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Probe

TO KILL A BLACK MAN

Book Review by Perry Adams

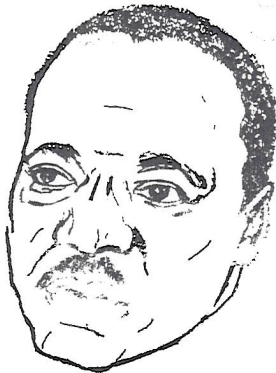
Louis E. Lomax's new book, *To Kill a Black Man*, is more than an examination of the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. Men and the conditions in which they must live are inseparable. The lives and deaths of these two men in Lomax's comparative analysis strikingly illustrate the issues that are ripping up American society: integration or separation, violence or nonviolence, and the ability and willingness of America's present institutions to meet and to resolve its ingrained racism.

Although both men held opposite views on integration, the issue itself posed the "question of just how, precisely, is the black man to define his existence in America?"

"Integration," observes Lomax, "for most of us meant nothing more than total equality of education and opportunity." Malcolm X, however, saw that for poor blacks trapped in the criminal conditions of northern ghettos, with neither faith nor stakes in America, integration was meaningless. In the early sixties he warned of "a bloody explosion" in the ghettos. On this point, both men agreed. King stated at the same time: "unless the race issue is soon resolved, this nation will experience the kind of violence that is unparalleled in modern history."

American racism, notes Lomax, particularly in the ghettos, "is designed to drive black people insane." There is no escape and those in the ghetto must face "mobsterism, death as well as corruption in high places" every day.

King's tactical weapon of nonviolence assumed that white Americans were people "of conscience and once nonviolently confronted they would share their power and position." Lomax feels that because of King's



leadership, his channeling of blacks' anger and frustration, Watts-type uprisings were delayed a few years. But King, continues Lomax, overlooked the fact that the average white American is unconcerned unless he is disturbed or threatened.

Regardless of civil rights legislation, the conditions of blacks in America continued to worsen. Knowing that integration was irrelevant to ghetto blacks, Malcolm saw that they would begin to seek power in new ways. Black militants, explains Lomax, "realized that to bring about change one must assemble an organization of dedicated people, outline a program and execute it." In other words, "the black man must manipulate the American machinery - by nonviolence or by violence - and cause it to work in his behalf."

The non-violent civil rights era ended with the Selma-Montgomery march. Blacks had become tired of being beaten and jailed for exercising their constitutional rights. Civil rights legislation had failed to reach the ghettos. "History," comments Lomax, "teaches that freedom belongs to those who have the power to take it." And the painful lesson, especially for King, was the fact that, for the poor in America, violence pays off.

In terms of the personal lives of these two men, the nub of the issue is this: "both had so much to offer, so much to live for, so many

reasons to die quietly in bed when they were old and grey. Yet, and this is true of all too many brilliant black men, American society murdered them by insisting that they consume and preoccupy their own lives with the struggle against racism." Had conditions been different, Malcolm X might have been an outstanding lawyer and King, a university president.

The extent to which America and its government will go to maintain racism was shown after Malcolm X "forged a major link with Middle East and African revolutionaries." Then the CIA began to watch him. Malcolm returned to America from Africa to rally American blacks to pressure the American government to stop CIA interference in Algeria and Ghana. Both countries at this time were being attacked by the American State Department. Malcolm was considered a major threat to American foreign policy.

Lomax states that the evidence indicates that the CIA "was deeply involved in Malcolm's death." It should also be noted that Lomax thinks that King's death was related to both of the Kennedys.

Lomax makes this indictment: "this society, this violent and corrupt American society, this racist American society assassinated both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. The men under arrest may have pulled the trigger, but they by no means acted alone; American society was not only in concert with the assassins but there is every evidence that they were all hired killers." In short, America not only tolerates but practices racism and violence by doing nothing to stop them. The basic question to ask is: who, indeed, wanted the deaths of both men?

Lomax concludes: "America is a white Anglo-Saxon, male society; to the degree that one deviates, either by birth or by choice, from this norm he faces unusual difficulty living out his life as he sees fit, he finds it all but impossible to fully express his gifts and talents. And to the degree that one protests against this fall in the American way of things one is apt to find himself in danger, mortal danger."

Lomax killed 30 Jul 70 in auto accident near Santa Rosa, New Mexico; state police say car overturned after Lomax lost control while trying to pass another car. See King file 1 Aug 70.