

Conspiracy: What Happened to Dr. King?

Transcript of a Commentary by Ambrose I. Lane, Sr.
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AMBROSE: And top of the morning, top of the week. This is We Ourselves. I'm Ambrose I. Lane Sr.

I've got kind of a cold so, - ah - my voice won't be as crystal clear as I'd like it to be. But today and Friday we're going to be talking about what happened to Dr. King. And of course on Friday will be the anniversary of his assassination. But I've been listening to the talking heads on cable and TV and they just keep bringing people in to talk about Conspiracy Theories. Well - I want to talk today about conspiracies and to try to educate as many of you who have not listened to me talk about this before, that it's not a question of theories, these are actual conspiracies against black leadership, especially against black, ordained ministers.

Let me begin by citing a March 21, 1993 article that appeared in the Washington Post headlined "Military Spied on King, Other Blacks Paper Says". And what the Washington Post was doing was reporting on a 75 plus year spying by the U.S. Army on African Americans. And what the Post did was publish an Associated Press article that itself reported on a 16 Month investigation conducted by the Memphis Tennessee Commercial Appeal Newspaper, one of the major white-owned newspapers in Tennessee.

The investigation, which employed the use of the Federal Freedom of Information Act, examined and I quote; "...classified documents and meeting notes from government and private archives as well as 200 interviews with Army agents living in the country and Mexico." End of quote.

Now the Army spying was prompted by the military's 1917, quote; "...conviction that black Americans were ripe for subversion by German agents during World War One and later by Communists and anti-war groups." end of quote.

The spying centered on southern black churches and, quote; "...covered three generations of the family of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. When King was shot to death in Memphis on April 4th, 1968 eight undercover Green Beret soldiers were there to keep an eye on him." end of quote. That's from the Commercial Appeal.

My question is: Were they there to assassinate him? Now the Commercial-Appeal also revealed, quote;

"The Army used wiretaps and other information from the Ku Klux Klan to keep track of the Civil Rights Movement leaders; U-2 spy planes also were used to gather information on civil rights demonstrations throughout the 1960's."

End of quote. The article informed it's readers of the fact that quote;

"Previous surveillance of civil rights leaders has been documented; most has involved the work of FBI and local police agencies rather than the military."

In short the AP report of the Commercial-Appeal newspaper's investigation simply confirmed the long running, white male, ruling class, institutional conspiracy against the best interests of African Americans. Why were there no similar 75 years of investigations involving military spying on any other American ethnic group, white or non-white? How was it secretly determined by those white males that African Americans were the only American group quote "... ripe for subversion by German agents and communists and anti-war groups"?

(cough) Excuse me.

How did our government decide that an openly racist hate group, none other than the Klu Klux Klan, with a well documented history of racist hate violence against African Americans, has the moral legitimacy and credibility to help them keep track of the civil rights movement's leaders? Didn't such Klan use confirm a white male conspiracy of the U.S. Military with fascists and criminals against law-abiding Americans? The white male conspiracy most eloquently described in Abraham Lincoln's speech attacking the Supreme Court's Dredd-Scott decision, continues today, and involves every white controlled institution, public and private. Many liberals, moderates, and so-called progressives intimidated by the right-wing propagandists who try to discredit anyone who is lead by the facts to conclude that a conspiracy exists have shied away from using the word conspiracy, yet the fact of a wide-ranging conspiracy clearly exists. And the Commercial Appeal investigation is simply another body of proof, proof coming from the extensive examination by a conservative white daily newspaper of official government documents and interviews of more than 200 conspiracy participants.

So they've crafted this language they talk about Conspiracy-Theory, Conspiracy-Theorist in order to put people down, in order to make sure that people who hear these people talking about conspiracies, they are put down like they are not on the money, they really don't know what they're talking about. Conspiracy-Theorists. If a conspiracy exists, and as the Commercial Appeal determined existed, over 75 years against Dr. King's family and the families of other ministers throughout the south that's not a theory, that's a conspiracy.

Now Webster's defines this word conspiracy as, and I quote; "An evil, unlawful, treacherous, or surreptitious plan formulated in secret by 2 or more persons; a plot."

And in law a conspiracy is "an agreement by 2 more persons to commit a crime, fraud or other wrongful act; any concurrence in action; combination in bringing about a given result."

Given these official definitions can anyone credibly claim that a 75 years plus secret plan by the military as well as the FBI and CIA later, to spy on African Americans as a singled out group was anything but a conspiracy? These spies invaded the lives and privacy of three generations of Dr. King's family and generations of untold others who were considered leaders simply because they were African Americans and some paranoid and stupid white male with the power decided way back in 1917 that one group of Americans were ripe for subversion by German agents.

Apparently African Americans stayed ripe in the minds of successive white males with the power, for whatever agents they selected as this conspiracy took on a life of its own. But the military were not alone. During the reign of J. Edgar Hoover conspiracy theories abounded as character assassinations flourished and lives were destroyed often simply at Hoover's whims. Although Hoover was a rabid racist, a fact known to many elected officials and many in the press his paranoia extended to other Americans, regardless of race. If ordinary Americans were asked today what the Federal government's section A of the Reserve Index was or is, 9 out of 10 would express total ignorance. Yet many, if they investigated the matter would find that Hoover's minions had placed their name on that index thereby giving government agents the authority to round them up and imprison them in a time of national emergency.

Now in a memo dated May 11, 1962 Hoover ordered the Atlanta FBI

agent in charge to place Dr. King's name on that infamous Index and tab him a communist. Even though Hoover had in his possession at that time a communiqué from that same Atlanta office that asserted there was no information on which to base a security matter inquiry. Meaning no evidence or credible suggestion of evidence of communist leaning or influence existed. But that of course didn't matter. What Hoover wanted from his minions, Hoover got.

What major newspapers, national network news groups and elected, appointed officials knew and did not tell the American people was that such an Index and list of secretly targeted American citizens had been uncovered and the significance of their find. And that continued failure allows the right-wing, even until today, to go on trashing those they label conspiracy-theorists.

According to the FBI's own records Americans of all races, religions and economic levels were targeted if they were, quote;

"...in a position to influence others against the national interest or are likely to furnish material, financial aid to subversive elements due to their subversive association's ideology" whatever that means.

The problem was in the definition. Who was a subversive? In Hoover's sick mind any American citizen exercising his or her Constitutional right to peaceably assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances was guilty of being a subversive until proven innocent.

Hoover's people had even decided the categories of Americans that posed the greatest threats. Those categories do be listed in section of A of his Reserve Index were; A) Professors, teachers or leaders, B) Labor union organizers or leaders, C) Writers, lecturers, newsmen, entertainers and others in the Mass Media field, D) Lawyers, doctors and scientists, E) Other potentially influential persons on a local or national level, F) Individuals who could potentially furnish material or financial aid. Those were all the categories that include most of the American people.

Noticeably absent was a category for business people and industrialists, although Labor compromised a category. Why? Ask yourself how many friends and relatives and acquaintances of all races, religions and economic levels do I personally know that fall in these categories? With this plans and actions by Hoover and his people, by this major secretive American governmental institution fit Webster's definition of conspiracy?

Sane Americans, rather they're liberals, real conservatives or moderates would answer this question affirmatively. But a special kind of conspiracy was evolved by Hoover's people in the case of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and many other Americans. The acronym for this conspiracy was COINTELPRO, which stood for Counterintelligence Programs.

Now, what I'm gonna cite to you is material contained in the final report of the Church Committee called "The Final Report Book 3: Supplementary Detailed Staff Report on Intelligence Activities on the Rights of Americans -- Produced by the U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities in Cooperation with the U.S. Senate Domestic Intelligence Sub-Committee" respectively chaired by the late Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho and then Senator and later Vice-President Walter F. Mondale, Minn.

Now according to this report - its a thousand page book - the Committee's findings were based on staff study of quote;

"... more than 20,000 pages of FBI documents, deposition of many of the Bureau's agents involved in the program, and interviews of several COINTELPRO targets. The cases demonstrate the consequences of a government agencies decision to take the law into its own hands. The Bureau conducted a sophisticated vigilante operation aimed squarely at preventing the exercise of the First Amendment right of Speech and Freedom of Association." ¹

The following are a few excerpts from a section of that report titled "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Case Study". Listen very carefully to this. Then you'll understand why I get so upset when these idiots start talking about conspiracy theories. You tell me whether or not a conspiracy was held in this instance.

"On December 23, 1963, a nine-hour conference was held at FBI headquarters to discuss Martin Luther King. In attendance were Assistant Director Sullivan, Internal Security Section Chief Frederick Baumgardner, three other FBI headquarters officials, and two agents from the FBI's Atlanta Field Office.

A prepared list of twenty-one proposals was presented and discussed. The proposals raised the possibility of "using" ministers, "disgruntled" acquaintances, "aggressive" newsmen, "colored" agents, Dr. King's housekeeper, and even suggested using Dr. King's wife or "placing a good looking female plant in King's office." An account of the meeting written by William Sullivan emphasized that the Bureau must take a "discreet approach"

in developing information about Dr. King for use "at an opportune time in a counterintelligence move to discredit him." It was generally agreed that the Bureau should make use of "all available investigative techniques coupled with meticulous, planning, boldness, and ingenuity, tempered only with good judgment," [sic] but that "discretion must not reach the point of timidity."

Sullivan's memorandum reported that the following decisions were made at the conference:

- (1) We must determine and check out all of the employees of the SCLC.
- (2) We must locate and monitor the funds of the SCLC.
- (3) We must identify and check out the sources who contribute to the SCLC.
- (4) We must continue to keep close watch on King's personal activities.
- (5) We will, at the proper time when it can be done, without embarrassment to the Bureau, expose King as an opportunist who is not a sincere person but is exploiting the racial situation for personal gain.
- (6) We will explore the possibility of utilizing additional specialized investigative techniques at the SCLC office."

"Sullivan testified that the plans formulated at the December 24, 1963 meeting were in accord with "Mr. Hoover's policy." After reviewing the memoranda, Sullivan emphasized,

I want to make this clear; this is not an isolated phenomenon that this was a practice of the Bureau down through the years. I might say it often became a real character assassination.

Sullivan was asked by the Committee whether he or any other employees of the Bureau ever objected to using these tactics. Sullivan responded:

Not to my recollection ... I was not ready at that time to collide with him. Everybody in the Division went right along with Hoover's policy. I do not recall anybody ever raising a question.

. . . never once did I bear anybody, including myself, raise the question, is this course of action which we have agreed upon lawful, is it legal, is it ethical or moral? We never gave any thought to this realm of reasoning, because we were just naturally pragmatists. The one thing we were concerned about will this course of action work, will it get us what we want, will we reach the objective that we desire to reach?

As far as legality is concerned, morals or ethics was never raised by myself or anybody else.... I think this suggests really in government we are amoral."

"On January 6, 1964 -- about two weeks after the FBI's conference to plan methods of "neutralizing" Dr. King's influence and to gather information about Dr. King's personal life -- the FBI installed the microphone in Dr. King's room at the Willard Hotel. As explained in the preceding chapter, additional

microphones soon followed; physical and photographic surveillance was initiated; special Headquarters "briefings" were held; "dry runs" were planned; and the most sophisticated and experienced Bureau personnel were deployed to gather information that might be used in a concerted effort to destroy Dr. King's influence.

Two days after the installation of the Willard Hotel microphones, Assistant Director William Sullivan proposed that the FBI select a new "national Negro leader" as Dr. King's successor. In proposing the plan, Sullivan stated:

It should be clear to all of us that Martin Luther King must, at some propitious point in the future, be revealed to the people of this country and to his Negro followers as being what he actually is -- a fraud, demagogue and scoundrel. When the true facts concerning his activities are presented, such should be enough, if handled properly, to take him off his pedestal and to reduce him completely in influence. When this is done, and it can be and will be done, obviously much confusion will reign, particularly among the Negro people. . . . The Negroes will be left without a national leader of sufficiently compelling personality to steer them in the proper direction. This is what could happen, but need not happen if the right kind of a national Negro leader could at this time be gradually developed so as to overshadow Dr. King and be in the position to assume the role of the leadership of the Negro people when King has been completely discredited.

For some months I have been thinking about this matter. One day I had an opportunity to explore this from a philosophical and sociological standpoint with [an acquaintance] whom I have known for some years.... I asked [him] to give the matter some attention and if he knew any Negro of outstanding intelligence and ability to let me know and we would have a discussion. [He] has submitted to me the name of the above-captioned person. Enclosed with this memorandum is an outline of [the person's] biography which is truly remarkable for a man so young. On scanning this biography, it will be seen that [he] does have all the qualifications of the kind of a Negro I have in mind to advance to positions of national leadership....

If this thing can be set up properly without the Bureau in any way becoming directly involved, I think it would be not only a great help to the FBI but would be a fine thing for the country at large. While I am not specifying at this moment, there are various ways in which the FBI could give this entire matter the proper direction and development. There are highly placed contacts of the FBI who might be very helpful to further such a step. These can be discussed in detail later when I have probed more fully into the possibilities."²

The Church Committee Report outlined in considerable detail the extensive efforts of J. Edgar Hoover's FBI to discredit Dr. King. Special sections of the Committee's Case Study dealt with such efforts to discredit King with the White House, with the Congress, with the universities and colleges, with the churches and international church bodies, with the Pope and the Vatican, with the Nobel Peace Prize sponsors, with the reception participants, especially during his trip to

receive the Nobel Peace Prize, with foreign leaders, with magazine and book publishers in this country, with the National Science Foundation, and with the Internal Revenue Service. Their actions were the same actions that any fascist regime would take to destroy an opponent's moral authority and political effectiveness. I can't say enough about the Church Committee's work. But I also know that information was withheld from them, even.

Now the Church Committee also investigated and published a special section dealing with Hoover's FBI and the Black Panther Party, the FBI's covert action program to destroy the Black Panther Party. According to the committee's report the FBI initiated in August 1967 a;

"covert action program -- COINTELPRO -- to disrupt and "neutralize" organizations which the Bureau characterized as "Black Nationalist Hate Groups." The FBI memorandum expanding the program described its goals as:

1. Prevent a coalition of militant black nationalist groups....
2. Prevent the rise of a messiah who could unify and electrify the militant nationalist movement ... Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael and Elijah Muhammad all aspire to this position....
3. Prevent violence on the part of black nationalist groups....
4. Prevent militant black nationalist groups and leaders from gaining respectability by discrediting them....
5. . . . prevent the long-range growth of militant black nationalist organizations, especially among youth.

The targets of this nationwide program to disrupt "militant black nationalist organizations" included groups such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), and the Nation of Islam (NOI). It was expressly directed against such leaders as Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Maxwell Stanford, and Elijah Muhammad.'

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Of special interest is fact that the Black Panther Party was not among the original groups targeted. Not until 5 months after Dr. King's assassination did Hoover determine that the Black Panther Party had suddenly become, quote;

"the greatest threat to the internal security of the country."

That inconceivable designation by Hoover unleashed the most

reprehensible series of actions, short of direct killings by FBI agents, undertaken domestically by the FBI. Although there is no available proof of direct killings there is considerable proof of FBI staff culpability in intentionally, malice afore thought, stimulating and prompting killings among the African American communities. Although we will not here reproduce the intensive documents in the Church Committee Report, the following excerpts will give you an idea of what agents did.

"By July 1969, the Black Panthers had become the primary focus of the program, and was ultimately the target of 233 of the total authorized "Black Nationalist" COINTELPRO actions.

Although the claimed purpose of the Bureau's COINTELPRO tactics was to prevent violence, some of the FBI's tactics against the BPP were clearly intended to foster violence, and many others could reasonably have been expected to cause violence. For example, the FBI's efforts to "intensify the degree of animosity" between the BPP and the Blackstone Rangers, a Chicago street gang, included sending an anonymous letter to the gang's leader falsely informing him that the Chicago Panthers had "a hit out" on him. The stated intent of the letter was to induce the Ranger leader to "take reprisals against" the Panther leadership.

Similarly, in Southern California, the FBI launched a covert effort to "create further dissension in the ranks of the BPP." This effort included mailing anonymous letters and caricatures to BPP members ridiculing the local and national BPP leadership for the express purpose of exacerbating an existing "gang war" between the BPP and an organization called the United Slaves (US). This "gang war" resulted in the killing of four BPP members by members of US and in numerous beatings and shootings. Although individual incidents in this dispute cannot be directly traced to efforts by the FBI, FBI officials were clearly aware of the violent nature of the dispute, engaged in actions which they hoped would prolong and intensify the dispute, and proudly claimed credit for violent clashes between the rival factions which. In the words of one FBI official, resulted in "shootings, beatings, and a high degree of unrest in the area of southeast San Diego." ⁴

Equally disgusting were the memoranda by FBI agents bragging about their successes in creating violence and havoc on the streets of African American communities and requesting authorization to take bigger and more reprehensible actions. Time and time again these FBI agents allowed and planned and approved actions to promote shootings, beatings other violence and crowded public events where they knew innocent people's lives were placed in danger based on the information provided them by their paid informants.

Did these secret actions comprise a conspiracy? Without a single doubt. Not only were these conspiracies, they were also conspiracies

the world would never have known about had they not been revealed by a courageous, outraged U.S. Senator and his colleagues with the clout to undertake a serious investigation and publish its findings. Special credit most also go to Carl Stern who was then a reporter for NBC who initiated a Freedom of Information law suit after documents were brought to his attention in 1971 seeking to force the FBI to produce other COINTELPRO documents.

Ultimately the political, media landscape has dramatically changed in our nation. It is extremely doubtful if our current political media leadership would exhibit similar courage. During the late 60's when the tragic events were unfolding many activist were suspicious and certain that government intelligence agents were infiltrating their groups, local and national, and provoking violence and criminal behavior. At that time we had no real proof until the Church Committee documentation was spread on the public record. The official files and memoranda and sworn testimonies given during public hearings.

Yet even with the voluminous information revealed there is so much more that has not been provided. Even the Senate committees were denied documents were still classified and kept secret for so called internal security reasons. Just as activists and observers had certainty without concrete proof in the 60's many activists and observers in the later years of the 80's and 90's explosions in violence and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and power exotic drugs on our nations streets feel a similar certainty that elitist, racist fascist white males, many working in government agencies and paid by our taxes are in conspiracy with their outside financial backers the major promoters and beneficiaries of the current chaos we continue to witness on the streets of our country. The CIA-Cocaine connection expose may have shown us only the tip of America's dope supply iceberg.

Commentary Foot Notes:

1. United States. Cong. Senate. Book 3: Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities. 94th Cong., 2nd sess. Washington: GPO, 1976
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.