King, including Andrew Young and Walter Fauntroy. It is fitting that the commitment to morality, truth and fundamental human decency that Dr. King shared with his colleagues may yet bring us from the night of horrors into the land of which Dr. King dreamed. NW



REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

office was officially designated by the FBI as the S.O.G.—the Seat of Government. Hoover viewed American Presidents as transients who passed through his administration and he was inclined to easy outrage when criticized even mildly, and especially when the criticism was justifiable. When Dr. King dared to criticize the FBI, Hoover reacted with alacrity.

The Senate Intelligence Committee chaired by Sen. Frank Church found earlier this year that the "substantial use" of illegal tactics "by the FBI in an attempt to destroy Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., violated the law and fundamental human decency." Hoover, when learning that Dr. King had been named *Time* magazine's "Man of the Year," wrote to the

magazine's "Man of the Year," wrote, "They had to dig deep in the garbage to come up with this one." Hoover branded Dr. King "the most notorious liar in the country" and even arranged for a "sterilized" tape to be sent to Dr. King just before he received the Nobel Peace Prize with an unsigned letter urging Dr. King to commit suicide because "your end is approaching... you are finished."

#### 4. Holloman and the FBI

Frank Holloman had served in high places with the FBI for 25 years before becoming Director of the Police and Fire Departments in Memphis. He had been the Special Agent in Charge (SAC) of the FBI office in Jackson, Mississippi, during the trouble there. He had operated as the SAC in the Atlanta FBI office—the city where Dr. King lived with his family and where his church was located. Holloman had also been the SAC for the FBI in Memphis.

For eight years Holloman served J. Edgar Hoover in a more personal manner. Holloman was the FBI Inspector in charge of Hoover's personal office in Washington. Holloman told me that he had met with Hoover every day during that eight-year period.

Holloman told me, "I have absolutely nothing to apologize for regarding anything the FBI and Mr. Hoover did for all the years that I was there." Yet it was during those years that Hoover developed and demonstrated the pathological obsession to destroy Dr. King that led the US Senate to conclude that Hoover's methods "violated the law and fundamental human decency."

#### 5. The Destroy-King Squad

In an effort to learn about the men who operated the squad to destroy Dr. King, I

away, the intelligence squad assistant supervisor defended all of the methods employed to destroy Dr. King and explained, "You had to stop the commie son of a bitch."

Following the murder of Dr. King and the widespread response to that murder, there were demands that the Department of Justice investigate the crime. Hoover was given that responsibility. Hoover assigned the Atlanta-based FBI intelligence squad to conduct the investigation. Thus, the men who had expressed the hope that Dr. King would die, who had actively sought to convince him to kill himself, who considered him to be as much an enemy of the country as they considered Khrushchev to be, were given the entire responsibility for finding out who killed him.

They never did crack the case, and they were able until now, to suppress the essential evidence that one of their own, Frank Holloman, had been engaged in stripping black witnesses and police security from the scene just before the killing.

#### 7. James Earl Ray

When James Earl Ray was captured, he insisted that he was innocent of the murder, and he has steadfastly maintained that position since. He was coerced into pleading guilty by his attorney upon promise of almost certain death if he did not. His attorney offered him huge sums of money to enter that plea and to create no embarrassing situation in court. Nevertheless, when Ray pleaded guilty he said in open court that there had been a conspiracy to kill Dr. King.

The bullet taken from Dr. King's body could not be matched to Ray's rifle, the FBI conceded, and the witnesses at the rooming house from which the shot was allegedly fired could not identify Ray as having been there. Ray asked the court for permission to withdraw the plea of guilty, to enter the plea of

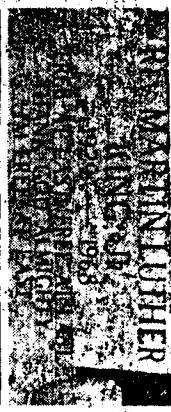
quickly withdrawing followed by an "investigation" by members of the intelligence squad who in any other circumstances would have been viewed by honest investigators as the possible prime suspects. They waived Dr. King dead, and following the unexplained clearing of witnesses and security, he was dead.

#### Conclusion

I had until recently held to the belief that the long night which began for Americans in the bright sunlight of a Dallas street more than a decade ago would end only when the Congress held open and public hearings about the murder of President Kennedy. That the night would end only when we realized that an examination of the tip of the Watergate iceberg was valuable if we understood what it said about what remained beneath the surface, subverting our democratic pretensions, rendering hopeless our democratic aspirations.

The still-unexplained death of the President troubles my spirits, our spirit, makes us uneasy. For we all remember where we were that day, even those of us who have forgotten where we spent our first wedding anniversary, or our teenage first birthday. To remember that moment on November 22, 1963 is an American national characteristic. We are unified in the incompleteness of that horror, never having determined why the President was killed or who killed him.

I think now that the road back to morality may begin with an effort by the good men and women in government to restore some of the trust of the people in some of the institutions of government by examining in the open the circumstances under which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was murdered. The circumstances have conspired to bring us to this moment in history, when the members of the Black Caucus in the House of Representatives, led



Author's note: Abby Mann, who wrote *Judgment at Nuremberg* and many other extremely important works, had undertaken the task of researching and writing a major work on the life of Dr. King for NBC television. Abby, one of my closest friends, asked me to join him in Memphis, so that we might together explore the facts surrounding the murder of Dr. King. This article is the result of that effort.

#### SOURCES

The sources for this article are interviews conducted by Mark Lane in Memphis with former FBI Inspector Frank Holloman, former Memphis police detective Ed Keddah, Memphis police officer W. B. Richmond, Memphis fireman Floyd Newsom and N.E. Wallace; and Rev. Billy Kyle; and elsewhere with the senior and now retired Atlanta-based FBI agent Arthur Marriogh. Regarding the FBI efforts to destroy Dr. King, some of the information cited here comes from the final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations of the United States Senate, Book II, pp. 219-223. Information regarding Judge Baile was obtained by interviews by Mark Lane with members of Judge Baile's family in Tennessee.

Mark Lane is the director of the Washington-based Citizens Commission of Inquiry, a non-profit organization committed to securing the truth about the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Mr. Lane is the author of six books, including the international best seller *Rush to Judgment*, and is former member of the New York State Legislature. He was a campaign director for President Kennedy in 1960 for New York City. He has taught law at the Catholic University of America and has lectured during the past year at more than 150 colleges, law schools and universities.

The Citizens Commission of Inquiry (CCI) is located at 105 2nd St. N.E., Washington, DC 20002; telephone, (202) 546-7500. CCI is anxious to secure assistance from those who are interested in its objectives.