

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : Mr. W. R. Wannall

FROM : J. G. Deegan *JGD*

SUBJECT: "NEWSDAY" ARTICLE ABOUT INVADERS
AND DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
DATED FEBRUARY 1, 1976

- 1 - Mr. N. P. Callahan
- 1 - Mr. J. B. Adams
- 1 - Mr. D. W. Moore, Jr.

DATE: 2/24/76

- 1 - Mr. W. R. Wannall
- 1 - Mr. J. G. Deegan
- 1 - Mr. J. D. Powell

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Handwritten initials/signature

This is in response to a notation by the Director on a 2/1/76 "Newsday" article which alleges that the FBI and the Memphis, Tennessee, Police Department had active informants in a violence-prone Memphis black youth group, the Invaders, and that they were instrumental in instigating a riot in Memphis 3/28/68. Allegedly this riot in turn led Dr. Martin Luther King to return to Memphis in April, 1968, where he was assassinated. The Director noted "What about this group and the reported action?"

In 1967 an umbrella black power group was formed in Memphis principally known as the Black Organizing Project (BOP). One of its cells was the Invaders, composed of young blacks. This group was particularly militant. Its leaders made statements to the effect that it would be desirable to burn the city and loot. On 2/12/68 the Memphis sanitation workers began a strike. A series of demonstrations and rallies were held in support thereof and this became a black cause.

A mass parade and rally was scheduled for 3/28/68 with King as the main attraction. The BOP actively urged all black students to skip school and participate in the march. BOP leader urged the youngsters to use sticks from placards and not to be afraid of the police. The march developed into a looting rampage with hundreds of arrests, three youths shot, one fatally and dozens of injuries. King fled the scene when he became aware of the looting that was occurring at the rear of the march. The presence of a large number of uncontrolled school age youngsters was the primary cause of the rioting.

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Memorandum to Mr. W. R. Wannall
Re: "Newsday" Article About Invaders
and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Dated February 1, 1976
157-8460

Memphis had five racial or extremist informants active in March, 1968. One became a member of the Invaders shortly after the above violence [redacted] thereon. He was present during the march and he reported. He did not lead the violence or participate therein. Another source was well acquainted with the Invaders. He was also present during the riot, but did not participate in the violence although he did report on it. Our informants in no way instigated the violence associated with the Invaders.

The Memphis Police Department did have an undercover officer in the Invaders. He, through the Memphis Police Department, furnished information to the FBI. He has been publicly disclosed and he is no longer with the Memphis Police Department. There is no indication in our files that he instigated the violence.

ACTION:

For information. This information is being furnished to the Department.

ORIGINAL

Jan

W.R. Wannall
1/22/76
Jan

ICE

Sunday, February 1, 1976

FBI Tied To King's Return To Memphis

By Les Payne

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The FBI continues to turn up in unexplained circumstances surrounding the assassination of Martin Luther King.

Newsday has learned that FBI informants actively participated in the rioting in Memphis in 1968 which drew the Rev. Dr. King back to the city where he was killed.

Several FBI informants and at least one undercover agent for the Memphis police department were among the most active members of a young, violence-prone black group which openly opposed King's peaceful march supporting the city's sanitation workers.

According to some witnesses, the 100-member group called the Invaders led the March 28 riots which attempted to discredit King's efforts. Following the riot, in which one youth was killed, scores injured and 238 arrested, King vowed that he would return to prove that he still could lead a nonviolent demonstration.

"Dr. King would never have returned to Memphis if the violence had not happened," said the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who was one of King's aides in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. "We never intended to get bogged down in Memphis."

The Invaders created major disruptions among local blacks supporting King, according to his aides. They criticized King for his nonviolent approach and urged local blacks to "burn, baby, burn." On April 4, the day King was killed, the groups met with him and his staff and threatened renewed violence unless they were given \$750,000 to redevelop their community. "They just got louder and louder," one aide who was at the meeting recalled. "We told them we didn't have access to that kind of money. We had to put

Two sources said FBI agents and Memphis policemen admitted that they had "penetrated" the Invaders with several informers. One of the informants reportedly planned a large portion of Police and FBI officials were regularly provided with detailed information about the group's plans, activities and of the group's violent confrontations, meetings. "They knew everything that went on at Invaders' meetings," one source said. "It was as if they had a tape recorder there." The undercover Memphis policeman who joined the Invaders was at the scene of the violence on the day of the riot, several sources said. He is reportedly still a member of the Memphis force.

"Weston [not the real name of the undercover police agent] was very focal, very active," said a former leader of the Invaders who has talked to the policeman since he was discovered to be a member of the force. "He had a 7.62 Russian automatic rifle and he was armed every time we were armed. He was always suggesting actions that we should take; I never saw him physically attack anyone. But he was one of the most provocative members of the Invaders."

The Invaders, who wore jackets with

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their names printed on the back, were organized in late 1967. The youths were led mainly by college students at nearby Memphis State and LeMoyné Colleges. The Invaders denounced the nonviolent strategy, but offered protection for King and his staff members. "They, like other blacks in the country, were naturally frustrated by the slow pace of change," said the Rev. Hoseah Williams, Atlanta SCLC director. "We usually put them to work as parade marshals or security guards. They would never have hurt Dr. King. But those who infiltrated our groups, and we could never identify them, tried to exploit the youngsters' frustrations and neglect and turn them against us."

The FBI and Memphis police verified recently that they had informants among the Invaders in 1968. However, Henry Lux, who was the assistant police chief in Memphis, downplayed the group's role in the March 28 violence. Robert G. Jensen, who was the FBI agent in charge at the time, said, "I wouldn't be surprised if we had informers in the group. I'm sure there was adequate coverage of the Invaders."

It is reliably reported that the bureau and Memphis police shared intelligence about the Invaders.

In addition to being involved with the March 28 violence, the Memphis police undercover agent was providing security for King at the Lorraine Motel on the day he was assassinated, according to knowledgeable sources. The officer was a member of the Invaders' four-man security force that had agreed to provide protection for King while he was in Memphis.

There have been a series of disclosures recently concerning covert FBI activities against King. This has led to a Department of Justice investigation. The inquiry started after the Senate Intelligence Committee discovered an FBI memorandum, dated March 28, 1969, which detailed a plan to portray King as a hypocrite for staying at a white-owned motel—the Rivermont Holiday Inn—where he fled after the violence erupted. The Justice Department investigated to see if the memo had anything to do with King's return to the black-owned Lorraine Motel, where he was killed. They found no evidence linking the FBI to a plot to have King return to the Lorraine motel. However, Newsday has learned that the Invaders heatedly discussed King's stay at the white motel among themselves—some threatening violence over the issue.

A source at the Justice Department told Newsday that the FBI memo was part of then FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's Counter-Intelligence Program (Cointelpro) against "Black Nationalist-Hate Groups." The plan, outlined in an FBI Domestic Intelligence Division memo, was put into effect March 4, one month before King was killed. It was designed to "prevent the rise of a 'messiah' who could unify . . . the militant black nationalist movement." An overall goal of Hoover's plan was to "discredit" black leaders and their movement among both blacks and whites.

The violence at Memphis, perhaps more than anything else, began to erode King's credibility among moderate

blacks. King and his group were preparing to lead a nonviolent "Poor Peoples March" on Washington later that month. After the Memphis riots some national black leaders attacked King for the violence. On the day before he was killed, NAACP leader Roy Wilkins attacked King in a story printed in the Memphis Press-Scimitar. Wilkins said he doubted that King could keep the Washington march nonviolent: "If the Washington march decides to throw a brick through a window, there's nothing Dr. King up front can do to stop it."

Jensen, who was in charge of the FBI in Memphis, said that the "ultimate decisions [for Cointelpro] were made in Washington D.C. and then they came to the field office." He denied that his office ever received the hotel memo. "I have no recollection of a memorandum dated March 28," he said. "If it was an intra-office memo I wouldn't have seen it anyway. It would have come to us as general instructions."

The Senate Intelligence Committee said that it uncovered no evidence that the FBI was implicated in King's murder or any cover-up. The committee chairman, Frank Church (D-Idaho), has reportedly called for a federal special prosecutor to investigate the assassination to resolve "many unanswered questions," including whether the bureau "vendetta" against King was related to his murder in Memphis.

Some of King's staff members over the years, have charged that the Invad-

ers were responsible for the riots which indirectly led, they say, to King's death in Memphis.

"The violence was definitely responsible for Martin's being in Memphis on April 4th," said Cong. Andrew Young (D-Ga.). "The Invaders themselves have taken responsibility for the violence. Now if the FBI was involved with the Invader, then it would bear looking into."

FBI officials deny any involvement in King's death. "The FBI did an excellent job in the investigation," Jensen said. "There are still a lot of theories, but no new evidence..."

However, former FBI agent Arthur Murtagh said that Hoover's relentless surveillance of King influenced the way individual agents approached the murder. For a time Murtagh directed the bureau's intelligence unit in Atlanta which tapped the civil rights leader's telephones and bugged his rooms. "The bureau under Hoover believed that King was a foreign Communist agent," he said. "He was the enemy. In this sort of atmosphere, the bureau's investigating King's murder was like the CIA investigating the assassination of a Russian premier."

Murtagh said that some agents were "ecstatic" after King was shot. "When King was shot, an agent I knew in Atlanta went on a 30-minute high. We were in the bureau's parking lot when the news came and this fellow kept saying, 'They got Zorro [King's code name] they got Zorro. They finally got that son of a bitch.'"