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Profile: Carl Rowan

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# The career of a hired gun, in his own words

by Anton Chaitkin

Newspaper columnist Carl T. Rowan recently wrote a series attacking National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Executive Director Benjamin Chavis as a thief and adulterer. Rowan's nationally syndicated articles brought to a successful conclusion the campaign of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith to stop Chavis and the NAACP from uniting with blacks such as Minister Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam.

After the NAACP executive board fired Chavis on Aug. 20, Chavis said, "I think it's a very sad commentary that a journalist like Carl Rowan would engage in a campaign to assassinate my character as he joined in a campaign when Martin Luther King, Jr. was alive to assassinate his character."

Chavis was referring to Rowan's role in the effort, largely orchestrated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to defame and destroy Dr. King. Typical of the FBI's actions was a directive sent by the Bureau to all FBI field offices on March 4, 1968, ordering a concerted offensive to "prevent the rise of a 'messiah' who could unify and electrify the militant black nationalist movement." Dr. King, the directive said, "could be a very real contender for this position." King was murdered one month later in Memphis.

Rowan did with Martin Luther King, Jr. what he has just done with Chavis—the difference so far is that Chavis is still alive.

We shall show here, largely in Rowan's own words, that Rowan was the leading public slanderer of Dr. King, using dirt from the FBI. Rowan knew that the FBI campaign was slanderous, and he knew that it was designed to set up King's murder. We shall see, in Rowan's own words, his degraded self-conception as a skilled, professional liar, whose perfidy cost many lives in addition to that of Dr. King.

## The war against Dr. King

In the summer of 1967, *Reader's Digest*, the world's largest-circulation magazine, published a shocking attack by Rowan on Dr. King. Rowan put forward the view that King opposed the Vietnam War because he was under communist direction.

Rowan's *Digest* article, unprecedented in its viciousness,

itself made headlines. The day the article was released, Aug. 28, 1967, the *New York Times* gloated that King had been "attacked by a fellow Negro" who was the "former director of the United States Information Agency" (USIA) and was "now the writer of a column appearing in more than 100 newspapers." The following are excerpts from the *Digest* article:

"Last April 4, the Rev. Martin Luther King stood in New York City's Riverside Church and delivered the most scathing denunciation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam ever made by so prominent an American. . . . Radios Moscow and Peking picked up King's words and spread them to distant capitals. In the White House, a presidential aide shouted, 'My God, King has given a speech on Vietnam that goes right down the commie line!' . . .

"Civil rights leaders wrung their hands and began to plan steps to take the already-splintered movement for Negro equality out from under the onus of King's broadside. . . . The directors of Freedom House called the program that King advanced 'demagogic and irresponsible in its attack on our government.'

"The *Washington Post* . . . said, 'Dr. King has . . . diminished his usefulness to his cause, to his country and to his people.' "

## 'The halo slips'

After discussing King's earlier usefulness, Rowan brings out the knife.

"But, inexplicably, something began to happen after a while. King seemed to develop an exaggerated appraisal of how much he and his crisis techniques were responsible for the race-relations progress that had been made. . . . Other Negro leaders, while not belittling demonstrations, argued that the Negro could never forgo a reliance on the law. . . .

"He no longer seemed to be the selfless leader of the 1950s. There was grumbling that his trips to jail looked like publicity stunts. . . .

## 'Sinister murmurings'

"King really gave both critics and admirers serious cause for concern in 1965, when he began to talk about foreign

policy. . . . [Various Negro leaders] pleaded in vain with King not to wade into the Vietnam controversy.

“Why did King reject the advice of his old civil rights colleagues? Some say it was a matter of ego—that he was convinced that since he was the most influential Negro in the United States, President [Lyndon] Johnson would *have* to listen to *him* and alter U.S. policy in Vietnam. Others revived a more sinister speculation that had been whispered around Capitol Hill and in the nation’s newsrooms for more than two years—talk of communists influencing the actions and words of the young minister. This talk disturbed other civil rights leaders more than anything else.

“I report this not to endorse what King and many others will consider a ‘guilt by association’ smear, but because of the threat that these allegations represent to the civil rights movement. When King was simply challenging Jim Crow, murmurings that he was associating with, or influenced by, ‘enemies of the United States’ had only limited impact. Most congressmen and editors knew that American Negroes did not need a communist to tell them that they disliked [abuses of their rights]. But now that King has become deeply involved in a conflict where the United States is in direct combat with communists, the murmurings are likely to produce powerfully hostile reactions. . . .

“A recent Harris survey showed that almost one of every two Negroes believes that King is wrong—and another 27% reserved judgment.

“. . . This opposition to King . . . suggests that . . . most Negroes still think of America as *their* country and do not want to seem unpatriotic. . . .

“Martin Luther King has alienated many of the Negro’s friends and armed the Negro’s foes, in both parties, by creating the impression that the Negro is disloyal.”

On April 8, four days after King’s Riverside Church speech, President Johnson’s press secretary reported privately that he had just spoken with Rowan, who said that he was “exploring the Martin Luther King matter. He said everyone in the Civil Rights movement has known that King has been getting advice from a communist.”

Then, on April 14, in his nationally syndicated column, Rowan tried to give credibility to this FBI filth: “Key members of the House and Senate have been told by the FBI that King is listening most to one man who is clearly more interested in embarrassing the United States than in the plight of either the Negro or the war-weary people of Vietnam.” A few months later, in the *Reader’s Digest* article, Rowan did not even mention the FBI.

### Setting up a murder plot

Rowan did not inform the public that the “communist” charges were lies, designed to stop King’s political activity. But did Rowan himself believe that the charges were true?

In his 1991 autobiography, *Breaking Barriers*, Rowan said that he telephoned Dr. King after the latter “began to rail

publicly against [President Johnson’s] Vietnam policies. I called King in Atlanta. I leveled with him completely about the documents and the charges that were crossing my desk. I told him how the President was being bombarded with slanderous materials. . . . None [of King’s concerned colleagues] could tell him, in ugly detail, as I did, what Hoover was saying about him.”

Rowan wrote, “The FBI produced reports as to which of King’s speeches had been written, or heavily influenced, by his ‘communist’ advisers. From time to time the documents brought to me mentioned the possibility of Dr. King ‘being killed by one of the husbands he has cuckolded.’”

“I considered this ominous and a possible setting up of a motive for someone to kill King.”

This was written many years after King’s assassination. But when Rowan himself threw this dirt at King, he did not tell the public that it was part of a murder plot.

### Rowan as a spook

How did the “documents and charges” get to Rowan’s desk?

U.S. Sen. Harris Wofford wrote in his 1980 book, *Of Kennedys and Kings*, that FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover “directed that ‘friendly’ reporters be furnished questions that would embarrass King. An editorial . . . which criticized King for his stand on Vietnam, was given to ‘friendly news sources’ in order to ‘publicize King as a traitor to his country and his race’ and, according to the FBI covering memorandum, ‘to reduce his income.’”

In addition to his journalism, Rowan has long been a trusted insider in that section of the intelligence community which is an extension of the British globalists.

Rowan boasted in his autobiography: “My job and my participation in cabinet and National Security Council meetings gave me a broad ‘need to know’ about things that had never been entrusted to any black official—and only to a very few white ones.

“Each morning I got a special supersecret intelligence briefing. . . . [The briefing included] some titillating gossip about the health and the mistresses of world figures.

“I noticed in March of 1964 that these briefings contained an extraordinary number of references to Dr. King and his private activities.”

Among these documents was a 13-page anti-King paper entitled “Communism and the Negro Movement,” prepared by the FBI’s joint British-U.S.-run Division Five. On Dec. 7, 1964, it was distributed to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, CIA director Richard Helms, Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, USIA Director Carl Rowan, three military intelligence offices, and the National Science Foundation.

Carl Rowan is a native of rural Tennessee. He stresses the unbearable repulsiveness of his early poverty, and the thrill and satisfaction of being finally accepted into the ranks

of successful, powerful men. After studying journalism at the University of Minnesota graduate school, Rowan was hired to write for the *Minnesota Tribune*. Publisher John Cowles, whom Rowan viewed as his savior from the lower depths, was a cousin and political collaborator of Thomas Lamont, the chief of J.P. Morgan bank and the notorious sponsor of Mussolini and Tojo.

### Rowan's 'bold use of color'

This is how Rowan demurely describes his early work as a prostitute in journalism, a peddler of his black skin:

"I got a telephone call from John Cowles . . . [who] said, 'Carl, you know there's going to be a mighty important conference of Asians and Africans in Indonesia in April. . . . I know you just got home, but what would you think of going back to cover that conference? . . . Dulles called me to say it would be a service to the nation if you were there. Allen says you have access to the key people who will be there well beyond the access available to anyone in the foreign service. . . .

" 'Mr. Cowles,' . . . I said rapidly, 'I could never pass up a chance to cover a meeting as important as this one will be. . . .

"I went into the kitchen and said . . . 'Christ, I think the Dulles who called Cowles was Allen, the head of the CIA, not John Foster, the secretary of state. Damned if I want people to think I'm working for the CIA!'

"I got so preoccupied in the rush to finish my series on Southeast Asia that I forgot my intentions to follow up discreetly and determine just which Dulles wanted me at Bandung. . . . Ah yes, whichever Dulles telephoned Cowles knew damned well that while the advantages of being a black journalist were not universally great, they could be of real importance at an Asian-African conference. I was able to obtain access to key people, and some of it did come from the bold use of my color."

John Cowles and his brother Gardner Cowles, Jr., the World War II director of domestic propaganda for the Office of War Information, were Anglophile advocates of the classical British Empire-style of psychological warfare. After 13 years of such "bold" work for Cowles, Rowan joined the State Department in 1961. After Kennedy's murder, Rowan became ambassador to Finland, and then director of the U.S. Information Agency.

### The Vietnam War

In this post, Rowan was allied to the McGeorge Bundy-Henry Kissinger faction which had immediately escalated America's self-destructive Vietnam intervention over John Kennedy's dead body.

Wofford reported on the 1965 meeting convened by Bundy and McNamara to push for the beginning of bombing North Vietnam: "McNamara, his deputy, Cyrus Vance, George Ball, William Bundy, Douglas Dillon, Carl Rowan,

and House Speaker John McCormack all concurred. In that meeting only Sen. Mike Mansfield was opposed."

Rowan explains how he worked to prepare the ground for that escalation:

"In 1964, Johnson asked me to accompany Rusk and McNamara to Saigon to reassess the state of the war and make recommendations as to the next course of U.S. action. . . . On my return to Washington, I wrote President Johnson the following memorandum on April 21, 1964: 'During the recent trip to Saigon with Secretary Rusk, I came to the conclusion that the weakest part of the war operation . . . is in the field of information and psychological warfare.' "

According to Rowan, he once candidly told President Johnson what kind of a tough job he had to do as head of the worldwide propaganda effort for the Vietnam War:

"People need and want soap and cornflakes, so they are easy to sell. It's just a matter of which brand they buy. But nobody wants war, or napalm bombs, or having their villages wiped out, or seeing thousands of GIs f— their women. I'm trying to sell what people wouldn't buy at a fire sale."

For this service, USIA Director Carl Rowan was awarded the "Communications Award" of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

On July 8, 1965, Rowan resigned from government for "private and family reasons." With his "supersecret" intelligence channels, Rowan continued his psychological warfare work as a private journalist.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot dead exactly one year after giving the speech which Rowan told the world seemed to be communist-scripted. After King was dead, Rowan tried to distance himself from the FBI. In his autobiography 23 years later, Rowan wrote, "My gut told me in April 1968 that no lone man showed up in Memphis on his own to kill King. Deep in my heart I felt, based on all the intelligence data that I had seen while at USIA, that someone in the U.S. government had put out a contract to 'neutralize' this black preacher—'neutralization' being almost synonymous with a death sentence in the argot of the intelligence community."

Rowan wrote that his "suspicions intensified" when he learned that the FBI had planted a "telephone tap and a microphone . . . in the home of Elijah Muhammad to listen in on conversations of the late leader of the Black Muslims," i.e., the Nation of Islam.

In 1988, Rowan, a zealous gun-control advocate, shot an intruder at his Washington, D.C. home with an unregistered gun. Rowan demanded that he not be prosecuted—the gun was legal, he said, because it belonged to his son, an FBI agent.

Now that Rowan is working to break up the working relationship of the civil rights community with the Nation of Islam, our suspicions have intensified that Rowan is under contract with his handlers to neutralize black leaders in the United States.