

The Final Nail in the Coffin of the MLK Official Story

A Review of William Pepper's *The Plot to Kill King*

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more, see: <http://dickatlee.com/issues/assassinations/mlk>

I came to Bill Pepper's work late in the game, reading in 2011 his stunning 2003/2008 *An Act of State*. I had been unaware of his earlier 1995 *Orders to Kill*, and was amazed by the degree of detail in the 20+ years of work he and his investigators carried out leading up to the 1999 civil trial verdict that King's death had involved a complex and far-ranging conspiracy of members of the U.S. Army, FBI (under direct orders of J. Edgar Hoover), Dixie Mafia, and Tennessee state and Memphis municipal governments. It prompted me to put up a detailed outline of the trial's revelations at <http://bit.ly/238YIsD>. I carelessly assumed that that told the whole story. I was wrong.

The Plot to Kill King is Pepper's third and -- he says -- final book on the topic. As such, it is fortunate that it has a title that so clearly identifies a purpose somewhat obscured by the previous more dramatic -- but less descriptive -- two titles.

The Plot describes the events -- seemingly random but most carefully contrived -- that drew King to Memphis, the local machinations used to guarantee the success of his killing, and the long process of cultivating the non-racist petty criminal James Earl Ray as the patsy.

It takes the reader from Pepper's first Ralph-Abernathy-induced 1978 interview with Ray through the following two decades, during which mountains of new evidence were uncovered in the face of increasing state and federal obstruction (including attempts on Ray's life) of any chance of a new criminal trial based on that evidence. It summarizes all the basic aspects of the conspiracy laid out in the 1999 civil trial, aspects that were covered perhaps more thoroughly in *An Act of State*. (It is that earlier thoroughness that prompts me to suggest that both books are essential for a full grasp of what happened.) The narrative part of *The Plot* concludes with a "final summation" for the jury of readers of the key parts of the case, and a telling epilogue detailing the many attempts to cover up the truth on the part of journalists, authors (particularly Gerald Posner's *Killing the Dream*) and venerable leaders on the Left.

(Per this last, one that might ring a bell for those concerned with 9/11 issues is (p. 312): "A well-known and respected Boston-area professor, who is highly regarded for his well-informed criticism of US government foreign policy, has always minimized the significance of our history of political assassinations. He told me that he had no idea that anyone had done the work I had undertaken on the Dr. King assassination. By that time I had published two books on the case setting out the evidence of Ray's innocence and the existence of the conspiracy. And he said he was not aware.")

What makes *The Plot* absolutely essential, in my opinion, to an understanding of what happened in Memphis (and the U.S. at that time) is the addition of a key resource -- the book's 400 pages (out of the 700-page total) of numerous appendices.

These fall into five main content areas:

1. A detailed listing (often daily) of meetings, communications, and travels of key government officials in the 15 months prior to the murder that either color in the environment or (flagged as such) specifically relate to King and the assassination.
2. The (horrifying) January 1967 *Ramparts Magazine* article, [*The Children of Vietnam*](#), by journalist Pepper. The article pushed King off his black center of gravity, opening his eyes to the larger scope of the problem as a war against all poor people of whatever color and nationality, and connecting the two men as friends and colleagues. King's subsequent fearless actions in pursuit of this new understanding alienated him from much of his black civil rights movement leadership colleagues and injected new urgency into the ongoing plans to kill him.
3. Various pieces of documentary evidence, including the letter James Earl Ray's lawyer used to bribe him to falsely plead guilty, telephone records proving the existence of Ray's patsy-handler "Raul" (a vital link steadfastly denied by the government and press), J. Edgar Hoover's JFK/RFK/MLK "personal wish list," and various photographs.
4. Perhaps most important, transcripts of depositions of (and a phone call with) witnesses that provided key information not available to the earlier books. I have found the research value of the depositions to have been greatly increased by the inclusion with each deposition of a concordance index of all the words in that deposition.

Pepper says he included all these to give the reader a chance to evaluate for themselves the basis for his conclusions, and he uses excerpts of the depositions for many of the newer revelations of the book. The deposed include:

1. Lenny Curtis, a worker at the Memphis Police gun range, who overheard a lot of vitally important conversations between local officials related to the assassination, and observed the man Pepper finally concluded was the shooter practicing the whole day of the killing with a special rifle.
2. Nathan Whitlock, a cab driver to whom Memphis mobster Frank Liberto acknowledged he'd set up the hit, and who managed to get the actual shooter to essentially admit he was the shooter.
3. Frank Strausser, the Memphis police officer who has now been fairly decisively shown to have been the shooter.
4. Ron Tyler Adkins, one of the sons in the family of Dixie Mafia/KKK/Masons member Russell Adkins, Sr. Ron was present at -- or privy to -- a large number of the meetings his father (or older brother Russell Jr, who took over after his father's 1967 death) had over many years with all the main civic/Mafia/FBI players in the assassination. His testimony details, among much else,
 - a) the years of planning,
 - b) the role of many of those players,

- c) the direct involvement of Hoover through his right-hand man and gay partner Clyde Tolson (Uncle Clyde to the Adkins family),
- d) the rather appalling role of key King colleagues as FBI informants, particularly Jesse Jackson, who Ron describes as the "money man" who arranged for King's transfer from a safe room in the motel to an exposed one, and then the ousting from the motel of the armed black organization, The Invaders, that had been protecting King, moments before the shooting, and
- e) the prior arrangements by the head of surgery of one of the three Memphis hospitals to have a possibly-surviving King sent to that hospital, from which he would be guaranteed not to emerge alive.

5. Johnnton Shelby, the son of Lula Mae Shelby, a surgical aide in the hospital just mentioned, who, after all the life-saving medical personnel were ordered out of the emergency room by the head of surgery, turned at the door to hear the breathing tube removed and see him put a pillow over King's face. All medical personnel were told not to speak of anything they knew, on pain of loss of job (and, eventually, pension).

6. (not a deposition) Cyril Wecht, whom Pepper refers to as "one of the worlds leading forensic pathologists," who after examining the autopsy report and the time lapse between shooting and death, provided the crucial insight that, while the damage caused by the bullet would have ultimately proved fatal, that fact could not have been known at the time to either the medical personnel who started treatment or the head of surgery who stopped it.

In an excellent [interview/review](#) on the website *Truth and Shadows*, Craig McKee quotes Pepper (*The Plot*, p.xiv) about his friend MLK:

"For me, this is a story rife with sadness, replete with massive accounts of personal and public deception and betrayal. Its revelations and experiences have produced in the writer a depression stemming from an unavoidable confrontation with the depths to which human beings, even those subject to professional codes of ethics, have fallen. In addition, there is an element of personal despair that has resulted from this long effort, which has made me even question the wisdom of undertaking this task."

and then concludes with the simple statement, "But he did undertake it, and we should all be grateful that he did." I'm not sure anyone could say it better.