

William F. Buckley Jr.

Revisionism on Hoover

The whole Hoover business is getting out of hand. One of the reasons for it is the partisanship of the headlining congressional investigating committees, which make one think back wistfully on the rough justice of those Nixonites engaged in maximizing the incumbency.

Now hear this: Carl Rowan, the prominent black journalist and former director of the U.S. Information Agency, has actually suggested that the evidence mounts that the FBI, under Hoover's leadership, connived in the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

I don't think Joe McCarthy ever made an allegation quite so breathtaking. They ran McCarthy out of town with wet towels. All that has happened to Carl Rowan, so far as I can see, is that he has received a quiet letter from Ladislav Farrago, the writer, biographer of General Patton, who has been spending the last several years preparing an authoritative biography of J. Edgar Hoover. Farrago wrote to Rowan to say, in effect:

Look, 1) in 1967 there was a genuine national concern over the company (I do not mean sexual) Dr. King was keeping.

2) During that period there were periodic threats against the life of Dr. King. These came in part from white fanatics, against

whom the FBI was generally able to contend — by bugging certain telephones, keeping some people under surveillance, penetrating their organizations, and providing King with special protections. But it became more and more difficult to protect him against the black extremists — such as, for instance, had assassinated Malcolm X — because the hostility to the FBI engendered by King and a few black extremists had made the work of the FBI extremely difficult in tight black circles.

3) Moreover, Rowan, back in 1967, was one of the black leaders who knew these facts. His idolatry of Dr. King is strictly a posthumous affair. Mr. Farrago reminded Mr. Rowan of an article published in September, 1967, in the *Reader's Digest*. Martin Luther King is saying "utterly irresponsible things," Rowan wrote then. After the speech in which King compared Americans in Vietnam to the concentration-camp masters of Nazi Germany, Rowan said, "Reaction across the nation and around the world was immediate and explosive. Radios Moscow and Peking picked up King's words and fed them to distant capitals. In the White House, a Presidential aide shouted, 'My God, King has given a speech on Vietnam that goes right down the Communist line!'"

Rowan then gave a list of

liberal leaders who had chided King on his excesses — Bunche, Brooke, *The Washington Post*.

Rowan went further. "King," he analyzed, "seemed to develop an exaggerated appraisal of how much he and his crisis techniques were responsible for the race-relations progress that had been made." And he warned:

"Negroes had, in fact, begun to grow uneasy about King. He no longer seemed to be the selfless leader of the 1950s." His visits to the "jail looked like publicity stunts."

Why did King move the civil rights issue into foreign policy? "Why did King," in adopting the Communist line, "reject the advice of his old civil rights colleagues? Some say it was a matter of ego . . . Others revived a more sinister speculation that had been whispered around Capitol Hill and in the nation's newsrooms for more than two years — talk of Communists influencing the actions and words of the young minister. This talk disturbed other civil rights leaders more than anything else."

And — may we not assume? — disturbed the director of the FBI? Carl Rowan would perhaps have an easier time understanding the whole mess if he went back to read what he was himself writing about it at the time of Hoover's maximum concern.