

APRIL 1968

WE WERE READING...
The Naked Ape, by Desmond Morris, the
nonfiction book on the top of best-seller lists.
WE WERE WATCHING...
Stanley Kubrick's box-office hit
2001: A Space Odyssey.



WE WERE LISTENING TO...
Otis Redding's "Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay" is
the number one single.

The days just before Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death were filled with great tension. The Saturday before flying to Memphis, he called his staff and advisers—Andy Young, Hosea Williams, me, and several others—together in his church office in Atlanta. He told us of the tremendous pressures he felt, of the migraine headaches he was having, of not having rested for three days. He considered his options, including quitting the leadership of the civil rights movement and devoting more time to pastoral work; writing; and perhaps becoming the presi-

dent of Morehouse College, his alma mater.

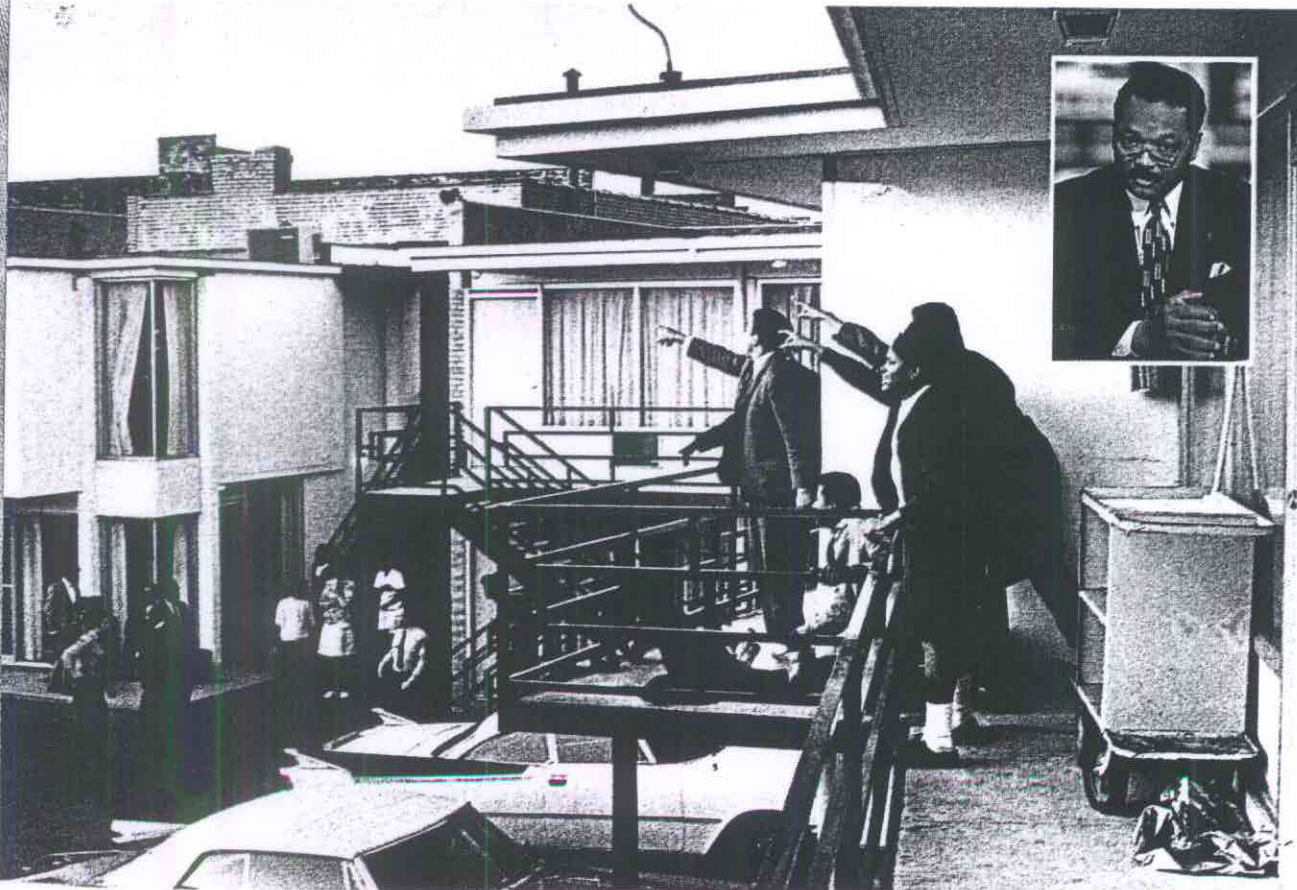
He said, "I've done my time. I've served 13 years. We've made great progress." But he was also deeply concerned about the state of the movement. The leadership was so divided over tactics. He mentioned his disagreements with H. Rap Brown, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Touré), Floyd McKissick, Roy Wilkins, and Whitney Young. He spoke of praying and fasting to the point of death. Perhaps at that point, he thought the leaders might unite at his bedside to reconcile. But then he said, "We have to have the spirit, the will to turn a minus to a plus. We can turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones. We have to go on." Dr. King spoke of black historic figures, like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman. "If I turned around," he said, "they wouldn't understand."

I listened while he preached himself out of a depression, and I was reminded of Jesus when he said, "Not my will, but thine be done." So we went on to Memphis, where we were laying the groundwork for the Poor People's Campaign.

On the night of April 3, the day before his assassination, Dr. King was scheduled to speak at a church, but

THE DAY A KING FELL

THREE DECADES AGO, IN MEMPHIS, THE NATION LOST ITS GREATEST CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER TO AN ASSASSIN'S BULLET. THE **REVEREND JESSE JACKSON** RECOUNTS THAT TRAGIC SPRING DAY AND THE EVENTS LEADING UP TO IT.



Left: The scene on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel moments after Martin Luther King, Jr., was shot. Inset: The Reverend Jesse Jackson today.

he had a bad headache and asked me to speak for him. I said, "Doctor, I can't think of anything to say." Finally, I said I would go only if Ralph Abernathy went with me. So Ralph and I went over to the church in a rainstorm. The church had a tin roof, and you could hear the rain pouring down on it.

As we entered through the side door, the people began to scream and cheer. Ralph turned to me and said, "They see us, and they think Martin is with us. This is Martin's crowd." We called back to the Lorraine Motel and told Dr. King he should come over, that he wouldn't have to stay long. He said that he would if we insisted.

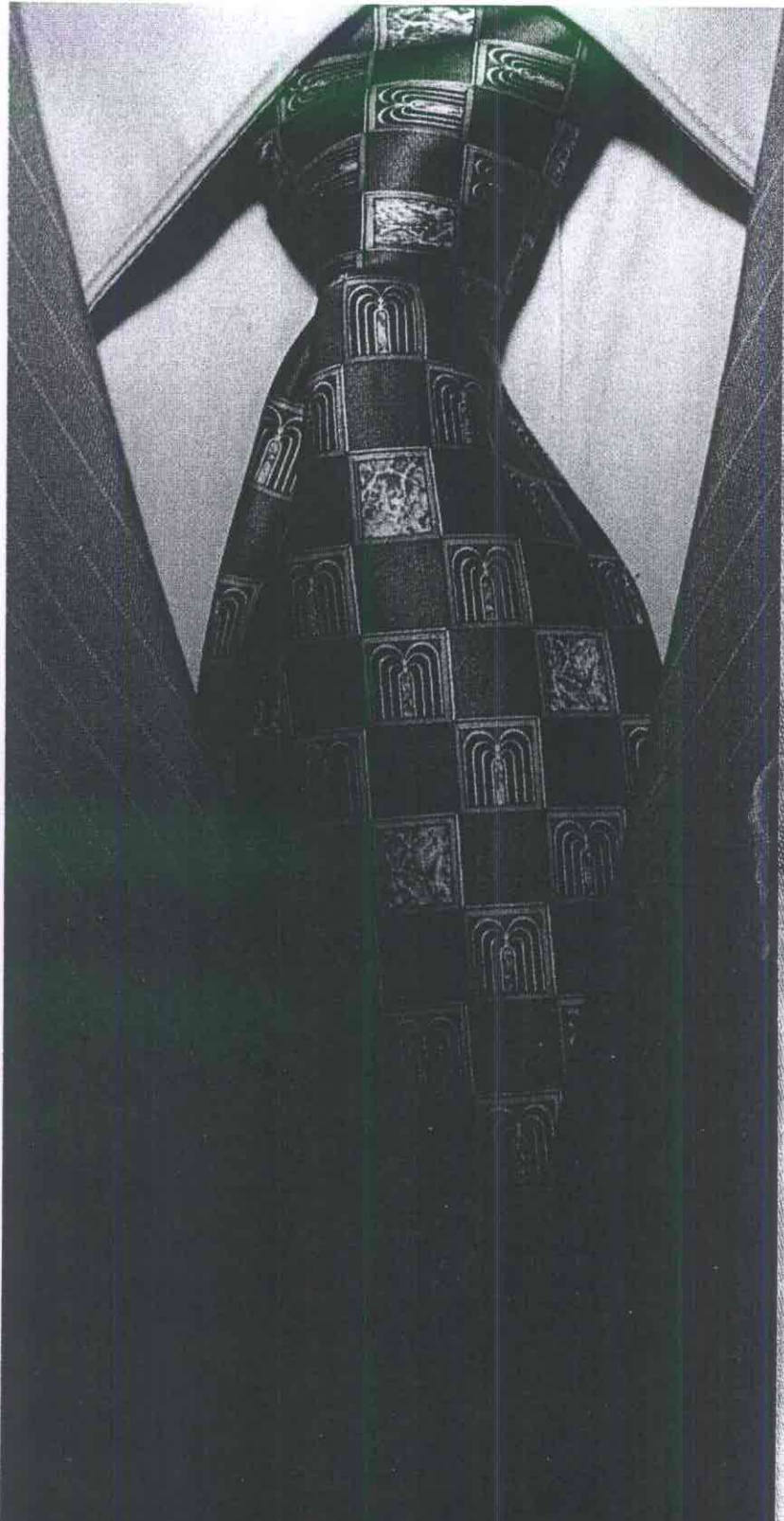
It was a very stormy night, and about 2,000 people were there. I will never forget Abernathy and his introduction. It was so formal, his reflection so final. He called Dr. King "the moral leader of our time" and said that "the weight of our struggle is on his shoulders."

Then Dr. King got up and, without a note, gave the whole Mountaintop speech. That speech was totally unplanned. Even ministers who were conditioned to listening to sermons wept as he spoke.

The next day, the day he died, we were about to go to the home of the Reverend Samuel Billy Kyles for dinner. I was walking across the courtyard of the motel just as Dr. King was coming out of his room on the second floor. I had on a regular shirt—I didn't wear ties back then—and Dr. King said, "Jesse, we're about to go out to Reverend Kyles's house for dinner. You ought to wear a tie." I said, "Dr. King, you know wearing a necktie is not a prerequisite for feeding an appetite." He said, "Boy, you're crazy." We were just joking.

Then he leaned over the railing and told my colleague Ben Branch, a saxophone player, "You ought to play my favorite song tonight, 'Precious Lord.'" As Dr. King raised up, I said, "Doc." He said, "Yeah." And that's when that bullet struck him and knocked him against the wall.

We hit the ground and started crawling quickly toward the balcony. There was blood everywhere. I reached for him. Then I went inside and called Mrs. King. I couldn't tell her that I thought he was dead. I told her she should try to come to Memphis as quickly as she could because Dr. King had been shot, maybe in the shoulder. But the news was breaking rather quickly, so she soon knew that he was dead. But I just could not tell her he was gone. ☐



LANVIN

PARIS

USA : Saks Fifth Avenue-Neiman Marcus-Bergdorf Goodman
Bernini-British American House-Stanley Korshak
Bigby & Kruthers-Papillon-Gentlemen's Boutique
Realta-Courtoué-Gus Mayer

CANADA : Holt Renfrew-Marc Bovet