

Slander After Death



Longer column filed King.

Jack Anderson

THE FBI vendetta against Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. didn't end with his murder. The old FBI bulldog J. Edgar Hoover, who had tried to blacken King's name while he was alive, also tried to tarnish his death.

Not long after King was gunned down on the balcony of his Memphis motel on April 4, 1968, Hoover sent word to me that the motive behind the murder was not racism but cuckoldry, that the assassin apparently had been hired by a jealous husband.

I have held back this story for more than seven years because of my rule against revealing sources. But Hoover's incredible attempt to panic King into committing suicide, it seems to me, abrogates any right he may have to confidentiality.

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BACK IN 1968, I was on good terms with the old FBI curmudgeon. He sent word through an intermediary that King's killer, James Earl Ray, had been in Los Angeles shortly before he returned east to stalk the civil rights leader.

Hoover's messenger suggested that Ray had been hired by a jealous husband, who had become enraged by the discovery that his wife had borne King's child. The intermediary identified the Los Angeles couple and showed me supporting data, including an FBI report describing a passionage interlude between the wife and King in a New York City hotel.

I was eager, of course, to find out

who was behind the assassination. So I flew to Los Angeles and did my damndest to confirm the FBI leads. I waylaid the wife and husband separately for confrontational interviews and questioned others who might have known of the alleged love affair, the paternity of the child or the attitude of the husband toward King.

I could find absolutely no evidence which contradicted the couple's own explanation that King was an honored friend of the family, a frequent guest in their home and nothing more.

I also discovered there were no FBI agents on this trail that was supposed to be so hot. I returned to Washington satisfied that the FBI story was erroneous and half convinced that it was a deliberate hoax.

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YET I WAS reluctant to believe ill of Hoover. But in late 1970 I happened to be on an airplane with the late Hale Boggs (Dem.-La.), then the House Democratic leader. He told me how members of Congress were being intimidated, if not blackmailed, by Hoover.

He said that the FBI would come upon a skeleton in a member's closet — a woman, a vice, a shady business associate — and then get word to him that an accusation against him had reached the FBI and they wanted to alert him so he could be on his guard. From then on, the congressman was likely to be a captive of Hoover's.