

Christianity's Contradictions on War

Though based on the pacifist teachings of Jesus, Christianity has been an accomplice to more wars and genocides than any other religion, a paradox reflected in the contradictory views of 16th Century protestant reformer Martin Luther and 20th Century civil rights martyr Martin Luther King Jr., as Gary G. Kohls explains.

By Gary G. Kohls

Like the vast majority of Christian religious leaders of his era, Martin Luther, the Father of the Protestant Reformation, met the definition of a "Constantinian" Christian, that is a Christian who espoused theological teachings that were tolerant of violence and accepted non-democratic, authoritarian and male-dominant practices. Those teachings represented the theological framework of the Christian church that became the state religion starting with the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine in the early Fourth Century.

Luther also was an Augustinian monk, an order named after Augustine of Hippo, who died in 430 and was later canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. St. Augustine regarded the nonviolent ethical teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount as simply metaphorical and therefore irrelevant in times of crisis. Augustine epitomized Constantinian Christianity, and Luther was a good student of Augustine.

Indeed, most of the influential religious leaders of the 1500s (including Luther, John Calvin, Henry VIII and the various popes) seemed to have an unwritten ecumenical agreement that you could kill one another and still be following Jesus. A cursory reading of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation Wars that drenched Europe in the blood of Christian killing Christian in the 16th Century will attest to that statement.

Constantinian-type Christianity (in stark contrast to Sermon on the Mount Christianity, which was the original form of that religion and the norm during the first few generations of its existence) follows a number of aberrant, anti-gospel, violence-tolerant church teachings that had been blessed by the murderous Emperor Constantine. Many of those teachings were made doctrinal by Augustine.

Constantine, it should be pointed out, was a ruthless military dictator who had rivals and even had members of his family killed. He was never a Christian in his lifetime and only consented to being baptized when he was on his deathbed.

Augustine shaped his theology to be in conformity with the authoritarian, obedience-demanding, pro-violence, justified-war politics of the emperor; and Luther followed suit.

The Lutheran Church

Luther's reformation attempts created great schisms in Christianity when he tried to reform a corrupted Roman Catholic Church by endorsing violent means and therefore predictably failed to bring any peaceful Christ-like transformation to the "reformed" church. (See the horrific details of the massacres in the Peasant's War of 1525 that Luther endorsed and that ruthlessly put down a peasant's liberation movement.)

I was born and raised Lutheran but have always been uncomfortable with Lutheranism's tendencies towards conservative politics, conservative theologies, flag-waving patriotism and teachings that tend to justify (or be silent about) American war-making. (Those tendencies are also prevalent in other American Protestant churches.)

After considerable study of the history and theology of the earliest form of Christianity, I now know that the Protestant church's simplistic acceptance of their nation's wars is totally contrary to the ethical teachings of the nonviolent Jesus which was faithfully taught by the earliest communities of faith.

After being confronted with these truths about the early pacifist church, my theology and politics have both moved to the opposite end of the theological spectrum of the church of my birth, toward the left-wing, pacifist, anti-fascist, nonviolent teachings of Jesus and Martin Luther King, Jr. and away from the traditional violence-justifying doctrines of Augustine and Martin Luther.

In Luther's defense however, he did make three insightful statements which resonate with me and which give me some hope that the Protestant churches might wake up some day and start teaching what Jesus taught.

As has been the experience of so many other non-violent (and therefore anti-war) Christian activists, King's commitment to the Sermon on the Mount ethics of Jesus has shaped my response to America's current Bush/Obama foreign policies of aggressive militarism and perpetual war (and the inevitable civilian deaths, refugeeism, starvation, pestilence and the spiritual and economic bankruptcy of the nations that participate in war).

Failing to Preach the Gospel

Here are three statements from the writings of Martin Luther, which Martin

Luther King would have approved:

–“The church that preaches the gospel in all of its fullness, except as it applies to the great social ills of the day, is failing to preach the gospel.”

–“War is the greatest plague that can afflict humanity; it destroys religions, it destroys states, it destroys families. Any scourge is preferable to it.”

–And then this profoundly important exchange, in which Luther taught one of his followers to trust the ethics of the gospel rather than the threats from his war-making government and courageously become a selective conscientious objector to war.

The questioner asked: “Suppose my lord was wrong in going to war?”

Luther: “If you know for sure that he is wrong, then you should fear God rather than men (Acts 5:29), and you should neither fight nor serve. For you cannot have a good conscience before God.”

Questioner: “Oh, no, you say, my lord would force me to do it; he would take away my fief and would not give me my money, pay and wages. Besides I would be despised and put to shame as a coward, even worse as a man who did not keep his word and deserted his lord in time of need.”

Luther: “I answer: You must take that risk and, with God’s help, let whatever happens, happen. He can restore you a hundred fold as he promises in the gospel”

I suspect that Luther’s wisdom in those statements developed in his later years, for surely a more spiritually mature Luther would have recognized the suffering of the impoverished and oppressed peasants (that ultimately led to the Peasant’s War of 1525) as one of the great social ills of his day.

In the years immediately prior to 1525, the peasants, inspired by Luther’s anti-church/anti-establishment revolutionary teachings, were finally rising up against their perennial oppressors: the ruling elite, the wealthy landowners and the authoritarian Catholic Church.

Initially the peasants protested nonviolently. They submitted written demands that they be granted their human rights. Tragically, as is still happening in these modern times, the protest movement was brutally put down by the establishment’s obedient soldiers and the peasants were compelled to resort to defensive violence, which ended badly for them (shades of the recent nonviolent protests in Egypt and Syria.)

Luther’s Betrayal of the Peasants

Luther shocked the peasants when he betrayed them and sided with the one percent ruling elite, whose well-armed soldiers slaughtered them in that brief war. Luther forever lost the support of the peasantry when he actually called for their annihilation. Luther wrote in a tract:

“These are strange times, when a prince can achieve heaven by killing peasants more assuredly than other men can with prayer.”

The reality that the briefly optimistic peasants hadn't comprehended was that their oppressors were the very ones that had protected Luther from being hunted down and killed by the soldiers of the pope.

Any thoughtful, fair-minded, ethical American must conclude that the Bush/Cheney administration's stated 2001 foreign policy of perpetual war and the continuation of unaffordable, bloated military budgets are two of the great social ills of our time. But war (despite the rape, pillage, starvation and destitution that inevitably goes along with it) seems to be a taboo subject in most of the churches of which I am familiar.

Modern wars can justifiably be described as organized mass slaughter that mostly kills and maims innocent civilians. It is a sobering reality that 80 to 90 percent of the casualties of modern warfare are unarmed non-combatant civilians, largely women and children.

The failure to protect non-combatants in war, according to the Christian Just War Theory, makes that war an unjust one and, in terms of the teachings of moral theology, that makes the killing in that war murder. And that, of course, makes the planners, perpetrators and participants in such wars murderers or accomplices to murder.

Martin Luther King Echoed Jesus

The heroic martyr Martin Luther King, whose prophetic work was modeled after the pacifist Jesus and the pacifist Gandhi (and not, despite his name, the war-justifying Luther), often commented on what was expected of faithful and ethical Christians in their response to injustice. King's views are best summarized by these profound but simple truths about silence in the face of evil:

—“It may well be that the greatest tragedy of this period of social change is not the glaring noisiness of the so-called bad people, but the silence of the so-called good people.”

—“The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its

prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.”

–“Cowardice asks the question – is it safe? Expediency asks the question – is it politic? Vanity asks the question – is it popular? But conscience asks the question – is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular; but one must take it because it is right.”

Luther’s three insightful observations above are as clear as could be, as are the statements of King. The church of Jesus Christ should be paying attention to all of these ethical statements simply because they are corollaries to Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount commands to “love your enemies” and “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” If the follower of Jesus takes these statements seriously, violence against “the other” is impossible.

A few months before his assassination on April 4, 1968, King said he didn’t want all his achievements mentioned at his funeral. What he wanted said instead was this: “Say that Martin King tried to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and that he was right on the war question.”

The vast majority of American Christian churches are silent and therefore wrong on the war questions. Even Luther’s statements on war justifiably indict them for failing to preach the full gospel.

Most of the Lutheran, Catholic and Reformed churches of the Third Reich were equally silent and wrong about the wars of both Kaiser Wilhelm and Hitler. And, of course both the Catholic and Protestant Churches in Christian Germany were silent and therefore wrong – on the Jewish question.

It seems to me that true peace churches should be modeling themselves after the primitive, pacifist church of the first two centuries by courageously speaking out against wars and the inevitable cruelty, torture and slaughter that always occurs in wartime.

True peace churches should be warning about the deadly spiritual consequences for both the warriors and their victims. True peace churches should be teaching what Jesus taught about violence (forbidden) and advise their members to refuse to participate in homicidal violence of any kind.

Idealistic peace churches, sadly, represent only a tiny fraction of the churches in America, and they have no choice but to be vocal. To be silent would make them complicit with evil.

When Silence Is Betrayal

Martin Luther King understood the consequences for whistle-blowers and prophets if and when they speak out for peace and justice. He said: "There comes a time when silence is betrayal but the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony."

King believed in the truth and practicality of the nonviolent teachings of Jesus, and, like Jesus, lived that way. And, contrary to the objectives of their assassins, neither their spirits nor their teachings died with them. Both are very much alive, and their spirits and inspiring words live on.

And for those who claim discipleship to the Jesus of the gospels, it should be ethically impossible to adopt the pro-violence stances of the multitude of non-peace churches, whose punitive politics and harsh theologies over the past 1,700 years have tragically dominated the Christian Church.

Jesus often taught about the coming of the Reign of God, which was all about the unconditional, nonviolent love of friends and enemies. He taught his disciples how they should live, how they should love and how they should respond when they were tempted to participate in or be silent about forms of violence such as militarism, racism, economic oppression, torture, cruelty, hunger and killing.

It is clear what Jesus taught. In so many words, he was saying that "violence is forbidden to those who wish to follow me." The planet and the creatures trying to survive on it are in peril if the church of Martin Luther, Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesus of Nazareth continues to fail in its sacred duty to actively and nonviolently resist – and courageously speak out against – war and violence.

Dr. Kohls was a founding member of Every Church A Peace Church, which has recently merged with the Church of the Brethren's Living Peace Church organization (<http://livingpeacechurch.tumblr.com/>). ECAPC is a 13-year-old international ecumenical movement to recover gospel nonviolence as a norm for all churches. Since its inception in 2000, ECAPC has been committed to the belief that "The church could lead the world toward peace if every church lived and taught as Jesus lived and taught."

Dr. King's 'Four Catastrophes'

Reflections on Martin Luther King Jr.'s "dream" a half century after he delivered his famous speech at the Lincoln Memorial have been clouded by the prospect of a U.S. military strike against Syria, as President Obama seems to have forgotten that King's message went beyond race, as Laura Finley notes.

By Laura Finley

The commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington has seen reflections and conversations about the nation's progress toward achieving Dr. Martin Luther King's dream of the beloved community. Not surprisingly, the focus has been on assessing racial equality, as many know Dr. King largely for his work on this issue.

Dr. King's vision and advocacy, however, was much broader in scope. As his writings and speeches show, Dr. King was concerned about what he called "four catastrophes:" militarism, materialism, racism and poverty.

Dr. King described militarism as an "imperial catastrophe." King, and others before him, critiqued not just the United States' engagement in violent conflict but also the values that underlie militarism: hierarchy, obedience, discipline, and power over others.

King exclaimed in his April 4, 1967 speech "Beyond Vietnam," "I knew that 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."

Yet, despite Dr. King's warnings, the U.S military remains the greatest purveyor of violence, with the largest military in the world. We spend more on our military than China, Russia, UK, France, Japan, India, Saudi Arabia, Germany and Brazil combined. The U.S. is also the leader in global weapons sales. As I write, President Obama continues to use drones to kill innocent civilians in Pakistan, Yemen and other places and is poised to authorize some form of military action in Syria.

To Dr. King, racism is a moral catastrophe. This moral catastrophe continues, as racial profiling, disparate access to education, wage differentials, and more remain intractable problems. All are exacerbated by Supreme Court decisions, such as the Court's June 2013 announcement that "enough progress has been made" to overturn key parts of the Voting Rights Act that are intended to help ensure adequate civic participation by people of color.

Materialism, according to Dr. King, is a spiritual catastrophe. Instead of caring for one another, we are taught that it is buying things that make us who we are. Often referred to as "affluenza," it really is like many of us are sick with the need to buy things bigger, better, faster and always, more, more, more.

Poverty is the economic catastrophe. King's later work, fighting for worker's rights, was what scared those in power the most. A recently released report documented the over-payment of CEOs, at the expense of laborers. Additionally,

the report found that almost 40 percent of the men on the list of the 25 highest-paid corporate leaders in American between 1993 and 2012 have led companies that were bailed out by U.S. taxpayers, had been fired for poor performance, or led companies charged with some type of fraud. This while 46.2 million Americans remain in poverty.

While politicians like Sarah Palin wish that Dr. King's dream will "always" be a reality, it is clear that we are far from actualizing his vision. And, until we move beyond seeing Dr. King as just an icon of racial equality, it will be hard to fully engage the interrelated four catastrophes he found so problematic.

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How Rev. King Inspires Palestinians

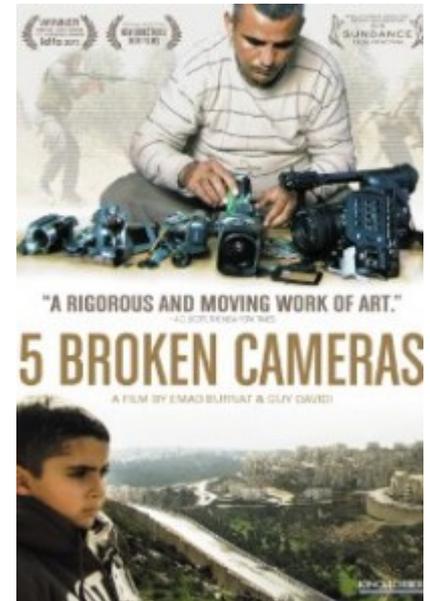
On the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, the inspiration from King's non-violent civil disobedience has spread around the world, including to Palestine where much of the resistance to Israeli repression is following King's guidebook, writes Jeff Cohen.

By Jeff Cohen

As I prepared for a grueling fact-finding trip to Israel and the Palestinian West Bank (occupied for 46 years), Secretary of State John Kerry announced that Israel and the Palestinian Authority had agreed to resume peace talks without preconditions.

On the day [my delegation](#) flew to the region, Israel announced that it had approved still more housing for Israeli settlers: "Israel has issued tenders for the construction of nearly 1,200 housing units in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank," [reported](#) London's *Financial Times*, "defying U.S. and Palestinian opposition to expansion of Jewish settlements three days before the scheduled

start of peace talks.”



It's the same old depressing story, with Israel showing little interest in making peace.

So before I turn to what's surprising and inspiring in the West Bank, let's acknowledge the bad news: Palestinians are slowly being squeezed out of their homes, deprived of their water and centuries-old olive groves, humiliated on a daily basis by Israeli settlers and the Israeli state in a relentless violation of their human rights that gets worse as much of the world looks away.

But here's the good news: Across the West Bank, Israel's occupation has given rise in recent years to a nonviolent "popular resistance" movement that should be an inspiration to people across the globe. This unarmed resistance has persisted in the face of Israeli state violence (aided by U.S.-supplied weapons and tear gas), lengthy jail sentences for nonviolent protesters and widespread detention and abuse of children.

It was fitting to return to the U.S. on the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington because Martin Luther King Jr. and his legacy of militant nonviolence were invoked by Palestinian activists in virtually every village and town I visited as part of the fact-finding delegation.

Like King, leaders of the Palestinian popular resistance from intellectuals to grassroots villagers who'd been repeatedly jailed spoke to us about universal human rights, about a human family in which all deserve equal rights regardless of religion or nationality.

"We are against the occupation, not against the Jews," was the refrain among Palestinian activists. "We have many Jews and Israelis who support us."

It was indeed inspiring to meet several of the brave Israelis who've supported the nonviolent resistance, often putting themselves in the frontline of marches (their jail sentences are tiny compared to what's dished out to Palestinians). They are admittedly a small minority, thoroughly ostracized within Israel a society that seems as paranoid and militaristic today as our country during the McCarthyite Fifties.

NABI SALEH: In this village near Ramallah that's being squeezed by settlers, a leader of the local popular resistance waxed poetic about Israelis who've supported their struggle: "After we started the popular resistance in 2009, we saw a different kind of Israeli, our partner. We see them as our cousin a different view than the Israeli as soldier shooting at us, or the settler stealing, or the jailer shutting the cell on us."

The story of Nabi Saleh was compellingly told in an atypical *New York Times Magazine* article by Ben Ehrenreich, "Is This Where the Third Intifada Will Start?"

"It's not easy to be nonviolent, but no soldier has been killed by a stone," said activist leader Manal Tamimi. "We want to show the world we are not terrorists. On CNN, Fox News, we're just terrorists, suicide bombers. I was in the states; you never hear of settlers attacking Palestinians."

As we were leaving her house, Manal added: "You need to be our messengers because your tax money is killing us. You are our brothers in humanity, but you are part of the killing."

Like our 1964 civil rights martyrs in Mississippi Schwerner, Cheney and Goodman Nabi Saleh reveres its martyrs: Mustafa Tamimi and Rushdi Tamimi.

BIL'IN: If you saw the Oscar-nominated documentary "5 Broken Cameras," then you know of the seven-year-long, partly-successful battle by the villagers of Bil'in to drive back Israel's "separation wall" (aka the Apartheid Wall) which was positioned to confiscate nearly 60 percent of their land, separating farmers from their fields and olive trees. It's an inspiring story of courageous nonviolence, with international activists (and Israelis) flocking to Bil'in to support the villagers' resistance.

"Internationals" who live in the West Bank and put their bodies on the line in support of nonviolent Palestinian struggles remind me of the U.S. students and others who "headed south" in the 1960s to support the civil rights movement.

We stayed overnight in the homes of Bil'in residents. Iyad Burnat, the brother of "5 Broken Cameras" director Emad Burnat, talked with us past midnight about the importance of media coverage, international support, and creative, surprise

tactics in a successful nonviolent movement (like using their bodies to close an Israeli “settlers-only” road). “In Bil’in we don’t use stones. The Israeli soldiers use that kids throwing stones to attack our people.”

Iyad was one of a dozen Palestinians we met who bristled at their lack of mobility now that their communities are ringed by the wall, settlements, checkpoints and Israeli-only highways. “It’s easier for me to get to the U.S. or the U.K. than to Jerusalem, 25 kilometers away.”

Like our Selma martyrs Jimmy Lee Jackson, Rev. James Reeb and Viola Liuzzo Bil’in has its nonviolent martyrs: Bassem Ibrahim Abu Rahmah and Jawaher Abu Rahmah.

EAST JERUSALEM: One of the most powerful and educational movies on Israel/Palestine is the 25-minute documentary, “My Neighborhood” which exposes the *Judaization* of East Jerusalem by focusing on a Palestinian family facing eviction from their home of 47 years in the middle-class neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah.

We sat down with the “stars” of the movie, the al-Kurd family, outside the part of the house they still can live in. Absurdly, zealous and aggressive Jewish settlers occupy the front part of the house. As we approached, I caught a glimpse of the settlers behind their Israeli flag. (Watch the movie here.)

Middle-aged mom Maysa al-Kurd and her 94-year-old mother told us they’ve lived in their East Jerusalem house since 1956, having been forced to flee Haifa during the 1948 “War of Independence.” Settlers are now using intimidation in hope of forcing them to flee again.

With half a home, the al-Kurd family is luckier than dozens of others in Sheikh Jarrah who’ve been driven out of the neighborhood completely. (Many Palestinians are refugees two or three times over.)

With the help of Israeli and international activists, the al-Kurd family has fought for years to live in peace and dignity in what’s left of their house. If you watch “My Neighborhood,” you’ll see grandson Mohammed, then in the 7th-grade, announcing that he wants to be a lawyer or journalist battling for human rights when he grows up. Two years later, he holds to that dream.

Maysa al-Kurd asked us to tell her family’s story to President Obama and, if we can’t reach him, to tell their story in social media. She wants to ask Obama “if it would be acceptable to him if his own kids were harassed in their home; if not acceptable for his kids, then he shouldn’t be silent” when Palestinian children are suffering.

HEBRON HILLS: Near the end of our tour of the West Bank, we visited the beleaguered but unbowed village of Al Tuwani in the South Hebron hills, where expansion-minded (“God gave us this land”) Israelis in nearby settlements have terrorized the village and sabotaged their fields and water. For “lack of a building permit,” Israeli soldiers demolished their village school and mosque.

It struck me that being Palestinian in some of these remote locations was akin to being black in rural Mississippi in the 1950s, facing continuous intimidation from lawless Klansmen (like these armed and sometimes-masked settlers) backed up by state power.

But Al Tuwani has resisted with women taking new roles in the economic sustenance of the village, with young Italian solidarity activists (Operation Dove) accompanying the men into the field as a “protective presence” and videotaping any confrontations, and with Israeli human rights lawyers defending their right to rebuild their community.

A woman leader in the village, like so many Palestinians, begged us to return home to contest media portrayals of Palestinians as terrorists: “You’ve seen the true Palestine, not what you see in news media . . . Tell the world the truth.”

Limits of Inspiration

While it was inspiring to see nonviolent “popular resistance” groups persisting across the West Bank, I felt ashamed and angry as a Jew to hear Palestinians document the relentless drive by the “Jewish State” to Judaize East Jerusalem and intimidate and humiliate West Bankers into leaving their cities, towns and villages.

Everywhere we went, we heard complaints about day-to-day hardship – checkpoints, Jewish-only highways, blocked Palestinian roads and how drives to work or school or neighbors that once took 15 minutes now take several hours.

Seeing these “facts on the ground,” I kept asking myself NOT “Why have many Palestinians turned to violence and terrorism?” but rather, “Why so few?”

I’m not the first or only one to think that thought. In a moment of candor in 1998, hawkish Israeli politician Ehud Barak admitted to *Haaretz* reporter Gideon Levy: “If I were a young Palestinian of the right age, I’d eventually join one of the terrorist organizations.” (Barak wasn’t punished for his candor Israelis elected him prime minister a year later.)

As hard as we tried, it was difficult to find a single Palestinian (or Israeli peace and justice activist) with much hope for the Kerry-led peace process; they fear that talks will again be a pretext for continued Israeli expansion into

Palestinian land.

We were repeatedly reminded that at the beginning of the Oslo “peace process” in 1993, there were about 260,000 Israeli settlers living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and that number increased to 365,000 by the time Oslo fell apart seven years later. Today, there are well over 525,000 settlers.

Everywhere you travel in the West Bank, you can see Palestinian villages on hillsides or in valleys and newer, gleaming Israeli settlements on the hilltops above, startlingly green thanks to abundant, diverted water. During the Oslo talks, then-Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon was quoted as telling a rightwing party to “run and grab as many hilltops as they can to enlarge the settlements.”

Many in the nonviolent Palestinian resistance also have little faith in the Palestinian Authority seen variously as weak, corrupt, “an Authority with no authority,” and a junior partner in administering the occupation. “We want a third Intifada, the Palestinian Authority wants to prevent it,” an activist told us.

Their faith is in spreading the grassroots resistance within Palestine, and gaining international support. We were told over and over: Without outside pressure on Israel, there will be no end to the occupation and no justice. Which is why every Palestinian nonviolent activist urged us to support the boycott of Israel aimed at ending the occupation and they emphasized that boycotting is a supremely *nonviolent* tactic.

All drew parallels to the successful, international boycott that forced South Africa’s apartheid regime to the bargaining table. And some mentioned another success the boycott of Montgomery buses led by Martin Luther King.

Jeff Cohen toured Israel/Palestine as part of a delegation sponsored by Interfaith Peace-Builders and the American Friends Service Committee, but the views expressed here are his alone. He heads the Park Center for Independent Media at Ithaca College, where he is an associate professor of journalism. He launched the media watch group FAIR in 1986, and cofounded the online activism group RootsAction.org in 2011.

Source of Anti-Government Extremism

Exclusive: The Right’s hostility to “gub-mint” is not new. It traces back to the South’s fears that any activism by the national government, whether building

roads or providing disaster relief, would risk federal intervention against slavery and later against segregation, perhaps even the end of white supremacy, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

One reasonable way of looking at democratic governance is that it carries out the collective will of a society, especially in areas where the private sector can't do the job or needs regulation to prevent it from doing harm. Of course, there are always many variables and points of disagreement, from the need to protect individual rights to the wisdom of each decision.

But something extreme has surfaced in modern American politics: an ideological hatred of government. From the Tea Party to libertarianism, there is a "principled" rejection at least rhetorically of almost everything that government does (outside of national security), and those views are no longer simply "fringe." By and large, they have been embraced by the national Republican Party.



There has also been an effort to anchor these angry anti-government positions in the traditions of U.S. history. The Tea Party consciously adopted imagery and symbols from the Revolutionary War era to create an illusion that this contempt of government fits with the First Principles.

However, this right-wing revision of U.S. history is wildly askew if not upside-down. The Framers of the U.S. Constitution and even many of their "anti-federalist" critics were not hostile to an American government. They understood the difference between an English monarchy that denied them representation in Parliament and their own Republic.

Indeed, the key Framers James Madison, George Washington and Alexander Hamilton might be called pragmatic nationalists, eager to use the new Constitution, which centralized power at the national level, to build the young country and protect its fragile independence.

While these Framers later split over precise applications of the Constitution

Madison opposed Hamilton's national bank, for instance they accepted the need for a strong and effective federal government, unlike the weak, states'-rights-oriented Articles of Confederation.

More generally, the Founders recognized the need for order if their experiment in self-governance was to work. Even some of the more radical Founders, the likes of Sam Adams, supported the suppression of domestic disorders, such as Shays' Rebellion in Massachusetts and the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania. The logic of Adams and his cohorts was that an uprising against a distant monarch was one thing, but taking up arms against your own republican government was something else.

But the Tea Partiers are not entirely wrong when they insist that their hatred of "gub-mint" has its roots in the Founding era. There was an American tradition that involved resisting a strong and effective national government. It was, however, not anchored in the principles of "liberty," but rather in the practice of slavery.

Southern Fears

The battle against the Constitution and later against an energetic federal government – the sort of nation-building especially envisioned by Washington and Hamilton – emanated from the fears of many Southern plantation owners that eventually the national political system would move to outlaw slavery and thus negate their massive investment in human bondage.

Their thinking was that the stronger the federal government became the more likely it would act to impose a national judgment against the South's brutal institution of slavery. So, while the Southern argument was often couched in the rhetoric of "liberty," i.e. the rights of states to set their own rules, the underlying point was the maintenance of slavery.

This dollars-and-cents reality was reflected in the debate at Virginia's 1788 convention to ratify the Constitution. Two of Virginia's most noted advocates for "liberty" and "rights" Patrick Henry and George Mason tried to rally opposition to the proposed Constitution by stoking the fears of white plantation owners.

Historians Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg recount the debate in their 2010 book, *Madison and Jefferson*, noting that the chief argument advanced by Henry and Mason was that "slavery, the source of Virginia's tremendous wealth, lay politically unprotected" and that this danger was exacerbated by the Constitution's granting the President, as commander in chief, the power to "federalize" state militias.

“Mason repeated what he had said during the Constitutional Convention: that the new government failed to provide for ‘domestic safety’ if there was no explicit protection for Virginians’ slave property,” Burstein and Isenberg wrote. “Henry called up the by-now-ingrained fear of slave insurrections the direct result, he believed, of Virginia’s loss of authority over its own militia.”

Henry floated conspiracy theories about possible subterfuges that the federal government might employ to take away black slaves from white Virginians.

Describing this fear-mongering, Burstein and Isenberg wrote:

“Congress, if it wished, could draft every slave into the military and liberate them at the end of their service. If troop quotas were determined by population, and Virginia had over 200,000 slaves, Congress might say: ‘Every black man must fight.’ For that matter, a northern-controlled Congress might tax slavery out of existence.

“Mason and Henry both ignored the fact that the Constitution protected slavery on the strength of the three-fifths clause, the fugitive slave clause, and the slave trade clause. Their rationale was that none of this mattered if the North should have its way.”

Madison, a principal architect of the new governing structure and a slave-owner himself, sought to finesse the Mason/Henry arguments by insisting that “the central government had no power to order emancipation, and that Congress would never ‘alienate the affections five-thirteenths of the Union’ by stripping southerners of their property. ‘Such an idea never entered into any American breast,’ he said indignantly, ‘nor do I believe it ever will.’

“Yet Mason struck a chord in his insistence that northerners could never understand slavery; and Henry roused the crowd with his refusal to trust ‘any man on earth’ with his rights. Virginians were hearing that their sovereignty was in jeopardy.”

Right to Bear Arms

Despite the impassioned arguments of Henry and Mason and after Madison gave assurances that he would propose amendments to address some of these concerns Virginia’s delegates narrowly approved the Constitution on a 89-79 vote.

The key constitutional revision to allay the fears of Southern plantation owners was the Second Amendment, which recognized that “a well-regulated Militia [was] necessary to the security of a free State,” echoing Mason’s language about “domestic safety” as in the protection against slave revolts.

The rest of the Second Amendment that “the right of the people to keep and bear

Arms, shall not be infringed” was meant by definitions of the day to ensure the right to “bear Arms” as part of a “well-regulated Militia.” Only in modern times has that meaning been distorted by the American Right to apply to individual Americans carrying whatever gun they might want.

But the double-talk about the Second Amendment didn’t begin in recent years. It was there from the beginning when the First Congress acted with no apparent sense of irony in using the wording, “a free State,” to actually mean “a slave State.” And, of course, “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms” didn’t apply to black people.

The Second Congress enacted the Militia Acts, which mandated that military-age “white” men must obtain muskets and other supplies to participate in bearing arms for their state militias. Thus, the South was guaranteed its militias for “domestic safety.”

Yet, the South still faced the broader political imperative of constraining the power of the federal government so it would never get so strong that it could end slavery. So, during the early decades of the Republic, leading Southern politicians tried to sabotage many of the federal plans for strengthening the United States.

For instance, when James Madison pressed ahead with his long-treasured plan to use the Commerce Clause to justify federal road-building and thus improve national transportation he was mocked by Thomas Jefferson for his excessive support of government, as Burstein and Isenberg noted in their book.

In the years after the ratification of the Constitution, Madison gradually pulled out of the Washington-Hamilton orbit and was drawn into Jefferson’s. The key gravitational pull on Madison was Jefferson’s opposition to federal initiatives grounded in the agrarian interests of the slave-owning South.

Madison’s realignment with his Virginia neighbor, Jefferson, bitterly disappointed Washington and Hamilton. However, after Jefferson gained the presidency in 1801, he and Madison joined in one of the biggest federal power overreaches in U.S. history by negotiating the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France despite the absence of any “enumerated power” in the Constitution that envisioned such an act by the central government. [For more on the politics of the Founding era, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Racism and the American Right.”](#)]

March toward War

As the national divisions over slavery sharpened, the South escalated its resistance to federal activism, even over non-controversial matters like

disaster relief. As University of Virginia historian Brian Balogh noted in his book, *A Government Out of Sight*, Southerners asserted an extreme version of states' rights in the period from 1840 to 1860 that included preventing aid to disaster victims.

Balogh wrote that the South feared that "extending federal power" even to help fellow Americans in desperate need "might establish a precedent for national intervention in the slavery question," as Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne noted in a May 22 column.

As it turned out, the fears of Patrick Henry, George Mason and like-minded Southerners proved prescient. The federal government would become the enemy of slavery. As the United States grew in economic strength, the barbaric practice became a drag on U.S. global influence.

With the election of Abraham Lincoln from the anti-slavery Republican Party, Southern states saw the writing on the wall. Defense of their beloved institution of owning other human beings required extreme action, which manifested itself in the secession of 11 Southern states and the enactment of a Confederate constitution explicitly enshrining slavery.

The South's defeat in the Civil War forced the Confederate states back into the Union and enabled the Northern states to finally bring an end to slavery. However, the South continued to resist the North's attempts to reconstruct the region in a more race-neutral way. The South's old aristocracy reasserted itself through Ku Klux Klan terror and via political organization within the Democratic Party, reestablishing white supremacy and oppression of blacks under the banner of "states' rights."

There were, of course, other American power centers opposed to the intrusion of the federal government on behalf of the broader public. For instance, the Robber Barons of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries used their money and their political influence inside the Republican Party to assert laissez-faire economics, all the better to steal the country blind.

That power center, however, was shaken by the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression. Recognizing the abject failure of the "free market" to serve the nation's broader interests, the voters elected Franklin Roosevelt who dealt a New Deal that stimulated the economy, imposed securities regulations and took a variety of steps to lift citizens out of poverty.

In the post-World War II era with the United States asserting global leadership, the South's practice of racial segregation became another eyesore that the federal government haltingly began to address under pressure from Martin Luther

King Jr. and the civil rights movement. By the 1960s, the South had lost again, with federal laws prohibiting racial segregation.

The momentum from these two government initiatives intervention to create a more just economy and racial integration helped build the Great American Middle Class and finally fulfilled some of the grand principles of equality and justice espoused at the Founding. However, the energy behind those reforms began to fade in the 1970s as right-wing resentment built.

Finally, in the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, the combined backlash against Roosevelt's New Deal and King's new day prevailed. Too many whites had forgotten the lessons of the Great Depression and had grown angry over what they viewed as "political correctness." Over the last several decades, the Right also built an imposing vertically integrated media machine that meshes the written word in newspapers, magazines and books with the spoken (or shouted) word on TV and talk radio.

This giant echo chamber, resonating with sophisticated propaganda including revisionist (or neo-Confederate) history, has convinced millions of poorly informed Americans that the Framers of the Constitution hated a strong central government and were all for "states' rights" when nearly the opposite was true as Madison, Washington and Hamilton rejected the Articles of Confederation and drafted the Constitution to enhance federal power.

Further, the Right's hijacking of Revolutionary War symbols, like yellow "Don't Tread on Me" flags, confuses the Tea Party rank-and-file by equating the Founding era's resistance against an overseas monarchy to today's hatred of an elected U.S. government.

Amid this muck of muddled history, the biggest secret withheld from the American people is that today's Right is actually promoting a set of anti-government positions that originally arose to justify and protect the South's institution of slavery. The calls of "liberty" then covered the cries of suffering from human bondage, just as today's shouts of outrage reflect resentment over the first African-American president.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

Dr. King's Timeless Call for Justice

Placing bombs among civilians as happened at the Boston Marathon is an inexcusable act, but Americans invite future violence when they ignore how their government's acts of brutality abroad drive people to extremism, a half-century-old lesson from Martin Luther King Jr., as Jose-Antonio Orosco recalls.

By Jose-Antonio Orosco

April 16 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail," which is now a classic document in American history and compelling testimony to the power of nonviolence and the struggle for equality.

Just a day before the anniversary, the Boston Marathon was marred by a horrific event, the placing of two crude but deadly bombs among the crowd near the finish line. At first glance, it may seem there is very little to connect the two: what does a document dealing with civil rights have to do with a terrorist bombing?

We ought to remember that, for decades, African Americans lived under constant threat of terrorist violence at the hands of white supremacist groups such as the KKK. Those that were not victims of physical lynchings often had to live with the psychological scars of being treated as second-class citizens.

Few people could understand, King wrote, how heartbreaking it is to explain to one's own children why they can't attend an amusement park because of segregation, or to try to come up with an answer to the question "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?" that will not somehow harden that child's heart forever.

In his letter, Dr. King tries to remind moderate white Americans who were concerned about marches and rallies getting out of hand that, in staging demonstrations around the country, civil rights activists were not trying to stir up trouble. Instead, they were trying to deal with the trouble that already existed in the United States and was overlooked by most people.

In using nonviolent civil disobedience, the activists were not attempting to create tension, but to find a way to give expression to the anger and "hidden tension" that boiled underneath the thin layer of normalcy generated by racist segregation. He called upon people to deal with the underlying causes of violence and not traffic in "a superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects."

Toward the end of his life, King taught us that our world is rife with various injustices, racism, militarism, poverty, and a culture of competitive

materialism, that damage the flourishing of millions of people around the world and are the causes for much misery and anger.

For many of those suffering those conditions, violence seems to be the only way to give voice to their frustrations. King did not mean to justify the use of violence, but only to explain why so many people in despair might be tempted to pick up the gun or the bomb.

Some of the first responders in Boston commented that the scene at the finish line looked like a war-zone. Media commentators pointed out that on the same day that the marathon bombings occurred there were several terrible explosions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Such observations ought not to diminish the pain and suffering of the victims in Boston, but to remind us, as King did in his letter, that there is but a thin veneer of civilization over a world plagued with misery.

The task of people of good conscience, King would counsel, is not to dismiss the perpetrators of violence by pathologizing them as “crazy,” but to take a good, hard look at how the world’s institutions are structured to reward war and aggression.

Terrorists ought to be brought to account and victims deserve compassion; but justice means more than punishment. It also means we have to consider how to think about building a world in which “in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine.”

Jose-Antonio Orosco is Associate Professor of Philosophy and the director of the Peace Studies program at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon.

Dr. King’s Warning of ‘Two Americas’

Besides battering down the walls of racial segregation, Martin Luther King Jr. demanded that America address its economic barriers to fairness and justice, a challenge that may have earned him even more contempt from the power structure, as Bill Moyers and Michael Winship note.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

You may think you know about Martin Luther King, Jr., but there is much about the man and his message we have conveniently forgotten. He was a prophet, like Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah of old, calling kings and plutocrats to account –

speaking truth to power.

King was only 39 when he was murdered in Memphis 45 years ago, on April 4, 1968. The 1963 March on Washington and the 1965 March from Selma to Montgomery were behind him. So was the successful passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act.

In the last year of his life, as he moved toward Memphis and his death, he announced what he called the Poor People's Campaign, a "multi-racial army" that would come to Washington, build an encampment and demand from Congress an "Economic Bill of Rights" for all Americans, black, white, or brown. He had long known that the fight for *racial* equality could not be separated from the need for *economic* equity fairness for all, including working people and the poor.

Martin Luther King, Jr., had *more* than a dream he envisioned what America could be, if only it lived up to its promise of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for each and every citizen. That's what we have conveniently forgotten as the years have passed and his reality has slowly been shrouded in the marble monuments of sainthood.

But read part of the speech Dr. King made at Stanford University in 1967, a year before his assassination and marvel at how relevant his words remain: "There are literally two Americas. One America is beautiful for situation. And in a sense this America is overflowing with the milk of prosperity and the honey of opportunity. This America is the habitat of millions of people who have food and material necessities for their bodies, and culture and education for their minds; and freedom and dignity for their spirits.

"Tragically and unfortunately, there is another America. This other America has a daily ugliness about it that constantly transforms the buoyancy of hope into the fatigue of despair. In this America millions of work-starved men walk the streets daily in search for jobs that do not exist. In this America millions of people find themselves living in rat-infected vermin-filled slums. In this America people are poor by the millions. They find themselves perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity."

Breathtakingly prescient words as we look around us at a society where the chasm between the superrich and poor is wider and deeper than ever. According to a Department of Housing and Urban Development press release, "On a single night last January, 633,782 people were homeless in the United States." The Institute for Policy Studies' online weekly "Too Much" notes that single-room-occupancy shelter rates run about \$558 per month and quotes analyst Paul Buchheit, who says that at that rate, "Any one of America's ten richest collected enough in 2012 income to pay an entire year's rent for all of America's homeless."

But why rent when you can buy? "Too Much" also reports that the widow of recently deceased financier Martin Zweig "amid a Manhattan luxury boom" has placed their apartment at the top of the posh Pierre Hotel on the market for \$125 million: "A sale at that price would set a new New York record for a luxury personal residence, more than \$30 million over the current real estate high marks."

Meanwhile, a new briefing paper from the advocacy group National Employment Law Project (NELP) finds there are 27 million unemployed or underemployed workers in the U.S. labor force, including "not only the unemployed counted by official jobs reports, but also the eight million part-time workers who would rather be working full-time and the 6.8 million discouraged workers who want to work but who have stopped looking altogether."

Five years after the financial meltdown, "the average duration of unemployment remains at least twice that of any other recession since the 1950s."

And if you think austerity's a good idea, NELP estimates that, "Taken together, the 'sequester' and other budget-cutting policies will likely slow GDP this year by 2.1 percentage points, costing the U.S. economy over 2.4 million jobs."

Walmart's one of those companies laying people off, but according to the website Business Insider, the megachain's CEO Michael Duke gets paid 1,034 times more than his average worker. Matter of fact, "In the past 30 years, compensation for chief executives in America has increased 127 times faster than the average worker's salary."

Two Americas indeed.

Bill Moyers is managing editor and Michael Winship, senior writer at the think tank Demos, is senior writer of the weekly public affairs program, Moyers & Company, airing on public television. Check local airtimes or comment at www.BillMoyers.com.

Can Christians Turn Away from War?

Despite originating in Jesus's messages of peace, Christianity has been arguably the world's most violent religion with its adherents committing genocide on all continents except unpopulated Antarctica. Again and again, Christian churches have blessed warfare, but a new generation is objecting, says Rev. Howard Bess.

By the Rev. Howard Bess

The present upheaval in Christian churches cannot be divorced from the coming-of-age of a younger American population that is weary of war on the world scene, fed up with violence in our American communities, and outraged at the violence that is taking place in our homes. For many, violence has become unacceptable.

A key question that is taking center stage in this new developing Christianity is: "Is God violent?" That topic is addressed in Rob Bell's book, *Love Wins*, which put him on the cover of Time magazine and won him a major piece in The New Yorker.

Bell is not a lonely voice. He represents a growing base of American Christians who are weary of an angry, violent God, who loves some people and not others, loves some kinds of Christians but not others, loves Americans and not Chinese, loves Christians but not Muslims, and endorses insane wars.

But, some Christians ask, what about the God found in the Bible? That God is sometimes loving and sometimes violent. Thus, for many Christians, choosing a God who favors no violence is a denial of the Holy Bible.

Which leads Christians to another question: Is the Bible indeed a Holy book without error or is it a collection of writings that reveals ongoing discussions and arguments about the nature and activities of the God of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Jesus?

The growing American objection to violence is forcing a new look among Christians at the authority of the Bible as a Holy book. In particular, the new breed of emerging Christians is choosing to look to Jesus for authority rather than the rest of the Bible. According to the historical record that survives, Jesus was a non-violent, loving people's rabbi. He never inflicted violence on others, nor did he endorse violence in his teachings.

When this new breed of emerging Christians looks at Jesus, they read simple statements like "Love your enemies" and "Blessed are the peacemakers." They hear him telling his disciple to "Put up your sword" with the added admonition, "Those who live by the sword will also die by the sword." These short sayings are memorable and give good guidance to living life in a different, non-violent, peaceful manner.

But can America become a non-violent, peaceful country? Or have the many wars of our past poisoned our minds and hearts beyond recall? Have we fallen into the lie that peace and security can only be attained with bigger armies and more powerful weapons? Or, do we hear the warning of Jesus "Those who live by the sword will die by the sword."

I recently reread Martin Luther King's "Pledge of Nonviolence." He asked masses of people to take the pledge, and it was one of the key motivators of mostly peaceful change in America during the civil rights movement.

Today, the so-called emerging Christians are leaving traditional churches in large numbers and for good reasons. One of those reasons is that traditional churches (with some notable exceptions) have not pursued their role as peacemakers.

Let us be fair. In the history of America, Christian churches and individuals have done an amazing amount of good. The drive to rid the country of slavery was church driven. The civil rights movement of the 1960s was church driven. The nation counts on the services of the Salvation Army and Catholic Social Services. We all benefit from Christian-based health and education networks.

However, Christian churches in America have utterly failed in communicating the message of peace and non-violence that is written in large letters in the teachings of Jesus. Just War Theory has been used to justify every war that America has chosen to wage.

Some timid churches have prided themselves as being tolerant toward this debate. But I believe Jesus would find the standard of tolerance disgusting. To be true to Jesus, Christians must be pro-active and shout the message of peace and non-violence from the rooftops.

I find the present upheaval in Christianity to be encouraging because people involved appear to be taking Jesus seriously. Jesus said that a small light could light up a whole room, that a bit of yeast could raise a whole loaf, and that a bit of salt could flavor the whole pot.

Our new crop of Jesus-followers is part of our nation's hope, leading the country from war and violence to the Jesus way of peace and non-violence.

The Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in Palmer, Alaska. His email address is hdbss@mtaonline.net.

Clint Eastwood's Dishonest 'J. Edgar'

Exclusive: In the movie *J. Edgar*, director Clint Eastwood glosses over the long train of abuses committed by the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover so there's more time for a psychological profile. But James DiEugenio says that leaves a dishonest impression of this violator of American rights.

By James DiEugenio

Much of the controversy around Clint Eastwood's *J. Edgar* has swirled around screenwriter Lance Black's depiction of the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover as a closeted gay man, since Black is a gay writer-director and most of his previous projects featured gay themes.

But even more important in any critical analysis of the movie is Eastwood's work as director. Because that informs us about why the American film business has come to a point when a mediocre, compromised and dishonest production like this much ballyhooed film gets praised for "being candid" about one of the worst Americans of the 20th Century.

To my knowledge, this is the third film made about J. Edgar Hoover. In 1977, there was a rather low budget, independent film directed and written by Larry Cohen, which starred Broderick Crawford as Hoover. It was titled *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover*. Considering its time period, it was a forthright look at Hoover. Because of its controversial topic, it was plagued by budget problems. Therefore it was made on the run by sneaking onto locations.

In 1987, Robert Collins wrote and directed a TV film, which starred Treat Williams as Hoover. This film was less forthright about Hoover and his crimes. (I should note, there is also a third production that cannot really be called a movie. It was more like a one-man theatrical show with Ernest Borgnine enacting the Director and Cartha DeLoach, a senior FBI official under Hoover, providing the support. With Hoover's No. 3 man on board, one can imagine the depth of insight into Hoover.)

The fact that Hoover has been dead since 1972, yet there has been so little produced on film about him tells us something about the man and the film business in the USA. For there can be little doubt that J. Edgar Hoover was one of the most perniciously influential men in 20th Century America.

While helming the Bureau, he conducted some of the greatest abuses of power and legal transgressions that any American civil servant ever did. And while he did so, he protected himself by collecting pieces of personal blackmail against federal, state and local politicians and government officers.

In one famous case cited by author Curt Gentry, Hoover managed to secure film of a prominent citizen's wife fellating her black chauffeur. When these kinds of things did not exist, Hoover would have FBI employees invent the evidence to execute the blackmail.

A good example of this was Hoover's destruction of Congressman Cornelius Gallagher, who was concerned about the use of the Bureau's technologies to spy

on Americans. Gallagher spoke about this in Congress and began to hold hearings on the topic. Hoover sent an emissary to warn him about his activities.

When Gallagher persisted, the Director manufactured a scenario of Gallagher being tied in with the local New Jersey mob. The FBI broke into his home and stole his personal stationery. Hoover's operatives then forged documents to connect Gallagher to local Mafia chieftain Joe Zicarelli. They also forged telephone tapes of Gallagher talking to Zicarelli.

Hoover and DeLoach got *Life* magazine to publish that false story. DeLoach then told Gallagher's lawyer that unless the congressman resigned DeLoach would have *Life* print a story that a New Jersey gambler had died of a heart attack at Gallagher's home while in bed with his wife. [See Anthony Summers, *Official and Confidential*, pgs. 211-12.]

Hoover's Secrets

But this is just the beginning of the evils that Hoover indulged himself in while Director. Hoover allowed his agents to conduct unauthorized mail intercept programs, cable intercept programs and breaking and entering called black back jobs in order to steal and plant evidence, usually on leftist groups. [See Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and his Secrets*, pgs. 282-84].

Beyond that, Hoover conducted taps on phones and planted surveillance bugs in homes and businesses. [Ibid, pgs. 285-86] When authors tried to tell the public about some of the things Hoover did, he would send agents to try and thwart publication of these books and magazine articles. [Ibid, pgs. 386, 462] He even went as far as sending agents into library archives to remove documents that could be used to discredit him. [Ibid, pgs. 288-89]

Meanwhile, Hoover authorized books to be written about the Bureau hiding his personal crimes and exaggerating and glorifying the Bureau's triumphs e.g. Don Whitehead's *The FBI Story*. He then had books ghost-written for him by agents on company time, e.g. *Master of Deceit*.

Not paying for the writing, Hoover could then pocket the profits himself. He would cover this windfall by saying he would donate the profits to something called The FBI Recreational Association. This turned out to be a slush fund used by him at his discretion. [Ibid, p. 448]

Inspiring McCarthy

Hoover played a prominent role in creating the Red Scare in the Fifties. In fact, some writers maintain that it was really Hoover who created Joe McCarthy by supplying him with reams of questionable information, which Hoover could not

get into the record himself.

This, in turn, created the hysteria to persecute Communists and leftist sympathizers, even though it was not a crime to be a Communist and the relatively small movement supported many worthy reforms, such as the end to racial segregation. Nevertheless, Hoover's Red Scare resulted in personal tragedies like the case of the Hollywood Ten, a group of screenwriters, actors and directors who were blacklisted for their leftist political beliefs.

Although Hoover toiled at exaggerating to an insane degree the number of people in the Communist Party and how dangerous they were to America, he ignored the influence of the Mob in American life all the way up to the notorious Apalachin Raid in 1957, which discovered a meeting of about 100 Mafiosi in upstate New York.

Even after that proof of a national crime syndicate, Hoover never really ratcheted up the man-hours or legal techniques used against the Mafia until Robert Kennedy became Attorney General and pushed him into it. RFK thought it silly to use as many agents as Hoover did on the Communist Party since he famously said that a large percentage of those presumed Communists were actually FBI informants.

In another split with the Kennedys, Hoover never worried about white militant groups in the South or the violations of the Brown v. Board of Education decision, striking down "separate-but-equal" schools. In fact, in a meeting at the White House in 1954, Hoover actually discounted the power of the Ku Klux Klan despite its long record of racial violence. [Gentry, p. 141]

When the Freedom Riders began their efforts to integrate public facilities in the South, Hoover knew at least two weeks in advance that the Klan planned to use violence to terrorize the protesters. The FBI even alerted the police in Montgomery when the bus was coming, knowing that the local police were working with the Klan. [Ibid, p. 483-485]

When the violence broke out in Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama and several people were severely beaten it was Robert Kennedy who had to call out federal marshals to stop it. It was this dereliction of duty by Hoover that sparked criticism from Martin Luther King Jr against the FBI's laxness on Klan violence. King's criticism infuriated Hoover because he didn't like the fact that he was a racist to be implied in public. [Ibid, p. 497]

But Hoover made sure that most of the FBI's Special Agents in Charge, and their assistants, in southern cities were southerners. [Ibid, p. 499] Though Hoover's later smearing of King's character became infamous, Hoover already had a long

record of collecting personal gossip and sexual blackmail against prominent individuals, including President Dwight Eisenhower. [Ibid, p. 441]

The FBI also had opened a file on King in 1958, long before he came to national prominence. There were at least 20 black bag jobs on King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) *that were recorded*. And as Gentry points out, the aim of these was to get information on King himself.

One of the worst aspects of Hoover's career was the launching of the infamous COINTELPRO assaults on certain groups, most notably the Black Panthers. This program employed the use of informants, double agents, newspaper assets, surveillance, and alliances with local police to sow discord and division within target groups, which often would degenerate into violent confrontations.

A prime example was the 1969 killing of Chicago Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark while they were sleeping. [See "How the FBI Tried to Destroy the Black Panthers" in *Government by Gunplay*, edited by Sid Blumenthal and Harvey Yazijian.]

A Pattern of Abuses

The above compilation of Hoover's abuses could go on and on: he hired lying witnesses like Harvey Matusow to put innocent people in jail; the FBI either planted or built the famous Woodstock typewriter to corroborate witness Whittaker Chambers's spy accusations against State Department official Alger Hiss; Hoover lied about how he rolled up a group of Nazi spies during World War II; and he watched as the two informants in the group were sentenced to long prison terms at hard labor.

Yet beyond wanting to giving the reader a real taste of what Hoover was like, I have summarized his career to make an important point about the Black/Eastwood film, which is this: *none of the above is in this popular movie!*

Which means the worst things that Hoover did are left out of the film. Of course, it would be impossible to detail, or even mention in passing, all of the above. But surely any honest film about the man would have to deal with at least some of it. But this film does not. So right off the bat, the viewer gets a whitewashed view of just how bad Hoover really was.

Most of the film's 137 minute running time consists of five episodes: 1.) Hoover's relationship with his mother; 2.) His relationship with his assistant Clyde Tolson; 3.) Hoover's role in the World War I-era Palmer Raids; 4.) The FBI's role in the Lindbergh child kidnapping case; 5.) The composition of a letter to Martin Luther King in which the FBI implied that he should commit suicide or else the Bureau would blackmail him about his infidelity.

The first two are personal matters of course. But before we get to them, it is interesting to explore how Black deals with the latter three since they are the incidents he uses to elucidate Hoover's professional career.

Exaggerating a Red Scare

The Palmer Raids are named after A. Mitchell Palmer who was Attorney General from 1919-1921. After a series of bombings, including one right outside his home, he was coaxed into organizing two raids by the Bureau of Investigation the forerunner of the FBI against suspected radicals who were behind the violence.

The problem was that the acts were carried out by anarchists, which the Bureau had very little information about. So instead, the raids were set up and planned against leftists, who the Bureau *did* have much information about.

Hoover had been in on the gathering of this information from the age of 22, when he was placed in charge of a unit in the Enemy Alien Registration Section of the Justice Department. [Gentry, p. 69] Hoover studied previous Justice Department raids against leftist unions like the IWW. And he became enamored of the dragnet-type raid. [Ibid, p. 73]

Before going any further, let us briefly describe what the film depicts about Hoover and the raids. Played by Leonardo DiCaprio, Hoover rides his bike down to the scene of the explosion near Palmer's house. He then is depicted as a foot soldier in the actual raids. As Palmer then leaves office, Hoover is heard saying, "I was only following orders."

To put it mildly, this is not what actually happened. First of all, to depict Hoover riding a bike to the scene is a bit of a stretch. The man was 24 years old at the time. He was not just a kid, as Eastwood and Black seem to imply. Further, he was not just a foot soldier, and he was not just following orders.

As Gentry and Tony Summers describe, Hoover actually assembled the lists of suspects for the two raids. But further, he also helped in cobbling together the (very weak) legal underpinnings for the raids, arrests, and deportation hearings. [Gentry, pgs. 81-82]

For the second series of raids, which began in late December of 1919, Hoover actually prepared the warrants all 3,000 of them. [Ibid, p. 89] These warrants usually contained only the name of the alien and the unsupported allegation that he was a member of the Communist Party.

Considering the advance work he did, Hoover was too valuable to be off in the field. In reality, and unlike what Eastwood depicts, he was back in the office coordinating things if anyone had any legal problem in the actual practice of

the raids. [ibid, p. 91] We know this from the actual written instructions given to the agents involved in the raids.

Finally, Black's script underplays just how bad the raids were. Approximately 10,000 men were arrested. Within a week, about 6,000 were released since there was not even a card to prove they were Communist Party members, indicating how bad Hoover's files were.

Of the remaining 4,000, about half had been arrested without warrants. In many cases, the warrants were delivered *after* the arrest. Yet even with all of these rights violations, Hoover still tried to get judges to set high bail bonds so the detainees could not be released.

He then set up a propaganda organ inside the Bureau to pass information onto newspapers putting the best possible spin on the raids. In spite of the fact that even with all the legal lacunae he supervised, almost no weapons of violent revolution had been found. [Gentry, pgs. 94-95]

Hoover also was in on the legal preparations for the deportation hearings. [Ibid, p. 95] He also granted interviews to newspapers like the *New York Times*. And when Palmer was called before Congress, Hoover sat next to him and supplied him with documents. [Ibid. p. 100]

These propaganda ploys were meant to disguise the fact that Hoover, who had a law degree, must have known that the raids employed a fistful of illegal acts and doctrines that anticipated the police state tactics soon to be used in the fascist nations of Italy and Germany. When lawyers did begin to write about these issues, what did Hoover do? He opened files on them for speaking out. [Ibid, p. 99]

These facts belie the presentation by Black and Eastwood of Hoover as a bicycle-riding innocent foot soldier who was only following orders. In fact, what they present better fits the embroidered image that Hoover used afterwards to try and discount his key role in this sorry episode.

Lindbergh Case

Let us now look at the film's depiction of the 1932 kidnapping of Charles Lindbergh's infant son.

As Black and Eastwood show, the local and state authorities did not want the Bureau involved. But it is also true that Hoover had the opportunity to stake out the meeting at which ransom money was exchanged for information on where the child was being held. Hoover decided not to do so. [Gentry, p. 150]

This turned out to be a mistake since the child was not at the location where the kidnapper's said he was. He was already dead. And the decomposed body was within five miles of Lindbergh's home. This discovery finally got the Bureau involved through the orders of the president. And shortly after Congress passed what became known as the Lindbergh Law, making kidnapping a federal offense and giving Hoover jurisdiction.

But this expansion of his authority became a problem since Hoover had great difficulty solving the case: the arrest of Bruno Hauptmann was not made for over two and a half years.

In fact, Hoover always thought that more than one person was involved and that there was likely an inside agent as part of the plot. Hoover first suspected for this role the baby's nursemaid, Betty Gow, who was the last person to see the infant in the crib and the first to discover his absence. [Lloyd C. Gardner, *The Case that Never Dies*, p. 32]

Also, unlike what the film shows, Hoover's certainty about the guilt of Hauptmann was not close to absolute. Indeed, his agents told him that the local authorities had fiddled with the evidence.

We now know today, through the work of Anthony Scaduto in his 1977 book *Scapegoat*, that the prosecution had employment records in their possession that they hid from the defense that made it very difficult to believe that Hauptmann could have driven from New York City (where he was working that day) to New Jersey, the scene of the crime, at the time he was supposed to be there.

Further, the prosecutors even tampered with the start date of Hauptmann's New York job to make it appear he was not even there on the day of the kidnapping. (For a brief overview of the case, [click here](#))

As Curt Gentry notes, in October 1934, three months before Hauptmann's trial began, Hoover called a press conference to announce the FBI was withdrawing from the case. [Gentry, p. 162] From then, until Hauptmann's execution in April 1936, there was a long series of FBI memoranda marking the Bureau's and Hoover's doubts about the case.

Agent Leon Turrou, Hoover's main liaison to the local authorities from the time of the indictment, called the proceedings against Hauptmann "a mockery" of a trial. For instance, one of the main witnesses used to identify the defendant was a Dr. Condon, who met in a cemetery with a man sent to collect the ransom. Yet Condon failed to pick Hauptmann out of a line-up.

And two days after, Condon told Turrou that Hauptmann was not the man he met. The man he met was much heavier, had different eyes, different hair etc. [Ibid,

p. 163] Yet, by the time of the trial, someone had changed his mind and he was now positive it was Hauptmann.

Same thing with Charles Lindbergh who only heard the man's voice in the cemetery. At first, Lindbergh said he could not positively identify the voice as Hauptmann's. But by the time he took the stand, Lindbergh positively identified it.

A witness who placed Hauptmann near the Lindbergh home was characterized in an FBI memo as "a confirmed liar and totally unreliable." [Ibid, p. 163]

Hoover himself doubted some of the evidence in the case. For instance as he admitted in a memo of Sept. 24, 1934, before the trial started, the defendant's fingerprints did not match "the latent impressions developed on the ransom notes."

And as Lloyd Garner writes, Hauptmann's fingerprints were not on the ladder allegedly used to climb to the infant's window at the Lindbergh home. The local authorities then washed the ladder of all prints and failed to disclose that Hauptmann's were not there. [Gardner, p. 344]

This is why when Lindbergh praised the FBI for its work on the case, Hoover was not thankful but indignant. [Gentry, p. 163] Of course, the FBI later concealed its doubts and made the case a hallmark of the official tour for propaganda purposes.

Eastwood and Black, again, sell the public the amended version, with both Hoover and Tolson in daily attendance at the trial, which was not the case.

Harassing King

An entire film could have been put together about Hoover's dark obsession with Martin Luther King. Yet of the three main episodes about the FBI depicted in the film, the Palmer Raids, the Hauptmann case and King the smearing of the civil rights leader takes the least amount of screen time.

What the movie's account essentially consists of is DiCaprio reciting the famous letter to be sent to King blackmailing him about his infidelity and suggesting he take his own life before this behavior was exposed.

Director Eastwood depicts King and another woman in a hotel room, and Hoover listening to audiotapes of the tryst. This scene occurred in 1964-65, yet one would never know that Hoover first opened files on King in 1958. Also left out is that Hoover had arranged other campaigns to damage previous prominent African-Americans, such as Marcus Garvey and Paul Robeson. [Summers, p. 352]

Another inconvenient fact was that prior to the Kennedys taking office, there were at most five black agents in the Bureau, except they were not really agents. They had gone to a segregated FBI school and were only called special agents to exempt them from the draft for World War II. In reality, each one was either a chauffeur or butler. [Michael Friedly and David Gallen, *Martin Luther King Jr.: The FBI File*, p. 61]

As mentioned at the beginning of this review, Hoover's racism extended to the struggle for civil rights in the South. As one commentator inside the Bureau wrote, the FBI never enforced civil rights law since Hoover was opposed to the civil rights program.

The only reason things eventually changed was because Bobby Kennedy put pressure on Hoover to support civil rights workers. But prior to that time, Hoover ignored the wholesale violation of civil rights on the part of Southern law enforcement. [Ibid, p. 62]

All of this is a necessary prelude to understanding the mania that Hoover had about figures like King and Malcolm X. As early as 1963, Hoover had called a meeting to explore "avenues of approach aimed at neutralizing King as an effective Negro leader." [Summers, p. 353] This meeting led to the proposal of 21 avenues for achieving the goal.

About a month later, Hoover had what he thought were tapes of King partying in a hotel room with women present. He was overjoyed. He wrote a memo about it that said, "This will destroy the burrhead." [Gentry, p. 568]

Undermining Civil Rights

The FBI's campaign was meant to not just discredit and humiliate King, but to derail the civil rights movement by leaving it without a charismatic leader, thereby giving Hoover the opportunity to maneuver someone of his own liking into that position. Preferably a much more conservative, less dynamic, and more establishment figure. [Summers, p. 354]

Hoover also used these tapes to try and drive a wedge between first, King and Bobby Kennedy, and then King and Lyndon Johnson. It did not succeed with the former, but as the Vietnam War escalated, it did succeed with the latter. [Ibid, p. 355]

Hoover ordered his agents to lobby organizations against giving King any official honors e.g. Marquette University in 1964. The FBI also worked hard to stop any media outlets from featuring him on TV, radio or in print media.

As time went on, Hoover tried to weaken support for King in Congress by

furnishing blackmail material to representatives and senators. Hoover also made the material available to other civil right leaders, like Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, to create dissatisfaction with King and dissension in the ranks. [Gentry, p. 574]

Hoover even used his influence with Cardinal Spellman of New York to try and stop Pope Paul VI from granting King an audience in the Vatican. [Summers, p. 356] When King was about to get his Nobel Prize, Hoover went ballistic, trying to get his blackmail tapes published by the press, e.g. executive editor Ben Bradlee at the *Washington Post*. (Ibid, p. 358)

All of this bile originated not just with Hoover's inherent racism, but also because of King's criticism of the Bureau's inaction on the violation of civil rights in the South. Angered by the criticism, Hoover also smeared King with allegations that he was being influenced by Communists. [Gentry, p. 506]

This sorry episode culminated with the sending of a composite tape and the threatening letter to King's wife and to his organization's headquarters in Atlanta in early 1965. This was meant to stop King from collecting his Nobel Prize, but failed. However, it did cause King emotional turmoil. [Summers, p. 361]

Background Missing

This would seem to me to be important information in preparing the viewer for DiCaprio reciting the blackmailing letter. Yet virtually all of it is missing from the film. Therefore, the episode is robbed of both its personal and historical background. Clearly, Black does not want the viewer to know just how deep-rooted and longstanding Hoover's racism was.

But what makes the omissions even worse is that Black and Eastwood then try to soften Hoover's bigotry. The filmmakers have Hoover dictating his memoirs to a black agent and have Hoover talking about his actions against the Klan in the South.

Regarding the former, knowing what we do about Hoover, this seems a real stretch. About the latter, the script leaves out the fact that there were virtually no actions in that area until Bobby Kennedy urged Hoover to use his COINTELPRO techniques against the Klan. [Gentry, p. 563]

Let us summarize what Black has done with Hoover's biographical materials. He left out the worst aspects of Hoover's career. Then in considering the actual facts and history in the three episodes he does describe, the Palmer Raids, the Hauptmann case, and the campaign against King, he left out key facts in order to make Hoover appear in a softer and hazier light.

One can fairly conclude that screenwriter Black had an agenda, which director Eastwood either condoned or agreed with. The result is that Black and Eastwood have done what a PR man might do, given the public's general knowledge about Hoover's unsavory history: they sprayed deodorant under his armpits and splashed some cologne on him so that this thoroughly deplorable villain could sit next to us at the dinner table.

According to Black and Eastwood, Hoover really wasn't such a bad guy after all. Sorry, some of us know better.

Let me end this section with this comparison. When Oliver Stone uses dramatic license in his political films, he gets pilloried from pillar to post and back again. Yet I detect little or no outrage from the familiar quarters for what Eastwood and Black have done with the record here. Why not?

Eastwood's Career

In the last two decades, Eastwood has managed to elevate his reputation and standing in the film colony in a way that would have seemed nearly impossible back in say 1971, the year that *Dirty Harry* was released.

If one recalls, Eastwood first got noticed by doing the TV series *Rawhide*, three so-called spaghetti Westerns with Italian director Sergio Leone, and the first of five movies in the *Dirty Harry* series.

Established as an actor with box-office appeal, Eastwood formed his own production company, called Malpaso, and produced, directed and/or starred in such films as *Breezy*, *The Eiger Sanction*, *Every Which Way but Loose*, *Any Which Way You Can*, *Honky Tonk Man*, *City Heat*, *Pink Cadillac*, *The Rookie* and so on.

Pretty much forgettable fare. But since Eastwood's much overrated Western *Unforgiven*, there seems to have been an almost industry-wide agreement to make believe that Eastwood is somehow both a fine actor and a serious director. Even people like Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese have joined in the effort.

This tells us a lot about the decline of American film, and the concomitant ascension of people like Quentin Tarantino, the Coen brothers, Kathryn Bigelow and Eastwood.

If one defines acting in its purest sense as channeling what one has into creating someone different than oneself, i.e. applying one's voice, carriage, intelligence and imagination to enliven this other persona, when has Eastwood ever done that?

When has he ever transformed himself like say Philip Seymour Hoffman did in the

film *Capote*? Or say Robert DeNiro did in *The Last Tycoon*, or *Bang the Drum Slowly*? When did he ever do what Gene Hackman did in *The Conversation*?

At his best, Eastwood flexes his persona to *indicate* someone else. But this after the fact elevation of Eastwood as an actor has now led to his elevation as a director. I cannot remember an Eastwood-directed film from which I recall any memorable editing montage, any remarkable photographic effects, or any kind of extraordinary use of what is called *mise-en-scene*, that is the placement and movement of actors within the frame.

What makes this such a telling point is that Eastwood's directing career goes all the way back to 1971 and the film *Play Misty for Me*. And that non-distinction continues here.

Little Creativity

I generously counted two directorial strophes that were above the pedestrian. When DiCaprio listens to the illicit tapes, Eastwood shows us two silhouettes on the wall of a hotel room beginning to undress. When the body of the Lindbergh baby is discovered, the camera tilts up to show how close it was to the Lindbergh home. And that is it for a 137-minute film.

But what is even more surprising is that the actor Eastwood does very little, if anything, with his cast. DiCaprio takes on a different voice, but it's not Hoover's voice. And it sometimes lapses into Boston Irish, and then into a southern drawl.

This might be excusable (although there are many voice coaches available to aid in these things). But DiCaprio does not even capture the unusual speech cadence that Hoover had, the stop-start, staccato phrasing the man used.

And even when Hoover ages, I could not discern a real attempt to capture the unusual gait that Hoover had, which made him seem even more compact and bearish than he was. As for conveying any of the malevolence or manipulation in the man, DiCaprio barely registers it.

Naomi Watts walks though her nondescript role as Hoover's secretary Helen Gandy. Armie Hammer as Hoover's friend and assistant, Clyde Tolson, is a complete non-entity. And when Eastwood ages him he gets even worse.

First, the make-up is bizarre, making Tolson look like a walking exhibit from a waxworks museum. And Tolson did not look like that, as anyone can see from his photos at Hoover's funeral. But secondly, Hammer's attempts to simulate old age are pure amateur-night stuff: the slow walk with shaking arms. It is out of summer-stock theater.

If Eastwood could not get a performance out of someone like Hammer, one could excuse him. But what can one say if a director cannot do anything with Dame Judy Dench? This is the actress who was voted as giving the finest female performance ever in the Royal Shakespeare Company as Lady MacBeth. Dench delivers here a performance at about the level of former TV actress Linda Lavin.

Eastwood is famous for not rehearsing and not wanting to do more than three or so takes of a scene. The result of that method is pretty obvious in *J. Edgar*. These actors needed to be pushed harder. Eastwood doesn't do that, nor does he believe in it.

Kissing Scene

Let me end with what Black and Eastwood use as the climax of the film. It is a lover's quarrel between Tolson and Hoover in a hotel room. They are on vacation and Hoover says he is thinking of taking a wife, Myrna Loy.

This causes Tolson to get angry, and a fistfight ensues. But then Hammer kisses DiCaprio. I wondered where this scene came from since I had not seen it mentioned in any of the now standard biographies of Hoover.

I finally located it in a book that is not considered a standard reference work, *Puppetmaster* by Richard Hack. On page 233 of that book, an argument is described between the two men at a hotel. But it does not resemble the one that Black and Eastwood depict.

Hack just writes about an argument the two had which, he said, resulted from some apparent slight to Hoover by Tolson. That is it. Nothing about Hoover taking a wife and Tolson flying into a jealous rage.

But further Hack does not footnote this episode either. So we don't know how reliable the sourcing is. But apparently that didn't bother Black from using it to fulfill his agenda.

If Black didn't have an agenda, if he had been interested in who Hoover really was, what he represented, and what his pernicious impact on America really was, he would have shown us a different confrontation, such as the one that went on between Hoover and Director of Domestic Intelligence William Sullivan.

To my knowledge, Sullivan was the only man in the executive offices who ever stood up to Hoover. About a year or two before Hoover died, Sullivan wrote a series of memos criticizing Hoover's performance as Director on issues like his gross exaggeration of the Communist threat inside the USA, his failure to hire African-American agents, and his failure to enforce civil rights laws. Sullivan also had tired of Hoover's blackmail surveillance on presidents and began to

think the Director was not of sound mind. [Summers, pgs. 397-99]

This culminated in a meeting in Hoover's office where Sullivan said Hoover should retire. Hoover refused, and it was Sullivan who was forced out of the Bureau. Sullivan later testified before the Church Committee and gave Congress much inside information about Hoover's illegal operations.

Sullivan once told columnist Robert Novak that if one day he would read about his death in some kind of accident, Novak should not believe it; it would be murder.

In 1977, during the re-investigations of the killings of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Sullivan died in New Hampshire as he was meeting with friends to go deer hunting. Another hunter, with a telescopic sight, mistook Sullivan for a deer and killed him with his rifle.

The book that Sullivan was working on about his 30 years in the FBI was then posthumously published, but reportedly in much expurgated form. He was one of six current or former FBI officials who died in a six-month period in 1977, the season of inquiry into FBI dirty deeds and FBI cover-ups of political assassinations.

If this film had ended with the Sullivan-Hoover feud, it would have told us something about both America and about Hoover. But it would have been dark and truthful. Evidently, Black and Eastwood were not interested in that.

Black's agenda is pretty clear. Why Eastwood went along with this pastel-colored romance about a man who was a blackmailing monster is difficult to understand. But it proves again, as Pauline Kael explained decades ago, why Clint Eastwood is no artist. Artists don't compromise. And they don't falsify.

James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era.

Would Jesus Join the Occupy Protests?

In the holiday season, many Christians take pride in helping the poor by donating food and toys but U.S. religious leaders have stayed in the background of challenges to an inequitable economic system, leaving that Jesus work to mostly secular young people of the Occupy movement, the Rev. Howard Bess observes.

By the Rev. Howard Bess

When the Martin Luther King Jr. monument was dedicated recently in Washington DC, I was reminded that the civil rights movement in America was led not by a politician fulfilling campaign promises, nor by a popular evangelist bent on saving souls, but by a highly trained theologian who put his religious teachings into practice with a demand for justice for those who had suffered at the hands of the rich and the powerful.

The Rev. King was a Baptist preacher who took his religion into the arena of racism, economics and social disparity. However, hatred caught up with him, and he was killed.

Now, nearly a half century later, there is another broad-based protest that is gaining momentum. The Occupy Wall Street protests echo some of King's complaints about economic inequality and social injustice and the message can no longer be ignored.

The significance of this latest public protest movement, erupting all over the country, may eventually rival the impact of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, yet when comparing the two movements, there is one glaring difference: priests, pastors and clergy of every stripe are rarely in the forefront of Occupy protests.

Instead, secular young people are doing the very work that Jesus from Nazareth would urge us to do. Just as Jesus condemned the injustices of his own day and overturned the money-changing tables at the Temple the Occupy protesters are challenging how Wall Street bankers and today's rich and powerful are harming the masses of people.

This week, religious people have felt proud of giving turkeys to the poor, but they should be joining the protests against the haughty rich. I maintain that Jesus would be a part of the actions in Portland, Denver, New York and many other cities. For Christians, the crucial issue should be "what would Jesus do"?

Today, Christian theologians and Bible scholars agree that the Jesus trip to Jerusalem at the end of his life is essential to understand what Jesus was about. Yet, Christian tradition has brainwashed followers of Jesus about the realities of his trip south to Jerusalem. We have all been exposed to the worship services in which children march waving palm branches and singing "Hosanna."

Traditionally we have called the event "the triumphal entry." However, put into the political and social context of Jerusalem in the early first century BCE, Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey was probably more like a protest march

that mocked every leader in the city.

Political and religious “leaders” of the day probably would have ridden into town on a prancing horse, certainly not a humble donkey. So, Jesus’s choice of transportation was more street theatre than triumphal entry. It triggered a week of confrontations and arguments with the leaders of state and Temple.

The key event of the week was the incident in the Temple. Once again church tradition has given us a special name for the incident, “the cleansing of the Temple.” But It was more likely another piece of street theatre that became a bit physical.

To better understand the Temple incident, we need to understand its context. The Temple had become a lot more than a religious temple. It had become a tax collection agency and a bank. The Temple held large sums of money accumulated by collecting tithes from the faithful.

In reality, the tithe was a tax, not a freely given gift to God. In addition, fees were charged for participation in the Temple’s religious exercises. So, the Temple collected lots of money.

With that fat treasury, the Temple had entered the banking business and regularly made loans, primarily to poor people. Poor people were the victims not only of a flat tax, but also high-interest loans. So, the gap between the haves and the have-nots was growing rapidly. The poor were getting poorer, and the rich were getting richer.

Yet, equity was a key concept in the Israelite tradition. Torah (the law) had very specific rules demanding systematic redistribution of wealth. But those who controlled the Temple operation completely ignored their own religious teachings. The banking operation that had developed was very good to those who controlled the system.

Christians believe that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world. However, from the perspective of history, Jesus died because he challenged a banking system that passed itself off as being righteous.

Today, bank buildings are the temples of America and the financial industry is a key pillar of an increasingly inequitable economic system. Although banks and their controlling officers claim to be upholders of orderly American life, a growing number of people know better.

Recent surveys have asked people “who in the banking business do you trust?” Credit unions came out on top, followed by locally controlled banks. Then, came regional banks. Large national banks came in dead last.

Christians should thank the current Occupy Wall Street protesters for their message and their activism. They are doing our justice work for us. The current crop of national bank leaders are being shown to be just as corrupt as the Temple bankers were in Jesus's day.

If Jesus were present among us today, he would be moving from Portland, to Los Angeles, to Kansas City, to Dallas, up to Chicago and on to Wall Street in New York City. He would join the protest in every city. He would be demanding an overhaul of our financial and banking system. He would be standing with the poor and their allies – and against the rich and their protectors.

When Jesus pursued the corruption of his own day, the representatives of the religious and political status quo killed him. And Jesus said to his followers “take up your cross and follow me.”

The Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in Palmer, Alaska. His email address is hdbss@mtaonline.net.

The Clash Over Dr. King's Legacy

The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial is fittingly located between the monuments to Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. But historian William Loren Katz asks which version of the martyred civil rights leader will be remembered, the gentle advocate for racial tolerance or the fierce activist for peace and justice.

By William Loren Katz

It has taken a hurricane to postpone the dedication of the long-awaited monument to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Washington – the first monument on the Mall for an individual who is not a president, not a white man and not a war leader.

King repeatedly proved he was not frightened by forces packing the power of hurricanes. He calmly faced many human storms before he was assassinated in April 1968.

However, since major corporations contributed to the monument, how will Dr. King's message and courage be presented to the American public and remembered by children?

In 1964 when Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, frightened by King's popularity since his 1963 March on Washington, called him “the most notorious liar in the country” and ordered the FBI to

increase its surveillance and of the man and his movement.

A more recent assessment of King was offered this Jan. 13 when the Pentagon commemorated Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day with an address by the Defense Department's general counsel, PenJeh C. Johnson, who insisted that King would understand why the United States was at war today.

Speaking to Defense Department officials, Johnson frankly acknowledged that King, in the final year of his life, became an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War. But Johnson hastily added that today's wars are not out of line with the Nobel Peace Prize winner's teachings.

"I believe that if Dr. King were alive today, he would recognize that we live in a complicated world, and that our nation's military should not and cannot lay down its arms and leave the American people vulnerable to terrorist attack."

Really?

According to civil rights veteran and noted feminist scholar and author Jo Freeman, who worked for King's SCLC beginning in 1965, King repeatedly opposed U.S. intervention in Vietnam before small gatherings, and only reluctantly and temporarily stopped when he warned that President Lyndon Johnson might withdraw the "war on poverty" if King continued.

But King's conscience, and Johnson's escalation of the war, drove him into a full-blown, highly public denunciation of the war in 1967. On April 4 at the Riverside Church in New York City, Dr. King delivered his speech, "Declaration of Independence from the War In Vietnam."

It was not only eloquent and passionate but also carefully reasoned and as unambiguous in its message as its title.

Dr. King's call for U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam was also hard to ignore. That spring, he and Stokley Carmichael led a massive peace march to the United Nations building.

King's war opposition also brought challenges from his enemies both to his leadership and to his moral purpose. There were more death threats and less government protection when he needed it most. He expected all that.

In 1967, King was denounced by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and other parts of the liberal and the mainstream media. He was even challenged by some civil rights allies.

King had dared to speak at a time when U.S. officials from the president on down, warned that communism's triumph in Vietnam would lead to victories across

Asia and beyond. They used this “domino theory” to make Americans as fearful of communism as they are of today’s Middle Eastern terrorists.

But King was resolute and unmoved. “A time comes when silence is betrayal,” King said. He minced few words, referring to “my own government” as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.”

Has much changed today when the U.S. boasts the largest military budget in history, one larger than all other countries combined? The United States has untold bases across the globe, and its armed forces have been kept in Iraq and Afghanistan longer than in World War II.

Weekly we hear of the drone strikes in Libya, Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere and how the U.S. government is contemplating air strikes against Iran’s nuclear building sites. U.S. casualties are rising in the Middle East, and there seems no end in sight for U.S. occupation and war.

Would Dr. King have called for withdrawal from Vietnam and, had he lived, not called for a withdrawal from Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya? Would he have failed to see parallels that are as obvious as they are frightening?

In his Riverside address, Dr. King pointed out that “our leaders refused to tell us the truth” about the war in Vietnam. Can we ever forget that the U.S. attack on Iraq was initiated to destroy weapons of mass destruction that didn’t exist, and retaliate against a Saddam Hussein and Iraq that had no part in the 9/11 attacks on the United States?

In the name of “Iraqi freedom,” American leaders ordered the torture of prisoners, even sending some to other countries or U.S.-run “black sites” for torture; to assure “democracy,” the U.S. supported corrupt leaders who lacked popular support.

The people of Vietnam, King said, “must see Americans as strange liberators.”

In Afghanistan today those who suffer from drone attacks directed from afar, and from deadly night ground searches for terrorists, do not see Americans as liberators. They see a distant, imperial power occupying their country, killing innocent civilians, and as doomed to fail as earlier invaders of Afghanistan.

“The madness of Vietnam,” Dr. King said in 1967, will “totally” poison “America’s soul.” He told how U.S. involvement in Vietnam “eviscerated” its war on poverty begun by President Johnson, and instead had its “funds and energies” and “men and skills” drawn into a war “like some demonic, destructive suction tube.”

What happens to “America’s soul” as the U.S. fights three Middle Eastern wars, its budget spins out of control, and joblessness and hopelessness reach proportions known only during the Great Depression?

Dr. King emphasized how the Vietnam War was “devastating the hopes of the poor at home” and “sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight in extraordinarily high proportion relative to the rest of the population.”

In 2011, a volunteer army draws even more heavily on the poor, those without jobs, men and women losing hope of finding meaningful work. Dr. King said then “I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor.”

Would the man who organized a Poor People’s March on Washington before his assassination be silent now?

Toward the end of his address at the Riverside Church, Dr. King said:

“Somehow this madness must cease. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam and the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam ...

“The great initiative in the war is ours. The initiative to stop must be ours.”

Was not Martin Luther King, Jr. reaching beyond Vietnam when he warned of “approaching spiritual death” and called for “a significant and profound change in American life and policy” and insisted “we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values.”

Was he only speaking of Vietnam when he said, “War is not the answer?”

We the people have to make sure it is neither the J. Edgar Hoover spin or the Pentagon version, but the real legacy of Dr. King that is acknowledged and celebrated. We owe that to future generations.

William Loren Katz, author of 40 books on American history including *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage*, is a visiting scholar at New York University, his university affiliation since 1973. His website is williamlkatz.com. For Dr. King’s entire Riverside Church speech, [click here](#).
