MARKED MAN:

MARTIN LUTHER KING AND THE FBI

*3DD Productions*

*2018*

# *PART ONE*

:05

*(Narrator)*

On January 5th, 1965, a package was delivered to civil rights leader Martin Luther King. Inside was a garbled audio tape. King recognised his voice and he remembered the hotel rooms where the conversations had taken place. He was being watched. There was a letter as well. It labelled King an ‘animal’, a ‘fraud’, and again and again it repeated the same words.

:39

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

The letter encouraged King to commit suicide. The letter said ‘King, look into your heart. You are an evil, abnormal beast. There is only one way out for you.’

:54

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

It’s hard to interpret any other way except saying that this material is going to be made public and the only other way out is suicide.

1:03

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

King and the movement just represented everything that could change the very fabric of American society.

1:12

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

They were determined to destroy Martin Luther King.

1:18

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

They’re afraid. It was a revolution in so many ways.

1:27

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

I mean he was photogenic. He was incredibly articulate. I mean, the whole nine yards.

1:35

*Dr Dorothy Cotton, Friend & Civil Rights Leader*

He could handle a room filled with people, and he had something genuine to say.

1:43

*(Narrator)*

His message of non-violent protest had won him allies and admirers around the world.

1:49

*(Martin Luther King)*

One day right down in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.

2:02

*(Narrator)*

But for others he was a danger to the American way of life. He had been threatened, harassed and assaulted.

2:14

*(Martin Luther King)*

I’ve been hit so many times I’m immune to it.

2:17

*(Narrator)*

But this letter was different. Its sender was not some disaffected crank or racist hatemonger. This letter had been sent by the FBI.

**TITLE – MARKED MAN: MARTIN LUTHER KING AND THE FBI**

2:40

*(Narrator)*

It was a clash between two of the great figures in American history. One was a civil rights leader, a minister fighting injustice. The other was a lifelong bureaucrat of unrivalled power and influence. The feud between Martin Luther King and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover lasted more than a decade.

3:03

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

Hoover was the FBI and the FBI was Hoover.

3:07

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

Presidents had a difficult time controlling him. Attorneys General, never controlled him.

3:13

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

He could bust anybody. Anybody. He was above the law.

3:18

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

He had a personal animus against King, and he had a personal animus against change.

3:24

*(Narrator)*

There were public arguments and covert surveillance. It would end only with King’s death on a motel balcony in Memphis, Tennessee. At the heart of their confrontation were differing visions of what America was and what America could be. Hoover’s America was an unequal, divided society. In the south, the segregationist Jim Crow laws held sway. Racist abuse and violence were common.

3:58

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

In the American constitution, everyone is equal. So, after the Civil War, there were three amendments passed mainly to ensure that there was no more slavery, everyone born on the soil of the United States was an American, and every American was entitled vote. However, the implementation and the definition of them was handed to the states.

4:24

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

In the American south, you had a totally racist society and a racist legal system.

4:30

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

The dominant social order at that time validated there being the separation between the races, there being a black America and a white America.

4:40

*Dr Dorothy Cotton, Friend & Civil Rights Leader*

I can’t even use the public library except on one day a week at the end of the week.

4:48

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

There is a system of segregation that was in place in the south. So all the institutions that were created for blacks were created by blacks.

4:56

*(Narrator)*

This was the America Martin Luther King grew up in. His father was a Baptist minister. Hopes in the family were high for the intelligent boy.

5:07

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

He was born to quite a prominent family. His mother Alberta Williams came from a line of preachers.

5:15

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

His father was strict and Martin seems to have been a quite gentle kid.

5:21

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

King’s mother envisioned him taking over his legacy, taking over the church, taking over that tradition.

5:29

*(Narrator)*

But as a young man, he wrestled with religious uncertainty. For a time, he considered a career in the law. Finally, however, he decided he would become a minister.

5:41

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

He became more attracted to the pulpit as a vehicle for social change.

5:49

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

Through that, he could do the things that he really wanted to do, which was justice in action. He found a meaning in his life. That was very important for him

6:00

*(Narrator)*

King went on to Boston University to complete a doctoral study. It was there, early in 1952, that he met another student named Coretta Scott. Eighteen months later, the young couple were married.

6:16

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

Daddy King didn’t want him to marry her to begin with, and Martin Luther King, he always wanted to please his dad, but in this, he was very clear, and he told his dad, ‘you know, this is the woman I want to marry. I can’t live without her.’ She chose to be with somebody who she knew was a visionary, and I would say that she very much liked being the wife of Martin Luther King

6:41

*(Narrator)*

King’s teachers in Boston tried to convince him to pursue a university career. But by now, the young man was set on his course.

6:48

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

He was given pastor-ship of a quite prestigious church, Dexter Avenue Baptist in Montgomery, Alabama.

6:57

*Dr Dorothy Cotton, Friend & Civil Rights Leader*

Martin was the minister at that church. That was something about the preacher that drew people to that church.

7:06

*(Narrator)*

Within two years of moving to the city, Martin Luther King was known far beyond Dexter Avenue. His every move was watched by J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI. On December 1st, 1955, 42-year old Rosa Parks was making her way home after a long day at work. The Montgomery City bus was crowded. So, the driver ordered four black passengers to give up their seats to the standing whites. Rosa Parks refused.

7:45

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

Rosa Parks was a seamstress by profession. That’s what she did. She was also active in the NAACP, the premier civil rights organisation.

7:56

*Dr Dorothy Cotton, Friend & Civil Rights Leader*

She was very quiet. I don’t think I ever heard her raise her voice as loud as mine.

8:01

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

The laws in the state at that time were that if a white person came on the bus, and no matter what you had to give up a seat and couldn’t sit in the same row, even though she was legitimately sitting in a segregated portion of the bus, and she just refused to do it.

8:18

*Dr Dorothy Cotton, Friend & Civil Rights Leader*

She just kept her seat. Martin started getting phone calls: ‘They’ve arrested Rosa. They’ve arrested Rosa.’ It was always like a whisper.

8:28

*(Narrator)*

The black community in Montgomery had suffered years of mistreatment on city buses. African-American passengers were frequently insulted, short-changed and left stranded by the exclusively white drivers.

8:40

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

This became the perfect case in order to push for desegregation of the bus lines, because there was nothing to besmirch this woman’s character. She was a model citizen in every which way.

8:56

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

This was the beginning. ‘We’re going to boycott these buses. We’re going to let the city of Montgomery know what it’s like when we don’t ride the bus. You’re going to feel this.’

9:08

*(Male reporter, off-camera)*

What results do you hope to achieve?

9:10

*(Rosa Parks)*

We hope to achieve equal rights.

9:19

*(Narrator)*

At first, it was to last just a single day, but when authorities proved unwilling to compromise, the boycott was extended. Black taxi firms carried passengers for the cost of a bus fare. When the city cracked down on this, community leaders arranged a car sharing system. Hundreds volunteered to help.

9:41

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

A lot of people also like to think that King organised everything, and he didn’t organise everything. He came to this a little reluctantly, too. They wanted to use the church as a meeting place, just to help start planning the boycott and he was like, ‘I’m not sure. I’m not sure.’

9:59

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

He was scared to death, but he thought, ‘Look, if I’m getting into this because I feel that I have a mission, I have to do this.’ So, he led it.

10:10

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

There’s always been a question of, ‘Did the movement create King, or did King create the movement?’ and I’d say it lies in between, but because of his ability to take Christian doctrine and make it social revolutionary doctrine. He was able to pull the heartstrings of people in ways no other leader could.

10:34

*(Narrator)*

The boycott, and King himself, gained national attention. But it was in the courts where the battle would finally be won.

10:41

*(Martin Luther King)*

This morning, the long-awaited mandate from the United States Supreme Court concerning bus segregation came to Montgomery. This mandate expresses in terms that are crystal clear, that segregation in public transportation is both legally and sociologically invalid.

11:01

*(Narrator)*

The bus boycott came to an end on December 21st, 1956. It had lasted 382 days.

11:11

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

They not only won, but they won the court of public opinion as well.

11:15

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

There were people who started to think, ‘Ok what can I do in my local community in order to help push?’.

11:23

*(Narrator)*

The success of the boycott reverberated far beyond Montgomery. It galvanised black citizens across America, but it also caught the attention of authorities in Washington.

11:34

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

I think it definitely alerted them, because this really spoke to a different era, a different America, a different social system, and the establishment at that time was not about creating a different social system.

11:50

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

The country was in danger because of the Cold War, so anything that disrupted American unity was also dangerous.

11:57

*(Narrator)*

Far more attention would now be paid to the Civil Rights movement and especially the charismatic young Baptist Minister Martin Luther King.

# *PART TWO*

12:15

*(Narrator)*

The 1960s was a decade of change in America. Old certainties were challenged. New leaders took to the stage. Foremost among this new generation was Martin Luther King, but while the civil rights leader was protesting inequality and segregation, he was also the subject of surveillance and intimidation by J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI. The two men helped define the decade. One of them was trying to change a nation. The other was striving to preserve it. John Edgar Hoover was born in Washington D.C. in 1895. He was a government man from the age of 22. He was in charge of the FBI from the beginning.

13:05

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

He was somebody who was a powerful personality. He could speak to the public very emphatically. He knew how to create political support and protection for himself.

13:16

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

He sat, imperious, in the justice department, as a man to be feared, who ruled by fear, and he consolidated his power by accumulating secret information, and using that information as a weapon of political warfare.

13:36

*(Narrator)*

Under Hoover’s leadership, the FBI established offices in major towns and cities across America. It began national training programmes for police and it invested millions to advance the science of crime-fighting, but its constant driving focus was protecting the American government and preserving social order.

13:57

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

He started the Red Scare, the Red witch hunt.

14:02

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

Although the Communist Party in the United States never had any more than 80,000 members at its peak in the 1930s, he felt that Soviet Communism rose up from the battlefields of World War I, floated across the Atlantic like a toxic cloud, and settled in the United States, that unless quarantined, could destroy America.

14:26

*(Narrator)*

In August 1956, the FBI began a covert operation to disrupt the American Communist Party. It was codenamed Counter-Intelligence Program – or CO-INTEL-PRO.

14:40

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

CO-INTEL-PRO was the ultimate iteration of the powers of surveillance.

14:48

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

They did dirty tricks. They infiltrated organisations, put agent provocateurs in there.

14:57

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

CO-INTEL-PRO could be used to destroy individuals as well as ideologies through relentless surveillance and through ‘poison pen letters,’ blackmail, and other criminal means.

15:17

*(Narrator)*

Within months, it expanded to include another group Hoover suspected of Communist sympathies, the leaders of the Civil Rights movement. Martin Luther King was determined to build on the success in Montgomery. He was just 27, but the young pastor had a maturity and bearing far beyond his years.

15:39

*Dr Dorothy Cotton, Friend & Civil Rights Leader*

Martin was one of my best friends. He was an easy guy to work with, a fantastic sermoniser.

15:49

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

He was beautiful, he could talk, and he was propelled to the front.

15:54

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

He was their rallying point and their voice.

15:59

*(Narrator)*

Early in 1957, a group of church leaders gathered in Atlanta. It was the first meeting of what would become the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. King was elected the group’s President.

16:10

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was Ralph Abernathy and Dr King and a couple of other pastors who decided that the church, the black church was going to lead this.

16:20

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

King, as a leader, was a cautious leader. He always erred on the side of, ‘If this is going to move forward and create some violence and some harm, he would back away.

16:33

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

Dr King decided, and decided wisely, that he was going to follow Gandhi’s approach in getting Indian independence. It is active nonviolence. You don’t fight back; you take it, but you don’t move.

16:49

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

Law enforcement was confounded. Civil disobedience had a resonance that billy clubs, subpoenas, arrests and government persecution could not easily defeat.

17:02

*(Narrator)*

The early years of the SCLC were difficult ones however. King struggled to balance the demands on his time. More and more he relied on a trusted band of advisers and aides. Among them was a white attorney from New York named Stanley Levison. Levison was involved with the SCLC from the beginning. In 1958, he helped write and edit King’s first book *Stride Toward Freedom*, and he was also a communist.

17:33

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

That didn’t necessarily mean that he was a law-breaker, but it did mean that the FBI under long-standing protocols could do almost anything to surveil a Stanley Levison, so he was keeping his eyes on on him all the time.

17:48

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

Levison proved to be a valued friend to King. In some ways, he translated the civil rights struggle to the moneyed in New York, because he had a pulse on white America in way, because he was of that, and so he could say to him, ‘Well, this is going to fly, this won’t fly, maybe wait on this, maybe wait on that.’

18:08

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

He funded parts of Dr King’s movement, the civil rights movement. He also co-wrote some of his speeches. He was his mentor and also partner.

18:19

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

When he became one of King’s most trusted advisors, it aroused Hoover’s suspicions which he had. Which was the civil rights movement was essentially something in league with communism subverting American unity

18:32

*(Narrator)*

The FBI had watched Levison before, in the early 1950s, but it was only in 1962 that they discovered how close he was to King. Surveillance of the attorney began once again, but nothing incriminating was found.

18:49

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

That didn’t matter to Hoover. Once a communist, always a communist.

18:53

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

Hoover came from a segregated Washington DC background. He kept the FBI a lily-white organisation as long as he could. To him, there was a kind of paternalistic attitude that if you had a white man and black man together, the black man was a puppet, and so as soon as he saw a communist in King’s entourage, to him, this could hardly be explained any other way except that Levison was now giving orders to King.

19:21

*(Narrator)*

King was warned by figures in government that people close to him had Communist backgrounds, but King trusted his friend, and he needed him. The SCLC continued to drift. Other campaigns and leaders had seized the initiative. King realised a change had to be made. In 1963, the SCLC launched a new campaign in Birmingham, Alabama. Tactics would be different this time. The protests would still be non-violent, but they would also be deliberately confrontational. Public spaces were occupied. Unjust laws were flouted. The Birmingham Police Department reacted violently.

20:11

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

They got beaten up, arrested, Dr King was arrested. They just turned the hoses on you and dogs.

20:18

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

The main tenant behind everything of course was non-violence. So for the protestors, no matter what was done to them, did not fight back. This is also I think part of the brilliance of the movement and part of the brilliance of King. He understood the optics.

20:34

*Dr Dorothy Cotton, Friend & Civil Rights Leader*

We knew that we had to break that system down, that system that didn’t allow African-American folks to function like other citizens.

20:44

*(Narrator)*

The footage became national news. The head of the Birmingham Police Department was fired. Businesses and public spaces in the city were forced to become more open to black citizens. The SCLC had a major victory to its name. Greater triumphs were to follow. They would drive the civil rights movement to new heights, and they would make King the most dangerous man in America.

*PART THREE*

21:17

*Dr Dorothy Cotton, Friend & Civil Rights Leader*

(singing) I’m gonna do what the sprit says do. I’m gonna do what the sprit says do, what the sprit says do. I’m gonna do, Oh Lord, gonna do what the sprit says do. (speaking) There was something happening, from Martin on down to farmers in the fields.

21:41

*(Narrator)*

In 1963, Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference joined other civil rights groups in a mass march on Washington. It was the largest gathering of protestors yet seen in America. More than a quarter of a million-people descended on the heart of government.

21:59

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

I don’t think we’ve ever seen a march quite like that. It was peaceful on every level.

22:04

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

And the cameras were ready. This was the first major televised made-for-television event on earth. It was a special bulletin, and the march and it was the first time it had ever happened.

22:17

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

Everyone who was a leader at this time was speaking.

22:21

*(Male voice, off-camera)*

I have the pleasure to present to you, Dr Martin Luther King.

22:28

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

Finally at the end was Martin Luther King, and he had prepared remarks, and he was doing his speech. It was beautiful. Then legend has it Mahalia Jackson, the great gospel singer, yelled up to him, ‘Martin, tell them about the dream!’ and he went off-script.

22:45

*(Martin Luther King)*

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character. I have a dream today

23:00

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

Even to think about it now, it was just unbelievable.

23:04

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

You know when there is a moment when everything comes together, and he created something much more transcendent in the way that he spoke, that touched everybody’s heart. People felt like God was speaking through him. He gave a picture of America to itself that it never quite had before. It really had a picture of integration, of what that could look like. It’s become a symbol of maybe the better America that we all hope we can achieve at some point in time.

23:37

*(Narrator)*

Not everyone was thrilled with the impact of the march and King’s address. To FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, the civil rights movement was a revolutionary, communist one. Now, he ordered his dirty tricks operation COINTELPRO to focus on Martin Luther King. The FBI Director wanted him “neutralised”.

24:01

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

J Edgar Hoover was determined, as he wrote, to prevent the rise of a black messiah in the United States.

24:09

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

He was convinced to the day he died that the civil rights movement was a commie plot.

24:16

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

The civil rights movement was in fact a home-grown movement that rose out of the segregation, bigotry, and lynchings that occurred in the deep south.

24:27

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

King did have the view of American economics which did come from a Marxist perspective but he kept that, you might say, to himself and paid much more attention to using Christian ethics criticising American society.

24:44

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

He was never a communist, okay? He wanted a system in which the masses of people really could see a more equal reflection in the nation.

24:54

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

J Edgar Hoover was convinced that King was the most dangerous man in America.

25:00

*(Narrator)*

Within weeks of the March on Washington, the FBI made a request to the Attorney General for a wiretap on Martin Luther King.

25:10

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

Hoover convinced the Attorney General of the United States, Robert Kennedy, that King had to placed under 24 hour a day surveillance, every day of the year, to guard against this insidious civil rights movement.

25:27

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

Technically you have a legal kind of surveillance, which is looking for evidence of communist control, communist involvement in the civil rights movement. That’s one thing. The CO-INTEL-PRO operation, which is what most people now associate with the FBI’s relationship with King was something completely different.

25:46

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

The case file was entitled ‘Martin Luther King: Security Matter: Communism.’ His home phones, his hotel rooms were bugged. Informants around him were cultivated.

26:01

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

They were determined to discredit him on every level.

26:05

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

It was one of the highest iterations of the national security surveillance state that Hoover ever mounted.

26:15

*(Narrator)*

The wiretaps uncovered no hint of Communist conspiracy.

What they did reveal however was something Hoover prized perhaps even more: details about Martin Luther King’s private life.

26:29

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

There’s no question that King cheated on his wife. There’s also little question that this had very little to do with the civil rights movement.

26:39

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

It fit what everybody thought black men were up to. A black man’s sex life, especially one in the public eye, is like the perfect archetype, the out of control black man.

26:52

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

Hoover realised that this was really a treasure, a tremendous weapon to be used against him.

25:59

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

They wanted to make sure that people couldn’t see King as a moral authority.

27:05

*(Narrator)*

The contrast between King’s public reputation and his private activities was a galling one to many in the FBI. Their hostility was deepened by criticism King made of the Bureau’s operations in the South. Hoover’s response was scathing. King however was now a figure of global renown. He met the Pope in Rome and, in October 1964, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The more the world praised King, the more disgusted and obsessed Hoover seemed to become. Damaging material was passed on to other arms of government. The IRS was urged to seek out tax violations. Universities were discouraged from awarding King honorary degrees, and, in November 1964, the anonymous hate letter telling King to commit suicide was sent by an FBI agent in Miami.

28:03

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

He accompanied that letter with edited tapes of King in a hotel room in Washington enjoying sexual activities with a woman who was not his wife. That package went off to King’s home and his wife opened it.

21:20

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

King knew that this had to be the FBI, and it had to be Hoover.

28:24

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

Coretta Scott King knew who she was married to. This was not going to interfere with their marriage because this was not about their marriage, okay? This was about the larger struggle and larger picture. They all sat down and listened to everything. They then strategised, what would they do?

28:42

*(Narrator)*

The FBI’s campaign to discredit King failed. In 1966, a Senate probe began investigating electronic surveillance techniques. Hoover grew nervous. The wiretaps were shut down. The civil rights movement had continued throughout.

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed legislation outlawing discrimination and segregation.

29:09

*(President Lyndon Johnson)*

This civil rights act is a challenge to all of us, to go to work in our communities and our states, and our homes, and our hearts, to eliminate the last vestiges of injustice.

29:25

*(Narrator)*

The following year, King led a voting rights movement in Selma, Alabama, and in 1966, he campaigned against housing discrimination in Chicago, but the conflict with Hoover was far from over, and King soon opened a new front.

29:54

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

He saw the Vietnam War as interfering in a space that just we did not belong.

30:01

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

It wasn’t just King but almost the entire Left was coming to a radical critique of the war as something that was not only a foreign policy disaster, but somehow revealed some of the inequities, the injustices in American society. The war was being fought with a predominantly black army, so a critique of the racial situation in America, their critique of American foreign policy began to work together.

30:31

*(Martin Luther King)*

One must never overlook the fact that our nation is obsessed with the guns of war in Vietnam, and it has created a climate of violence, a climate of confusion, a climate of division, and even a climate of hatred.

30:46

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

His sense of justice for people, and his sense of ‘this is just another level of exploitation of us in so many ways.’ It was obvious to him something had to be done.

30:57

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

Here was proof to Hoover that King was a dangerous communist, because how could you be an American opposed to the policies of your government, and not be a communist?

31:09

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

Hoover and the FBI began to see their role as investigating, and critiquing, and subverting, disrupting, the whole anti-war movement. So as King began to embrace that movement, this put him at even more odds with the FBI.

31:30

*(Narrator)*

The FBI recruited an informant in the SCLC. The organisation was added to an internal list of ‘black nationalist hate groups’. King persevered however. He saw the gains made in civil Rrghts had not transformed the lives of African-Americans as he had hoped. In 1968, he began a new campaign. His target this time was the whole American system.

31:54

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

Doing the same thing wasn’t going to work. King knew this. The struggle was not just about black America. It was about America. A fundamental change had to happen.

32:05

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

If you’re going to fight for civil rights, you also have to fight for people’s ability to live where they want to live, how they want to live.

32:13

*(VO, Martin Luther King)*

We will get together and be together. Black people, Mexicans, Americans, American Indians, Puerto Ricans, Appalachian Whites, all working together to solve the problem of poverty.

32:29

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

He began speaking more as a radical. The whole political environment had changed to an extent that he wasn’t the only one speaking in these radical terms.

32:38

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

When King became the head of the war on poverty, that was one bridge too far for the establishment of the United States.

32:47

*(Narrator)*

The campaign was a political threat to the government. The FBI stepped up its disruptive efforts. It smeared leaders national and local, and it spread false rumours about the dangers of taking part in the campaign.

33:01

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

You have to understand that Hoover saw the civil rights movement not only as controlled and directed by communism, but as a threat to every bit of the established order of America that he represented.

32:19

*(Narrator)*

But King was not deterred. The Poor People’s Campaign would go ahead. He spent the early months of 1968 touring the deep south to recruit demonstrators. He declared that a strike by sanitation workers in Tennessee would have his support as part of the campaign. In the spring, he travelled to Memphis to join the protests.

*PART FOUR*

33:51

*(Narrator)*

In April 1968, Martin Luther King had come to Memphis, Tennessee in support of striking sanitation workers. His presence in the city was known to the FBI. Although the days had passed when agents would bug King’s hotel rooms, the civil rights leader remained under surveillance. King’s Poor People Campaign targeted the government in a new, far more direct manner. The FBI was hard at work to disrupt it.

34:21

*(Martin Luther King)*

Well I don’t know what will happen now but it really don’t matter with me now, because I have been to the mountaintop, and I have seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land.

34:28

*(Narrator)*

King’s last speech in Memphis would be prophetic. After the rally, he returned to the Lorraine Motel where he and his team were staying. King rose late the next morning. An afternoon of meetings with SCLC staff followed, before King and his associates prepared to leave the Lorraine Motel for dinner.

Shortly after 6pm, they stepped outside Room 306. A single gunshot rang out.

35:16

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

He was shot right in the cheek. He’s on the balcony, turns, went to get his coat, and that was that.

35:24

*Dr Dorothy Cotton, Friend & Civil Rights Leader*

Martin was just one of my best friends.

35:29

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

I remember I was looking in the mirror and I had a transistor radio in those days, on the edge of the sink, and the news came over the radio, that he’d been shot. It was deeper than a shock. I remember thinking, “Oh this is it. It’s over now, this whole non-violent movement, it’s over. It’s all over. It wasn’t going to be nice anymore. It was finished. I never talked about him since that night. I’ve never listened to him. I can’t hear his voice.

35:59

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

It was a time of unbelievable sadness.

36:05

*(Narrator)*

President Johnson declared a national day of mourning. On April 8th, Coretta Scott King led a march of 40,000 mourners through Memphis. The following day, more than 100,000 people gathered in King’s hometown of Atlanta for the funeral. There were less peaceful responses as well. Riots broke out in more than a hundred cities. Dozens were killed and many more injured.

36:38

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

I remember this. A feeling that the country was coming apart at the seams.

36:44

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

Chicago particularly went up in flames. They tore down everything.

36:49

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

We were at war with ourselves in a way that we had not been since the Civil War.

36:56

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

I think people went a little crazy, because you already had Malcolm X dying. You had JFK, now King. I think that it was too much for so many people.

37:09

*(Narrator)*

But amid the tears and the fury, there were questions. Who was Martin Luther King’s assassin? Where had he gone? Did he work alone? Leading the investigation was J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI.

37:24

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

His hostility toward King created an impression than the FBI was not serious in tracking down his killer.

37:32

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

The bureau in hot pursuit of King’s assassin failed. They lost the thread.

37:40

*(Narrator)*

Shortly after the shooting, witnesses had seen a man running from a boarding house opposite the Lorraine Motel. A package was found close to the scene. It contained a rifle and binoculars. Fingerprints on these were traced to a man named James Earl Ray. A manhunt was launched. Weeks passed however, with no sign of King’s assassin.

38:04

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

James Earl Ray was a penniless drifter.

38:09

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

James Earl Ray simply managed to escape in a way that nobody could have predicted from someone like that.

38:18

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

The fact that King’s assassin could elude an FBI manhunt boggled the mind then and boggles the mind now.

38:25

*(Narrator)*

It was two months before James Earl Ray was found. He was apprehended far from Memphis.

38:31

*(Male English news reporter)*

News of Ray’s arrest came first from the FBI chief J Edgar Hoover in Washington. He said that Ray was carrying two Canadian passports and a fully loaded pistol when he landed in London from Lisbon.

38:44

*(Narrator)*

Ray was extradited back to the United States. The following year, he confessed to the murder of Martin Luther King. He was sentenced to 99 years in prison, but questions remain. Days after his conviction, Ray recanted his confession. He insisted others were involved in the crime.

39:04

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

The King family believed that James Earl Ray did not do it.

39:09

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

To elude the pursuit of the FBI made the FBI look horribly amateurish, if not complicit.

39:14

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

How’d he get the gun? How’d he do all this stuff? How did he know King was going to be there at that particular time? You can’t pick up a high-powered rifle and aim and shoot somebody in the head. That’s not easy to do.

39:25

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

The suspicion that Ray had help, from white racists in this country is great, but again, we’ll never know.

39:33

*(Narrator)*

But other secrets did come to light. In 1971, a group of activists broke into an FBI Office in Pennsylvania.

39:43

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

They managed to loot the files and enterprising reporters looking over this noticed a stamp on some of them: CO-INTEL-PRO, and they didn’t know what this meant. It was just something that they hadn’t seen before, and so they began filing requests for this programme, to find out what it was.

40:05

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

Americans learnt that the FBI had been an instrument of political warfare in this country, beyond anyone’s imagination.

40:14

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

The American people I think were so jaded, so disbelieving, so set up for the government not being on their side or for them. People weren’t terribly surprised and I think they weren’t shocked.

40:27

*(Narrator)*

Shortly after the disclosures, J. Edgar Hoover shut the programme down. It would be among his last orders as FBI Director. After almost forty years at the helm of the Bureau, Hoover died of a heart attack at his Washington home on May 2nd 1972. He was 77.

40:46

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

Hoover’s legacy for better or worse is encapsulated in CO-INTEL-PRO.

40:51

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

Hoover was an American Machiavelli. No man should ever have that kind of unchecked power in America ever again.

40:59

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

His opposition to civil rights has put him in the indefensible position of someone who stood for some of the worst things in the American national character.

41:09

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

His legacy we live with every day. It is the national security state. The surveillance powers of the FBI are immense to this day. To a great extent, they are now controlled by law.

41:26

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

The FBI put itself on a good track as far as reserving it’s efforts for the most important crimes against the country.

41:35

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

Agents of the FBI are schooled from the beginning not to repeat Hoover’s mistakes

41:47

*(Narrator)*

Over half a century has now passed since Martin Luther King’s death. The years have not dimmed the brilliance of his rhetoric, nor have they diminished the relevance of his words.

42:04

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

Martin Luther King stands as an unrealised ideal.

42:09

*Professor Richard Gid Powers, FBI Historian*

The civil rights movement is properly seen as a moral crusade that appealed to the best aspects of the American character.

42:19

*Tim Weiner, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist*

His legacy: freedom, liberty, justice, is part of our heritage now. He belongs to the ages.

42:29

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

The whole object of society itself is to find equality with people of all colours and all ethnicities and all religions, and the American Dream in particular is not fulfilled until this happens.

42:48

*Dr Cheryl Sterling, Director of Black Studies - CCNY*

This was a man who believed in what he was trying to do. He always saw what could be better and he said, ‘I am going to push for that better.’

42:58

*Dr Dorothy Cotton, Friend & Civil Rights Leader*

I was with him everywhere he was going to preach and going to sing. We could be in a car going to our next meeting or whatever, and Martin was back there telling jokes and laughing and he was easy to be with.

43:16

*Bonnie Greer, Critic and Broadcaster*

He got people to look at their shared humanity, accept it, and move it along.