

## BREAKING THE SILENCE: MARTIN

By Carl Doerner

April 4<sup>th</sup> marks the 47th anniversary of the evening Dr. Martin Luther King came to New York's Riverside Church to deliver the speech in which (to thundering applause) he denounced the U.S. government as the "greatest purveyor of evil in the world." His assassination occurred exactly one year later, a warning to any who dare challenge the powers that be.

In April 1967 the condemnation was on Lyndon Johnson's disastrous war against Vietnamese people. Martin criticized a racist, imperialist conflict which, by the time it ended, cost 58,000 American lives, 3.7-million Vietnamese deaths and made vast regions unfit for agriculture.

As in the murder of Malcolm X, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover wiretapped and shadowed Martin throughout his 13-year leadership of the civil rights movement. After the 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, a secret FBI memo labeled Martin "the most dangerous and effective Negro leader in the country." Another explored approaches "aimed at neutralizing King as an effective Negro leader." Hoover scrawled contemptuous notes about him on the margins of articles that crossed his desk. In June Hoover told billionaire Haroldson Hunt the King problem "required a final solution."

The Riverside speech described a departure of Martin's campaign from civil rights for Negroes to universal human rights, a rallying cry to all people impoverished by our economic system. It called for gathering to shut down government in Washington through civil disobedience until poor people's needs were addressed.

By September, 5,000 delegates gathered in Chicago as an emerging third party force, the National Conference for New Politics, explored offering King as a presidential candidate. The threat Martin posed to the establishment and national security state grew rapidly and prospect of a large, spirited encampment in Washington with the national army imbedded in Vietnam hastened plans to destroy him and his movement.

When the "I Am A Man" sanitation workers strike erupted in spring, 1968, Martin went to Memphis to march with strikers, welcoming their struggle as prelude to his plans to march on Washington. Speaking the night before his murder, emotionally with biblical reference that acknowledged looming threats to his life, Martin said, "I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land."

To limit scrutiny of circumstances of crimes, plotters in each assassination of the 1960s created scapegoats, disreputable men to be quickly named, prosecuted and imprisoned. But like the alleged assassin of Kennedy in Dallas, Lee Harvey Oswald, King's assassination patsy, James Earl Ray, had military records of poor marksmanship. Evidence emerged that army sniper J. D Hill and others were positioned in Memphis, should the recruited assassin miss. Weapons handled by Oswald and Ray were never clearly linked to the killings. As for our constitutional protections, absent forensic evidence or due process or trial, these men are officially recorded as the murderers.

Marrell McCollough, a close associate and driver for Martin in Memphis, was an infiltrator, an army military intelligence agent assigned to the Memphis police. A moneyless escapee from Missouri prison, Ray was handled and funded by known

Portuguese gunrunner “Raul” and paid to leave a package containing a rifle in a street doorway. Ray was then accused of firing that rifle from a rear bathroom.

Frustrated by years of cover-up, Ray’s attorney William Pepper brought a 1999 civil trial for the King family. The murder was planned in Jim’s Grill. Owner Lloyd Jowers, who aided Raul in shooting Martin from backyard shrubbery across from the Lorraine Motel, was found guilty at this trial.

Men had been photographed fleeing that shrubbery. Police allowed them to drive away. Early next morning Memphis police destroyed the crime scene, ordering the bushes cut and removed. Raul, who has admitted to being the assassin, lives under government protection in New England. McCollough went to work at CIA.

Ray was coerced to confess involvement, immediately recanted, was denied trial and died in prison. As the major media totally ignored the trial that exonerated Ray, Pepper published his book on the case, “Orders to Kill,” and began a speaking tour. He went beyond blaming the government to say “economic power holders stood deeper in the shadows.” In February 2002, he addressed a standing-room-only crowd in Greenfield, echoing a phrase from Martin’s Riverside speech, “a time comes when silence is betrayal.”

In his Riverside speech conclusion, addressed both to the Vietnam era and our own time, Martin declared, “a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.” By not breaking this silence we live beneath lies of the powerful and experience the spiritual death Martin predicted.