

Book on King says FBI had spy in SCLC

By Dallas Lee
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In 1966, when the Justice Department ordered an end to the wiretaps inside the Southern Christian Leadership Conference offices, the FBI had only one reliable pair of eyes and ears tuned to the movement of Martin Luther King Jr. — those of an informant.

For years his name has been a closely guarded secret, but now the informant has been publicly identified in a book based on the FBI's own astonishing files from the 1960s. According to "The FBI and Martin Luther

King Jr.," an SCLC bookkeeper named James A. Harrison provided regular information to FBI agents for six years for a stipend that ranged up to \$10,000 annually.

Harrison works today in the Atlanta area. Reached by The Atlanta Journal, Harrison positively declined comment on any part of the book and refused to acknowledge that he had ever worked for the SCLC.

The book was written by David J. Garrow, a political science professor at the University of North Carolina and published by W. W. Norton & Co.

The files indicated that the informant usually provided only general information on

King's plans. But Garrow describes Harrison as "the only Atlanta source for information on King and his organization" after wiretap surveillance was terminated under orders of Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach and later Attorney General Ramsey Clark.

According to the book, Harrison was among SCLC officials who went with King to Memphis in April 1968, where King was assassinated by a gunman.

SEE KING

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Martin Luther King



King

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Before successfully approaching Harrison with a proposal to serve the FBI as an informant, the book reports, Atlanta-based agents suggested to their Washington superiors that Andrew Young be approached.

Washington axed that suggestion, the book states, because there would be "a great a risk" of Young "losing the agent if get lost, and then forming a press and public about the contact."

The informant had little direct contact with King, the book said, and never was asked

to comment on King's personal life, even though the book details through other FBI documents several attempts to smear King or his associates with sexual innuendo.

Current SCLC President Joseph Lowery said most black leaders will have little interest in knowing about Harrison's secret role.

For one thing, he said, "the credibility of the FBI in the black community is subject to extreme scrutiny because we know how devious they've been with us."

"No good can be achieved by stirring around these skeletons," Lowery said.

"The important thing is that it didn't work. The movement was effective," Lowery said. "I'd rather know what the FBI knew about

James Earl Ray, about his shady Dr. King in those last days, . . . about Raoul (the man Ray has said was involved in a conspiracy to kill King), . . . about the St. Louis connection."

Lowery said "agents inside the movement were aware of FBI surveillance but never attempted to find out who the informants were."

"We had nothing to hide," he said. "It was a racist, arrogant notion that the communists were influencing the movement. They (FBI officials) were saying that these Baptist and Methodist ministers didn't have sense enough to run a movement. They were attributing to communism those efforts to provide justice that should be attributed to democracy."

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