

# RFK and the End of an Era

A just published book on the RFK murder re-examines the evidences and asks what the world might be like if the four 1960s assassinations never occurred.

By **James DiEugenio** *Special to Consortium News*



Authors Tim Tate and Brad Johnson begin their new book, *The Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy: Crime, Conspiracy and Cover-Up – A New Investigation* (Thistle Publishing) with this quote from RFK the day after Martin Luther King Jr. was killed: “What has violence ever accomplished? What has it ever created? No martyr’s cause has ever been stilled by an assassin’s bullet.”

Just two months later Kennedy would become the last in a series of four assassinations of American leaders from 1963-68: President John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy. The cumulative political impact of those murders is hard to overstate. Toward the end of their book the authors try to estimate what that impact was.

Though it’s impossible to say for sure, they conjecture that, at the very least, the Vietnam War would have ended much sooner and would not have expanded into Laos and Cambodia. We know for certain that President Richard Nixon’s decision to expand the war caused the collapse of the government of Cambodia’s Prince Sihanouk, the eventual takeover by the Khmer Rouge and the death of two million people.

The murder of Bobby Kennedy has always seemed to get less attention in the mainstream media than the other 1960s assassinations, perhaps because it’s been considered an “open and shut case.” There were, after all, seventy witnesses to RFK’s murder. But the Los Angeles Police Department decided very early, and quite literally, that what happened in the wee hours of June 5, 1968 would not be another Dallas, as Tate and Johnson say.

It’s not widely known that Sirhan Sirhan’s attorneys did not mount a defense to the charges against him. Instead they resorted to what’s known as an alternative defense called “stipulation to the evidence.” In legal terms this means the defense accepts the testimony and exhibits presented by prosecutor as valid. Therefore, there was no argument in court over the medical, eyewitness or ballistics evidence.

What the trial was really about was Sirhan’s mental state. Since his legal team thought he was guilty, they tried to avoid capital punishment by arguing he was mentally unbalanced at the time. This failed, and Sirhan only escaped

electrocution because California later outlawed the death penalty.

As Tate and Johnson show, this defense strategy doomed Sirhan. For example, when coroner Thomas Noguchi was on the stand, lead defense lawyer Grant Cooper actually tried to curtail his testimony by saying, "Is all this detail necessary? I think he can express an opinion that death was due to a gunshot wound."

Noguchi should have been Sirhan's star witness, and Cooper should have had him on the stand all day, the authors argue. Noguchi's 62-page autopsy report proved that all the bullets that hit the senator entered from *behind* Kennedy. They also entered at extreme upward angles and at close range, i.e. from 1-3 inches.

### **Sirhan Not Close Enough**

Every witness in the pantry of the Ambassador Hotel placed Sirhan *in front* of Kennedy, and at a distance of 2-5 feet. The fatal headshot struck RFK behind the right ear at point blank range, with the barrel almost touching his skin. As the authors note: How could not one single witness recall such a horrifying image? Witnesses put Sirhan in front of Bobby Kennedy and therefore he could not have been close enough to fire the shot that ended Kennedy's life.

As Tate and Johnson describe, Noguchi was struck by the deep circular powder burns in Kennedy's hair. He did experiments with pigs' ears, firing at them from differing close ranges. The only distance at which he could duplicate that imprint was 1.5 inches. This is considered a point blank or contact shot. If Cooper had walked Noguchi through those experiments, the prosecution would have had the steep challenge of countering that evidence. But it never happened.

We know today that the police understood the problem they had. As the authors show, using the LAPD's own secret exhibits, the authorities had performed three different reconstructions of the shooting. Each one of these reenactments featured certain key witnesses from the Ambassador Hotel pantry. In each of them, at the direction of the witnesses, Sirhan was placed several feet in front of Kennedy. Since the two earliest reconstructions were done in 1968, before the trial, they could have been used as strong evidence for the defense.

Because Noguchi's testimony was curtailed, his autopsy report was not entered into the trial record. But perhaps worse, because the defense stipulated to the evidence, the work of prosecution witness, DeWayne Wolfer, head of the LAPD crime lab, never underwent cross-examination. One of the most serious problems for the official case is that Sirhan's handgun held a maximum of eight shots. Yet in addition to the four shots that struck Kennedy there were five other victims. Three bullets hit Kennedy and one passed through his jacket shoulder

pad. That's nine shots and Sirhan could only have fired eight. Here is where Wolfer borrowed a device from the John Kennedy case: a Magic Bullet.

In addition to these nine shots, there was also evidence that there were bullets in door frames, ceiling tiles, and the swinging gate into the pantry. But Sirhan's lawyer agreed that the prosecution would not have to prove which bullet came from where.

Wolfer said that the bullet that went through Kennedy's jacket shoulder also hit labor leader Paul Schrade in the middle of his forehead. Yet that bullet was fired from behind the senator and Schrade was walking behind Kennedy. As Schrade told the authors, when he heard that, it was the end of innocence for him on the RFK case.

Schrade said he would have had to be nine feet tall and bending over at his waist for that bullet to hit him in the head.

Wolfer had an interesting explanation for the bullet that hit bystander Elizabeth Evans. Because the police needed to account for holes in the ceiling tiles, Wolfer said that this projectile went through the tiles, and struck the ceiling behind them. It then ricocheted off that surface, making another hole on the way down, and then struck Evans. Yet, the hospital report on Evans said a bullet hit her in the front hairline traveling *upward*. In other words, like in a master pool game, this must have been a double bank shot.

### **Too Many Holes**

But even Wolfer's fertile imagination could not account for the evidence of the multitude of shots fired. This created serious problems because, as the authors describe, these extra bullet holes were witnessed by law enforcement professionals.

William Bailey was an FBI agent in Los Angeles who had been watching the California primary results on television in which Kennedy had just defeated Eugene McCarthy. After Kennedy proclaimed victory and said, "On to Chicago, and let's win there," Bailey fell asleep. He was awakened when a fellow agent knocked on his door and said they were assigned to the Ambassador to interview witnesses.

Bailey and his partner were there for a good part of the next two days. During that time, Bailey said he saw at least two bullet holes in the center divider of the swinging gate leading into the pantry. He also added that there appeared to be the base of two bullets in the holes. He was certain they were not nail holes.

Martin Patrusky, a waiter and crime scene witness, later said police told him there were two bullets that were taken out of the divider. In addition to this, there were two policemen who saw a bullet hole in the doorframe leading into the pantry. When the late Vincent Bugliosi, a lawyer who worked in the LA district attorney's office at the time, called police officer Robert Rozzi to ask him about this, Rozzi said he saw what appeared to him to be a bullet about a foot and a half from the bottom of the floor embedded in the door frame. Bugliosi then called Sgt. Charles Wright who confirmed that there was a bullet hole in the frame and that it was later removed. This evidence, if true and which was kept out of the trial, appears to indicate that there were more shots in the pantry than Sirhan could have fired.

Co-author Johnson managed to locate an audio recording made by a Canadian journalist as he followed Kennedy from his victory speech in the Embassy Room to the pantry. That audiotope was in the archives of the RFK case in Sacramento. Johnson had it analyzed by Philip Van Praag, a master audio technician. After a long, detailed technical study, Van Praag concluded that there were at least 13 shots on the tape. Further, two pairs of shot sounds are too close to each other to be fired by one man.

As the authors note, the vast majority of the RFK evidence was supposed to be available for viewing after the trial of Sirhan. This did not happen. The fact it did not allowed certain officials involved to misrepresent the facts of the case to the public. Senator Kamala Harris, now the darling of the Democratic liberal establishment, then continued to deny Sirhan's lawyers an evidentiary hearing while she was California attorney general.

### **RFK Jr. Visits Sirhan**

Robert Kennedy Jr. has now become the first Kennedy family member to openly question the verdict in the murder of his father. A few months ago, he did what what Martin Luther King's son, Dexter King, did in 1997 when he visited James Earl Ray in prison, leading Dexter to believe in Ray's innocence in the murder of his father.

A few months ago, Kennedy Jr. quietly visited Sirhan in prison. After months of sifting through the evidence at the behest of Schrade, he came to the conclusion that Sirhan had not killed his father. This startling news was reported by the The Washington Post. Kennedy Jr. supports Schrade's plea for a new investigation. Kennedy's son is an experienced attorney who is partly responsible for getting his cousin Michael Skakel out of prison. Kennedy's book on that case was a powerful exposé of how the justice system failed when it was improperly influenced by outside factors.

Kennedy Jr.'s pronouncement may finally give his father's case the attention and the serious analysis it deserves. Reading Tate and Johnson's book shows how poor of a job the mainstream media has done. As late Congressman Allard Lowenstein said:

"Robert Kennedy's death, like the President's was mourned as an extension of the evils of senseless violence...What is odd is not that some people thought it was all random, but that so many intelligent people refused to believe that it might be anything else. Nothing can measure more graphically how limited was the general understanding of what is possible in America."

Fifty years later our understanding of what is possible in America may not be so limited after all.

**James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. He is the author of *The JFK Assassination : The Evidence Today*. His most recent book is *Reclaiming Parkland*.**

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## Distorting the Life of Bobby Kennedy

As the 50th anniversary of his assassination is being remembered on Tuesday, it is vital to have a complete and accurate picture of the complex figure of Robert F. Kennedy, explains James DiEugenio.

**By James DiEugenio** *Special to Consortium News*



TV commentator Chris Matthews' book, *Bobby Kennedy: A Raging Spirit*, has been a best seller since it was released last October, but there's a lot of important material that Matthews left out about Kennedy, whose assassination on June 5, 1968 is being remembered on Tuesday.

In recapping his early life, Matthews tells the story of Kennedy graduating from Harvard and going on to pursue a law degree at the

University of Virginia, where he was chair of the Student Legal Forum. In that role, he invited some high profile guests to speak in Charlottesville.

One guest, Nobel Prize winner Ralph Bunche, would augur Kennedy's later support for civil rights. Bunche, both a diplomat and professor at Howard University, was African-American, and the invitation was to a state where most of everyday life was still segregated. When Bunche told Kennedy he would not speak before a segregated audience, RFK appealed the issue through four levels of the college administration—saying he would not back down for moral reasons—and won. Bunche ultimately addressed an overflowing, integrated audience that was about one-third African-American. As Matthews correctly notes, Bunche stayed at Bobby's house that night, which was pelted with stones.

### **A Transformative Trip Abroad**

In 1951, after he graduated, Bobby traveled with his brother, then Congressman Jack Kennedy, to the Middle and Far East to learn about U.S. foreign policy and raise his credentials in that area. Matthews mentions the trip, but omits the name of Edmund Gullion, a respected State Department diplomat whom the brothers contacted in Saigon to assess whether France could win its war to re-colonize Indochina.

Matthews' excision of Gullion is inexplicable, given his importance: he told the Kennedy brothers that France could not win, since Ho Chi Minh had inspired the Viet Minh to fight until death, rather than return under colonialism's yoke. Gullion also said France could not win a war of attrition, because the home front would not support it.

Bobby later said Gullion deeply affected JFK's foreign policy views. Thus, soon after, JFK attacked both parties' positions on thwarting Communism in the Third World. That lonely campaign continued for six years, climaxing in the senator's speech protesting Eisenhower's second attempt to support France's desperate effort to maintain an imperial empire, this time in Algeria.

During the next year (1958), JFK bought 100 copies of the best-selling

book, *The Ugly American*, one for each senator, a story Matthews fails to tell. The thinly disguised novel was an unsubtle critique of America's growing involvement in Indochina and the State Department's incompetence in dealing with the Vietnamese.

As JFK aide Arthur Schlesinger noted, when Senator John Kennedy opposed the Eisenhower/Nixon proposed intervention at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, RFK agreed, believing one could not consider anti-Communism in the Third World without considering colonialism's impacts. Bobby noted this in a 1956 article for *The New York Times Magazine*:

“. . .because we think that the uppermost thought in all people's minds is communism...We are still too often doing too little too late to recognize and assist the irresistible movements for independence that are sweeping one dependent territory after another.”

At a talk at Fordham University, Bobby told the audience that the fatal flaw of American foreign policy was the commitment to European colonialism, noting “We supported France in Indochina far too long.” Although this is a stunning critique, Matthews does not include it in his book.

### **RFK and Joseph McCarthy**

By leaving out such stories, it seems Matthews is trying to position Bobby Kennedy closer to Senator Joe McCarthy than he really was to paint RFK as an ardent Cold Warrior. After Bobby successfully managed his brother's Senate campaign in 1952, his father suggested he work for McCarthy, who was Joe Kennedy's friend. Matthews devotes seven pages to this part of the history, though he omits some key points.

For example, Bobby resigned in protest from McCarthy's committee after only six months. During this time, he worked on what many think was the Committee's most valuable report, about how some American allies' trade practices benefited China and North Korea during the Korean conflict. Unlike Roy Cohn, McCarthy's choice for chief counsel, RFK's report did not accuse individuals of being traitors.

Further, RFK did not participate in Cohn's pursuit of alleged Russian spies in the State Department. In fact, in private, he clearly admitted his dispute with Cohn, whom he found reckless and pugnacious, attracting the wrong kind of publicity to the Committee. Once he resigned, he kept a low profile for a short while and then the Democratic minority appointed him their chief counsel.

As RFK predicted, McCarthy and Cohn imploded on national television during the Army-McCarthy hearings. After this, Bobby took over the committee and retired two of its most controversial, even absurd, cases, against a Queens, NY dentist, Irving Peress and a Pentagon pastry chef, Annie Lee Moss. Also, the RFK-run committee never filed charges with respect to McCarthy's accusation about the infiltration of defense plants.

When the proceedings ended, Bobby wrote the minority report, which was so critical of McCarthy and Cohn that some Democrats would not sign it. It recommended the Senate take action for their abuses. The report provoked hearings on the subject of censure; which was the end result. However, Matthews spends significantly more time on RFK's earlier Committee work than on his later role, which was longer and more important.

Matthews skims over the next part of RFK's life, as Chief Counsel for the McClellan Committee. Here, the 31-year-old lawyer rose to national prominence as the foe of Teamsters' President Jimmy Hoffa and organized crime. Mathews captures little of the political complexity of this four-year drama. For example, the Committee Republicans, led by Sen. Barry Goldwater, were pleased when RFK began pursuing Hoffa since they thought it would weaken unions, in general. But they were unhappy when RFK expanded the focus to the Teamsters' relationship with the Mafia, since the Committee now sought to clean up corrupt unions.

It got even worse for Goldwater when, while Bobby was investigating a long strike against the Kohler Company in Wisconsin, he became close to Walter Reuther, the United Automobile Workers' president, who was running the strike. As chief counsel, RFK made him a featured witness



before the Committee. This resulted in the largest fine ever levied against a corporation in a strike until that time. Again, Matthews omits this important biographical material.

### **JFK's Presidential Bid**

In 1960, Bobby managed his brother's presidential campaign against Vice-President Richard Nixon. Matthews does note Bobby's 1959 visit to Johnson's ranch, where LBJ lied to him about his intention not to enter the 1960 race. Thus, when Johnson did enter, late in the campaign, RFK had to run a two-stage strategy: The first beating Senator Hubert Humphrey in the primaries; the second was to beat Johnson in the local and state delegations in states without primaries. Despite the extra load, Bobby held off Johnson and JFK won on the first ballot at the convention.

At this point, a group of advisors convinced JFK to abandon his original choice for vice-president, Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri, and instead pick Johnson, so he could win in the south.

Matthews' version of what followed differs from the dominant meme in the literature. Authors like Jeff Shesol and Robert Caro concluded that, after Johnson accepted JFK's offer, Bobby tried to get Johnson to leave the ticket. Matthews' interpretation is that JFK knew what Bobby was doing and supported it, since he had not thought Johnson would accept the offer. Whichever version is correct, it made the LBJ/RFK relationship even rockier, and the two were antagonists for the next eight years—which ultimately fractured the 1968 Democratic convention.

### **The Kennedys and the CIA**

Matthews correctly views the Bay of Pigs operation as one that was designed to fail. In his previous books, he didn't admit this, which is odd, since CIA Director Allen Dulles left a handwritten confession to that effect in his Princeton archives. Peter Grose, Dulles' biographer, discussed this in his 1994 book, *Gentleman Spy*. Thus, Matthews took two decades to present what Dulles admitted over 50 years earlier. So, finally, Matthews says the goal behind the

deception was to have JFK send the Navy and Marines into Cuba to save the day. However, JFK refused, although Nixon—whom Kennedy defeated in 1960 for the White House—advised the President to declare a beachhead and invade. This discredits what Matthews observed in his previous book *Kennedy and Nixon*, where he implies there was an equivalency between the two presidents.

Matthews virtually eliminates the crucial role Bobby had soon after. The President appointed him as a member of a White House committee that was mandated to investigate the operation. During the inquiry, Bobby granted Dulles no quarter, since he already suspected what Dulles later admitted: that the CIA director had deceived JFK about the operation's chance of success, hoping he would approve an American armada to save himself from a humiliating defeat.

Thus, the President had authorized the Bay of Pigs given false information; and when RFK understood Dulles' deceptions, he conferred with his father, who arranged for his son to meet former Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett, who admitted he and David Bruce (at State) had tried to get Dulles fired in the 1950s. But Dulles was protected by his brother, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.

Lovett advised JFK that he now had the perfect opportunity to do what he, himself, could not. Thus, on Bobby's and Lovett's advice, the President fired not just Allen Dulles, but Deputy Director Charles Cabell and Director of Plans, Dick Bissell. Feeling duped by the CIA and the Pentagon—which had also approved the disastrous project—Bobby now became JFK's trusted advisor on foreign affairs.

### **Operation Mongoose**

Matthews omits these episodes and then writes that 1962's Operation Mongoose was Bobby's idea. Mongoose was the secret campaign of sabotage and covert actions against Cuba that, after seven months of memo shuffling, was authorized in November 1961 and launched in February 1962.

The definitive record of the memoranda—*Foreign Relations of the United States, Volume X*—shows that it was hardly Bobby's idea. In fact, it

was Walt Rostow, Assistant to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, who began the discussion by focusing on the "Cuba problem" and suggesting a blockade or an invasion. Others, like Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and CIA officer Tracy Barnes, joined in later; and it was Barnes' option to infiltrate and sabotage shipping that was ultimately supported.

President Kennedy appointed Bobby to be a kind of ombudsman over the project, since he did not trust the CIA. As David Corn revealed in *Blond Ghost*, a biography of Ted Shackley, Mongoose's day-to-day supervisor, Bobby insisted on seeing every plan for every foray into Cuba. He also demanded that every plan include a detailed, written description. To put it mildly, after the freewheeling days of Allen Dulles, the Agency chafed at this studious procedure for Mongoose. This is another point Matthews' ignores.

### **Battle for Civil Rights**

Matthews begins the Kennedys' battle for civil rights with Bobby's role as Attorney General and his intervention in the Freedom Riders' attempt to integrate inter-state busing in the south. However, this is not the whole story. During JFK's campaign in June 1960, he said he was prepared to win the Democratic nomination without a single vote from the south at the convention. As author Harry Golden noted, after he was nominated, he told his civil rights advisors that he would break the walls of segregation through legal actions based on three statutes that his predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower, did not use to any significant degree: the Supreme Court's *Brown vs. Board* decision of 1954, and the 1957 and 1960 Civil Rights Acts.

And this is what Attorney General Bobby Kennedy did, filing more civil rights cases in his first year than Eisenhower filed during his two full terms in office. By the end of 1961, he opened 61 new investigations and by 1963, five times as many lawyers were working on civil rights cases than under Eisenhower.

This approach had been planned by the Kennedy campaign's civil rights advisor, Harris Wofford. Before Bobby became attorney general, Wofford had written a long memorandum on the issue, saying it was not

possible to pass an omnibus civil rights bill through Congress in 1961, and probably not in 1962—since the Senate would filibuster it. Thus, the Attorney General and White House would be wise to use executive orders and legal actions to build momentum.

This happened, and faster than Wofford anticipated, because some of the things JFK had done before he was president encouraged the civil rights movement in a way that Eisenhower had not. For example, in 1957, he spoke in Jackson, Mississippi, stating that all Americans must accept the Brown vs. Board decision as the law of the land. Further, during the 1960 campaign, JFK called Coretta Scott King to comfort her about her husband's arrest, while Bobby worked behind the scenes to get King out of prison. In May 1961, as the new attorney general, Bobby declared at the University of Georgia Law School that he would enforce the Brown v. Board decision.

Matthews ignores almost all of this. But without this information, the story of the meteoric success of the civil rights movement from 1961-1963 is incomplete. Vivian Malone, one of the first black students to enroll at the segregated University of Alabama, did so although Governor George Wallace stated he would stand in the schoolhouse door to prevent it. When Vivian's sister was asked why Vivian did such a dangerous thing, she said her sister trusted that Bobby Kennedy would protect her. And he did, sending over 3,000 troops under General Creighton Abrams to the campus. Matthews simply does not explain this crucial link between the civil rights movement and the Kennedys' actions.

### **Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnam**

Nor does he shed light on the Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnam in 1963. As to the former, Matthews notes that Bobby proposed an air strike to destroy the missiles on the island, tracing this to the first meeting of President Kennedy's advisors. However, I could not find this quote in the meeting's transcript. In fact, RFK cautioned his brother against both an invasion and bombing campaign at the first meeting. Although he mentioned more aggressive actions at the second meeting, he qualified them with words like 'if' and 'whether.' Thus,

these were contingencies, not commitments.

Matthews then says the brothers acknowledged former Secretary of State Dean Acheson's view, which is completely inaccurate. In one of the most famous incidents during that two-week crisis, Acheson wanted no negotiations, and rather pushed for a sneak attack on the missile sites to eliminate them. Bobby, then attorney general, recoiled, saying it would be the equivalent of what the Japanese did to America at Pearl Harbor.

The transcripts show that JFK asked about each option—an invasion, bombing campaign, and surgical air strikes. For each, he considered the number of casualties. The President even questioned Chief of Staff Maxwell Taylor about the number of fatalities with a “surgical strike.” And when the President visited the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he was appalled by their opposition to his choice of a blockade. What really startled the brothers was when the congressional leaders they called to the White House said they also thought a blockade was too meek—including liberal Senator William Fulbright, who favored an invasion.

Feeling isolated, JFK had Bobby work as his back channel to the Soviets; thus, Bobby communicated with Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin and worked out a deal: the Russians would remove the atomic weapons from Cuba in return for the U.S. not invading the island and making a silent promise that JFK would later remove American missiles from Turkey.

If we understand Bobby's role here, we understand what JFK was doing in Vietnam in 1963, and also RFK's position on the war from 1964-1968. Nevertheless, Matthews seems unable to deal with the ramifications of NSAM 263, President Kennedy's October 1963 order to begin withdrawing American advisors from Vietnam; and, Bobby's prime role in designing it.

The President had sent Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and General Taylor to Saigon that fall to report on the conditions that would support NSAM 263. But since he didn't trust the two to write what he needed to justify his withdrawal plan, he summoned General Victor

Krulak and Colonel Fletcher Prouty to the White House. As historian John Newman notes, JFK asked Bobby to supervise their report, which was sent by jet to Hawaii where it was given to McNamara and Taylor to read on their flight to Washington. But you will not read one sentence about this in Matthews' book.

### **LBJ and RFK's Decision to Run for President**

This omission points to a larger vacuum. One reason Bobby decided to run for president in 1968 was because he felt that though Johnson had said he wanted to continue JFK's policies, he obviously had little intention to. As John Bohrer notes in *The Revolution of Robert Kennedy*, even in early 1964, the Attorney General was advising Johnson not to militarize Vietnam. His advice, of course, was ignored.

Bobby also figured that Dean Rusk, the hawkish secretary of state, would now urge Johnson to escalate the war to heights he and his brother had never contemplated. But it was Johnson's signing ceremony for the civil rights bill in 1964 that was a turning point: LBJ asked RFK to pass around pens, after LBJ had already given one to racist FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Bobby had had enough. He left the Administration and successfully ran for senator from New York. After this, he headed the "Kennedy wing of the Democratic party."

In 1965, Bobby asked Johnson to fire Rusk and tell South Vietnam the U.S. would no longer fight its war. He also railed against the NRA's influence, insisted on warning labels for cigarettes, and even asked that "right to work" laws—which weakened unions—be repealed. You can read about these courageous stands in John Bohrer's book, but not in Matthews'.

One thing LBJ did to reverse JFK's foreign policy was to appoint Thomas Mann to key positions on Latin America. Bobby suspected that Johnson did this to deliberately undo one of JFK's key diplomatic creations—the Alliance for Progress. Thus, Bobby, as senator, traveled to Latin America to find out what was going on. Matthews gives one page to this central event. Yet some of the things RFK said and did before, during and after this trip are crucial to understanding who he was at the time.

After the State Department briefed him about whom he should meet and what to say, Bobby told a colleague, "It sounds like we're working for United Fruit again." He told a crowd in Lima, Peru they should imitate great Latin American revolutionaries like San Martin and O'Higgins. At almost every other stop he ended his speeches by saying, "The responsibility of our times is nothing less than revolution." He made it a point to visit the ancient capital of the Inca empire in Cuzco and, on his way back, children were cheering "Viva Kennedy."

In Brazil, when sugar cane workers told him they were paid only for three days while working six, the senator walked to the landlord's house and yelled that he was swindling his workers. After this, he visited Brazil's president, who had been installed by a CIA-sponsored coup after JFK was killed. While driving back to his hotel room he saw soldiers striking some of the crowd and trying to keep them away from his car. As Bohrer writes, he jumped out and shouted, "Down with the government! On to the palace!" I have to share these key incidents with the reader because they are not in Matthews' book.

That journey south is a fitting prelude to Bobby's last campaign. Matthews does include a couple of important incidents in the prelude to RFK's decision to run against President Johnson. First, he describes a meeting between Bobby and Walter Cronkite, where the CBS broadcaster told he him must run in order to end the Vietnam War. Second, he quotes Bobby saying in November 1967 that his brother would have never committed half a million men to Vietnam and, in fact, was determined not to send combat troops at all. But Matthews doesn't write how Bobby came to that conclusion.

### **An Incandescent Crusade**

Matthews' description of Bobby's remarkable 85-day campaign is fairly prosaic and doesn't come close to capturing what was perhaps the most bold and brilliant presidential campaign in the last 60 years. Here was the last crusade of the 1960s—the last hope of a generation that had already witnessed to this point the murders of JFK in 1963 and Malcolm X in 1965. Martin Luther King was relying on Bobby to enter the race, and when he did, was overjoyed, saying he would make an

outstanding president. RFK had King, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta on his side.



At his first formal campaign appearance at Kansas State University, before Johnson exited the race, RFK called the president's Vietnam policy "bankrupt" and "deeply wrong." He then quoted the officer who said that after the Battle of Ben Tre, "We had to wipe out the village in order to save it." Bobby then asked, "Where does such logic end?" Later he said, "We cannot send American troops to assume the burden of fighting for corrupt and repressive governments all the way round the globe. . . ." Then, in Indiana, he echoed King when he said black Americans were dying in the war in disproportionate numbers than whites.

King was gunned down in Memphis on April 4, 1968 during the Indiana primary campaign. Kennedy had a rally scheduled in a predominantly African-American area of Indianapolis that night, which the police told him to cancel, since they couldn't assure his safety. Nevertheless, he went and made one of his two greatest speeches. The other had been his "Ripple of Hope" address in Cape Town, South Africa on June 6, 1966, exactly two years before his death. Bobby pleaded with the crowd in Indianapolis not to give in to racial polarization, to hatred and bitterness. As many have noted, almost every major city in America went up in smoke that night, but Indianapolis did not.

Kennedy won Indiana and Nebraska, two primarily agricultural states outside the northeast. He also won every primary he entered except for Oregon. And he climaxed his triumphant crusade with his greatest victory in the California primary. As journalist Jack Newfield and others have pointed out, something exceptional happened in California. Chavez and Huerta got the word out about RFK all the way down to Los Angeles; and King's followers did not forget RFK's speeches in Cape Town and Indianapolis.



When the polls opened that morning, Kennedy's workers drove around East LA to check the turnout and were shocked to see Hispanics and African Americans lined up before the doors opened. For the first time in the city's history, the turnout on the poor east side surpassed the wealthy west side. Bobby had given the poor a reason to vote, which is why he beat Eugene McCarthy. A few moments after declaring his victory and saying, "On to Chicago, and let's win there," he was killed—the last of four major 1960s' assassinations. Matthews doesn't mention how they brought the end to a remarkable decade. Nor does he mention how his death caused the violent Chicago convention and how its influence led, among other reasons, to the victory of Richard Nixon, the anti-RFK candidate.

Why does Matthews continually ignore these points? If one thinks, as his employers at MSNBC do, that Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama are the liberal ideal, then what Bobby Kennedy represented in 1968 was radical: Can you imagine either of these politicians telling Brazilian citizens to storm the palace? Not even on *Saturday Night Live*.

**James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. His most recent book is *The JFK Assassination : The Evidence Today*.**

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## 50th Anniversary of May 1968, Paris: Memories of an Illusory Revolution

At the time it seemed that Paris had yet again become the center of a world revolution, but in time a quite different legacy has emerged, recalls Diana Johnstone fifty years later.

**By Diana Johnstone** *Special to Consortium News*  
**in Paris**



Nineteen Sixty-Eight began with the Têt offensive, when the Vietnamese national liberation struggle suddenly showed its strength as a military force, though it was eventually beaten back into guerrilla warfare. The images of burning villages and burning children were seared into the consciousness of millions of people around the world. In the United States, Martin Luther King, whose call for an end of the war clearly linked the anti-war cause to the battle for civil rights, was assassinated on April 4.

In France, reactions to the U.S. war in Vietnam, a former French colony, were viscerally linked to the war in Algeria, which was fresh in people's memories. For those who had supported Algerian independence from France, achieved only six years earlier, the Vietnamese people's struggle for independence was a natural follow-on.



If anything, the Vietnamese victory was even more clearly just and inevitable. On the other side were a smaller number of diehard colonialists who hated Charles de Gaulle for giving Algeria away and dismantling the French Empire. The youth group "Occident", rooted mainly in the law faculty in the rue d'Assas, organized commando groups to defend ill-defined "Western values" which they considered under threat.

One evening, to my great surprise, I turned out to be one of those "threats." As I arrived late to take part in an anti-war panel in Saint Germain en Laye, near Paris, I smiled at a small group of men standing at the entrance who proceeded to knock me flat and bleeding, leaving a few of my teeth loose. That was my informal introduction to "Occident". This sort of encounter heightened tensions, and leftist groups strengthened their *services d'ordre* in self-protection.

Such minor incidents concerning Vietnam helped set the mood for the street fights that inflamed the Latin Quarter in the early days of May 1968.

The revolt broke out on May 3 after police entered the sanctuary of the Sorbonne

and arrested student leaders protesting the shutdown of the university at suburban Nanterre. I don't think that at the time many people cared about the problem at Nanterre. But the sight of police occupying the Sorbonne aroused protests, and in the streets, police charged protesters.

Some ran for cover, but many fought back with surprising determination. After several days violent skirmishes grew between groups of students and baton-wielding security police, the Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (CRS), which was met with the slogan "CRS SS!"

### **A State of Siege**

Within a week the entire Latin Quarter was in a state of siege. May 10 was the "night of the barricades". I happened to be there, in the streets near the Pantheon, and was struck by what seemed to me a certain mimesis.

All night, students around the Pantheon calmly built barricades, passing the paving stones from hand to hand with the same gestures they had seen in the 16-millimeter films of Vietnamese peasant women rebuilding bombed dikes.

The next day, the streets were cluttered with debris from the police charge. The Latin Quarter was occupied by rows of armed CRS, and students who had been apolitical a few days before wandered in a new landscape, transformed into an oppressed people with an occupation army to overthrow. Was there some latent desire to be like the Vietnamese, who at the time were the object of widespread sympathy and admiration – even adoration?

In between my library research and my part-time work for a movie dubbing studio, I followed those events unroll as closely as I could. I was present at many of the key happenings, the major skirmishes in the Latin Quarter, the orations at the Odéon theatre, the night of the barricades, the big marches, the speech at the Sorbonne of the student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit on his triumphant return after being expelled to Germany. I rushed to buy every edition of the daily "Action." Yes, I was there.

But did I understand what it all meant? Hardly. Do I understand now? A little better, I think. But the French May '68 was too ambiguous and contradictory to be easily understood. I would even venture to say that nobody did, or could, fully understand its meaning because there were so many actors performing out of different motivations, often obscure even to themselves.

I recall overhearing a chic young woman in a shop in Saint Germain des Près remark to the clerk that she had to rush to finish her shopping in order to "get back to making the revolution."

Paris was nearly the last student population in the world to get into the spirit of the times. The revolt grew when French workers and labor unions joined the students. But such was the mystique of Paris, capital of revolution, that it was only when students in Milan or Berlin heard of the Paris events that they thought something truly momentous was happening. Many set out on pilgrimage for Paris heedless of transport strikes and gasoline shortages, to join the revolution in the Sorbonne.

However it may be interpreted, the massive French revolt of May 1968 quickly became the symbol of an era. The “events”, as they were called at the time, featuring an ephemeral revolution at the Sorbonne and the biggest general strike in French history, momentarily created the illusion of Paris as center of a worldwide revolution.

### The Walls That Spoke



The extreme ambiguity of the Paris revolt was expressed in the graffiti slogans that appeared on walls around the city as if by magic. The walls seemed to talk – and indeed that was one of the slogans: “Les murs ont la parole.” It seemed that the

walls themselves were announcing a new dispensation: “It is forbidden to forbid,” and in allusion to the paving stones being hurled at police, “Sous les pavés la plage” (under the paving stones the beach). Enjoyment without limits was the dominant message, down with authority of all kinds, down with work, “L’imagination prend le pouvoir” (imagination takes power), “Be realistic, demand the impossible!”

The myth of the spontaneous talking walls overlooked the fact that the most striking slogans were directly inspired by a group of radical libertarian theorists calling themselves the Situationists. Their best known exponents were Guy Debord, author of *La Société du Spectacle*, and Raoul Vaneigem, author of a

*"Traité de savoir vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations,"* which exhorted the young to total revolt against existing society.

Like other radicals of the period, Situationists considered genuine, non-existent socialism (as opposed to the Soviet variety of "real existing" but false socialism) to be the ultimate goal of social revolution. But their immediate target was "consumer society" and what Debord called "the spectacle society."

In May '68, they had the situation of their dreams. Their triumph was fleeting and deeply ironic. The social liberation that ensued paved the way to a far greater alienation in terms of consumerism and commercial spectacle than ever. May '68 itself was exactly the opposite of what it seemed at the time.

The hedonistic spirit or "it is forbidden to forbid" was represented by the student rebel who came to personify May '68, Cohn-Bendit. A news photograph showing him staring impertinently into the face of a helmeted police officer at short range was a perfect image of cheeky defiance of skittish authority. For the media, it was love at first sight, and a love that lasted.

Cohn-Bendit was nicknamed by the media "Dany the Red". While it may have applied to his hair color, it did not fit his politics, insofar as "red" denotes communist or socialist. While loosely attached to the Anarchist Federation, Cohn-Bendit was much less concerned with liberating the working class from the chains of labor than with freeing the individual from social restraints on personal liberty.

Born in France of German Jewish refugee parents, Daniel chose to retain German citizenship in order to avoid military conscription. Studying sociology at the university of Nanterre, he delighted his fellow students with his colossal nerve. Dany had attitude. He excelled at defying authority. This talent had been fostered in the ultra-progressive Oldenwald boarding school he had attended in Heppenheim, Germany, whose slogan was "Become What You Are." Its anti-authoritarianism pedagogy had taken on a fresh luster in the 1960s as German authoritarianism came to be blamed for the rise of Hitler, notably by the Frankfurt School philosophers.

In parallel to the political agitation going on against the United States war in Vietnam, Cohn-Bendit introduced an agitation against the authority of the university itself in regard to personal matters, challenging the ban on allowing male students to visit the rooms of girls in student dormitories. It was this incongruous mix of issues that exploded on May 3, 1968.

## Workers Go For Wages



Alain Krivine's *Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire* (JCR) was perhaps the most conspicuous leftist organization, which played a key role by providing the *service d'ordre* that protected the student demonstrators from right-wing provocateurs while preventing clashes with police from going too far. The chief of Paris Police at the time, Maurice Grimaud, later credited himself and Alain Krivine for keeping the war dance within certain bounds.

The leftists wanted to rouse the workers to make the Revolution. But when the workers massively joined the movement by going on strike in the greatest general strike in French history, the Communist-led CGT (General Confederation of Labor) succeeded in leading the strike toward negotiations and wage increases.

For the ultra-lefts, that amounted to a cowardly betrayal by the union leadership. For several years, the most ardent militants, especially the Maoists, tried to relight the flame of revolt by entering factories as ordinary workers.

While scorning the student revolt as *petit bourgeois*, the Maoists quickly adapted to the mood of revolt, shifting the focus of their *Comités de base* from Vietnam to French society. During the May events, the *Comités de Base* applied the Maoist theory of creating liberated territories in the periphery, making the revolution in cultural workplaces like schools and libraries. Employees everywhere were going on strike, reorganizing their own work, which often needed it.

Whatever its ideological significance, this tendency of over-managed people to take control of their work lives struck me at the time as the most positive aspect of the May events. A similar aspect was a seemingly spontaneous movement by artists to “serve the people” anonymously.

In the Ecole des Beaux Arts, students produced the posters that symbolized May '68 even more than the Situationist graffiti. A close friend of mine, who before and after the revolutionary mood of the period strove to make a name for himself as an artist, was overwhelmed and for a while converted by the movement to produce art anonymously, for the pure pleasure of society, without thought of gain or glory.

While the Maoists pursued their cultural revolution and the Trotskyists tried to channel the street battles, political commentators and sociologists flocked to the scene to explain to the rebels what they were rebelling about. It was perhaps all the easier for French students to act out revolution in that they could situate themselves in a long national tradition running from the great revolution of 1789 through 1830 and 1848 to the Paris Commune of 1871. “The Student Commune” was the title of philosopher Edgar Morin’s glowing essay opening the most widely noted of the shelf-load of books that appeared in shops more quickly than the streets could be repaved: *La Brèche*.

### **Revolt on the Periphery**

# LA BEAUTÉ



# EST DANS LA RUE

While the (CGT) worked to get the workers back on the job before they could be further contaminated, the massive strikes rekindled young intellectuals' interest in their own working class as a potential "revolutionary subject". Seen from the vantage point of publisher François Maspéro's crowded bookstore, La Joie de Lire, in the rue Saint Séverin, it was clear before May that the contemporary front lines of the world revolution were in the imperialist periphery, in Vietnam or Latin America, and certainly not in France.

But even as it attracted the attention of the world, the May movement looked inward, turning its back on the Third World in its effort to unfold revolution according to national patterns. Thus began the loss of interest in the Third World that soon ruined Maspéro. (He was targeted for "revolutionary" anarchist shop-lifting, in order to punish him for "exploiting" the subjects he published books about, unlike all those other publishers only interested in making money).

It is significant that La Joie de Lire was sold to Nouvelles Frontières, a budget travel agency. The sixties trips to Algeria, Cuba, China and even California in search of revolutionary models gave way to vacations in warm climates, period.

The philosopher Edgar Morin described May '68 as an "osmosis" occurring between the "existential libertarian exigency" of some and the "planetary politicization" of the others.

The world seemed to be coming together politically when it was in fact falling



apart.

The *gauchistes* were momentarily united by hostility to the French Communist Party. The leadership of the PCF was clearly convinced that revolution in France was a dangerous fantasy in a NATO member state and discretely worked with de Gaulle's prime minister Georges Pompidou to restore normal order.

The hatred of French intellectuals for the French Communist Party has been an obsession overflowing political categories. Hatred for the PCF came from right, left, and center. A specialist in the matter, Cornelius Castoriadis, writing under the name of Jean-Marc Coudray in *La Breche*, explained why: the PCF is "neither reformist nor revolutionary".

"Prisoner of its past, the Stalinist bureaucratic apparatus is incapable, in France as almost everywhere, of turning the corner that would allow it in theory to play a new role. Not, certainly, a revolutionary role, but the role of the great modern reformist bureaucracy needed for the functioning of French capitalism, which has been recommended to it for years by volunteer advisors, knowledgeable sociologists, and subtle technicians", Castoriadis wrote.

#### **'A New Period in Universal History?'**

In 1968, both Maoist revolutionaries and budding technocrats saw the youth revolt as a blessed historic opportunity to snatch the working class from the clutches of the PCF. The PCF needed to be destroyed in order "to make the revolution" – or conversely to modernize French capitalism.

"Whatever comes next," declared Castoriadis, "May '68 has opened a new period in universal history."



This extravagant appraisal of the significance of May '68 was by no means unusual. The exaltation of May's spontaneity by established intellectuals was a way of celebrating the relegation of the PCF and its bureaucracy to the ashcan of history.

Castoriadis perceived an explosion of creativity, "brilliant, effective and poetic slogans surged from the anonymous crowd." Teachers were astonished to discover that they knew nothing and their students knew everything. "In a few days, twenty-year olds achieved political understanding and wisdom honest revolutionaries haven't yet reached after thirty years of militant activity," he wrote.

Did this stupefying miracle really take place? It was hailed in any case: for, if innocent youth could rise from its tabula rasa and make the revolution, there was obviously no need for a structured organization like the Communist Party.

There was immense joy among intellectuals at discovering a new revolutionary subject close to themselves. Castoriadis announced that in modern societies youth is a *category* more important than the working class, which has become a dead weight on revolution.

But could spontaneous youth actually make the revolution? Even as he was extolling the glorious "explosion", Castoriadis pointed to its limits. "If the revolution is nothing *but* an explosion of a few days or weeks, the established order (know it or not, like it or not) can accommodate itself very well. Even more, contrary to its belief, it has a profound need for it. Historically it is the revolution that permits the world of reaction to survive by transforming itself, by adapting," he observed. The outcome could be "new forms of oppression better adapted to today's conditions."

Indeed, transformation and adaptation ensured that the real economic powers running the world were not seriously disturbed by all this turmoil.

All of this, I readily admit, went right past me at the time. The May events did seem to suggest that sudden, unforeseen changes were possible. That in itself was exhilarating. I watched in some wonderment as the French seemingly decided to make "the revolution". It was in their tradition, not in mine.

At the same time, I was not happy with May '68 because the Vietnamese and their struggle were forgotten. Ironically, one reason the French government clamped down so quickly on student activists may have been to prove Paris' fitness as a neutral and orderly capital for the talks that were opening there between the Americans and the Vietnamese. Nobody paid much attention to those talks, and the war raged on, but in Paris, it was overshadowed by the illusion of an imminent

revolution at home.

## The Legacy of May '68

**Show Solidarity with the French Revolution - 1968!!**

Up Against the Wall - DeGaulle!! Up Against the Wall - DeGaulle!! Up Against the Wall



Millions of French workers, peasants and students have told the French bankers and billionaire corporations that the country they've worked and sweated to build over many generations by rights belongs to them - NOT to the small clique of millionaire parasites who claim to "own" it. The massive struggle was sparked by students seizing their universities, objecting to almost feudal conditions there. It gained momentum as the French masses, both the workers and the lower middle class who lived under steadily worsening conditions during the DeGaulle regime, struck and seized the factories where they produced the wealth of society.

We want to show our solidarity with the 1968 French Revolution against the French Imperialist Ruling Class in order to enable us to further explain and expose the US Imperialist Ruling Class which is today sending our brothers to die for their profits in Vietnam. And bring closer the day of the American Revolution against that small clique of millionaires who militarize our campuses and usurp the wealth of our society and seek to monopolize it for their own ends.

**DEMONSTRATION: Sat. June 1, 12 noon at the**  
**French Consulate** 934 Fifth Ave. - 75th St.

Sponsored by:

**COALITION FOR AN ANTI-IMPERIALIST MOVEMENT**  
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Youth Against War and Fascism  
Veterans and Reservists to End the War in Vietnam  
U.S. Committee to Aid the NLF  
Seward Pk HS P&F Coalition  
Free School SDS

Pro-Independence Movement of Puerto Rico (MIP)  
Blacks Against Negative Dying  
City Univ Anti-Imperialist League  
Stuyvesant HS Committee to End the war in Vietnam

**Support the French Workers and Students**

Co-sponsored by: COLUMBIA STUDENT STRIKE COORDINATING COMMITTEE

DeGaulle!! Up Against the Wall - DeGaulle!! Up Against the Wall

Politically, the May '68 revolution was rapidly defeated at the polls. The majority of the population turned against

the disorder, as is usual in similar cases, especially when no one could see where it was heading. In a snap election in June 1968, the Gaullists won an increased majority, and the French Communist Party won 20% of the vote compared to the 3.9% of votes that went to the only party openly representing the May movement, the PSU (*Parti Socialiste Unifié*).

Nevertheless, both De Gaulle and the Communists were the historic losers. Whatever else it didn't do, the May '68 student generation succeeded in discrediting and undermining existing authority, notably the political authority of De Gaulle and the PCF, and indeed authority itself. The illusion was widespread that spontaneity would undermine the ruling class and overcome consumerism and the "spectacle society."

On the contrary, the result has been the triumph of the "spectacle society", the reign of images and financial power - the opposite of what May '68 seemed to promise at the time.

The "sexual liberation" aspect of May '68 has been exaggerated, as the French were not a puritan people to start with, just discrete. But it helped accelerate an evolution away from the legal imposition of Catholic rigidity, leading to legalization of abortion in 1975.

Many prominent '68 revolutionaries went on to highly successful careers, especially in communications, evolving into defenders of the liberal

Establishment and advocates of humanitarian wars. Cohn-Bendit's mass media stardom enabled him to convert European Green parties from principled pacifism into support for NATO's attack on Yugoslavia. For one reason or another, many young people in France today regard May '68 as the mistaken illusions of their parents.

Since both De Gaulle and the French Communist Party were seen as enemies by the United States, a *cui bono* suspicion exists (especially among the losers) that May '68 must have been the result of CIA manipulation. Certainly, the CIA was active against both those forces of resistance to American hegemony and would no doubt have loved to engineer May '68. It may have tried to nudge things a bit here and there. But engineering such events is a feat beyond the power of even the most ambitious intelligence agency. May '68 was indeed genuine – but genuinely what?

**Diana Johnstone is a political writer, focusing primarily on European politics and Western foreign policy. She received a Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota and was active in the movement against the Vietnam War. Johnstone was European editor of the U.S. weekly *In These Times* from 1979 to 1990, and continues to be a correspondent for the publication. She was press officer of the Green group in the European Parliament from 1990 to 1996. Her books include *Queen of Chaos: The Misadventures of Hillary Clinton*, CounterPunch Books (2016) and *Fools' Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions*, Pluto Press (2002).**

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## The Washington Post's 'Breakthrough' on the MLK Murder

**Updated:** The Washington Post broke with recent corporate media practice by daring to raise questions about who killed Martin Luther King Jr., as William F. Pepper and Andrew Kreig explain. (Updated with more on NPR's coverage.)

By William F. Pepper and Andrew Kreig



For the fiftieth anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s murder, *The Washington Post* last week overcame its tainted history of

softball coverage and published a hard-hitting account quoting the King family's disbelief in the guilt of convicted killer James Earl Ray.

The bold, top-of-the-front-page treatment on April 2 of reporter Tom Jackman's in-depth piece –“The Past Rediscovered: Who killed Martin Luther King Jr.?” – represents a major turning point in the treatment of the case for the past five decades by mainstream media. Print, broadcast and all too many film makers and academics have consistently soft-pedaled ballistic, eye-witness and other evidence that undermines the official story of King's death.

This time, the *Post* and Jackman, an experienced reporter, undertook bold but long overdue initiative. One can only hope that it leads to similar coverage – rigorous and fair – for other history-changing events, including current ones that are inherently secret.

### **The Post's MLK Success Formula**

Jackman's method was relatively simple. Reporters use it routinely on other stories that are not so politically sensitive as King's death. In this instance, the reporter quoted family members and other experts and provided balance with other perspectives.

Thus, Jackman wrote near the top of his long column:

“In the five decades since Martin Luther King Jr. was shot dead by an assassin at age 39, his children have worked tirelessly to preserve his legacy, sometimes with sharply different views on how best to do that. But they are unanimous on one key point: James Earl Ray did not kill Martin Luther King.

“For the King family and others in the civil rights movement, the FBI's obsession with King in the years leading up to his slaying in Memphis on April 4, 1968 – pervasive surveillance, a malicious disinformation campaign and open denunciations by FBI director J. Edgar Hoover – laid the groundwork for their belief that he was the target of a plot.”

That wasn't so hard, was it?

*Memphis Commercial Appeal* investigative reporter Marc Perrusquia appears to be a kindred spirit to Jackman. Based on extensive reporting for his newspaper, Perrusquia documented a new book released last month *A Spy In Canaan: How the FBI Used A Famous Photographer To Infiltrate the Civil Rights Movement*. This is the story of Ernest Withers, who took iconic photos of King and other civil rights leaders during the 1950s and 1960s. The implications are disturbing, given the smear campaign against King especially before his death.

## Tone Deaf NPR Falls Flat

Sadly, straightforward reporting can be uncommon in these kinds of sensitive cases, particularly if a news outlet decides to prioritize its previous reporting, or the goodwill of its law enforcement sources.

Thus, typical of MLK death anniversary coverage was the April 3 report on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* show by NPR's Justice Correspondent Carrie Johnson, previously a *Washington Post* reporter for a decade ending in 2010 covering justice issues. As part of a series "1968: How We Got Here," her NPR segment's title was "Conspiracy Theories About MLK's Death Continue, But Investigators Say Case Is Closed."

That title using "Conspiracy Theories" is a smear. It's used by reporters and academics to discredit alternative researchers ever since the CIA secretly distributed to its operatives in April 1967 the now-declassified "CIA Dispatch 1035-960." The 53-page CIA memo urged agency personnel to persuade their establishment contacts to use the term "conspiracy theorist" to undermine critics of the 1964 Warren Report on the JFK assassination, thereby helping to discredit New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison's grand jury investigation of a fatal plot alleged to include CIA personnel scheming against the president.

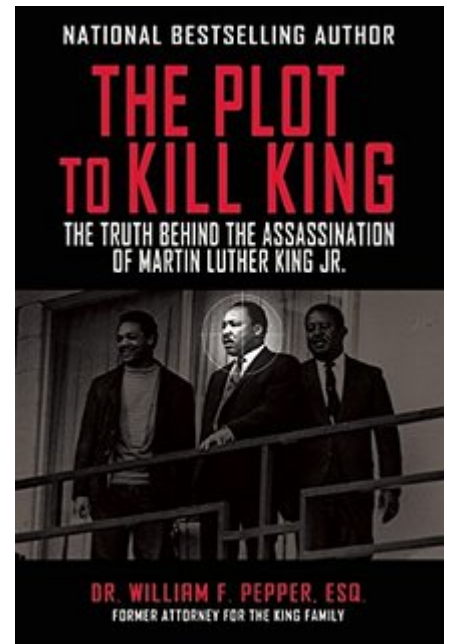
Even without knowing that history, many career-minded reporters and their news managers these days instinctively use the term to demonstrate that they are team-players too sophisticated to be taken in by the alternative media.

In this instance, the NPR team on the show hosted by Mary Louise Kelly quoted one of this article's co-authors, William Pepper, but in ways that implicitly discredit his views.

One way that the NPR approach trivialized Pepper's experience was by focusing heavily on his involvement with a mock trial of the defendant Ray in 1993 and not five decades of relevant experience, especially his research findings in the late 1990s.

A more neutral and informative perspective for readers might have been to note that Pepper had worked in the 1960s with King in expanding the civil rights leaders' reform agenda. Later, the King family asked Pepper to reinvestigate the murder. Pepper's street reporting among witnesses and suspects in the Deep South led to evidence that won the King family a civil jury verdict in 1999 that discredited the official story, and then to three Pepper books about the evidence, most recently "The Plot To Kill King" published in 2016.

Instead, the NPR reporter and her team placed more credence, as evident by the biased headline for the segment, on former government investigators who had worked on the case years if not decades before the 1999 civil trial.



Johnson, when contacted for comment for this column, responded that reporters do not write headlines for stories and that her on-air account was expanded in a written blog post on April 4 that addressed some of the matters raised here. But she failed to respond either then or later to four specific questions we sent her about her approach.

Why didn't you note, as Jackman did, that the King family doubts the official verdict and asked Pepper to reinvestigate?

Why didn't you mention that they won an actual jury verdict in 1999 (in contrast to a 1993 TV poll based on six years of less evidence)?

Why use the headline and intro "conspiracy theories" when that was (we now know from declassified CIA records) a smear term that the CIA popularized in the press and academia in the 1960s to discredit researchers into the JFK assassination?

Are you aware that Robert Blakey [whom NPR quoted] replaced the original House Select Committee on Assassination top counsels, Richard Sprague and Robert Tanenbaum after they resigned in protest because they believed they did not have freedom to investigate murder leads?

The NPR report illustrated a longstanding pattern by news reporters of deferring to high officials and former officials. The problem has hurt reporting on many other civic issues, including the nation's two other most prominent 1960s assassinations.

**MLK as a 'Black Life That Mattered'**

Authorities have long pinned all blame for King's murder on the ill-educated petty thief James Earl Ray, who was supposedly motivated by racism. The evidence Pepper uncovered shows that Ray's movements were manipulated by a handler so that he would be at the scene when a professional team undertook the hit.

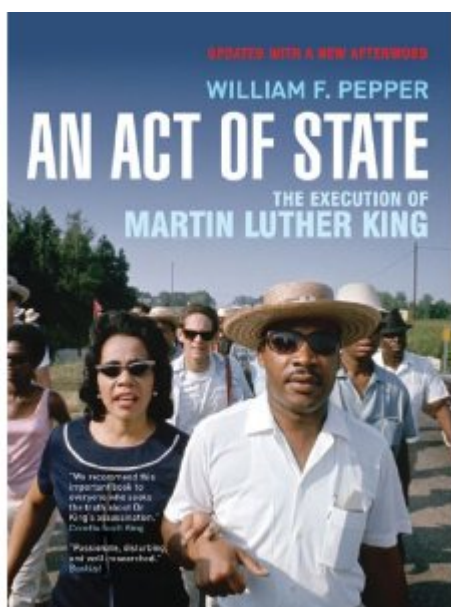
Not coincidentally, the misleading story about Ray carries a number of false historical implications.

For one, a theory of purely racially motivated killing unrealistically confines the murder and King's focus to the Jim Crow-era of Deep South segregation and related civil rights abuse. That makes today's younger audiences think of King and his message as largely out of date.

In fact, King's legacy remains highly relevant to today. During the last years of his life, he focused on economic justice, anti-war activity and coalition building. By 1968, these goals were far more threatening to the power structure than civil rights.

Rather than repeat some of the many apt tributes to King's legacy that honored his memory last week, let's focus on a colossal irony:

King's was a black life that truly "mattered." And it mattered in significant part because the "Poor People's Campaign" that he envisioned could unite whites and others in a mass movement far beyond the scope of the largely black-led civil rights marches in the Deep South that included some white supporters.



And yet many of those most focused currently on injustice issues have scant suspicion that the circumstances of the great prophet's death, like that of the two Kennedys, are in dispute. But the facts are relatively knowable and understandable to those who disregard the "conspiracy" smear and dare to look at the scientific, witness and other evidence.

The pioneering scholar Peter Dale Scott developed, beginning in the 1970s, the alternative terms "Deep Politics" and "Deep State" to replace the biased smear term "conspiracy theory." Scott popularized the term in a series of books that



continue to the present.

No reasonable person would argue, of course, that every anti-government theory has merit. Good evidence exists. So does bad evidence, including misinformation, disinformation, and whacko nonsense that floats around partisan circles.

### **Democracy in Danger**

King's death provides lasting lessons for problems that we face now.

One difficulty is how to understand vital justice-related issue, many of which are inherently secret until final stages of the judicial process (and some of which remain secret even afterward).

That means we in the public must rely on institutions, dishonest, or otherwise flawed. But we can know from the study of historical materials whether these institutions are honestly addressing such momentous issues as the King murder. Those insights can provide a Rosetta Stone for current mysteries.

That's why Tom Jackman's treatment for the Post of the King case provides a basis for hope. Most in the mainstream media have refused to cover the truth about the murder.

With luck and continuing public scrutiny, this Washington Post initiative will hopefully extend to others in the mainstream media.

*This article was originally published on [Op-Ed News](#).*

**Dr. William F. Pepper is a human rights lawyer most known for his defense of James Earl Ray in the trial for the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. and of Sirhan Sirhan in the trial for the murder of Senator Robert F. Kennedy. Pepper is the author of "The Plot To Kill King" (Skyhorse Publishing, 2016), the final volume of a trilogy.**

**Andrew Kreig is a Washington, DC-based investigative reporter, non-profit executive, attorney and author. He edits the non-partisan [Justice Integrity Project](#), which has published separate "Readers Guides" to the MLK, RFK and JFK assassinations. He and his co-author will speak at the "Kennedys & King" conference from May 3-4 organized by the Wecht Institute on Forensic Science and Law at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh (Details: [www.duq.edu/rfkmlk](http://www.duq.edu/rfkmlk)).**

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# King's Legacy Betrayed

The legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., who was assassinated 50 years ago today, has been cynically exploited by corporate and political leaders who care more for the needs of their rich donors than black constituents, comments Margaret Kimberley.

By **Margaret Kimberley** *Special to Consortium News*



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was the preeminent leader of the black liberation movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Millions of people engaged in the struggle against America's shameful apartheid system but King was the most influential. His actions are remembered, his words are quoted by activists, politicians, and pundits. His birthday is a national holiday. Only the worst and most retrograde racists dare to speak ill of King.

But the lionizing is mostly a sham. In fact there are very few people who remember the importance of what King said, what he did or why and how they should replicate his work. His legacy has been subverted and is now understood only by the most conscious students of history.

Nothing illustrated this state of affairs more clearly than the use of King's words in a Ram truck commercial broadcast during the 2018 Super Bowl football championship. Viewers were told that Ram trucks are "built to serve."

The voice over is provided by King himself speaking exactly 50 years earlier, on February 4, 1968. The Drum Major Instinct sermon was a call to reject the ego driven desire for attention in favor of working for more altruistic pursuits. "If you want to say that I was a drum major say that I was a drum major for justice."

The commercial's creators deliberately ignored the portion of the sermon in which King derided the influence of advertising. He even mentioned vehicle advertising specifically. He warned that "gentleman of massive verbal persuasion" can influence people to act against their own interests. "In order to make your neighbors envious you must drive this type of car."

## **A Nation Going Backwards**

Corporate interests are not alone in pretending to honor King while actually attacking him. King's legacy is severely diminished because it has been used by cynical individuals for corrupt purposes. As we commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary

of his assassination we see a nation that has moved backwards on nearly every front. Legalized discrimination was eliminated but powerful forces undermined progress and America in 2018 is devoid of the change that King fought to make real.

Much of the blame lies at the feet of the Democratic Party, who have an undeserved reputation for enacting progressive policies. In reality, Democrats actively targeted black people for joblessness, poverty, imprisonment and disenfranchisement. Democrats became the party of corporate interests and aligned themselves with every neoliberal initiative. They forsook the union movement, working hand in hand with finance capitalists to take living wage jobs out of the country. Bill Clinton oversaw the end of public assistance as a right, destroying what Franklin Roosevelt enacted 60 years earlier. He built on the work of Ronald Reagan and massively increased the prison population.

Barack Obama offered a “grand bargain” of austerity to Republicans and continued the George W. Bush policy of tax cuts for the wealthiest. The banks which created the 2008 financial collapse were rewarded with huge bailouts of public funds. Black people ended up losing the small bit of wealth they held before the crash and now lead only in the negative measurements of quality of life.

Democrats destroy public education through charter schools and refuse to raise the minimum wage even when they control Congress and have the power to act. They were never the party of peace and they are now most outspoken in encouraging an anti-Russian resumption of the Cold War and supporting imperialist interventions.

After the legislative victories of the 1960s black Americans were ignored, subjugated or co-opted. It is true that there are thousands of black elected officials, when in King’s day there were hardly any. But this political class is a traitorous one and works for its own benefit, its patrons in corporate America and the civil rights organizations that are subsidiaries of the Democratic Party. The black political class went along with every sordid deal that Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama pursued. Their positions are secure but the rest of black America is anything but.

### **Prison Population Explodes**

A glaring example is the enormous increase in incarceration rates. When Martin Luther King was alive there were only 300,000 incarcerated Americans. There are now more than 2 million. The exponential increase is not coincidental. Mass incarceration was a direct reaction to the freedom movement. Segregation put black people under physical control and the system devised new ways to secure the same result when it ended.

Black men became the face of drug dealing, or deadbeat fatherhood or anything else that the press and politicians told white Americans to fear and hate. The ripple effect is terrible and damages family life, the ability to earn a living and even to vote. In 48 states felons either lose the franchise permanently or are prevented from voting until all supervision is lifted. In Florida alone 1.5 million people cannot vote because of past convictions. A recent court case declared this rule unconstitutional and if a November 2018 ballot measure passes they may have their voting rights restored. That will be a happy result but there are 5 million more Americans, disproportionately black, who elsewhere lose the ability to vote due to criminal convictions.

Until incarceration becomes a mass movement, political issue, the Voting Rights Act amounts to very little. Actually the act already amounts to little because the Supreme Court nullified its most important provisions requiring southern states to seek permission before changing voting rules. The Democrats are less concerned with getting out the vote than in making their wealthy patrons happy and protecting the Senate majority and federal judiciary they claim is so important.

Of course the Democrats are in a bind. They don't want to get out the vote because that would mean fighting for the issues that the masses need addressed. The wishes of wealthy, corporate America don't dovetail with those of working people. Fat cat funders don't want an increased minimum wage. Getting out the vote would mean biting the hand that feeds. So the people be damned.

### **King's Challenge to Militarism Defied**

King began his fight for the particular needs of black people in a uniquely oppressive system. As years went by he also opposed the economic system itself and the war in Vietnam. In 2017 the Democrats, including most Congressional Black Caucus members, went along with Donald Trump's request for a 10% increase of an already huge military budget. They will go through the pretense of complaining when that increase inevitably restricts federal spending for social needs, but they are connivers who hope we miss their charade.

The liberation movement succeeded against great odds. Most black people then as now lived in the southern states and could not vote. Yet their coordinated mass action won them the franchise anyway. That lesson must not be forgotten as the juggernaut of neoliberal plots threatens everyone.

Every major American city is undergoing an onslaught of gentrification which displaces millions of black people at the whim of finance capital. The politicians who will speak in praise of King today do nothing to stop them. In fact they depend upon their largesse to stay in office.

They do nothing to stop the continued terror of billionaire rule. Instead they assist the richest in grabbing more and more. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos this year became the richest person on the planet. His plans for a new Amazon HQ could be funded entirely by his corporation. Instead cities across the country scramble to give away property and tax dollars to help fund the race to the bottom for workers.

### **Hollow Admiration**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. should be remembered for his tremendous courage in speaking out against the power of money and the military industrial complex. The poseurs who go along to get along should be silent today. The past 50 years have been so tragic because the hard won victories were deliberately destroyed.

King inspired the people to fight for their needs. He did so when the New York Times and Washington Post vilified him. He spoke against the Vietnam war when his compatriots feared angering Lyndon Johnson. The mass action movement that he led forced LBJ to act when he didn't want to. If politicians act on behalf of the people it is never because they have the right motives.

That is what we must remember about King. The admiration is hollow unless we do as he and millions of others did and commit ourselves to challenging the system. That will mean openly and loudly denouncing the people committed to destroying what they worked and died to achieve. The worst traitors are the most prominent and well respected. But the respect is undeserved and quite dangerous. The night before he was killed King spoke of getting to the promised land. That won't happen until the scoundrels are named and opposed. Honoring King's legacy demands that we do just that.

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# The King Assassination Case and the Mueller Probe

Fifty years after the King assassination, Americans still have a hazy view of the House Select Committee on Assassinations' findings, an ambiguous understanding that may end up characterizing American views on Robert Mueller's probe as well, Bob Katz explains.

By Bob Katz

What is our official conclusion about the Martin Luther King assassination? Or rather, after all this time, is there an "official" conclusion? The answer to that goes beyond mere historical curiosity. For the murky ambiguities that define this case, coupled with an evident fondness among Americans for simplified, easy-reader versions of wrenching events, could well foreshadow the ultimate outcome of another critical probe 50 years later – Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into alleged collusion between Donald Trump and the Russian government to sway the outcome of Election 2016.

When it comes to the April 4, 1968 assassination of Dr. King, James Earl Ray is the name that pops up first in the minds of most Americans, as well as in Google searches and history textbooks. An oft-convicted thief, Ray managed to elude a massive international manhunt for two months before being captured in London while trying to board a plane to Brussels. Questions concerning his finances, travels, and possible collusion with others have always surrounded the case, although Ray's culpability is widely assumed.

The House Select Committee on Assassinations, the most comprehensive formal investigation into King's murder, and the only one with subpoena power, concluded in 1979 that, "there is a likelihood that James Earl Ray assassinated Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a result of a conspiracy."

Ray never stood trial. Soon after his arrest he pled guilty. Three days later, he attempted to withdraw the plea, a quest that consumed much of the rest of his life. The HSCA report, therefore, stands as the single most authoritative interpretation of the case, and the closest thing we have to a definitive last word. Yet relatively few Americans have heard of the HSCA or, if they have, know much at all about its findings.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of King's assassination, it's worth asking what's behind this erasure, this gradual airbrushing of the HSCA findings from the historical record? It could happen again, after all, the virtual deletion from public memory of an official investigation into a crucial national

mystery. (Just saying.)

### **House Select Committee on Assassinations**

The HSCA spent two years in the late 1970s investigating the King assassination as well as that of President Kennedy. Funded by Congress and headed by Robert Blakey, a Notre Dame law professor and former Justice Department official with an expertise in organized crime prosecutions, the HSCA had its own professional staff and unprecedented access to police and intelligence agency files.

On August 16, 1978, James Earl Ray was brought to the Rayburn Office Building on Capitol Hill to testify. His appearance, some ten years after the murder that traumatized the country and snuffed out one of America's leading voices for peace and justice, was intensely anticipated.

Every major news outlet, print and electronic, was present. Rev. Jesse Jackson, who had been at King's side on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel that fateful spring evening, took what probably counted as a box seat, behind Ray, as close as he could get. I too was there, in the gallery, working with a public interest group that monitored the hearings.

Flanked by seven U.S. Marshalls, Ray entered the hearing room to stone silence as spectators and media were commanded to remain seated and stationary. He calmly raised his right hand to take the oath, this unassuming figure already a peer of John Wilkes Booth and Lee Harvey Oswald in the pantheon of American villains. Seeing Ray in person was like seeing a ghost.

But this ghost was stripped of all standard trappings of creepiness. There was no eerie musical soundtrack accompanying his entrance. He wore a striped tie with a blue-green checkered sport coat that might have made a positive impression on a Missouri parole board in the 1950s. His dark hair was combed in a wave and tapered above the ears to reveal graying sideburns. With darting eyes and a tight-lipped grimace, he appeared just handsome enough to have landed an audition for the role of a petty burglar in a "Law & Order" episode.

Peppered with questions from the committee chair, Louis Stokes of Ohio, Ray nervously gave answers with varying degrees of forthrightness concerning his racial animus (he professed none and investigators also found little evidence of this); his finances while on the run (smuggling and odd jobs were his explanation – the HSCA believed Ray and one of his brothers robbed an Alton, IL bank of \$27,000 in July, 1967); and accomplices (Ray insisted that a blond Latino named "Raoul" directed much of his activity, including the purchase of a rifle and a road trip that brought him to Memphis on April 3 – investigators believed Ray's brothers John and Jerry, both petty criminals, assisted him).

It was, alas, no ghost story. There was no “aha!” moment of reckoning, no Hollywood ending.

### **A Disappointingly Obscure Scoundrel**

Regarding its investigation of a conspiracy, the HSCA explicitly implicated a St. Louis lawyer named John Sutherland who'd been active in such segregationist groups as the St. Louis Citizens Council, the Southern States Industrial Council, and the American Independent Party of George Wallace. Within these networks, Sutherland was reported to have circulated a “serious” offer to have King killed, coupled with the promise of a \$50,000 reward.

Sutherland, who died in 1970 and was never interrogated, proved a disappointingly obscure scoundrel for story-telling purposes. And the HSCA, commendably circumspect, employed language that was hardly meant to excite headlines:

“James Earl Ray may simply have been aware of the offer and acted with a general expectation of payment after the assassination; or he may have acted, not only with an awareness of the offer, but also after reaching a specific agreement, either directly or through one or both brothers, with ... Sutherland. The legal consequences of the alternative possibilities are, of course, different. Without a specific agreement with the Sutherland group, the conspiracy that eventuated in Dr. King's death would extend only to Ray and his brother(s); with a specific agreement, the conspiracy would also encompass Sutherland and his group.”

The upshot: no riveting narrative arc, no snappy logline. The HSCA findings have thus been consigned to history's dustbin, invisible to all but scholars and buffs, doomed by poor ratings. It was a classic show biz failure, a failure to recognize that its attention-deficit audience – we the people – prefers explanations that are neatly wrapped and sound-bite succinct.

Obviously the HSCA was handicapped by strict adherence to the known facts, which turned out to be convoluted and puzzling. No scriptwriter with blockbuster dreams would ever want to be so confined. “Inspired by a true story,” whatever that means, is where the real action is.

Which brings us to the Mueller probe. It may yet yield high-profile trials for dastardly offenses, and wouldn't that be nice. Absent an A-list conviction, the Mueller investigation seems susceptible to the same factors that effectively sidelined the King findings. Too many confounding footnotes, too many loose threads, and an assortment of two-bit bad guys standing in, but for who?

All available box office evidence suggests that Americans crave political dramas that are sharply plotted, easy to follow and seamlessly resolved. The ambiguous



kind? Not so much. The truth, in the long run, may not be an ideal vehicle for maximizing audience share.

If in the end Mueller demonstrates only that vile crimes were perpetrated with craven or treasonous intent by despicable actors plausibly though not provably affiliated with the White House, what will be the popular understanding of the Trump-Russia-election saga ten years, twenty years from now? Especially when a far less complicated account – NO COLLUSION! – gets blasted from the loudest megaphone known to humankind.

**Bob Katz was involved in monitoring the HSCA investigation and was present for James Earl Ray's testimony. He is the author of several books and his writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, as well as *Consortium News*. His most recent book is *The Whistleblower: Rooting for the Ref in the High-Stakes World of College Basketball* (see [BobKatz.info](http://BobKatz.info) )**

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## MLK's Warning of America's Spiritual Death

**From the Archive:** A half century ago, The New York Times accused Martin Luther King Jr. of "slander" for decrying the Vietnam War and The Washington Post detected "unsupported fantasies" in his speech, recalled more favorably by Gary G. Kohls.

By Gary G. Kohls (Originally published on Jan. 19, 2014; slightly edited for time element)

Martin Luther King Jr.'s Riverside Church speech was titled "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence." It was delivered exactly one year before his April 4, 1968 assassination in Memphis. In the speech, King 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."

The people who heard that speech recognized it as one of the most powerful speeches ever given articulating the immorality of the Vietnam War and its destructive impact on social progress in the United States. In explaining his decision to follow his conscience and speak out against U.S. militarism, King said:

"I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw

men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such.”

But King went farther, diagnosing the broader disease of militarism and violence that was endangering the soul of the United States. King said, “I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today – my own government.”

### **Poisoning America’s Soul**

King knew very well that the disease of violence was killing off more than social progress in America. Violence was sickening the nation’s soul as well. He added, “If America’s soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read ‘Vietnam’.” King urged his fellow citizens to take up the causes of the world’s oppressed, rather than taking the side of the oppressors. He said:

“I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a ‘thing-oriented’ society to a ‘person-oriented’ society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

“We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. We still have a choice today; nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation. We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace and justice throughout the developing world a world that borders on our doors.

“If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality and strength without sight.”

King pointed to an alternate path into the future: “Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter but beautiful struggle for a new world. This is the calling of the sons of God, and our brothers wait eagerly for our response. Shall we say the odds are too great? Shall we tell them the struggle is too hard?”

### **Signing His Own Death Warrant**

By denouncing so forcefully the war crimes that the U.S. military was committing daily in the killing fields of Vietnam, some of King's followers understood that he had just signed his own death warrant. But King, being a person of conscience, was compelled to express his deep sense of moral outrage over the horrific maiming, suffering and dying of millions of innocent Vietnamese civilians in that unjust war that afflicted mostly unarmed women and children and that was going to leave behind lethal poisons in the soil, water and unborn babies that would last for generations.

He knew that non-combatants are always the major victims of modern warfare, especially wars that indiscriminately used highly lethal weapons that rained down from the air, especially the U.S. Air Force's favorite weapon, napalm – the flaming, jellied gasoline that burned the flesh off of whatever part of the burning adult or child it splashed onto.

King also connected the racist acts (of American soldiers joyfully killing dispensable non-white "gooks" and "slants" – often shooting at "anything that moves") on the battlefields of Southeast Asia to the oppression, impoverishment, imprisoning and lynching of dispensable, deprived non-white "niggers" in America.

King saw the connections between the violence of racism and the violence of poverty. He saw that the withholding of economic and educational opportunities came from the fear of "the other" and the perceived need to protect the white culture's wealth and privilege with violence if necessary.

King knew, too, that fortunes are made in every war, and the war in Vietnam was no exception. In his speeches, he talked about that unwelcome reality that the ruling class preferred not be discussed. That meant his well-attended Riverside Church speech threatened not only the powerful interests already arrayed against his civil rights struggle but also the interests of the war profiteers and the national security establishment.

### **War is Good Business**

The longer the Vietnam War lasted, the more the weapons manufacturers thrived. With their huge profits, there was a strong incentive for these financial elites to continue the carnage. And therefore the Wall Street war profiteers financed, out of their ill-gotten gains, battalions of industry lobbyists and pro-military propagandists who descended upon Washington, DC, and the Pentagon to claim even more tax dollars for weapons research, development and manufacture.

With that funding secured, armies of desperate jobs-seekers were hired to work in thousands of weapons factories that were strategically placed in

congressional districts almost everywhere, with weapons research grants likewise being awarded to virtually every university in the nation. Thus, weapons-manufacturing and R&D soon became vitally important for almost every legislator's home district economy as well as for the household budgets of millions of American voters who indirectly benefitted from the U.S. military's killing, maiming, displacement, starvation and suffering of non-white people in war zones.

King's anti-war stance was based on his Christianity and on the ethics and life of Jesus, but it was also based on his standing as a revered international peace and justice icon. Those factors made him a dangerous threat to the military/industrial/congressional/security complex.

The powerful forces that were working hard to discredit King had already infiltrated the civil rights movement. Their efforts, cunningly led by the proto-fascist and racist J. Edgar Hoover and his obedient FBI, accelerated after the Riverside speech. The FBI ramped up the smear campaigns against King. Eventually he was "neutralized" with a bullet to the head. [The case for believing that King's murder was not simply the act of lone gunman James Earl Ray is laid out in many studies, including attorney William F. Pepper's *An Act of State: The Execution of Martin Luther King.*]

### **King's Prophetic Vision**

Now, five decades after his anti-war speech (which was widely kept from the public), it is clear how prophetic King's observations were. America is indeed losing its soul. Violence, racism, militarism and economic oppression are still American epidemics.

Both upper- and middle-class investors of get-rich-quick schemes in America have succumbed to predatory lenders, cannibalistic corporate mergers and acquisitions, psychopathic multinational corporate schemers, corrupt crony capitalists, and the rapist/exploiters of the land and water by extractive industries all schemes that will eventually burst as part of predictable economic bubbles.

Those busted bubbles regularly wipe out investors (except for the large, deep-pocketed "insiders" who, usually being forewarned, will have sold their holdings just in time, before the publicly revealed "bust"), leaving the taxpayers to bail out the financial messes that were created by the so-called "invisible hand of the market" but are really caused by the cunning work of corporate gamblers.

King was trying to warn us not just about the oncoming epidemic of violence toward victims at home but also about the tens of millions of people around the

world who were and are still being victimized by U.S. military misadventures. King was also warning us about the multinational corporate war profiteers whose interests are facilitated and protected by the U.S. military whether they are operating in Asia, Latin America, Africa or the Middle East.

The Pentagon budget averages well over \$700 billion per year, including wars that are often illegal and unconstitutional. That amounts to \$2 billion per day with no visible return on investment, except for the military contractors, the oil industries and Wall Street financiers.

Vast sums also are needed to address the physical and mental health costs needed for the palliative care for the permanently maimed and psychologically-traumatized veterans. Hundreds of millions of dollars more are spent paying down the interest payments on past military debts.

All those potentially bankrupting costs represent money that will never be available for programs of social uplift like combatting racism, poverty and hunger, or paying for affordable housing/healthcare, universal education or meaningful job creation. Can anyone else hear a demonic laugh reverberating down Wall Street?

King was warning America about its oncoming spiritual death if it didn't convert itself away from military violence. But most observers of the U.S. see America still worshipping at the altars of the Gods of War and Greed. Our children may be doomed.

The vast majority of American Christian churches (whether fundamentalist, conservative, moderate or liberal, with very few exceptions) have failed King's vision, despite the lip service they sometimes give to King on MLK Day. Churches whose members were brought up on the Myth of American Exceptionalism (and the myth of being "God's chosen people") consistently refuse to take a stand against the satanic nature of war.

### **Past the Point of No Return?**

If America is to avert future financial and military catastrophes, King's central warnings about the "triple evils" of militarism, racism and economic oppression must be heeded. That means a retreat from worldwide network of budget-busting military bases. And, if America wants to shed the justified label of "Rogue Nation," the covert killing operations of its secret black ops mercenary military units all around the world must be stopped, as should the infamous extrajudicial assassinations by America's unmanned drones.

If King's 50-year-old warning continues to be ignored, America's future is bleak. The future holds the dark seeds of economic chaos, hyperinflation,

unendurable poverty, increasing racial/minority hostility, worsening malnutrition, armed rebellion, street fighting, and perhaps, ultimately, institution of a reactionary totalitarian/surveillance police state in order to control citizen protests and quell rebellions.

In 1967, many Americans considered King hopeful vision for a better future as irrational idealism. He was told that the task was too great, the obstacles were too imposing, and there was no will for even the churches to reverse their age-old, conservative pseudo-patriotism and society's institutional racism. I suspect that many of the churches that called King a communist and therefore ignored him back then wish that they could turn back the clock and give King's (and Jesus's) path a try.

King finished his speech with these challenges: "War is not the answer. We still have a choice today; nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation. We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace and justice throughout the developing world a world that borders on our doors. If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality and strength without sight."

And he had these sobering words for the churches that are immersed in a polytheistic culture (the worship of multiple gods, including the gods of war and mammon) and thus are tempted to quietly ally themselves with those gods rather than the God of Love that King was devoted to:

"I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all the other southern states. I have looked at her beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlay of her massive religious education buildings. Over and over again I have found myself asking: 'What kind of people worship here? Who is their God?'"

Today, the task is even tougher, the obstacles much more imposing, but the path that King outlined remains.

**Dr. Gary G. Kohls is a retired physician who writes about peace, justice, militarism, mental health and religious issues.**

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## The Warfare Comes Home

The recent killings in Baton Rouge, Minneapolis and Dallas recall the racial violence of the 1960s which also occurred against a backdrop of U.S. warfare, a

parallel that ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern notes.

By Ray McGovern

In 1967, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. faced a painful dilemma. How could he tell oppressed young blacks and police to shun violence on the streets of our country, but rather to behave nonviolently, when the entire country watched state-sanctioned violence in Vietnam on evening TV?

What Dr. King [chose to do then](#) needs to happen again – NOW. Against the “practical” advice of virtually all his Realpolitik associates, King asked one of his closest advisers, Vincent Harding, to draft a speech, *Beyond Vietnam*, in the dangerous prophetic tradition of speaking truth to power. (Thirty-five years later, I studied under the late Dr. Harding at [Word and World](#), a timely workshop in Greensboro, North Carolina, aimed at making faith *relevant* by closing the gaping gaps between Seminary, Sanctuary, and Street.)

In that momentous Vietnam speech before 3,000 people at Riverside Church in New York, Dr. King broke multiple taboos by making unmistakably clear and explicit the organic connection between violence at home and abroad. The date of the speech was April 4, 1967; King was murdered exactly a year later.

But who will be today’s Dr. King? Who will have the courage of Harding and King to tell it like it is – to draw the connections between 15 years of state-sanctioned violence abroad and what is happening in our streets at home? Are there no prophets left?

I edged toward this key issue in [an article](#) that I wrote last year, which Consortiumnews.com dusted off from the archives and posted again in the wake of the despicable, but – I would suggest – largely explainable violence in Baton Rouge, Minneapolis and Dallas.

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## Ghosts of '68 in Election 2016

Longtime observers of American politics have noted striking parallels between the unpredictable wartime election of 1968 and the bizarre presidential contest of 2016, another time of war and distress, as Michael Winship recalls.

By Michael Winship

Watching the mad, mad, mad, mad world that is the 2016 presidential campaign, I was trying to remember a presidential campaign that was as jaw-dropping, at

least in my lifetime, and easily settled on 1968.

For those too young to remember, imagine: As fighting in Vietnam rages on and the Tet Offensive makes us all too aware of the futility of our Southeast Asian military fiasco, Minnesota Sen. Eugene McCarthy decides to run as an antiwar candidate against incumbent President Lyndon Johnson.

Supported by an army of “Clean for Gene” college students knocking on doors and making phone calls, McCarthy does surprisingly well, and then New York Sen. Robert Kennedy gets into the race, too. Johnson makes a surprise announcement that he will not seek a second term in the White House and McCarthy and Kennedy duke it out in the primaries.

In the midst of all this, civil rights giant Martin Luther King Jr., is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, and riots erupt across the cities of the United States. Two months later, Kennedy is murdered in the kitchen of a Los Angeles hotel just minutes after winning the California primary.

In August, eight years after his defeat by John F. Kennedy, the Republicans bring back Richard Nixon as their presidential candidate and the Democrats select Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who has not run in a single primary, as their party’s standard bearer.

Simultaneously, a police riot against protesters outside the Democratic convention in Chicago leaves an indelible image of chaos, tear gas and blood. Nixon wins the election with a well-executed campaign set to the accompaniment of dog whistle signals against minorities and left-wing dissenters.

Oh, and one other thing – Alabama Gov. George Wallace, arch segregationist and race baiter, runs as the third-party candidate of the American Independent Party, campaigning as a rebel populist seeking the votes of the angry, white working class. He wins almost 10 million votes and carries five states in the South.

All of which brings me to one of the curiosities of that manic ‘68 campaign season, a slim volume written by Russell Baker, former *New York Times* columnist and veteran White House and congressional reporter. First serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post*, it was published as a book under the title *Our Next President: The Incredible Story of What Happened in the 1968 Elections*.

But here’s the thing: Baker’s book was written *before* all the events I just described. It was imaginary, a work of speculative fiction that soon found the real thing giving it a run for its money. And yet, much of what Baker dreamed up presaged what really happened and is eerily reminiscent of what’s going on in 2016 America.



In the book, President Johnson is indeed as besieged as the actual LBJ – “being ground in a politics of frustration more bitter than any could remember since the Depression election of 1932,” Baker writes. “A seemingly endless war, record food prices, rising taxes, intractable poverty, a surly unmanageable Congress and now an incipient revolution of race – and Johnson bore the burden of public blame for all.” It’s all too similar to the climate today.

But in Baker’s version of history, Johnson uses his legendary political wiles to create a scenario that he believes will lead to his reelection – Hubert Humphrey is made to step down as vice president, becoming secretary of state, and Kennedy is named as the next vice president, creating a Johnson-Kennedy ticket. Pandemonium ensues.

### **Art Anticipating Life**

As in the actual summer of 1968, there are race riots that impact the campaign and as is the case in 2016, the Republican Party is in complete disarray, riven by a plethora of potential candidates, many of whose names may now seem unfamiliar but all of whom were genuine presidential possibilities – Mitt Romney’s father, George, the governor of Michigan; Ohio Gov. James Rhodes; former Pennsylvania Gov. William Scranton and Illinois Sen. Charles Percy, among others. There’s Nixon, of course, New York’s Gov. Nelson Rockefeller and, oh yes, California Gov. Ronald Reagan.

After much shouting and disruption, eventually they choose as their slate New York City Mayor John Lindsay and running mate John Tower, conservative U.S. senator from Texas.

George Wallace is prominent in Baker’s story, too, running just as he really did in 1968... and in 1972 (when he was shot and forever after wheelchair-bound)... and in 1976. Here’s Baker’s description of the Southern populist’s campaign:

“Wallace’s crude animal reaction to the complexities of American society found a sympathetic hearing that summer among millions baffled by the speed at which the future was hurtling upon them and frustrated by their individual impotence against the tyranny of vast computerized organizations spreading through American life. With his snake-oil miracle cures, Wallace satisfied a deep public yearning to be deluded with promises of easy solutions.”

And here’s Baker’s version of Wallace inveighing against protesters: “If I ever get to be president and any of these demonstrators lay down in front of my car, it’ll be the last car they ever lay down in front of.”

If, as Mark Twain supposedly said, history does not repeat itself but certainly does rhyme, Russell Baker’s description of the state of the union

nearly 50 years ago and a Wallace candidacy that's so very much like Donald Trump's is as blank verse from the past, reflecting a national mood that today is perhaps even more confused and enraged.

I'm far from the first to draw the parallel. George Wallace's own daughter, Peggy Wallace Kennedy, recently told National Public Radio that both men have played to our basest instincts. "Trump and my father say out loud what people are thinking but don't have the courage to say," she said. "They both were able to adopt the notion that fear and hate are the two greatest motivators of voters that feel alienated from government."

And back in January, Dan T. Carter wrote in *The New York Times*, "Both George Wallace and Donald Trump are part of a long national history of scapegoating minorities: from the Irish, Catholics, Asians, Eastern European immigrants and Jews to Muslims and Latino immigrants. During times of insecurity, a sizable minority of Americans has been drawn to forceful figures who confidently promise the destruction of all enemies, real and imagined, allowing Americans to return to a past that never existed."

An aversion to spoilers tempts me to not tell you how Baker's story ends but you may have trouble tracking down a copy of this long out-of-print little book, so here it is: the three-way election – Johnson vs. Lindsay vs. Wallace – is deadlocked in the Electoral College. As per the Constitution, the choice of president is turned over to the House of Representatives, and the Senate chooses the vice president. A series of maneuvers, miscalculations and skullduggery ultimately results in a second President Kennedy.

We should be so lucky.

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## Who Would Dr. King Endorse?

Hillary Clinton won endorsements from Congressional Black Caucus members while civil rights legend Harry Belafonte came out for Bernie Sanders. But another question is who would Martin Luther King Jr. have supported since he like Sanders advocated for "democratic socialism," as Jeff Cohen recalls.

By Jeff Cohen

Corporate mainstream media have sanitized and distorted the life and teachings of Martin Luther King Jr., putting him in the category of a “civil rights leader” who focused narrowly on racial discrimination; end of story. Missing from the story is that Dr. King was also a tough-minded critic of our capitalist economic structure, much like Bernie Sanders is today.

The reality is that King himself supported democratic socialism and that civil rights activists and socialists have walked arm-in-arm for more than a century.

The same news outlets that omit such facts keep telling us that the mass of African-American voters in South Carolina and elsewhere are diehard devotees of Hillary (and Bill) Clinton implying that blacks are somehow wary of Bernie Sanders and his “democratic socialism.”

Here are some key historical facts and quotes that get almost no attention in mainstream media:

1909: Many socialists both blacks and whites were involved in forming the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), our country’s oldest civil rights group. Among them was renowned black intellectual W.E.B. Dubois.

1925: Prominent African-American socialist A. Philip Randolph became the first president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, a union that played a major role in activism for civil *and* economic rights (including the 1963 “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom”).

1952: In a fascinating letter to Coretta Scott, the woman he would marry a year later, Martin King wrote: “I imagine you already know that I am much more socialistic in my economic theory than capitalistic. . . . Today capitalism has out-lived its usefulness.”

1965: King wrote an essay in *Pageant* magazine, “The Bravest Man I Ever Knew,” extolling Norman Thomas as “America’s foremost socialist” and favorably quoting a black activist who said of Thomas: “He was for us before any other white folks were.”

1965: After passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965, King became even more vocal about economic rights: “What good is having the right to sit at a lunch counter if you can’t afford to buy a hamburger?”

1965-66: King supported President Lyndon Johnson’s “War on Poverty” but urged more calling for a “gigantic Marshall Plan” for our nation’s poor of all races.

1966: In remarks to staffers at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), King said: "You can't talk about solving the economic problem of the Negro without talking about billions of dollars. You can't talk about ending the slums without first saying profit must be taken out of slums. You're really tampering and getting on dangerous ground because you are messing with folk then. You are messing with captains of industry. . . . It really means that we are saying something is wrong with capitalism. There must be a better distribution of wealth, and maybe America must move toward a democratic socialism."

March 1967: King commented to SCLC's board that "the evils of capitalism are as real as the evils of militarism and evils of racism."

April 1967: In his speech denouncing the U.S. war in Vietnam at New York's Riverside Church, King extended his economic critique abroad, complaining about "capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa, and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries."

May 1967: In a report to SCLC's staff, King said: "We must recognize that we can't solve our problem now until there is a radical redistribution of economic and political power . . . this means a revolution of values and other things. We must see now that the evils of racism, economic exploitation and militarism are all tied together . . . you can't really get rid of one without getting rid of the others . . . the whole structure of American life must be changed."

August 1967: In his final speech to an SCLC convention, King declared: "One day we must ask the question, 'Why are there forty million poor people in America?' And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising a question about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy. And I'm simply saying that more and more, we've got to begin to ask questions about the whole society.

"We are called upon to help the discouraged beggars in life's marketplace. But one day we must come to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. It means that questions must be raised. And you see, my friends, when you deal with this you begin to ask the question, 'Who owns the oil?' You begin to ask the question, 'Who owns the iron ore?' You begin to ask the question, 'Why is it that people have to pay water bills in a world that's two-thirds water?'"

Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated as he and SCLC were mobilizing a multiracial army of the poor to descend nonviolently on Washington D.C. demanding a "Poor Peoples Bill of Rights." He told a New York Times reporter

that “you could say we’re involved in the class struggle.”

A year before he was murdered, King said the following to journalist David Halberstam: “For years I labored with the idea of reforming the existing institutions of the South, a little change here, a little change there. Now I feel quite differently. I think you’ve got to have a reconstruction of the entire society, a revolution of values.”

Unlike what Hillary Clinton professes today, Dr. King came to reject the idea of slow, incremental change. He thought big. He proposed solutions that could really solve social problems.

Unlike corporate-dominated U.S. media, King was not at all afraid of democratic socialism. Other eminent African American leaders have been unafraid. Perhaps it’s historically fitting that former NAACP president Ben Jealous has recently campaigned for Bernie Sanders in South Carolina.

If mainstream journalists did more reporting on the candidates’ actual records, instead of crystal-ball gazing about the alleged hold that the Clintons have over African American voters, news consumers would know about the deplorable record of racially-biased incarceration and economic hardship brought on by Clinton administration policies. (See Michelle Alexander’s “Why Hillary Clinton Doesn’t Deserve the Black Vote.”)

With income inequality even greater now than during Martin Luther King’s final years, is there much doubt that King would be supporting the progressive domestic agenda of Bernie Sanders? Before Bernie was making these kinds of big economic reform proposals, King was making them but mainstream media didn’t want to hear them at the time . . . or now.

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