

B O O K S

THE FBI AND MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.: From "Sole" to Memphis, by David J. Garrow. W. W. Norton, 320 pp., \$15.95.

The G-man's vendetta

JOHNNY GREENE

TWO YEARS AGO, I WAS given approximately 2000 pages of FBI documents relating to the murder of Viola Liuzzo. Liuzzo, a white Detroit housewife, had been killed in a nightrider slaying following the historic 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery voting-rights march. The FBI documents were revealing, but curiously they did not disclose a great deal about the murder. The FBI devoted dozens of pages to a description of the scene of the crime. But there were literally hundreds of pages that dealt with Viola Liuzzo—a monograph in themselves, discussing every aspect of the woman's life from her birth to the moment of her murder. As I read the documents I realized the FBI had expended more energy investigating Liuzzo than it had her alleged assailants. In fact, the FBI had investigated Liuzzo, a murder victim, as if she had committed a murder herself.

This was a chilling realization for which there appeared no rational explanation. But as I read and reread the documents, a major theme emerged, and it appeared more often than not in the handwriting of J. Edgar Hoover. The theme was simple: The life of Viola Liuzzo was to be totally discredited in order to damage the civil-rights movement and, more importantly, the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. To accomplish this goal, an idealistic middle-class housewife from Detroit was transformed by the FBI into a drug addict who deserted her husband and children to go to Selma to sleep with black men. This sordid, fabricated information was disseminated by Hoover and his agents to a number of persons, including members of the

media and President Lyndon Johnson. In response, newspapers and magazines questioned Liuzzo's presence at Selma, and President Johnson refused for hours to call the husband of the slain woman even to offer condolences.

I mention the Liuzzo case now because it is representative of the manner in which the FBI, by 1965, was conducting its all-out war against Martin Luther King, Jr. Tucked away on one page of the Liuzzo documents was this revealing comment: "Martin

FBI agents put bugs in King's offices, in his hotel rooms, and then finally in his home.

Luther King has telephonically advised the [Liuzzo] family he will arrive in Detroit on Sunday, March 28." By 1965 the FBI had installed so many wiretaps and bugs to monitor King that it was aware in advance of every move the civil-rights leader would make, even his attendance at the funerals of martyrs.

The FBI willingly violated King's right to personal privacy, and in order to monitor King's activities, the bureau did not hesitate to engage in break-and-entering "black-bag" jobs. The agents planted their bugs in King's offices at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) headquarters in Atlanta and New York City, in countless hotel and motel rooms where he was scheduled

to register, and, eventually, inside King's own Atlanta home. Based on the information the FBI gathered through these wiretaps and bugs, and additional information it gathered through photographic surveillance of King, the reckless rumors concerning King that Hoover then fabricated and concocted for the media and Lyndon Johnson, made the FBI remarks about Viola Liuzzo appear tame.

For years Hoover's war against King was discussed and analyzed by persons in the media to whom the FBI offered to leak damaging information. Constantly, informed observers asked why Hoover had initiated his attack on King, why the aging FBI director had invested millions of the taxpayers' dollars and the work of innumerable agents to acquire any possible derogatory information about King. But there was never a convincing answer. In 1962 King had suggested that the FBI was indifferent to the plight of southern black civil-rights activists, who were regularly beaten by southern whites while law enforcement agents, including agents from the FBI, looked on. In 1964, apparently still boiling about King's comments, Hoover publicly retaliated, calling King "the most notorious liar" in America. To many persons, that King-Hoover exchange provided an answer. But was it really possible that Hoover, who was powerful enough to violate every aspect of a citizen's privacy, could have launched his war against King simply out of spite?

The answer is no. The reasons for Hoover's war against King are more complicated and far more insidious than a plain grudge. In his exhaustive study of the Hoover-King conflict, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, David J. Garrow traces Hoover's aversion to King almost to the moment King arrived on the national scene. Garrow attributes Hoover's initial suspicions of King to the FBI director's maniacal preoccupation with communism. Hoover was unable to see the emerging southern civil-rights movement as an indigenous response to the entrenched—and often FBI-protected—forces of racial repression. In Hoover's estimation, the civil-rights movement

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had to have been inspired, if not directed, by communists intent on disrupting the American social fabric. Because of information he received from the FBI's resident communist-chasers, Hoover was eventually satisfied that King, the SCLC, and the civil-rights movement were all part of his feared communist plot.

IN 1962 THE FBI RECEIVED information that King and Stanley Levison were friends and that Levison was one of King's closest advisers. This information alarmed the FBI because up until 1957 Stanley Levison had allegedly been involved at the highest levels of the Communist Party in the United States, conducting secret financial affairs for the Communist Party from 1952 until 1955.

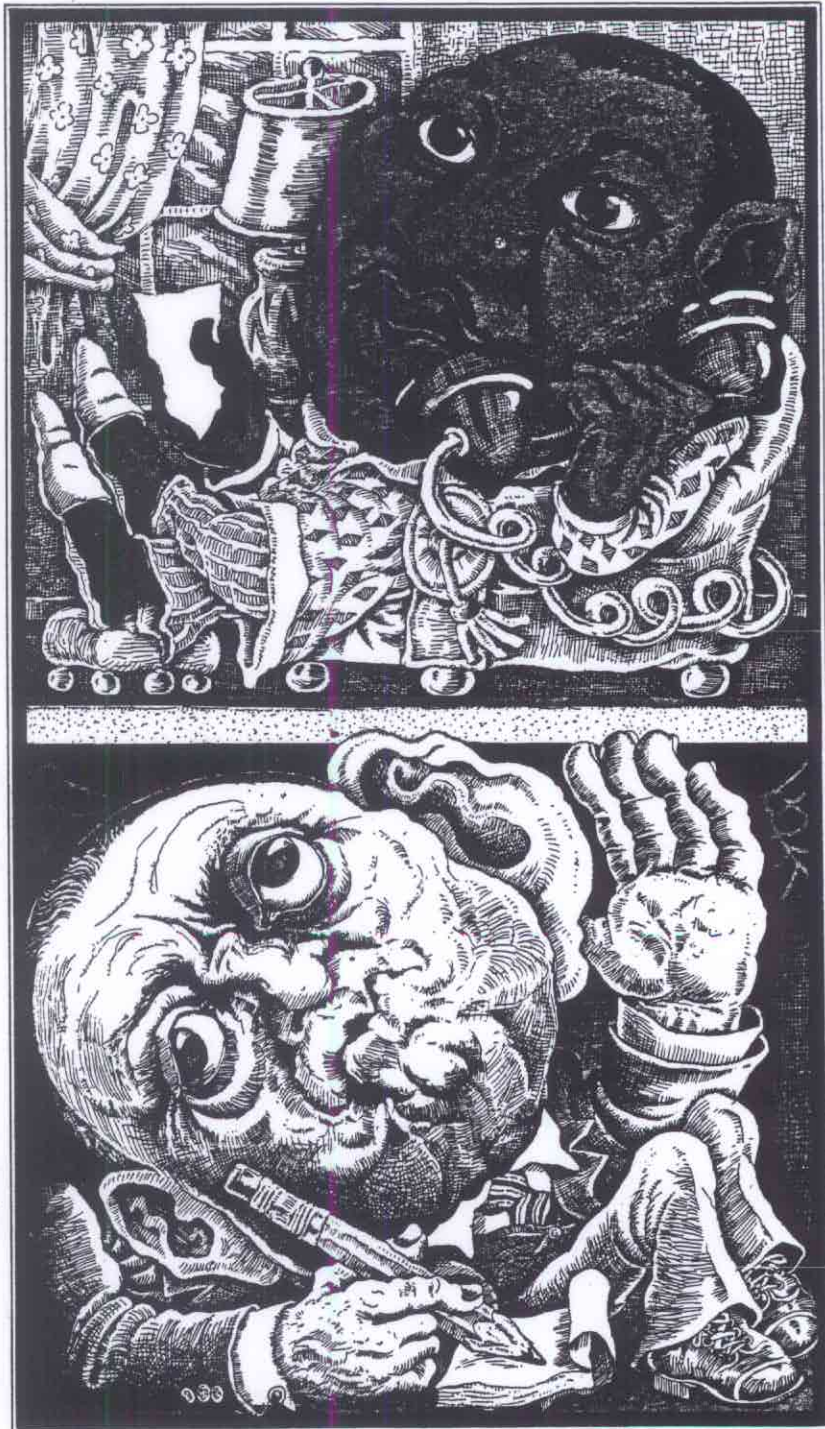
Garrow attributes this information to three previously unidentified FBI informants. One was code-named Fedora. His real name was Victor M. Lessiovski, a Soviet employee of the United Nations. Lessiovski was a KGB agent who continued to hold an important job at the United Nations until 1981. Lessiovski was introduced to Stanley Levison, and although the two men occasionally met for lunch, that was the extent of their association. The primary FBI allegations against Stanley Levison came from two brothers, Morris and Jack Childs, who worked as FBI informants under the code name Solo from the early 1950s until the late 1970s. These brothers infiltrated the Communist Party and, from posts of importance within the party, reported regularly to the FBI on such subjects as the movement of funds from the Soviet Union to the CP, and the activities of other alleged members, like Levison. When the FBI learned of the link between Levison and King, the monitoring of King began.

In the mid-1950s, Stanley Levison dropped his contacts with the CP and publicly stated his disillusionment with the party. Although the FBI was aware of Levison's actions, it still considered him dangerous. And it was on the basis of Levison's alleged prior involvement with the CP that Hoover instigated the bugs on King.

According to Garrow, the political information to be gathered from the surveillance initially disappointed the bureau and Hoover. The personal information it gathered, however, shocked FBI agents and eventually led Hoover to characterize King as "a

'tomcat' with obsessive degenerate sexual urges." Hoover reached this conclusion, apparently, because he learned from the monitoring that King occasionally enjoyed a cocktail, that he told jokes, and that he conducted telephone conversations with women,

including white women. Hoover found this behavior so offensive that he sent to President Johnson dramatized accounts of King's behavior. In memos that discussed the preparation of these reports on King, Hoover and his agents frequently indicated that they



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were no longer interested in only monitoring King. Because King enjoyed a drink, because he laughed and joked with members of his staff and friends, and especially because he spoke on the telephone with white women, the FBI had decided to destroy Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the last three years of his life, as King spoke out against the Vietnam war, the FBI concentrated on monitoring King's political statements and activities. Thus the FBI was constantly able to furnish Lyndon Johnson with statements made by King in private that criticized the war. Johnson, in turn, was incensed. The president felt he had given King and the civil-rights movement as much as could be reasonably requested, especially the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Now, as King bluntly attacked the Vietnam War and flirted with running for president in 1968 as a peace candidate, Johnson remarked to an aide: "Goddamn it, if only you could hear what that hypocritical preacher does sexually."

Hoover's campaign to destroy King had succeeded—King was discredited, in the eyes of the president of the United States. Hoover had initiated the surveillance of King because he believed that communists were responsible for the southern civil-rights movement. When that surveillance disclosed a side of King that Hoover felt was reprehensible, he deliberately placed the FBI on a collision course with King that would end when King stepped onto a balcony at a motel in Memphis.

To those who have wondered why the FBI went after King as it did, Garrow's book will answer many questions. But other persistent questions remain unanswered. Garrow explains at some length Hoover's own aversion to sexual matters, but then says that Hoover intentionally had his agents gather potentially damaging sexual information—especially allegations of homosexuality—against public individuals for his private files. The still prevalent rumor of Hoover's own homosexuality (his relationship with his longtime aide Clyde Tolson) is not even addressed. Another question of importance that is overlooked is the role the FBI may indirectly have played in King's murder.

If King's schedule were totally available to the FBI, on a twenty-four-hour-a-day basis, is it possible that the then virulently racist FBI, which con-

stantly leaked information on King, might have leaked too much information concerning King's personal activities and organizational movements to the wrong people? Garrow says in his book that the FBI stopped microphone surveillance of King prior to his death. On the contrary, it is said by reliable sources that Hoover's final moment of victory over King was more sordid and more degenerate than any FBI-dramatized account of King's antics. According to those sources, Hoover listened without emotion to the tape recording of the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., and to the cries of anguish of King's aides as they were helpless to revive their leader. □

AMERICA'S STRUGGLE AGAINST POVERTY: 1900-1980, by James T. Patterson. Harvard University Press. 268 pp., \$17.50.

Welfare whitewash

JOAN KENNEDY TAYLOR

WHAT CAUSES POVERTY IN an industrial society? The answers that have been given to this question have usually fallen in one of two categories—either poverty is seen as resulting from some lack in poor people themselves, or it is considered to be inherent in the society's structure. Which view you hold, will of course influence what policies on poverty and welfare you think should be adopted. Those who hold to the deficiency view often hope that public policy can train and reeducate the poor, and so do away with poverty by eliminating the conditions of its occurrence. Those who see poverty as arising from the very structure of the system tend to feel that such policies are merely cosmetic; they call instead for government programs to counteract what they see as systemic imbalances by redistributing wealth directly to the poor. In either case, the idea that it is the role of government to do something about poverty with funds obtained by taxing the rest of the peo-

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ple has rarely been questioned.

Reformers in America first began to see poverty as a general social problem during the progressive era, around the turn of the century. From that time to this, with the major exception of the Depression years, a majority of the general public has inclined toward the first view of poverty—most of the poor are probably poor through their own fault. On the other hand, welfare policies have varied greatly during these years, as has the intellectual climate of opinion surrounding the experts.

The author of this book, a professor of history at Brown University, writes in his preface that his purpose is to analyze these changing perspectives on poverty and welfare and to try "to integrate intellectual history and analysis of public policy." James Patterson for the most part succeeds in this aim; *America's Struggle Against Poverty* contains a great deal of useful information on, and analysis of, the relation between expert opinion and government policy. But the view that I would consider to be the correct one is missing from this book, just as it seems to be from public life: that, to the extent that poverty is caused by the "system," a major cause is government programs themselves, and that, in any case, the use of government coercion, including taxation, to achieve so-called public-policy goals cannot be morally defended.

Patterson begins his book with what he refers to as "snapshots" of poverty in pre-Depression America—snapshots, because there were no comprehensive figures on American poverty before the 1930s. He concludes that around 1900 the poor numbered between 30 million and 40 million, or 40 percent of the population. These were people who owned little furniture and no real estate, had no indoor toilets or running water, ate an inadequate diet, and lacked any provision against disaster except local charity or the police station. By the late twenties, conditions had dramatically improved. Real per-capita income was one and a half times greater than at the turn of the century; the view was widespread that economic growth could lead to the total prevention of poverty but that, in the meantime, what need remained could best be met by private charity rather than by wasteful and demoralizing public relief.

Then came the Depression years. According to official government estimates, approximately 25 percent of