

Carl T. Rowan

The FBI and Dr. King — unanswered questions

In this column, almost exactly a year ago, I wrote the following about the FBI's attempt to destroy Dr. Martin Luther King:

"Is it a proper FBI function for agents to mail to the wife of a man the FBI director despises a tape recording suggesting that the man has a sexual affair going with another woman? Should this tape be used this way primarily because agents close to the FBI director hope that sending it to the wife will activate the hated man's tendency toward suicide? This was done under Hoover."

The front pages of America recently have blared forth most of the story of J. Edgar Hoover's grisly plot to destroy the reputation and influence of Dr. King. With FBI officials now acknowledging these monstrous efforts to destroy the civil rights leader, I write not to say "I told you so."

I wish only to have Americans realize that what I wrote in 1974, but more importantly what I wrote in many columns about Hoover and the FBI in 1969, was true.

When I first revealed what Hoover and the FBI had done to Dr. King, for reasons of Hoover's venality, personal spite, political ideology, I stirred up quite a fuss. I shall never forget that when Vera Glaser and Malvina Stephenson asked Hoover who had started the controversy over illegal wiretaps, the late FBI

"That racist columnist, Rowan." Millions of Americans were a lot more prepared to believe that I was a black racist, forced by paranoia to make "incredible" charges against Mr. FBI, than to believe that Hoover would engage in blackmail and other crimes.

How could Americans believe that hero Hoover almost died of apoplexy when *Time* magazine named King "Man of the Year"; that he would encourage a scurrilous attempt at blackmail designed to induce suicide to prevent Dr. King from even accepting the Nobel peace prize; that he would lobby Congress to try to force USIA not to distribute abroad a film of the massive 1963 civil rights march of which the Reverend King was a leader.

Now that the Senate and various FBI officials have made it clear that I knew what I was writing about six years ago, perhaps you'll treat seriously what I'm about to say:

I am utterly convinced that the FBI knows a lot more about the assassination of Dr. King than has ever been revealed.

The FBI kept Dr. King under both electronic and physical surveillance right up to the time he was killed, and the campaign to destroy his reputation continued long after the assassination in Memphis.

Hoover passed around "top secret" documents suggesting the FBI knew

every time King smiled at a woman, or vice versa. Given this kind of surveillance, why were there no FBI "informants" around to see someone firing a gun at Dr. King?

I look back at notes I took during private sessions with top FBI personnel when the FBI supposedly was pressing one of its largest man-hunts in history — looking for Dr. King's killer. I view those notes in the light of recent revelations regarding FBI activities here at home and CIA assassination attempts abroad, and I personally become convinced that the FBI never told the American people the whole truth about King's murder.

I recall the strange difficulties James Earl Ray, who was imprisoned for the killing, had with his attorneys. I note the repeated squelching of his claims that he is the patsy for other conspirators. I look back at the evidence and am personally convinced that killing Dr. King was not conceived — perhaps not even executed — by James Earl Ray alone.

We may never know the whole truth. But that Senate committee ought to go on and explore the question of whether, when King's bitter enemies failed to blackmail him into committing suicide, they took other means to "eliminate" him.

The mere thought is grotesque. But given the facts at hand, can we ignore the possibilities?