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The Baltimore Riot and the Death of Martin Luther King Part I:

by R.B. Jones
Baltimore Times

I don't know if it is safe for me to write this column. A couple of years ago, I was dubbed "The Angriest Black man in Print" by the City Paper and angry black men are not in vogue these days. This is the era of pabulum, Barack Obama platitudes about equal grievances and equal culpability in the racial divide between African-Americans and whites. I, unfortunately, am angrier now than when I won the City Paper award.

I guess it has to do with Obama and his followers' attempt to insist that this is a post-racial America when the very obvious facts contradict that fairy tale. But perhaps I am a grumpy old relic of the 1960s, like Obama's former pastor Jeremiah Wright, and I should be relegated to the category of cranky old uncle frothing at the mouth over long dead grievances. I don't think so!

I have been angry this past week because of two things. There is the distortion about the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and there is the great distortion about the riot of 1968 in the city. It is ironic that, at the time of the anniversary of the murder of Dr. King, there is a post-racial candidate for president in Barack Obama. I have been castigated countless times because I have not jumped on the post-racial bandwagon. I am constantly called a hater and a crab in a basket trying to pull a brother down. I have also been told to get over my anger about the past.

I have no animosity toward Obama. I am post racial because I feel the same way about him as I do any pro-war, imperialist, corporate lackey politician. I find him occasionally amusing and always entertaining and particularly dangerous to the development of an effective effort to promote an African-American agenda or an economic justice policy for the country. At a time when military adventurism, corruption and economic catastrophe threatens the survival of the American Empire, Obama is talking about increasing the military by 100,000 and keeping forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and the hundreds of US foreign military bases that are huge financial drains.

During the anniversary year of Dr. King's death, Obama is held up as the fulfillment of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech about a colorblind

America. Dr. King did not die because of some isolated violent red neck lined him up in a rifle sight. James Earl Ray no more planned and carried out the murder of Dr. King than I did. The government of the United States killed Dr. King and used Ray as a patsy. First of all, King was criticized by the media for his first choice of a hotel in Memphis, and he stayed at the Lorraine to quell criticism. Prior to Dr. King's assassination, a black detective who was assigned to King's security and surveillance was ordered to stay at home that day. He probably knew one of the local police sharpshooters used in the assassination.

James Earl Ray was a petty criminal who never showed much imagination or cleverness. Yet, the public is supposed to believe that he killed King and was clever enough to escape to England, where he got caught because he attempted to pull a small robbery. All the men whose names he used on fake passports, including one in Canada, all looked like Ray. How did he, acting alone match the fake passports so well? He was the decoy to cover up the real culprits.

Prior to King's assassination, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover wrote a famous memo saying that his agency would prevent the rise of a messiah figure who could unite the black freedom movement. He mentioned Malcolm X, whom the FBI assassinated three years before. Hoover said it was his intention to keep the black groups from uniting and that effort the COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence Program) used assassination, slander in the media, repeated false arrests, psychological warfare and brutality against the Black Panthers and other groups. The agency taped King having extra-marital sex and threatened him with exposure if he did not commit suicide. They knew he had attempted suicide when he was younger and, if he killed himself, their tracks would be covered.

Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered because his opposition to the Viet Nam War and his campaign for economic justice threatened the twin pillars of the American Empire military force and economic exploitation, domestic and foreign. Martin Luther King Jr., in his later evolution, supported reparations for the black victims of American slavery and illegal Jim Crow segregation.

Dr. King was a Nobel Peace Prize winner and internationally recognized change agent and nonviolent crusader. He was a moral and organization threat because, even though at the end of his life many had deserted him over fear of opposing America's atrocity in Viet Nam, he still commanded widespread respect and admiration. King had to die and the government killed him as he was helping sanitation workers in Memphis and planning for his multiethnic "Poor People's Campaign" aimed at tying up Washington DC.

Around Town with Erika Woodward

by Erika Woodward
Baltimore Times

Baltimore 68: Riots and Rebirth

Beginning in the devastating hours following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the city of Baltimore was rocked by riots and rebellions for two tumultuous weeks. Those dark days of April 1968 left six dead, hundreds of properties in ruins and forced then governor Spiro Agnew to deploy thousands of armed National Guard Troops to the city. With the country already reeling, Baltimore gained the attention of President Lyndon Johnson, who called for the addition of Army troops.

For the 40th Anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King's death, the University of Baltimore will offer a comprehensive examination of the riots, including their cause and short and long term consequences, through April 5. The conference features lectures, forums and more from. Learn more and register online at www.ubalt.edu, 410-837-5340.

In much of the talk about the 40th anniversary of King's murder, there is discussion about whether his dream has been fulfilled and how much progress has been made. King's latter day dreams were the elimination of poverty and a reduction of the bloated military budget. He supported a guaranteed minimum income for all citizens and medical care for all people. King said that not only should there be a redistribution of wealth in the society, but also a change in the moral perspective of the nation which he described as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today."

It is ironic that in recent days Rev. Jeremiah Wright has been severely criticized for things that Martin Luther King Jr. said in a slightly different manner. Of course, King was a young man when he made his criticism of America, and he still had some optimism that the American Empire could be converted to a genuine American democratic republic, a dream still deferred 40 years later. That is why America is still talking about a dialogue about race which keeps getting put off each decade. Dr. King wanted to dialogue about race relations, and he got a bullet in the neck for his trouble. That's not the kind of dialogue that will heal this country where truth is often regarded as an unwelcome stranger at the gate.

This country's national anthem should be "Mendacity" by Archie Shepp. After all, I have seen discussions in the media about the riot of 1968, blaming that uprising for creating racial tensions in the city. More about that gigantic lie next week as I give my perspective on the riot that I lived through as a teenager.

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