

8/13/70

Dr. Ralph Abernathy
Southern Christian Leadership Conference
Atlanta, Ga.

Dear Dr. Abernathy,

This is a more painful letter to write than the others (all unanswered) that I have written you, every SCLC official I could, all of Dr. King's friends I could approach, all the black leaders within my reach, and those with him when he was assassinated who have helped themselves be made into black Judases. Several black members of Congress, too, as well as black publishers and other personalities, such as leading entertainers.

The intended defamation in the current TIME and the attendant publicity could have been reduced, if not eliminated, by the open and honest airing of the inherent FBI blackmail, as I do it in my study of the assassination, which you would not take the time to read or send someone to examine. One of you, Mr. Whitney Young, in conversation with me a year ago, confirmed my suspicion that all black leaders were engaging in self-blackmail in your futility.

Without rancor and intending no personal insult, I ask you, as a man and as a Christian minister, to justify your and all other silences about this assassination and the obviously framed solution. Is this the manly course; the dedication of true friends of the victim of a murder? Is this the course of those dedicated to a decent society? Of those seeking a better life for those so long and so unjustly denied it?

It is a cowardly course, one that defames friendship as it does honor, regardless of any seemingly utilitarian self-justification behind which you all hide, like in the fable of the Emperor's Clothes.

I did not ask that you help me get my work published, or that you help finance my investigation, although I think the book, with its extensive documentation, including of the Birmingham murders and the disingenuous, truly subversive record of the FBI, would have raised funds for your work. I asked only that you (plural) inform yourselves, seek and learn the truth.

It is Dr. King's great tragedy, as it was John Kennedy's, that among his friends, among those made great by the touch of his greatness, there was no single one with the manhood to follow the biblical injunction.

Only truth can set you free from the captivity of this record. If it is already late, I beg of you, in your own interest, do not let it get later still without doing what the course of personal honor and genuine dedication to those things of which you speak require of you. See the evidence I have gathered and included in the completed book.

Letter to Time enclosed

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

8/12/70

Letters to the Editor Editor
TIME Magazine
Time-life Bldg.
Rockefeller Center
New York, N.Y.

Dear Sir,

That J. Edgar Hoover threatened Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to his face (TIME Aug. 17), and that in the presence of a number of Dr. King's friends, is as unlikely as it was unnecessary. It would have been a well-witnessed crime, blackmail. The results could have been accomplished more subtly and effectively.

The inherent blackmail extended to three Attorneys General. I set the record out in detail in my own writing, FRAME-UP: The King/Ray case.

If TIME's source was first-hand, could it be other than FBI, whose morals are here involved?

In trying to frame Dr. King, it prepared to frame James Earl Ray and did.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

Post 8-11-70

Mrs. King Denies Time's Account Of Husband's Meeting With Hoover

ATLANTA, Aug. 10 (UPI) — Mrs. Martin Luther King Jr. today denied a Time magazine article which said her late husband toned down criticism of the FBI only after J. Edgar Hoover confronted him with wiretappings that revealed alleged extra-marital activities.

"The conversations between my husband and Mr. Hoover, which he related to me, do not correspond at all to the Time

magazine report," Mrs. King said.

"The love, concern and devotion which Martin expressed toward me and the children are our most precious and treasured memories.

"The all-embracing love which he symbolized for all people was experienced in a most profound way by his own family."

Time Magazine said that in

a 1964 meeting some four years before Dr. King's assassination — Hoover told Dr. King of the wiretaps and "lectured him that his morals should be those befitting a Nobel prizewinner."

Hoover then reportedly asked Dr. King to tone down his criticism of the FBI, which Time said Dr. King did, resulting in Dr. King's popularity decline among many blacks.

ones. "The white press," Williams says, "so thoroughly indoctrinated King and his people with the idea that the capitulation of the bus company [following the Montgomery, Ala., boycott] was a victory for the blacks that they believed it; believed, too, that other things would inevitably fall like tin soldiers, all in a neat line."

King, says Williams, suffered from a fatal inability to perceive what was happening to him, and believing in himself, continued to lash out at the white power structure. "He did not understand that it had armed him with feather dusters," Williams writes. "He was a black man and therefore always was and always would be naked of power, for he was slow, indeed unable, to perceive the manipulation of white power, and in the end white power killed him."

But not, Williams believes, without some help from King himself, for King

white society: he compromised. Says Williams: "Compromises that seem to favor black people have always turned out to be defeats for them. 'Political expediency' is nonexistent for Negroes. The demands made must be stood by."

The Doctors. Only toward the end of his career, Williams feels, did King fully understand the realities of power in America and begin to take the steps that would have made him a truly effective leader by seeking to unite the nation's poor across class and color lines against the Viet Nam War. This idea, Williams argues, so threatened the hegemony of the white power structure group that it decided that King must be destroyed.

King unwittingly provided the noose. Suspecting that some of his associates had Communist connections, the FBI began tapping King's telephone and bugging his hotel rooms in 1963. From a se-

OPINION

Posthumous Pillory

No black American was so widely honored in his lifetime; yet segregationists denounced Martin Luther King Jr. as a Communist and worse, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover once publicly branded him a liar, and militant blacks eventually came to see him as a "sellout" to the white Establishment. Now a black writer has added yet another—and unlikely—epithet to those fastened on the assassinated leader. In a new book, *The King God Didn't Save* (Coward-McCann, Inc.; \$5.95), Novelist John Williams (*Night Song, The Man Who Cried I Am*) calls King a failure.

Full of frustration and seething black anger, Williams' book is both a compassionate catalogue of King's strengths and achievements and an agonizing reappraisal of his weaknesses. Dedicated to the memory of the man Martin Luther King "could have become had he lived," the book argues that King was the complicitous victim of a "white power" plot to manipulate, castrate and ultimately destroy him.

Fatal Inability. Though Williams' work is disorganized and repetitive, its message is clear. Williams believes that white power corrupted and then co-opted King by making him believe that he had power when, in fact, he had none, by granting him minor concessions so that he could not demand major



KING LEAVING HOOVER OFFICE (1964)
Armed with feather dusters and flawed by hubris.

suffered from the tragic flaw of *hubris*. An ambitious, middle-class Christian, he sought success and basked in the public recognition that his efforts brought him, says the author, who interviewed many of King's friends and associates in preparing his book. King gloated over a magazine poll that showed him to be the nation's most respected black leader, savored his meetings with presidents and kings, accepted the Nobel Prize as if it were an inalienable right rather than a cherished award.

But he could not, states Williams, relate to the black underclass or understand its impatience with a system that refused to recognize its legitimate demands. Because of this lack of understanding, the angry Williams charges, King did what no black leader can afford to do if he is really to influence

security viewpoint, the wiretaps uncovered nothing. They established no links between King and the Communists. But, Williams reports, they did turn up an astonishing amount of information about King's extensive and vigorous sexual activities. (According to one of Williams' sources, identified only as Person B, "Martin and the rest of them had a code. A very attractive woman was called 'Doctor.' I forget the other names for women not so attractive." Williams' informant was a "Doctor.")

Private Detail. Most newspapers ignored the rumors and leaks to them of King's extramarital activities, but their existence undermined King's effectiveness just the same. The effect, says Williams, was one of slow political assassination; King was spared it only by the bullet of James Earl Ray.

Williams has the correct outline of the FBI tape story. What he does not have is precisely what happened at the celebrated meeting between FBI Director Hoover and King in 1964. Hoover, *TIME* learned, explained to King just what damaging private detail he had on the tapes and lectured him that his morals should be those befitting a Nobel prize-winner. He also suggested that King should tone down his criticism of the FBI. King took the advice. His decline in black esteem followed, a de-

cline scathingly narrated by Williams.

Williams' anger over the slow progress of the fight for equality is more understandable than some of his charges. His depiction of "white power" as "a marsh underfoot for anyone not white . . . treacherous and deadly" is, of course, wildly exaggerated. Far more serious, King himself was less a victim than he was a victor. His leadership brought conscience and cohesion to the cause of black equality, while his faith in the tenets upon which the

country was founded forced Americans to recognize the equity of his demands and Congress to take action to meet them.

King's compromises were not capitulations, but sane and sound recognition of the way progress historically has been wrung from the American system. He may have failed to reach his ultimate goal. But by serving as the catalyst in the formation of a truly national civil rights movement, he laid the groundwork for its possible success in the future.