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BLACK STUDIES RESEARCH SOURCES:
Microfilms from Major Archival and Manuscript Collections
August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, General Editors

THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., FBI FILE

Edited by David J. Garrow

The Martin Luther King, Jr., FBI File

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The recently released 17,000-page file on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., compiled by headquarters officials at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, details the heavy surveillance and painful harassment that J. Edgar Hoover's FBI directed against America's foremost civil rights leader throughout the 1960s. Most of this file has never been published until now, and it should not be confused with other less comprehensive collections of FBI material on King. This file contains hundreds of substantive documents and is an essential source for the study of Dr. King and his role in the civil rights movement.

Beginning in 1962, when highly valued informants within the top ranks of the American Communist Party told the FBI that one of King's closest confidants, New York lawyer Stanley Levison, was a long-time Communist functionary, Bureau agents closely monitored King's activities and listened in on thousands of his phone conversations. Such round-the-clock surveillance kept FBI executives aware of King's every move and enabled them to pass along memos detailing King's upcoming political plans to interested superiors, including Attorney General Robert Kennedy and President's John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

The copious FBI headquarters file on Dr. King allows the scholar, student, or interested citizen to track the Bureau's pursuit of King blow-by-blow, as reports flow in from FBI field offices in New York and Atlanta and other cities, as top FBI executives write to each other about ways to expand their blanket-like coverage on King, and as reports summarizing the Bureau's information on King and the civil rights movement flow outword to the White House, the Pentagon, and other federal offices.

The FBI's declassified documents also allow the reader to follow the development of King's own career and civil rights activities in a way never before possible, for ironically the Bureau's heavy-handed pursuit of King produced an invaluable historical record of the day-to-day thoughts and endeavors of one of America's most famous and important citizens, a man whose hectic life did not allow him the time to put on paper many of the important ideas and concerns that the omnipresent agents of the FBI carefully noted.

FBI worries about King's supposedly dangerous associates came to be shared by top-ranking Justice Department officials, and in the fall of 1963 Robert Kennedy authorized the Bureau to expand its surveillance of King even further. Wiretaps were placed on King's own home and office phones, and hostile FBI officials began plotting ways in which they might harm King's public reputation and destroy his political influence. One upshot of this virulent antipathy was an extensive—and expensive—FBI effort to listen to and record King's most private moments by means of surreptitious "bugs" or microphones secretly implanted in King's hotel rooms by specially skilled teams of Bureau agents. Although a 1977 federal court order sought to limit the after-effects of these outrageous violations of King's personal privacy by removing from the FBI's



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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

In Reply, Please Refer to
File No. **DA 100-3-275**

New York, New York
April 11, 1962

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Re: Communist Party, U.S.A.
Negro Question
Internal Security - C

A confidential source, who has furnished reliable information in the past, advised on April 10, 1962, that on that date Stanley Levison conversed with Martin Luther King and they discussed the following:

King related that he had a successful visit in Washington, D.C. in which he was able to organize a new unit of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and also visited with the Attorney General and the Vice President. King stated that a mass meeting was also held in Washington at which \$3000.00 was raised that would net \$2500.00 after expenses. Levison commented that was not bad considering it was Washington, D.C. King was convinced that he could have raised \$5000.00 if he had a little more time in organizing the meeting in advance.

Levison informed King that he wanted to determine the date for Party Wacheel (phonetic) to come down to Atlanta to visit King. It was decided that April 23, 1962 would be an agreeable date. Levison emphasized that he wanted King to invite Wacheel to King's home so that Wacheel could see that King lived in a modest dwelling. Levison stated that Harry could be of great assistance in fund raising for King.

Levison stated that Jack O'Dell (Printer Pitts O'Dell) and Levison had been discussing the forthcoming concert which would be held in Atlanta for the purpose of raising funds. King and Levison discussed the arrangements which would be necessary to rent the auditorium in Atlanta for this concert. They indicated

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Date of Review **10/20/00**
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DATE OF REVIEW FOR DECLASSIFICATION **10/20/00**

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CONFIDENTIAL

The Attorney General
April 20, 1962

Director, FBI
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
SECURITY MATTER - C

1 - Mr. Belmont
1 - Mr. Evans
1 - Mr. Rosen
1 - Mr. Sullivan
1 - Mr. Board
1 - Mr. Harbo
1 - Mr. Kitchen

This Bureau has recently received additional information showing the influence of Stanley David Levison, a secret member of the Communist Party, upon Martin Luther King, Jr. You will recall that I have furnished you during the past few months substantial information concerning the close relationship between King and Levison.

A confidential source who has furnished reliable information in the past advised on April 16, 1962, that Levison had learned that Levison is forming in King's name an organizational structure to be known as the Chardl Society for Human Rights. Levison contemplates sending invitations signed by King to approximately twenty prominent people to attend a luncheon on May 17, 1962, in Washington, D. C. A public announcement will be made at that time of the formation of the organization. You, as well as the President, Senators Clifford C. Case, Senator Eugene McCarthy and former Attorney General William F. Rogers, are among those being considered to be invited to the luncheon.

The informant said that he is under the impression that Theodore Kheel, arbitrator for the New York City Transit Authority; Harry Belafonte, well-known singer; and A. Phillip Randolph, prominent labor leader, are involved in the formation of the organization.

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APR 20 1962

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files all of the "fruits" of this repugnant electronic surveillance and by sealing these items in the National Archives until 2027, the remaining documents fully detail all of the FBI's efforts against King, while not invading those private matters not appropriate for public review.

This important research collection supplies invaluable firsthand information on King's planning of civil rights protests in such Southern hot-spots as Birmingham and Selma, on his tension-ridden 1966 foray into the segregated ghettos of Chicago, and on his controversial 1967 decision to vocally oppose the Vietnam war policies of President Lyndon Johnson. It also maps the planning of King's final great crusade, the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, which was about to get underway when King was cut down by a sniper's bullet in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968. The final sections of the FBI's comprehensive King file trace the recurring controversies that emerged after King's death concerning the FBI's harassment of him, and these sections guide the curious researcher through the Bureau's responses to the many complaints and investigations of the 1970s that focused on the FBI's distasteful activities against King throughout the previous decade. Taken as a whole, this publication of the FBI's file on King and on his role in the civil rights movement makes available to researchers in history, political science, sociology, and law a crucially important documentary record on one of the central leaders and one of the central issues of our time.

The Martin Luther King, Jr., FBI File.
35mm microfilm (16 reels) with printed guide.
Price: \$950. ISBN 0-89093-678-1. Available now.

David J. Garrow is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and is the author of *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*: From "Solo" to Memphis and Protest or Selma; *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as well as the forthcoming *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1955-1968*.

This is a collection as indispensable to a comprehensive appreciation of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights movement as it is crucial to an understanding of the establishment forces by which the movement—and by extension civil liberties in their broadest context—were imperiled.

—David Levering Lewis
Howard University, Author of *King: A Biography*

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NEW DEAL AGENCIES AND BLACK AMERICA

Edited by John B. Kirby

New Deal Agencies and Black America provides a unique understanding of the relationship produced in the critical years of the 1930s and early 1940s between the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration and America's black population. At no time since Reconstruction were black people's individual and collective needs more directly tied to certain policies and priorities of the federal government as they were during the New Deal years. From 1933 to the eve of World War II, New Deal reform and recovery programs fostered a complex interrelationship between the Roosevelt administration and Afro-Americans that was reflected in government policies on race, politics, and economics and was carried over to the civil rights era of the postwar years. At the same time, the 1930s had considerable impact on traditional black organizations and black leadership, on the development of new expressions of racial and social protest, and on the lives of average black Americans whose personal destinies were perceived as often linked to the destiny of Roosevelt's New Deal.

Nowhere is this complicated and intricate web of economic, social, and political relationships more vividly revealed than in the activities of those federal agencies charged with developing and administering government programs. *New Deal Agencies and Black America* is a major source for analyzing, first, the Roosevelt administration's policies with respect to blacks and second, black people's response to the depression and the New Deal. Heading federal agencies and departments in the 1930s were some of the New Deal's most prominent spokespersons: Harold L. Ickes, Frances Perkins, Will A. Alexander, Harry Hopkins, Aubrey Williams, and others. Involved with the white New Dealers, whose commitment to racial justice often worried, were such important black figures as Eugene K. Jones of the Department of Commerce, Mary McLeod Bethune of the National Youth Administration, Robert C. Weaver of the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Housing Authority, Lawrence A. Oxley of the Department of Labor, Joseph H.B. Evons of the Farm Security Administration, and Sterling Brown of the Federal Writer's Project. Brought to Washington to serve as "race relations advisors" to the New Deal, these and other blacks often labored in relative obscurity and with limited authority as they sought to bring the New Deal more directly to black America. Referred to by some as Roosevelt's "Black Cabinet," individuals like Bethune, Weaver, and Oxley frequently constituted the major tie between national government and black communities.

New Deal Agencies and Black America makes available for the first time the rich resources of the many federal agencies and departments responsible for shaping the New Deal-black American relationship. To combat the vast array of federal departments and agencies of

the 1930s where racial matters are buried often in countless sub-agencies and separate projects would take literally months of effort for an individual researcher. Now much of this material has been made accessible within a single collection. Not only do these papers shed much light on the policies and attitudes of the Roosevelt administration's response to black racial and economic conditions, but they also offer equal insight into the experiences of countless black people, of all walks of life, who struggled to survive the devastation of depression and racism in the 1930s. Included in the documents of *New Deal Agencies and Black America* are the personal and official files and correspondence of black and white New Dealers; letters and statements written to various agencies from every segment of black America; and official and unofficial studies and reports—from federal, state, and local levels—that focus on black employment, racial discrimination, black education and arts, rural and agricultural conditions, public housing, and black business and politics. This collection is a rich depository of basic data and information on numerous aspects of black life, the activities of black leaders and organizations, and the hopes and frustrations of both blacks and whites associated with the New Deal reform and recovery in the depression decade.

For readers concerned with the 20th-century Afro-American experience, the evolution of the "welfare state," and recent American history, *New Deal Agencies and Black America* is an indispensable source.

New Deal Agencies and Black America.
35mm microfilm (25 reels) with printed guide.
Price: \$1500. ISBN 0-89093-656-0. Available now.

Note: This collection has been published from the holdings of the National Archives.

John B. Kirby is Professor of History at Denison University and is the author of *Black Americans in the Roosevelt Era*.

This collection of material on the members of Franklin Roosevelt's Black Cabinet is part of the recovery of primary sources that is revolutionizing the writing of Afro-American history. It is valuable not only for the study of famous individuals—Mary McLeod Bethune and Robert Weaver—and of important agencies—the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Public Housing Administration—but it also provides invaluable material on black social history. This is a rich repository of primary sources on blacks of several classes and regions. I applaud its publication on microfilm.

—Neil Irvin Painter
Department of History
The University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill

This is a particularly valuable collection for understanding both the ways in which the federal government responded to the needs of blacks in the depression years and the scope and nature of the role of blacks in the federal government during the Roosevelt era. It is a boon to all students of black life in the 1930s.

—Harvard Sitkoff
Department of History
University of New Hampshire

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