

Ex-Activists Deny Plotting With FBI To Assassinate King

By Jim Adams
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Former members of a black activist Memphis youth group acknowledged yesterday that their rhetoric included violence but denied that they were part of an FBI plot to assassinate the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

"We have never been in the employ of, worked with or even known of FBI people," Calvin Taylor, a former member of the group called the Invaders, told the House Assassinations Committee. "That's just the movie business, I guess."

A former Memphis undercover policeman, Merrill McCullough, who infiltrated the group and became its minister of transportation, agreed.

"The Invaders were not a front for anybody," McCullough testified. "It was just a grass-roots organization of young people of the community."

The committee took the testimony to answer the theory in a television program that the FBI manipulated the Invaders in a plot to assassinate King in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

Chief counsel G. Robert Blakey said the program suggested that the FBI had the Invaders foment violence during King's March 28, 1968, march in Memphis to lure the nonviolent protest leader back to be killed on April 4.

King's successor as leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, testified in August that King returned to try to restore a tone of nonviolence to the Memphis garbage men's strike.

McCullough testified that the violence during King's March 28 march for striking garbage men "was spontaneous" but said he believes the rhetoric of one Invader, John B. Smith, contributed to it.

The undercover agent said Smith told some people in the crowd that "nonviolence would not work; that it would only lead to you being taken downtown and being beaten."

"I believe that in the tense atmosphere, that contributed to the spontaneous violence," McCullough said.

But Smith denied that he advocated violence to any of the marchers or even talked to the youngsters who later broke store windows and threw sticks.

"Our rhetoric is the only thing we have been accused of that is wrong," Smith added. "Nobody has accused us of any act of violence."

Taylor said he knew of no Invader involvement in the March violence but said some Invaders advocated "violence as a possible alternative for solving problems."

"We said the same things everybody was saying at that time: 'Burn, baby' and 'destroy property,'" Taylor testified.

Blakey said speculation on Invader involvement in a plot to assassinate King has also been fed by the fact that Invaders left their room in the Lorraine Motel, where King was shot, shortly before the assassination.

But Del. Walter Fauntroy (D-D.C.) quoted former King aides as saying they had asked the Invaders to leave.

Fauntroy said the aides had allowed some Invaders to become part of the Memphis staff but King became angry when he heard about it and told them he did not want anyone who advocated violence to be associated with him.