

The Government that Honors Dr. Martin Luther King with a National Holiday Killed Him

By Edward Curtin
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A review of *The Plot to Kill King* by William Pepper, the culminating book in a trilogy by the preeminent authority on the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.



MLK, speaking at Mason Temple
Memphis, April 3, 1968

Very few Americans are aware of the truth behind the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Few books have been written about it, unlike other significant assassinations, especially JFK's. For almost fifty years there has been a media blackout supported by government deception to hide the truth. And few people, in a massive act of self-deception, have chosen to question the absurd official explanation, choosing, rather, to embrace a mythic fabrication intended to sugarcoat the bitter fruit that has resulted from the murder of the one man capable of leading a mass movement for revolutionary change in the United States. Today we are eating the fruit of our denial.

In order to comprehend the significance of this extraordinary book, it is first necessary to dispel a widely accepted falsehood about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. William Pepper does that on the first page.

To understand his death, it is essential to realize that although he is popularly depicted and perceived as a civil rights leader, he was much more than that. A non-violent revolutionary, he personified the most powerful force for the long-overdue social, political, and economic reconstruction of the nation.

In other words, Martin Luther King was a transmitter of a non-violent spiritual and political energy so plenipotent that his very existence was a threat to an established order based on violence, racism, and economic exploitation. He was a very dangerous man.

Revolutionaries are, of course, anathema to the power elites who, with all their might, resist such rebels' efforts to transform society. If they can't buy them off, they knock them off. Forty-eight years after King's assassination, the causes he fought for—civil rights, the end to U.S. wars of aggression, and economic justice for all—remain not only unfulfilled, but have worsened in so

many respects. And King’s message has been enervated by the sly trick of giving him a national holiday and urging Americans to make it “[a day of service.](#)” Needless to say, such service does not include non-violent war resistance or protesting a decadent system of economic injustice.

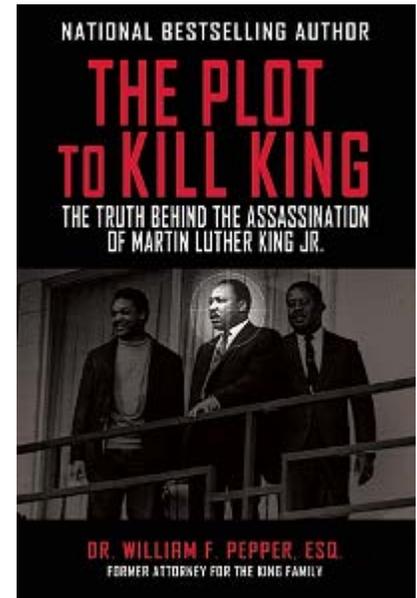
Because MLK repeatedly called the United States the “[greatest purveyor of violence on earth,](#)” he was universally condemned by the mass media and government that later—once he was long and safely dead—praised him to the heavens. This has continued to the present day of historical amnesia.

But William Pepper resurrects the revolutionary MLK, and in doing so shows in striking detail why elements within the U.S. government executed him. After reading this book, no fair-minded reader can reach any other conclusion. [The Plot to Kill King](#), the culminating volume of a trilogy that Pepper has written on the assassination, consists of slightly less text than supporting documentation in its appendices, which include numerous depositions and interviews that buttress Pepper’s thesis on the why and how of this horrible murder. It demands a close reading that should put to rest any pseudo-debates about the essentials of the case.

Pepper, an attorney who represented the King family in the [1999 trial](#) that found U.S. officials of the federal (in particular, the FBI and Army Intelligence), state, and local governments responsible for King’s assassination, has worked on the King case since 1977. He met MLK in 1967, after King had read Pepper’s *Ramparts*’ magazine article, “[The Children of Vietnam,](#)” that exposed the hideous effects of U.S. napalm and white phosphorous bombing on young and old Vietnamese innocents. The text and photos of that article reduced King to tears and were instrumental in his increased opposition to the war against Vietnam as articulated in his dramatic Riverside Church speech (“[Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence](#)”) on April 4, 1967, one year to the day before his execution in Memphis. That speech, in which King so powerfully and publicly linked the war with racism and economic exploitation, foretold his death at the hands of the perpetrators of those abominations.

Devastated by King’s death, and assuming the alleged assassin James Earl Ray was responsible, Pepper retreated from the fray until a 1977 conversation with the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, King’s associate, who raised the specter of Ray’s innocence. After a five-hour interrogation of the imprisoned Ray in 1978, Pepper was convinced that Ray did not shoot King and set out on a forty-year quest to uncover the truth.

Before examining the essentials of Pepper’s discovery, it is important to point out that MLK, Jr, his father, Rev. M. L. King, Sr, and his maternal grandfather, Rev. A.D. Williams, all pastors of Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church, were [spied on by Army Intelligence and the FBI since 1917.](#) All were considered communist sympathizers and dangerous to the reigning hegemony because of their



espousal of racial and economic equality. When MLK Jr. forcefully denounced unjust and immoral war-making as well, and announced his [Poor People's Campaign](#) and intent to lead a massive peaceful encampment of hundreds of thousands in Washington, D.C., he set off panic in the bowels of government spies and their masters. Seventy-five years of spying on black religious leaders here found its ultimate "justification." As Stokely Carmichael, co-chairman of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, said to King in a conversation [secretly recorded by Army Intelligence](#), "The man don't care you call ghettos concentration camps, but when you tell him his war machine is nothing but hired killers, you got trouble."

It is against this "trouble" that Pepper's investigation must be set, as that "trouble" is also the background for the linked assassinations of JFK, Malcolm X, and RFK. Understanding the forces behind the military, the spies, and the gunmen who, while operating in the shadows, are actually the second layer of the onion skin, is essential. The government and mainstream-corporate media form the outer layer with their collusion in disinformation, lying, and truth suppression, but Pepper correctly identifies the core as follows.

Bombastic, chauvinistic, corporate propaganda aside, where the slaughter of innocents is, and always was, justified in the name of patriotism and national security, it has always and ever been about money. Corporate and financial leaders trusted with the keys to the Republic's treasure moved from boardrooms to senior government positions and back again. Construction, oil and gas, defense industry, and pharmaceutical corporations, their bankers, brokers, and executives thrive in a war economy. Fortunes are made and dynasties created and perpetuated and a cooperating elite permeates an entire society and ultimately contaminates the world in its drive for national resources wherever they are ... Vietnam was his [King's] Rubicon ... Here, as never before, would he seriously challenge the interests of the power elite.

MLK was assassinated on April 4, 1968, at 6:01 PM as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. He was shot in the lower right side of his face by one rifle bullet that shattered his jaw, damaged his upper spine, and came to rest below his left shoulder blade. The U.S. government claimed the assassin was a racist loner named James Earl Ray, who had escaped from the Missouri State Penitentiary on April 23, 1967. Ray was alleged to have fired the fatal shot from a second-floor bathroom window of a rooming house above the rear of Jim's Grill across the street. Running to his rented room, Ray allegedly gathered his belongings, including the rifle, in a bedspread-wrapped bundle, rushed out the front door onto the adjoining street, and in a panic [dropped the bundle in the doorway of the Canipe Amusement Company](#) a few doors down. He was then said to have jumped into his white Mustang and driven to Atlanta where he abandoned the car. From there he fled to Canada and then to England where he was eventually arrested at Heathrow Airport on June 8, 1968, and extradited to the U.S. The state claims that the money Ray needed to purchase the car and for all his travel was secured through various robberies and a bank heist. Ray's alleged motive was racism and that he was a bitter and dangerous loner.

When Ray, under extraordinary pressure, coercion, and a payoff from his lawyer to take a plea,

pleaded guilty (only a few days later to request a trial that was denied) and was sentenced to 99 years in prison, the case seemed to be closed, and was dismissed from public consciousness. Another hate-filled lone assassin, shades of Lee Harvey Oswald and Sirhan Sirhan, had committed a despicable deed.

In the years leading up to Pepper's 1978 involvement, only a few lonely voices expressed doubts about the government's case—Harold Weisberg in 1971 and Mark Lane and Dick Gregory in 1977. The rest of the country put themselves and the case to sleep. They are still sleeping, but Pepper is trying with this last book to wake them up. Meanwhile, the disinformation specialists continue with their lies.

While a review is not the place to go into every detail of Pepper's rebuttal of the government's shabby claims, let me say at the outset that he emphatically does so, and adds in the process some tentative claims of which he is not certain but that, if true, are stunning.

As with the assassinations of President Kennedy and his brother, Robert (two months after MLK), all evidence points to the construction of patsies to take the blame for government executions. Ray, Oswald, and Sirhan all bear striking resemblances in the ways they were chosen and moved as pawns over long periods of time into positions where their only reactions could be stunned surprise when they were accused of the murders.

It took Pepper many years to piece together the essential truths, once he and Abernathy interviewed Ray in prison in 1978. The first giveaway that something was seriously amiss came with the 1979 House Select Committee on Assassinations' report on the King assassination. Led by Robert Blakey, suspect in his conduct of the other assassination inquiries, who had replaced [Richard Sprague](#), who was deemed to be too independent, "this multi-million dollar investigation ignored or denied all evidence that raised the possibility that James Earl Ray was innocent," and that government forces might be involved. Pepper lists over twenty such omissions that rival the absurdities of the magical thinking of the Warren Commission. The HSCA report became the template "for all subsequent disinformation in print and visual examinations of this case" for the past thirty-seven years.

Pepper's decades-long investigation not only refutes the government's case against James Earl Ray, but definitively proves that King was killed by a government conspiracy led by the FBI, Army Intelligence, and Memphis police, assisted by southern Mafia figures. He is right to assert that "we have probably acquired more detailed knowledge about this political assassination than we have ever had about any previous historical event." This makes the silence around this case even more shocking. This shock is accentuated when one is reminded (or told for the first time) that in 1999 a Memphis jury, [after a thirty-day trial](#) and over seventy witnesses, [found the U.S. government guilty in the killing of MLK](#). The King family had brought the suit and William Pepper represented them. [They were grateful that the truth was confirmed](#), but saddened by the way the findings were buried once again by a media in cahoots with the government.

The [civil trial](#) was the King family's last resort to get a public hearing to disclose the truth of the assassination. They and Pepper knew that Ray was an innocent pawn, but Ray had died in prison in 1998 after trying for thirty years to get a trial and prove his innocence (shades of [Sirhan Sirhan who still languishes in prison](#)). During all those years, Ray had maintained that he had been manipulated by a shadowy figure named Raul, who supplied him with money and his white Mustang and coordinated all his complicated travels, including having him buy a rifle and come to Jim's Grill and the boarding house on the day of the assassination. The government has always denied that Raul existed.

Blocked at every turn by the authorities and unable to get Ray a trial, Pepper arranged an unscripted, mock TV trial that aired on April 4, 1993, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the assassination. Jurors were selected from a pool of U.S. citizens; a former U.S. Attorney and a federal judge served as prosecutor and judge, with Pepper serving as defense attorney. He presented extensive evidence clearly showing that authorities had withdrawn all security for King; that the state's chief witness was falling-down drunk; that the alleged bathroom sniper's nest was empty right before the shot was fired; that three eyewitnesses, including the *NY Times'* [Earl Caldwell](#), said that the shot came from the bushes behind the rooming house; and that two eyewitnesses saw Ray drive away in his white Mustang before the shooting, etc. The prosecution's feeble case was rejected by the jury that found Ray not guilty.

As with all Pepper's work on the case (including book reviews), the mainstream media responded with silence. And though this was only a TV trial, increasing evidence emerged that the owner of Jim's Grill, Loyd Jowers, was deeply involved in the assassination. Pepper dug deeper, and on December 16, 1993, Loyd Jowers appeared on ABC's *Primetime Live* that aired nationwide. Pepper writes,

Loyd Jowers cleared James Earl Ray, saying that he did not shoot MLK but that he, Jowers, had hired a shooter after he was approached by Memphis produce man [Frank Liberto](#) and paid \$1,000,000 to facilitate the assassination. He also said that he had been visited by a man named Raul who delivered a rifle and asked him to hold it until arrangements were finalized ... The morning after the *Primetime Live* broadcast there was no coverage of the previous night's program, not even on ABC ... Here was a confession, on prime-time television, to involvement in one of the most heinous crimes in the history of the Republic, and virtually no American mass-media coverage.

In the twenty-three years since that confession, Pepper has worked tirelessly on the case and has uncovered a plethora of additional evidence that refutes the government's claims and indicts it and the media for a continuing cover-up. The evidence he has gathered, detailed and documented in [The Plot to Kill King](#), proves that Martin Luther King was killed by a conspiracy masterminded by the U.S. government. Much of his evidence was presented at the 1999 trial, while other was subsequently discovered. Since the names and details involved make clear that, as with the murders of JFK and RFK, the conspiracy was very sophisticated with many moving parts organized at the highest level, I will just highlight a few of his findings in what follows. A reader should read the

book to understand the full scope of the plot, its execution, and the cover-up.

- Pepper refutes the government and proves, through multiple witnesses, telephonic, and photographic evidence, [that Raul existed](#); that his full name is Raul Coelho; and that he was James Earl Ray's intelligence handler, who provided him with money and instructions from their first meeting in the [Neptune Bar in Montreal](#), where Ray had fled in 1967 after his prison escape, until the day of the assassination. It was Raul who instructed Ray to return to the U.S. (an act that makes no sense for an escaped prisoner who had fled the country), gave him money for the white Mustang, helped him attain travel documents, and moved him around the country like a pawn on a chess board. The parallels to Lee Harvey Oswald and Sirhan Sirhan are startling.
- He presents [the case of Donald Wilson](#), a former FBI agent working out of the Atlanta office in 1968, who went with a senior colleague to check out an abandoned white Mustang with Alabama plates (Ray's car, to which Raul had a set of keys) and opened the passenger door to find that an envelope and some papers fell out onto the ground. Thinking he may have disturbed a crime scene, the nervous Wilson pocketed them. Later, when he read them, their explosive content intuitively told him that if he gave them to his superiors they would be destroyed. One piece was a torn-out page from a **1963** Dallas telephone directory with the name Raul written at the top, and the letter "J" with a Dallas telephone number for a club run by Jack Ruby, Oswald's killer. The page was for the letter H and had numerous phone numbers for H. L. Hunt, Dallas oil billionaire and a friend of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Both men hated MLK. The second sheet contained Raul's name and a list of names and sums and dates for payment. On the third sheet was written the telephone number and extension for the Atlanta FBI office. (Read Jim Douglass's important interview with Donald Wilson in *The Assassinations*, pp. 479-491.)
- Pepper interviewed four other witnesses who confirmed that they had seen Raul with Jack Ruby in Dallas in **1963** and that they were associated.
- Pepper shows that the alias Ray was given and used from July 1967 until April 4, 1968—Eric Galt—was the name of a Toronto operative of U.S. Army Intelligence, Eric St. Vincent Galt, who worked for Union Carbide with Top Secret clearance. The warehouse at the Canadian Union Carbide plant in Toronto that Galt supervised "housed a top-secret munitions project funded jointly by the CIA, the U.S. Naval Surface Weapons Center, and the Army Electronics Research and Development Command ... In August 1967, Galt met with Major Robert M. Collins, a top aide to the head of the 902nd Military Intelligence Group (MIG) Colonel John Downie." Downie selected four members for an Alpha 184 Sniper Unit that was sent to Memphis to back up the primary assassin of MLK. Meanwhile, Ray, set up as the patsy, was able to move about freely since he was protected by the pseudonymous NSA clearance for Eric Galt.
- To refute the government's claim that [Ray and his brother robbed the Alton, Illinois Bank](#) to finance his travels and car purchase (therefore no Raul existed), Pepper "called the sheriff in

Alton and the president of the bank; they gave the same statement. The Ray brothers had nothing to do with the robbery. No one from the HSCA, the FBI, or *The New York Times* had sought their opinion.” CNN later reiterated the media falsehood that became part of the official false story.

- Pepper proves that the fatal shot came from the bushes behind Jim’s Grill and the rooming house, not from the bathroom window. He presents overwhelming evidence for this, showing that the government’s claim, based on the testimony on a severely drunk Charlie Stephens, was absurd. His evidence includes the testimony of numerous eyewitnesses and that of Loyd Jowers, the owner of Jim’s Grill, who said he took the rifle from the shooter in the bushes and brought it into the bar where he hid it. Thus, Ray was not the assassin.
- He presents conclusive evidence that the bushes were cut down the morning after the assassination in an attempt to corrupt the crime scene. The [order to do so came from Memphis Police Department Inspector Sam Evans to Maynard Stiles](#), a senior administrator of the Memphis Department of Public Works.
- He shows how King’s room was moved from a safe interior room, 201, to balcony room, 306, on the upper floor; how King was conveniently positioned **alone** on the balcony by members of his own entourage for the easy mortal head shot from the bushes across the street. (Many people only remember the iconic photograph taken **after-the-fact** with Jesse Jackson, Andrew Young, et al., standing over the fallen King and pointing across the street.) Pepper implicates that [Reverends Billy Kyles](#), Jesse Jackson, and, to a lesser extent, Ralph Abernathy were involved in these machinations. He uncovers the role of black military-intelligence agent Marrell McCollough, attached to the 111th MIG, within the entourage. [McCollough can be seen kneeling over the fallen King](#), checking to see if he’s dead.
- Pepper confirms that all of this, including the assassin in the bushes, was dutifully [photographed by Army Intelligence agents](#) situated on the nearby Fire House roof.
- He presents evidence that all security for Dr. King was withdrawn from the area by the Memphis Police Department, including a special security unit of black officers and four tactical police units. The only black fireman at the nearby fire station, [Ed Redditt](#), was withdrawn from his post on the afternoon of April 4th, allegedly because of a death threat against him.
- He names and confirms the presence of Alpha 184 snipers at locations high above the Lorraine Motel balcony.
- He explains the use of two white mustangs in the operation to frame Ray.
- He proves that Ray had driven off before the shooting; that Loyd Jowers took the rifle from the shooter who was in the bushes; that the Memphis police were working in close collaboration with the FBI, Army Intelligence, and the “Dixie Mafia,” particularly local produce dealer Frank Liberto and his New Orleans associate Carlos Marcello; and that every aspect of the government’s case was filled with holes that any person familiar with the details

and possessing elementary logical abilities could refute.

- So importantly, Pepper shows how the mainstream media and government flacks have spent years covering up the truth of MLK's murder through lies and disinformation, just as they have done with the Kennedy and Malcolm X assassinations that are of a piece with this one.

But since this is a book review and not a book, I will stop listing Pepper's very detailed and convincing findings. While he may not have answered every aspect of the case and may be mistaken in some small details, he has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt the basic fact that James Earl Ray did not kill Martin Luther King, but that this great and dangerous leader was killed by a conspiracy organized at the highest levels of government.

The Plot to Kill King will mesmerize any reader seeking the truth about MLK's assassination. Even when Pepper, towards the end of the book, offers circumstantial and non-corroborated testimony from witnesses Ronnie Lee Adkins and Johnnton Shelby, the reader can't help but be intrigued and to consider their stories highly plausible given all that Pepper has proven. Adkins claims that his father, a friend of Clyde Tolson, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's deputy, and then he himself, were part of the plot to kill King. This involved politicians, the FBI, MPD, and mafia, including the aforementioned produce dealer Frank Liberto and others, making payoffs with FBI money to various people, including Jesse Jackson (whom Adkins Jr. claims was a paid FBI informer), and working closely on the details of the assassination. Johnnton Shelby's story as recounted in his deposition (2014) to Pepper (reproduced, together with Adkins' (2009), as appendices in the book), is that his mother, who was working as an emergency-room aide at St. Joseph's Hospital when King was brought there, inadvertently witnessed men spitting on Dr. King as he lay in the emergency room and a doctor putting a pillow over his head and suffocating him to death. Pepper tends to accept these accounts, but says he isn't completely convinced of all aspects of them. The reader is offered plenty of food for thought concerning these claims.

Besides clearly proving the government's part in killing Martin Luther King, this book is very important for the way Pepper links the case to those of JFK and RFK, who was murdered two months after King. At the center of all these murders is a trinity of men who were devoted to the ending the Vietnam War and all wars, restoring economic justice for all Americans, and eliminating racial inequality. That their goals were the same provides a motive for their murders by forces opposed to these lofty objectives. That their murders clearly involved highly sophisticated operations and cover-ups that could never have been pulled off by "crazed lone assassins" points to powerful forces with those means at their disposal. And when it comes to opportunity, when did the shadowy forces of the deep state ever lack for that?

The ramifications of the MLK assassination profoundly inform our current condition. For anyone who truly cares about peace, love, and justice, *The Plot to Kill King* is essential reading. William Pepper should be saluted. He has carried on Martin King's noble legacy.