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CIA Asking Hill to Cut Back Public Access to Agency's Files

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

On June 8, 1965, a CIA security officer met with an informant in the Hilton Hotel in downtown Washington to discuss the progress of his spying on the civil rights movement and especially on the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

The meeting, which lasted nearly four hours, dealt with "highly derogatory information" involving King and allegations of "communist-directed infiltration into the movement," according to a nine-page memo prepared the next day for the chief of CIA's Security Research Staff. The highly placed informant, who had "long provided information on the Negro civil rights movement and its leaders" to the CIA, promised to stay in touch. He emphasized he did not want to be "downgraded" by being asked to report to the FBI.

The CIA's spying on King, which produced a file including some of his haberdashery bills, Diners' Club receipts and notes listing phone calls and appointments, was never disclosed in the extensive congressional or executive branch investigations of the agency conducted in recent years. It has come to light solely as the result of litigation under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Thousands of documents on CIA activities—from reports on President Kennedy's assassination to controversial mind-control experiments and other excesses—have been made public under FOIA since the agency was effectively brought under the law five years ago.

Now the CIA is seeking to halt all but the most limited disclosures. Under a bill pending in both the House and the Senate, the agency has asked for an extraordinary exemption that would put its operational and technical files almost completely beyond reach of FOIA. Even illegal activities, it appears, could be legally covered up. Public inquiries could be rejected without any inspection of the documents sought. Lawsuits would be fruitless. The files would be immune from court action, except for individuals seeking records about themselves.

The CIA has described the proposal in more modest terms. According to CIA Deputy Director Frank Carlucci, the bill would provide only "a limited exemption to protect our most sensitive information." He maintains that "the loss to the public from the removal of these files from the FOIA process would be minimal."

Despite such assurances, the law has forced the CIA to release a great deal of information that would still be buried in the agency's files if the bill it wants had been the prevailing rule.

Some documents that have been made public expand, or contradict, what the CIA reported in the 1975-76 investigations. Some deal with issues that the investigators never touched, such as the CIA's spying on Dr. King. (That was disclosed in an FOIA lawsuit brought by author-critic Harold Weisberg of Frederick, Md.)

Item: The Rockefeller Commission, appointed by President Ford in 1975 to investigate CIA activities in the United States, came across a program started in 1967 by the CIA's Office of Security "to identify threats to CIA personnel, projects and installations," especially those stemming from the antiwar movement on college campuses.

The commission was satisfied that the operation "used no infiltrators, penetrators or monitors," and relied primarily on press clippings, campus officials and police authorities.

Records later released under the Freedom of Information Act about the program, which the CIA styled "Project Resistance," show that it used confidential informants repeatedly in Texas, California, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. The CIA file even included a blank "Confidential Informant Identification" form for Project Resistance.

Item: The Senate investigating committee headed by Frank Church (D-Idaho) said in its final report that Project Resistance, which lasted until 1973, eventually developed a nationwide index of 12,000 to 16,000 names.

But according to records later made public under FOIA, the CIA's Office of Security indexed 50,000 members of the California Peace and Freedom Party alone, primarily college students in just two counties.

Item: The CIA told the Church committee that the records for MKULTRA, the agency's premier mind-control program, had been destroyed in 1973, reportedly with concurrence of then-director Richard Helms.

Some 16,000 pages of records dealing with MKULTRA and other CIA experiments with exotic drugs were subsequently unearthed and turned over to John Marks, a former State Department employee and frequent CIA critic, under the Freedom of Information Act.

Testifying about some of the newly discovered documents in 1977, CIA Director Stansfield Turner said they showed the CIA carried out 149 projects involving drug testing, behavior modification and secret administration of mind-altering drugs at 80 American and Canadian universities, hospitals, research foundations and prisons. But he assured Congress that the mind control work had been almost completely phased out in the mid-1960s.

According to Marks, who kept pressing for more documents as he wrote a book on the subject, the CIA replaced MKULTRA with another wide-ranging, supersecret behavior control project that continued into the 1970s under the agency's Office of Research and Development. The CIA told Marks in June 1978 it had discovered "130 boxes" of mind control material, in response to his inquiry about the ORD project, but he is still waiting to find out what is in them beyond a few "trivial documents" that were released.

"They've been kidding me ever since," Marks says. "In effect, they've already repealed the FOIA, at least as far as mind control is concerned."

Item: The CIA's view of its once-secret war in Laos was reflected in still another release under FOIA. Its position was set down Oct. 30, 1969, in a memo from CIA General Counsel Lawrence R. Houston regarding congressional inquiries on the issue, espe-

CIA 4.01 Project Resistance

CIA 2.01 Security

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Documents Indicate CIA Spied on King, Wanted to Discredit Him as Black Leader

By JEFF PRUGH
Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—The Central Intelligence Agency spied on Martin Luther King in the 1960s through informants, gathered records of King's telephone calls and photocopied some of his credit-card receipts and messages scrawled on business cards, according to documents in a federal lawsuit.

Many of the documents, which have been disclosed in a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit (Harold Weisberg vs. CIA, et al) and obtained by the Los Angeles Times, reflect an interest by the CIA in an alleged "Peking-line" Communist influence on King and his followers.

The documents contain also discussions of how allegedly derogatory information about King could be used to discredit him as a civil rights leader.

One CIA informant suggested that King be "removed" as a black leader. "It is 'A' (informant's name deleted) belief that somehow or other Martin Luther King must be removed from the leadership of the Negro movement, and his removal must come from within, not from without," an internal CIA memo dated May 11, 1965, reads, adding that if whites contributed to King's ouster, it might make him a "martyr."

"A" feels that somewhere in the Negro movement, at the top," the memo continues, "there must be a Negro leader who is 'clean,' who could step into the vacuum and chaos if Martin Luther King were either exposed or assassinated."

The disclosure of the 373 pages of files (which contain numerous deletions) is believed to provide the first documentary evidence that the CIA engaged in surveillance of King in the United States before he was shot to death by an assassin in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

It is not, however, the first disclosure of U.S. government surveillance of King, nor is it the first indication that the CIA engaged in domestic spying.

In 1975, when congressional hearings were called to investigate intel-

ligence abuses, it was disclosed that the FBI had tried to "neutralize" King's effectiveness by eavesdropping on his motel rooms with microphones and on his telephone conversations with wiretaps that were initially approved in 1963 by Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy.

Moreover, it has been disclosed that the CIA had spied on and kept files on thousands of Americans, mostly under a domestic program called Operation CHAOS, which was a violation of the agency's statutory charter. Then, in 1978, the New York Times reported that the CIA had recruited American blacks in the late 1960s and early 1970s to spy on Black Panther members in this country and Africa—and that CIA officials feared that disclosure of these activities would bring charges of racism against the agency.

In the CIA files on King, the allegedly damaging information against him had been confirmed by an unidentified "highly placed official in the Department of Justice," according to a memorandum dated June 9, 1965. The memo added that an informant had been told that an unidentified "Washington source had the entire King file in his office, including photographs and tapes."

One anonymous source is reported in the memo to have told another that "if we don't publish it, it is going to blow up underneath our noses, because it is certain to come out sooner or later."

The purported information on King, according to the same memo, consisted of:

- "Highly derogatory information on (material deleted) which have taken place within the United States and overseas."

- "A possible theft of money."

- "Association with identified Communist or pro-Soviet types on an intense personal basis, particularly (material deleted)."

The same memo reports that informant "A" said that "details of the King matter are definitely known to the editors of the New York Times and the New York Herald Tribune, but they will not break the story because they have been asked not to,

'A' stated, presumably by the President (Lyndon B. Johnson)." There is no clue in the files as to whether 'A' in one document is the same informant identified as "A" in others.)

Another document, dated one month earlier in 1965, reflects a concern by its writer within the CIA that if any black leader were shown to be engaged in "illegal activities," it would cause a split between Johnson and black leaders, disrupt the civil rights movement and enable the "Communist left" to "cause extremely critical problems for the government of the United States."

The writer said that source "A" was concerned that if King were exposed by "white sources, official or otherwise," it would have "no good effect and would probably only make King a Martyr," according to the same document (May 11, 1965).

"A" was also concerned that King might possibly be assassinated before his exposure, which would have the effect of making him a martyr and would not at all be helpful to the Negro movement," the memo continues.

Last July, the House Assassinations Committee, although concluding that conspiracies were "likely" in the deaths of King and former President John F. Kennedy, cleared both the CIA and the FBI of any role in the conspiracies.

The rest of the released file on King includes photocopies of Diner's Club credit-card receipts for purchases in Miami and Chicago, handwritten phone messages to King, lists of some of his telephone calls (to men and women, a flying service, a television station, two airlines and the Urban League—all in the Miami area), plus phone numbers written on the backs of other persons' business cards.

Also in the file is a teletype summary of news media reaction in Cuba and Mexico to King's assassination.

Radio Havana is quoted as commenting: "His death shows once again that the exploited masses can only answer reactionary violence with revolutionary violence."

US/WORLD NEWS IN BRIEF

CIA spied on Dr. King

WASHINGTON — The Central Intelligence Agency spied on Dr. Martin Luther King in the 1960s through informants, gathered records of King's telephone calls and photocopied some of his credit-card receipts and messages scrawled on business cards, according to documents in a federal lawsuit. The documents, disclosed and obtained by the Los Angeles Times, contain discussions of how allegedly derogatory information about King could be used to discredit him as a civil rights leader. One CIA informant suggested that King be "removed" as a black leader.