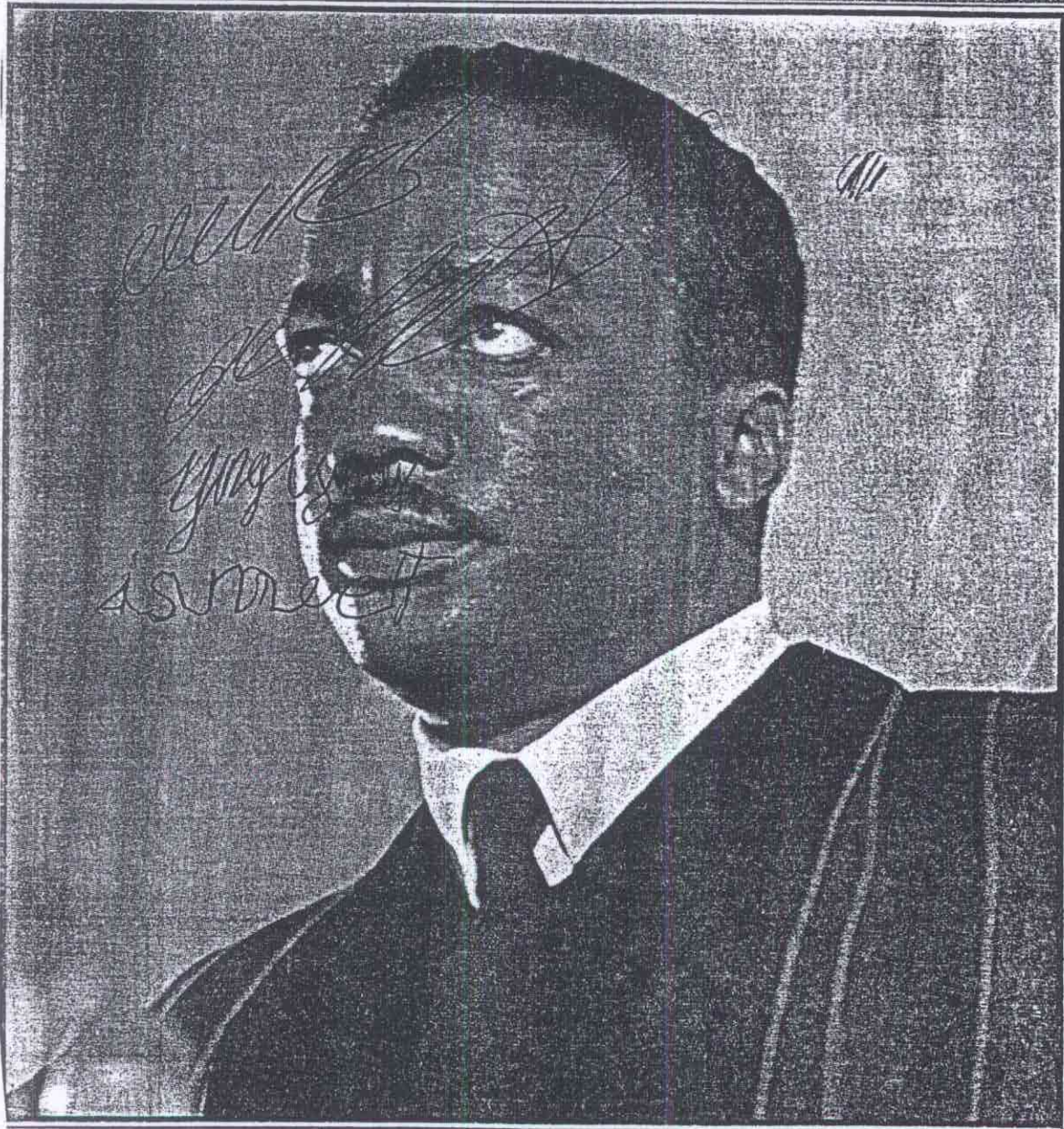


The Washington Star

TV THIS WEEK

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LIGHT



Paul Winfield stars as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. on NBC

Some Portrayals Unflattering in New 'King' Bio

By Mary Ellen Perry
Washington Star Staff Writer

When all is said and done concerning "King" — this week's controversial six-hour drama about the late civil rights leader Martin Luther King — U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young may have had the last and best word.

"It's the story of a man," says Young, who was a close associate of the Atlantan's throughout his star-crossed career. "It's not the story of a movement, or of a period in history or of any organization, but of an individual — Dr. King."

The NBC production airs in three, two-hour segments, Sunday through Tuesday nights, same time and station — WRC-4, 9 p.m.

Writer-producer Abby Mann has spared no talent in recruiting an all-star cast to bring to the screen the drama of Dr. King's life from his days as a ministerial student to his assassination in Memphis in 1968.

Paul Winfield, who plays King, is best known for his role in the movie "Sounder," but has also turned in several superior performances on television, including a moving portrayal of Dodger baseball player Roy Campanella in "It's Good to Be Alive."

In "King" he is teamed again with Cicely Tyson, his co-star in "Sounder," whose well-known credits include "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman," and, more recently, "Wilma," the story for television of Olympic sprint cham-



The Kings (Paul Winfield and Cicely Tyson) start down the long road.

Champion Wilma Rudolph. Here, the tiny Tyson plays the stately Coretta Scott King with the help of a page-boy wig and a pair of upswept glasses.

Mann has assembled a competent

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group of supporting players to back up Winfield and Tyson including Roscoe Lee Browne, Art Evans, Ernie Banks, Howard Rollins, William Jordan and Cliff DeYoung.

And yet, there was dissension early on in the filming of the special, that included criticism from the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, also a close associate of King's and the inheritor of his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. It was Abernathy who com-



Cicely Tyson portrays Coretta Scott King, wife of the Rev. King.

plained that the show presents King "not as he really was, but as an Uncle Tom being led around by white men."

As for the white men, all advance reports are that they don't come off looking any larger than they were in real life. An exact quote attributed to current Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd is "embarrassing;" the late Chicago Mayor Richard Daley "comes off poorly;" the late FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover is portrayed as a racist and the late Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, as well as the late Atty. General Bobby Kennedy are not exactly flattered, either.

So unsparing are those portrayals that Young was afraid the special would never get on the air when he saw parts of it some months ago, exactly because he thought it was a good film and an honest portrayal of King and what happened to him.

No wonder, then, that Young took

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Some Unflattering Portrayals Appear in 6-Hour 'King' Drama

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time out from his U.N. duties last Sunday to host a special VIP preview screening of "King" in New York.

It was Young, as it turns out, who first introduced King to Mann back in 1966, a meeting which resulted in King giving Mann permission to make a movie of his life. And King told Mann: "You mustn't show me as a saint. Then people would feel unable to do the same things."

So Mann has shown King in fear — which he surely was at times — as well as in triumph; King in doubt

— which he surely was many times — as well as in certainty.

"To me," says Mann, "King was the man I admired most in the world. He was following the precepts of Jesus in the 20th century, and that made him a true revolutionary."

Mann's previous TV and Movie credits include "Judgment at Nuremberg," a stark revelation of the Nuremberg, Germany, trials of Nazi henchmen right after World War II for which he won an Academy Award in the writing category; "Ship of Fools;" "The Detective," and "The Marcus-Nelson Murders," a pilot that led to the

"Kojak" series.

In spite of his confidence, the brunt of the series' success will fall on Winfield's capable shoulders.

"I want to show what non-violence cost him (King) and how he believed in it and how it worked for him," says Winfield. "It wasn't the coward's way out. He had as much right to be angry as anyone, but he had a saving grace."

"He didn't perceive of his enemies as evil or as monsters. I hope part of that comes across to the younger people. If it does," says Winfield, "I'll have accomplished one of my major goals in accepting the role."