

Martin Luther King

Okay. I deplore and condemn the murder of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. But no more and no less than I deplore and condemn any murder of any man. The attention and the *brouhaha* being paid to the King murder is more than a little ridiculous and more than a little revolting.

Every day tens of thousands of people are murdered, and nobody gives a hoot; no flags at half mast, no stores and banks and ball games close down for close to a week. When the great black leader, Malcolm X was assassinated no banks and no schools shut down, and no vice president appeared at his funeral. It appears to me that there is more fuss and feathers about the assassination of the Rev. King than there was about the assassination of President Kennedy — or at least as much.

Why? Why should this one murder and this one funeral command the continuing and uninterrupted attention of the entire nation? The civil rights movement is opposed to discrimination, and yet to single our Dr. King's funeral for sole and unremitting attention appears to me an insult and discrimination against all other victims of murder and foul play, here and throughout the world.

I have a goodly hunch about the answer to this mystery, and the answer makes the whole spectacle repellent and shameful and hypocritical, and not simply ridiculous. I have a hunch about why department store after department store took out black-bordered ads with Dr. King's

portrait, proclaiming that they would shut down in honor of his funeral. The hunch: that these worthies acted not out of grief and respect, but out of pure fear. Fear that unless continual low obeisance is made in the direction of the Rev. King, the Negroes of this nation would rise up and level them to the ground. In a sense, these stores and schools were paying a kind of anticipatory blackmail. It's a truly degrading spectacle. So intensely did this fear grip midtown Manhattan on the Friday after the murder that firm after firm released its employees early, in response to wild rumors that permeated New York that the whole of midtown Manhattan was in flames and ruins. Invariably, these employees rushed home and barricaded their doors, waiting for the holocaust that never came.

Rev. King, far and away the Number One leader of the Negro people, was also its leading apostle of absolute non-violence; hence he was the major restraining force on the developing Negro revolution. All the more was this true because, in moments of crisis, he relaxed his absolute non-violence to come out in favor of the use of violence by federal troops to put down Negro rioting — as he did in Watts three years ago, and as he did in last summer's urban rebellions. Now that influence is gone; like Gandhi, his mentor in non-violence mass movements, he was cut down by an assassin's bullet.

Perhaps the most important sign of radicalizing of the Negro mood in the wake of Dr. King's death was the extensive rioting in Washington, D.C. For the Negroes of Washington had always been very quiet and docile, most of them being low-grade civil servants with a genteel status in the Negro community. But now Washington, for the first time, has erupted, and we were treated to the highly revealing picture of soldiers with machine guns on the White House steps. The veil, the mask, the illusion that the government rules by voluntary "consent" of the public was, in those photographs and in that reality, stripped away, and we saw clearly, some for the first time, that the government rules, in the last analysis, by the gun and the bayonet — and by these alone.