

American Renaissance

There is not a truth existing which I fear or would wish unknown to the whole world.

— Thomas Jefferson

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The Unknown Martin Luther King, Jr.

King was hardly the greatest American.

by Benjamin J. Ryan

Forty years after his death, the popularity of Martin Luther King remains extraordinary. He is perhaps the single most praised person in American history, and millions adore him as a hero and almost a saint. The federal government has made space available on the Mall in Washington for a national monument for King, not far from Lincoln's. Only four men in American history have national monuments: Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt; and now King will make five.

King is the only American who enjoys the nation's highest honor of having a national holiday on his birthday. There are other days of remembrance such as Presidents' Day, but no one else but Jesus Christ is recognized with a similar holiday. Does King deserve such honors? Much that has been known to scholars for years—but largely unknown to most Americans—suggests otherwise.

Plagiarism

As a young man, King started plagiarizing the work of other and he continued this practice throughout his career.

At Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, where he received a bachelor of divinity degree in 1951, many of his papers contained material lifted verbatim and without acknowledgement from published sources. An extensive project started at Stanford University in 1984 to publish all of King's papers tracked down the original sources for these early papers and concluded that his academic writings are "tragically flawed by numerous

instances of plagiarism." Journalist Theodore Pappas, who has also reviewed the collection, found one paper showing "verbatim theft" in 20 of a total of 24 paragraphs. He writes:

dissertation, the book-length project required to earn a PhD, leading some to say he should be stripped of his doctoral degree. Mr. Pappas explains that King's plagiarism was a lifelong habit:



Martin Luther King, Jr. with his wife Coretta.

"King's plagiarisms are easy to detect because their style rises above the level of his pedestrian student prose. In general, if the sentences are eloquent, witty, insightful, or pithy, or contain allusions, analogies, metaphors, or similes, it is safe to assume that the section has been purloined."

King also plagiarized himself, recycling old term papers as new ones. Some

No one else but Jesus Christ has a national holiday on his birthday.

of his professors complained about sloppy references, but they seem to have had no idea how extensively he was stealing material, and his habits were well established by the time he entered the PhD program at Boston University. King plagiarized one-third of his 343-page

"King's Nobel Prize Lecture was plagiarized extensively from works by Florida minister J. Wallace Hamilton; the sections on Gandhi and nonviolence in his 'Pilgrimage' speech were taken virtually verbatim from Harris Wofford's speech on the same topic; the frequently replayed climax to the 'I Have a Dream' speech—the 'from every mountainside, let freedom ring' portion—came from a 1952 address to the Republican National Convention by a black preacher named Archibald Carey; and the 1968 sermon in which King prophesied his martyrdom was based on works by J. Wallace Hamilton and Methodist minister Harold Bosley."

Perhaps King had no choice but to use the words of others. Mr. Pappas has found that on the Graduate Record Exam, King "scored in the second-lowest quartile in English and vocabulary,

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Letters from Readers

Sir — The December issue printed three thought-provoking articles on the presidential election. They do not, however, mention the crucial role legalized abortion has played in slowing the growth of the non-white population of the United States and the world. Mr. Smith commends Gov. Palin for “her muscular evangelical faith,” which is manifested, *inter alia*, in her refusal to abort her Down-Syndrome child and her daughter’s refusal to abort her illegitimate child. He quotes with approval Pat Buchanan’s observation that Mrs. Palin’s power base is among “lifers, evangelicals. . . .”

But black and Hispanic American women have abortions at five times and three times the rate, respectively, of white American women. Fully 43 percent of black American pregnancies end in abortion. The availability of abortion is undoubtedly the main (and maybe the only) reason why the fertility rate of black American women between the ages of 15 and 44 declined between 1980 and 2005 from 91 to 67 births per 1,000 women while the fertility rate of white American women declined during the same period only from 62 to 58 births per 1,000 women. The availability of abortion is also the main reason why the fertility rate of Puerto Rican women is now lower (1.83) than that of white American women (1.86).

Indeed, John Donohue and Steven Levitt have argued in a series of persuasive articles that the availability of abortion “and the resulting radical decline in the birth rate of poor, unmarried, teenage girls” has been a crucial factor in the decline in the American crime rate over the past several decades.

Palin-supporting Republicans want to criminalize abortion. Their hold on the Republican Party is so strong that when socially liberal Rudolph Giuliani entered the race for the Republican nomination, he felt compelled to say that he supported the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits Medicaid from funding abortions for women who are too poor to afford them. I have qualms about government-enforced eugenics, but it is obscene for the government to force black and Hispanic women to have children they do not want.

Palin-supporting Republicans also insist that abstinence should be the preferred means of birth control in the United States and the rest of the world. In view of the inability of most blacks to think in terms of long-term consequences, abstinence as a means of limiting the population growth of Africa is no more than a bad joke.

Professor Steven Farron, Johannesburg, South Africa

Sir — Kudos for Jared Taylor’s criticism of Reilly Smith’s enthusiasm over Sarah Palin. I voted for John McCain with gritted teeth, but I tried for two months to get the party to dump Gov. Palin from the ticket.

Sarah Palin is lovely and apparently a good mother, but it is astonishing that “conservative” Republicans have attempted to transform her into a great leader before she’s done any actual leading. They’ve been duped by her siren song of “pro-life,” “family,” “small-town values” into thinking that these mere slogans will somehow make her a great “conservative” president. I hope Mr. Smith will come to realize he’s been gulled—like almost all of the

political class—into thinking women are no different from men. It’s all about getting women’s votes, and hardly any so-called conservatives had the guts to point that out.

Mr. Smith needs to ask himself this question: Why was Sarah Palin a better choice than a good conservative man?

W. Edward Chynoweth, Sanger, Calif.

Sir — Congratulations to Gregory Hood for his very perceptive December article about the false appeal of Ron Paul. Your readers may be interested to know that in his most recent “Straight Talk,” Dr. Paul wrote the following:

“I congratulate our first African-American president-elect. Martin Luther King, Jr. certainly would be proud to see this day. We are stronger for embracing diversity, and I am hopeful that we can continue working through the tensions and wrongs of the past and become a more just and colorblind society. . . . A free society emphasizes the importance of individuals, and not because they are part of a certain group. That’s the only way equal justice can be achieved.”

Peter Curtis, Reading, Penn.

Sir — Thank you for your marvelous coverage of the Austrian elections in your November issue. I do not believe such a careful and complete analysis could be found in any other publication in the English language.

Harper McAlister, Montreal, Canada

Sir — European nationalists generally have an unfavorable view of the United States, and it isn’t hard to figure out why. Your article on Austria in the December issue lists a number of things the nationalists are against: NATO membership; Turkish membership in the EU, the EU itself, and Muslim immigration. The US government supports every single one, especially Turkish membership in the Union, which it sees as some sort of ridiculous fantasy of Western-Muslim reconciliation. If Austria or any European country ever dared cut off Muslim or non-white immigration, the US would be the first to impose economic sanctions. Our government is no more a friend to the native peoples of Europe than it is to the whites of the United States.

Jim Marshall, Orlando, Fla.



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in the lowest ten percent in quantitative analysis, and in the lowest third on his advanced test in philosophy.”

Adultery

King lived a double life. During the day, he would speak to large crowds, quoting Scripture and invoking God’s will, and at night he frequently had sex with women from the audience. “King’s habits of sexual adventure had been well established by the time he was married,” says Michael Eric Dyson of Georgetown University, a King admirer. He notes that King often “told lewd jokes,” “shared women with friends,” and was “sexually reckless.” According to King biographer Taylor Branch, during a long party on the night of January 6 and 7, 1964, an FBI bugging device recorded King’s “distinctive voice ring out above



Georgia Powers, one of King’s lovers.

others with pulsating abandon, saying, ‘I’m f***ing for God!’”

Sex with single and married women continued after King married, and on the night before his death, King had two

adulterous trysts. His first rendezvous was at a woman’s house, the second in a hotel room. The source for this was his best friend and second-in-command, Ralph Abernathy, who noted that the second woman was “a member of the Kentucky legislature,” now known to be Georgia Davis Powers.

Abernathy went on to say that a third woman was also looking for King that same night, but found his bed empty. She knew his habits and was angry when they met later that morning. In response, writes Abernathy, King “lost his temper” and “knocked her across the bed. . . . She leapt up to fight back, and for a moment they were engaged in a full-blown fight, with [King] clearly winning.” A few hours later, King ate lunch with Abernathy and discussed the importance of nonviolence for their movement.

To other colleagues, King justified his adultery this way: “I’m away from home twenty-

five to twenty-seven days a month. F***ing’s a form of anxiety reduction.” King had many one-night stands but also grew close to one of his girlfriends in a relationship that became, according to Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer David Garrow, “the emotional centerpiece of King’s life.” Still, sex with other women remained “a commonplace of King’s travels.”

In private, King could be extremely crude. On one FBI recording, King said to Abernathy in what was no doubt a

teasing remark, “Come on over here, you big black motherf***er, and let me suck your d**k.” FBI sources told Taylor Branch about a surveillance tape of King watching a televised rerun of the Kennedy funeral. When he saw the famous moment when Jacqueline Kennedy knelt with her children before her dead husband’s coffin, King reportedly sneered, “Look at her. Sucking him off one last time.”

Despite his obsession with sex and his betrayal of his own wife and children, and despite Christianity’s call for fidelity, King continued to claim the moral authority of a Baptist minister.

Whites

King stated that the “vast majority of white Americans are racist” and that they refused to share power. His solution was to redistribute wealth and power through reparations for slavery and racial quotas:

“No amount of gold could provide an adequate compensation for the ex-



King with his best friend, Ralph Abernathy.

ploitation and humiliation of the Negro in America down through the centuries. Not all the wealth of this affluent society could meet the bill. Yet a price can be placed on unpaid wages. . . . The payment should be in the form of a massive program by the government of special, compensatory measures which could be regarded as a settlement.” Continued King, “Moral justification for such measures for Negroes is rooted in the robberies inherent in the institution of slavery.” He named his plan the Bill

of Rights for the Disadvantaged. Some poor whites would also receive compensation because they were “derivative victims of slavery,” but the welfare of blacks was his central focus.

King has been praised, even by conservatives, as the great advocate of



color-blindness. They focus too narrowly on one sentence in his “I Have a Dream” speech, in which he said he wanted to live in a nation “where [my children] will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” The truth is that King wanted quotas for blacks. “[I]f a city has a 30 percent Negro population,” King reasoned, “then it is logical to assume that Negroes should have at least 30 percent of the jobs in any particular company, and jobs in all categories rather than only in menial areas.”

One of King’s greatest achievements is said to have been passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. At the signing ceremony on July 2, he stood directly behind President Lyndon Johnson as a key guest. The federal agency created by the act, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, now monitors hiring practices and ensures that King’s desires for racial preferences are met.

Like liberals today, King denied racial differences. In a reply to an interviewer who told him many Southern whites thought racial differences were a biological fact, he replied:

“This utterly ignorant fallacy has been so thoroughly refuted by the social scientists, as well as by medical science, that any individual who goes on believing it is standing in an absolutely misguided and diminishing circle. The American Anthropological Association has unanimously adopted a resolution

repudiating statements that Negroes are biologically, in innate mental ability or in any other way inferior to whites.”

The conclusions to be drawn from his belief in across-the-board equality were clear: failure by blacks to achieve at the level of whites could be explained only by white oppression. As King explained in one interview, “I think we have to honestly admit that the problems in the world today, as they relate to the question of race, must be blamed on the whole doctrine of white supremacy, the whole doctrine of racism, and these doctrines came into being through the white race and the exploitation of the colored peoples of the world.” King predicted that “if the white world” does not stop this racism and oppression, “then we can end up in the world with a kind of race war.”

Communism

In his public speeches, King never called himself a communist, instead



claiming to stand for a synthesis of capitalism and communism: “[C]apitalism fails to realize that life is social. Communism fails to realize that life is individual. Truth is found neither in the rugged individualism of capitalism nor in the impersonal collectivism of communism. The Kingdom of God is found in a synthesis that combines the truths of these two opposites.”

However, David Garrow found that in private King “made it clear to close friends that economically speaking he considered himself what he termed a Marxist.” Mr. Garrow passes along an account of a conversation C.L.R. James, a Marxist intellectual, had with King: “King leaned over to me saying, ‘I don’t say such things from the

pulpit, James, but that is what I really believe.’ . . . King wanted me to know that he understood and accepted, and in fact agreed with, the ideas that I was putting forward—ideas which were fundamentally Marxist-Leninist. . . . I saw him as a man whose ideas were as advanced as any of us on the Left, but who, as he actually said to me, could not say such things from the pulpit. . . . King was a man with clear ideas, but whose position as a churchman, etc. imposed on him the necessity of reserve.” J. Pius Barbour, a close friend of King’s at seminary, agreed that he “was economically a Marxist.”

Some of King’s most influential advisors were Communists with direct ties to the Soviet Union. One was Stanley Levison, whom Mr. Garrow called King’s “most important political counselor” and “at Martin Luther King’s elbow.” He organized fundraisers for King, counseled him on tax issues and political strategy, wrote fundraising letters and his United Packinghouse Workers Convention speech, edited parts of his books, advised him on his first major national address, and prepped King for questions from the media. Coretta Scott King said of Levison that he was “[a]lways working in the background, his contribution has been indispensable,” and Mr. Garrow says the association with Levison was “without a doubt King’s closest friendship with a white person.”

What were Levison’s political views? John Barron is the author of *Operation SOLO*, which is about “the most vital intelligence operation the FBI ever had sustained against the Soviet Union.” Part of its work was to track Levison who, according to Mr. Barron, “gained admission into the inner circle of the



communist underground” in the US. Mr. Garrow, a strong defender of King, admits that Levison was “one of the two

top financiers” of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), which received about one million dollars a year from the Soviet Union. Mr. Garrow found that Levison was “directly involved in the Communist Party’s most sensitive financial dealings,” and acknowledged there was first-hand evidence of Levison’s “financial link to the Soviet Union.”

Hunter Pitts O’Dell, who was elected in 1959 to the national committee, the governing body for the CPUSA, was another party member who worked for King. According to FBI reports, Levison installed O’Dell as the head of King’s New York office, and later recommended that O’Dell be made King’s executive assistant in Atlanta.

King knew his associates were Communists. President Kennedy himself gave an “explicit personal order” to King advising against his “shocking association with Stanley Levison.” Once when he was walking privately with King in the White House Rose Garden, Kennedy also named O’Dell and said to King: “They’re Communists. You’ve got to get rid of them.”

The Communist connections help explain why Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy authorized the FBI to wiretap King’s home and office telephones in October 1963. Kennedy, like his brother John, was deeply sympathetic to King but also aware of the threat of communism.



Mr. Garrow tried to exonerate King of the charge of being a fellow traveler by arguing that Levison broke with the CPUSA while he worked for King, that is, from the time he met King in the summer of 1956 until King’s death in 1968. However, as historian Samuel Francis has pointed out, an official break with the CPUSA does not necessarily mean a break with the goals of communism or with the Soviet Union.

John Barron argues that if Levison had defected from the CPUSA and re-

nounced communism, he would not have associated with former comrades, such as CP officials Lem Harris, Hunter Pitts O’Dell, and Roy Bennett (Levison’s twin brother who had changed his last name). He was also close to the highly placed KGB officer Victor Lessiovsky, who was an assistant to the head of the United Nations, U Thant.

Mr. Barron asks why Lessiovsky



The march on Washington, 1963.

would “fritter away his time and risk his career . . . by repeatedly indulging himself in idle lunches or amusing cocktail conversation with an undistinguished lawyer [Levison] . . . who had nothing to offer the KGB, or with someone who had deserted the party and its discipline, or with someone about whom the KGB knew nothing? . . . And why would an ordinary American lawyer . . . meet, again and again, with a Soviet assistant to the boss of the United Nations?”

Other Communists who worked with King included Aubrey Williams, James Dombrowski, Carl Braden, William Melish, Ella J. Baker, Bayard Rustin, and Benjamin Smith. King also “associated and cooperated with a number of groups known to be CPUSA front organizations or to be heavily penetrated and influenced by members of the Communist Party”—for example, the Southern Conference Educational Fund; Committee to Secure Justice for Morton Sobell; the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America; the National Lawyers Guild; and the Highlander Folk School.

The CPUSA clearly tried to influence King and his movement. An FBI report

of May 6, 1960 from Jack Childs, one of the FBI’s most accomplished spies and a winner of the Presidential Medal of Freedom for Intelligence, said that the CP “feels that it is definitely to the Party’s advantage to assign outstanding Party members to work with the [Martin] Luther King group. CP policy at the moment is to concentrate upon Martin Luther King.”

As Republican Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina concluded in a Senate speech written by Francis, King’s alliance with Communists was evidence of “identified Communists . . . planning the influencing and manipulation of King for their own purposes.” At the same time, King relied on them for speech writing, fundraising, and raising public awareness. They, in turn, used his stature and fame to their own benefit. Senator Helms cited Congressman John M. Ashbrook, a ranking member of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, who said: “King has consistently worked with Communists and has helped give them a respectability they do not deserve. I believe he has done more for the Communist Party than any other person of this decade.”

Christianity

King strongly doubted several core beliefs of Christianity. “I was ordained to the Christian ministry,” he claimed, but Stanford University’s online repository includes King’s seminary writings in which he disputed the full divinity of Jesus, the Virgin Birth, and the Resur-

rection, suggesting that we “strip them of their literal interpretation.”

Regarding the divine nature of Jesus, King wrote that Jesus was godlike, but not God. People called Jesus divine because they “found God in him” like a divinely inspired teacher, not because he literally was God, as Jesus himself claimed. On the Virgin Birth, King wrote:



Model of the 2-1/2-story statue of King that is to go up on the National Mall. Chinese sculptor Yei Lixin made a name for himself with heroic statues of Mao Tse Tung.

“First we must admit that the evidence for the tenability of this doctrine is to [sic] shallow to convince any objective thinker. How then did this doctrine arise? A clue to this inquiry may be found in a sentence from St. Justin’s First Apology. Here Justin states that the birth of Jesus is quite similar to the birth of the sons of Zeus. It was believed in Greek thought that an extraordinary person could only be explained by saying that he had a father who was more than human. It is probable that this Greek idea influenced Christian thought.”

Concerning the Resurrection, King wrote: “In fact the external evidence for the authenticity of this doctrine is found wanting.” The early church, he says, formulated this doctrine because it “had been captivated by the magnetic power of his [Jesus’] personality. This basic experience led to the faith that he could never die. And so in the pre-scientific thought pattern of the first century, this inner faith took outward form.” Thus, in this view, Jesus’ body never rose

from the dead, even though according to Scripture, “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.”

Two other essays show how King watered down Christianity. In one, he wrote that contemporary mystery religions influenced New Testament writers: “[A]fter being in contact with these surrounding religions and hearing certain doctrines expressed, it was only natural for some of these views to become part of their subconscious minds. . . . That Christianity did copy and borrow from Mithraism cannot be denied, but it was generally a natural and unconscious process rather than a deliberate plan of action.” In another essay, King wrote that liberal theology “was an attempt to bring religion up intellectually,” and the introduction to the paper at the Stanford website says that King was “scornful of fundamentalism.” King wrote that in fundamentalism the Trinity, the Atonement, and the Second Coming are “quite prominent,” but again, these are defining beliefs of Christianity.

Known and unknown

King is both known and unknown. Millions worldwide see him as a moral messiah, and American schools teach young children to praise him. In the United States there are no fewer than 777 streets named for him. But King is also unknown because only a few people are aware of the unsavory as-

pects of his life. The image most people have of King is therefore cropped and incomplete.

above other Americans as a distinguished orator and writer, but this short, 5’6½” man often stole the words of others. People believe he was a Christian, but he doubted some of the fundamentals of the faith. Our country honors King, but he worked closely with Communists who aimed to destroy it. He denied racial differences, but fought for racial favoritism in the form of quotas. He claimed to be for freedom, but he wanted to force people to associate with each other and he promoted the redistribution of wealth in the form of reparations for slavery. He quoted the ringing words of the Bible and claimed, as a preacher, to be striving to be more like Jesus, but his colleagues knew better.

Perhaps he, too, knew better. His closest political advisor, Stanley Levison, said King was “an intensely guilt-ridden man” and his wife Coretta also called him “a guilt-ridden man.” Levison said that the praise heaped upon King was “a continual series of blows to his conscience” because he was such a humble man. If King was guilt-ridden might it have been because he knew better than anyone the wide gap between his popular image and his true character?

The FBI surveillance files could throw considerable light on his true character, but they will not be made public until 2027. On January 31, 1977, as a result of lawsuits by King’s allies against the FBI, a US district judge ordered the files sealed for 50 years. There



King and President Lyndon Johnson.

are reportedly 56 feet of records—tapes, transcripts, and logs—in the custody of the National Archives and Record Service.

Meanwhile, for those who seek to know the real identity of this nearly untouchable icon, there is still plenty of evidence with which to answer the question: Was Martin Luther King, Jr. America’s best and greatest man? **Ω**

Benjamin J. Ryan is working toward a PhD in Church-State Studies. For a fully footnoted version of this article, please send \$3.00 and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to our address on page 2.

King towers