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The Campaign Against Dr. King

by Bayard Rustin
A. Philip Randolph Institute

It is no surprise that J. Edgar Hoover hated Martin Luther King, Jr. But even in this cynical age accustomed to dirty tricks and deceit it is shocking to learn the desperate and despicable lengths Hoover and the FBI went to in order to destroy King.

During the time when I worked with Dr. King, we knew that the FBI had sent spies into the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and we suspected that we had been bugged as well. In recent weeks it has been revealed that the FBI went much further -- that they organized and carried out a campaign designed to destroy Dr. King. The FBI tried to prevent a college from giving King an honorary degree, they hatched a plan to keep the Pope from granting him an audience, and tried to undermine the financial support for the S.C.L.C.

The FBI did not stop at trying to destroy King as a civil rights leader. Nor did they stop at a slanderous whispering campaign planned to destroy Dr. King's personal reputation. They went so far as to send a note and tape recording to King in late 1964 in an effort to drive him to suicide.

Paradoxically the revelations about Hoover's six-year campaign to destroy Dr. King make it clear that it was not King's reputation that was damaged by this effort but the reputation of Hoover and the FBI. Hoover's suspicions about King, if they could be called that, tell us more about him than about King.

Certainly in his later years Hoover was a petty man, jealous of his reputation, and deeply resentful of any criticism. It is unclear what aroused Hoover's suspicion of King, but perhaps it was the very largeness and charity of King's character.

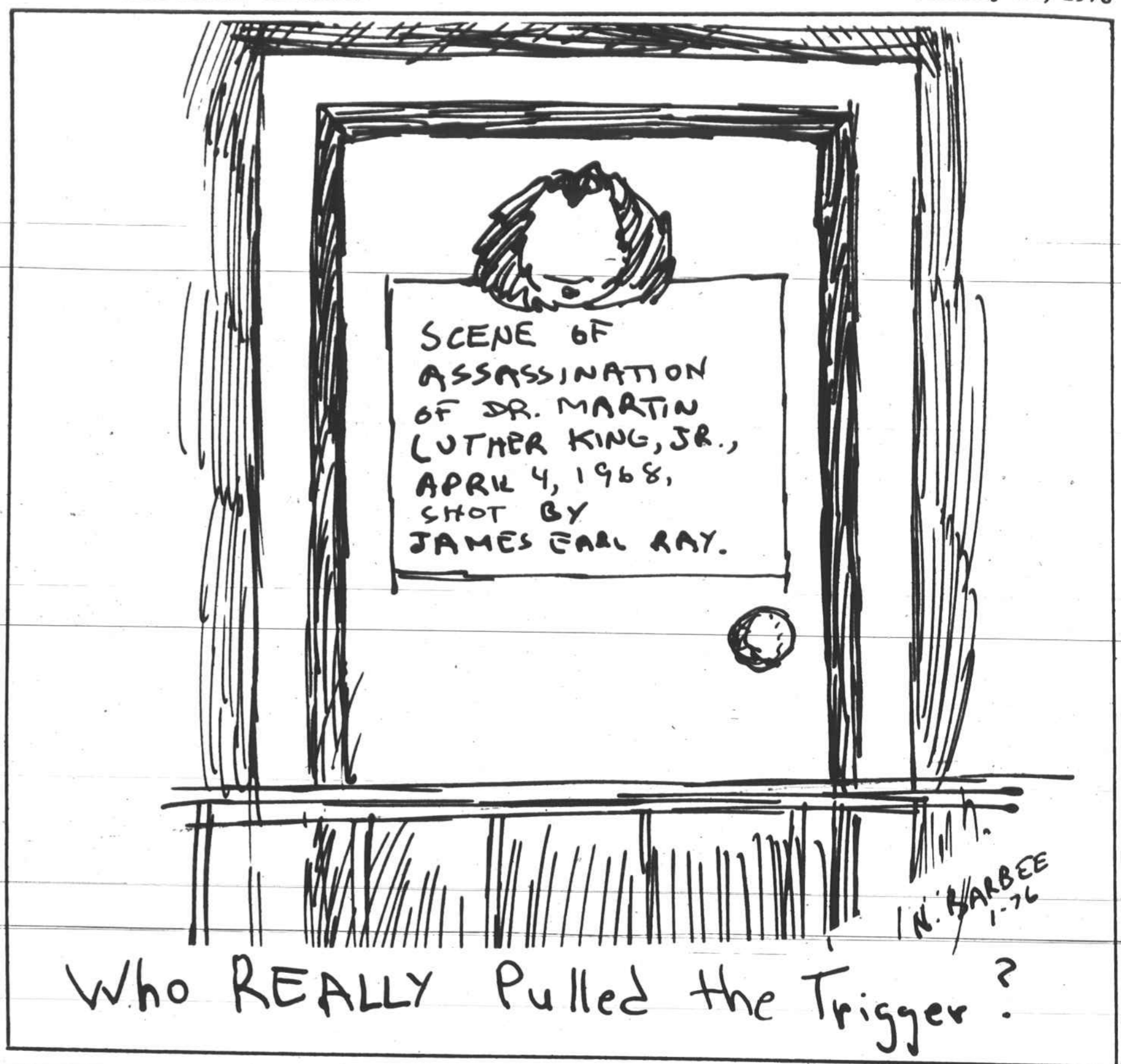
If it could be said that King and Hoover were foes, the way in which they conceived of their contest and the manner in which they reacted to each other show the stark contrasts between the quality of man that each was. While Hoover used a federal agency to carry on a personal vendetta against King, Martin was engaged in a great battle for social justice through non-violence and Christian love.

One incident during my ten year association with Dr. King illustrates this difference. Apparently angered by Dr. King's criticism of the FBI for appointing conservative agents to investigate civil rights violations in the South, Hoover publicly attacked King as the "biggest liar" in the country. Many of King's advisors, myself included, urged Martin to make a counterblast at Hoover, demanding that Hoover produce evidence to back his charge.

But public denunciation was completely alien to Martin's character. Whenever someone was in error and especially when they wrongly attacked him, Martin always sought a personal conference to attempt to reconcile the differences. Thus he met with Hoover and asked the FBI chief to explain just what he had done that Hoover considered deceitful. Hoover, of course, was unable to supply any basis for his attack.

I don't imagine that Martin would have been too alarmed at the knowledge that the FBI was out to destroy him. What would have disturbed him and what should disturb us today is that all the time and effort devoted to tearing down King could have saved the lives of many people who were killed during the great crusade to gain civil rights.

The good that men do does live long after they have died. Dr. King did much good in his life. It is our responsibility to make sure that that good continues and that it be expanded. For what King did will be regarded one hundred years from now as one of the greatest contributions to mankind. Martin took the strategy of non-violence a step even beyond Gandhi. He showed that it is possible for a minority using the principles and tactics of non-violence to win concessions from the majority, an effort Gandhi attempted but failed to achieve in South Africa. He showed that it is possible to secure justice and realistic to dream of a better world.



To Be Equal Vernon E. Jordon, Jr.

Three main themes will dominate the course of the new year, and they are all interrelated. How the nation handles them will tell a great deal about what kind of a people we are and what sort of future we'll have.

First, 1976 is the Bicentennial Year. After all the hoopla and fanfare over the past several months, the real thing has finally arrived.

It started early with last summer's displays of fake militia battles and wearing revolutionary-era costumes and in the coming months we'll be hearing a lot about America's struggle for freedom 200 years ago.

But if that's all we hear, chalk the Bicentennial down as another commercialized non-event to be yawned at and ignored.

If America's birth 200 years ago is taken seriously, the Bicentennial ought to be an occasion of putting our society under the microscope and analyzing our shortcomings as well as our triumphs, the work that still needs to be done to attain our ideals, as well as celebrating the progress we've made.

Above all, it should be the occasion to come to grips with the gravity of America's historic racial injustices. The "liberty" the colonist fought for did not include their black slaves and blacks have continued to be excluded from the fruits of this society while being disproportionately included in its dirty work and its poverty statistics.

So instead of blind celebration, the Bicentennial

ought to be a period of rational discourse, reflection and formulation of action plans to overcome the heritage of racism.

The second 1976 theme ought to reinforce that. This is a presidential election year and already we're heavily into political debate with both parties fielding a full slate of contestants for the top prize and more waiting in the wings.

Ideally, a presidential election ought to be an educational experience for the nation, with lines drawn on issues instead of personalities and an opportunity given for full citizen participation not only in choosing candidates but also in debating the key issues.

This election looms even more important for the future because of the presence of extremist candidates in both parties whose hidden message is dismantling of social programs and halting black progress at home while pursuing military adventures abroad.

I have faith though, that the American people are sensible enough to reject demagogues and send them a message of their own, namely that there's no room in a progressive country for dubious leadership devoted to fomenting racial hatred and economic warfare against poor and moderate income people.

But it's a long way till election time, and months till the conventions, and there's little evidence to suggest that the coming campaign will be devoted to rational, issue-

oriented politics that explains alternative policies and the reasons for them. Our elections have all too often turned into circus events dominated by personality and media manipulations. It would be sad if this one too, degenerated into another lost opportunity to build an educated citizenry that understands the complex issues our nation faces.

The final theme of 1976 is bound to be a campaign issue itself, and that is the economic Depression that's dogged the country for over a year-and-a-half. Real income is down and unemployment is up and our mangled economy hasn't shown any real signs of coming out of the slump.

So the time is ripe for candidates to tell us what they plan to do to increase economic opportunities for blacks, minorities and poor whites who have been frozen out of the system. It is clear that the old economic rules don't work any more and that it will take massive job-creation programs to get people back to work again, and I predict that candidates honest enough to spell this out will do a lot better than those who keep repeating that everything's all right, it's just that several million people can't find work and maybe they're too lazy to.

So it all shapes up as a potentially crucial year for our nation, certainly an interesting one. Which may not be too comforting though, since "may you have an interesting year," is an old Chinese saying used as a curse!