

# Bureau Clergyman: How the FBI Colluded with an African American Televangelist to Destroy Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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On January 23, 1956, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Assistant to the Director Louis B. Nichols set up a private meeting with a clergyman. The Bureau's third-in-command was accustomed to consulting with clergy at FBI Headquarters (FBIHQ). In addition to serving as the Bureau's liaison to Congress and chief public relations officer, Special Agent Nichols regularly enlisted prominent private citizens to aid the FBI. Collaborating with clergy became particularly important for the Bureau during the Cold War. As America framed its fight against communism in spiritual terms, the Bureau positioned itself as the nation's foremost spiritual army. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, a life-long Presbyterian, drafted a pledge for FBI Special Agents vowing, "I shall, as a minister, seek to supply comfort, advice and aid to those who may be in need of such benefits; as a soldier, I shall wage vigorous warfare against the enemies of my country, of its laws, and of its principles." Agent Nichols was especially suited for the job. Prior to joining the FBI in 1934, he was the assistant religious works director for the racially segregated Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). He was a man of faith, and when it came to partnering with clergy to wage warfare against perceived enemies of the state, he was an experienced and steady hand.<sup>1</sup>

Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux was the ideal partner. The celebrity African American radio and television preacher used his charismatic authority and prominent media ministry to proclaim a cold war jeremiad. Michaux preached that communism, not racism, was the nation's most dangerous moral foe. It would destroy America, he believed, unless the nation deployed all of its resources toward a spiritual awakening, one soul at a time. The FBI embraced him. Agent Nichols testified to Director Hoover, "The Elder has a very active mind. He effervesces with enthusiasm and it certainly can be said that he does have

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a most radiant personality." In Michaux, the religious Special Agent saw a like-minded black minister with tremendous public influence. "I am convinced in my own mind . . ." Special Agent Nichols told the director, "that he [Michaux] has been a powerful influence for good . . ." The administration was mutual. Michaux believed the FBI director and his six thousand agents did God's work. They were his co-laborers in the Cold War battle for America's soul. He saw Hoover as "a minister of God" and the FBI as "second in importance only to the church." For Michaux, the FBI was a bulwark against crime and a powerful mobilizing force for America's only hope: religious revival.<sup>2</sup>

The top special agent and black minister met on that wintry Monday to coordinate their responses to the black civil rights crusade. Agent Nichols told Michaux the FBI was "naturally busy" monitoring communist subversion within the movement. As the Montgomery bus boycott was budding, the G-Man admitted the FBI was "fearful in the view of all the emotion that is presently being generated." Therefore, with a sense of religious vocation, he told Michaux, "It might be necessary to call [you] into service." Michaux was called to help the Bureau combat black religious activists for civil rights. He assured Michaux that fulfilling his calling would surely bring "some sanity back into being." The Elder did not need much convincing. Like the FBI, he believed that godless communists had a hand in all civil rights protests. He therefore departed Agent Nichols' office pledging his fidelity to the Bureau, nothing that he would be "ready . . . at any time."<sup>3</sup>

Michaux's most prominent *service* to the FBI occurred during the Bureau's campaign to neutralize and publically discredit the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. The Elder, the nation's first minister to have his own television show, colluded with the Bureau to shape public opinion against King and cast doubt upon King's religious commitments and activities. As soon as the FBI labeled the civil rights icon the nation's "most dangerous Negro," the Bureau called Michaux into service, and he was ready. The Elder disagreed with King's crusade, and the FBI fed him a steady diet of corroborating intelligence. At best, King was a misguided minister, unwittingly providing an opportunity for America's godless enemies to divide and conquer the nation. At worst, King was a religious fraud, a communist in clerical disguise purposefully exaggerating the nation's racial sins in an effort to destroy America's religious heritage. Either way, Michaux and the Bureau concurred: King and his religious agitations were a threat to national security. He had to be stopped. The Elder used his status and popular media ministry to launder the Bureau's counterintelligence and publically scandalize King's gospel labors for civil rights, even as he defended the Bureau against King's criticisms. In the end, the Elder demonized King, lionized

Hoover and the Bureau, and contested calls for black equality under the law. Michaux's religious commitments made him single-minded: the FBI's enemies were his enemies, and he made no qualms about it.

The FBI's open partnership with Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux makes three primary interventions into historical studies of the FBI and American religion. First, it displays how the Bureau publicly embraced religion and sought the aid of clergymen to help maintain prevailing social arrangements. Studies of the FBI and religion in general and black religion specifically have overwhelmingly fixated on the Bureau's Counter Intelligence Programs (COINTELPROs) and their antagonistic relationships to religion. These historical and theological studies highlight the Bureau's covert means of opposing religion.<sup>4</sup> However, much less is known about how the Bureau endorsed faith.<sup>5</sup> The Bureau did oppose some Protestant faith communities, but it openly embraced expressions of faith that supported the righteousness of the status quo.

The FBI had, what I call, Bureau clergymen: male ministers who were FBI "Special Service Contacts" and/or on the "Special Correspondents List." In addition to journalists (Don Whitehead), politicians (James Eastland), business executives (Joseph Kennedy), and other prominent private citizens who shared the Bureau's religious and political worldview and agenda, these official FBI programs identified and recruited clergy. The Bureau enlisted male ministers such as Elder Michaux, the Reverend Archibald Carey, Jr., Cardinal Richard Cushing, the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale, and Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, to name a few. These men—the Bureau unapologetically embraced patriarchal and heterosexual norms, denying the validity of female, trans, and openly gay clergy—all viewed Hoover and his Bureau as the vanguard of the nation's Christian foundation. Once ministers had sufficiently convinced the Bureau of "their willingness . . . to be of assistance . . . and demonstrated their complete loyalty, reliability, and value to the Bureau," they officially became Bureau clergymen. Far from secret informants, ministers on the actual lists of contacts enjoyed very *public* and cooperative relationships with the FBI. Like Michaux, clergy in the highly orchestrated programs were periodically "*call[ed] into service*" and given "special assignments" to work in concert with the Bureau to ensure "national security" and instill "good will toward the Bureau throughout the country." The FBI strategically provided them with Bureau publications and illegal leaks from FBI files. In turn, ministers laundered the information for the FBI, utilizing their "particular talents" as divine spokesmen to legitimize and sanctify FBI endeavors, shape public opinion, and oppose ministers, faith communities, causes, and politicians the Bureau deemed subversive. In exchange, these cooperating

clerics received a host of political favors ranging from the all-important Cold War endorsement of the FBI, classified information, and personal favors from the FBI at the expense of taxpayers. It was a symbiotic relationship of affinity: Bureau clergy certified the FBI as an instrument of God and labored to help the Bureau uphold racial, social, and political norms while the FBI provided material favors and validated the patriotism of their anointed clergy during the Cold War.<sup>6</sup>

The Bureau's relationship with Michaux sheds light on this Christian syndicate. The Elder has received little attention in studies of "American" religion.<sup>7</sup> However, he was a pioneer in American religious broadcasting and a notable figure within the FBI. Michaux's cordial relationship with the Bureau began in 1939 and lasted until his death in 1968. Examining the FBI's partnership with the Elder during the King ordeal expands our notions of the various ways the Bureau utilized Protestant religion to accomplish its aims.

Second, tracing the FBI's partnership with Michaux draws attention to the religious dimensions of the Bureau's infamous crusade against the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholars have explored the various reasons the FBI used surveillance and counterintelligence against King, including Hoover's jealousy and the FBI's belief that King was a communist and/or a threat to the political and racial status quo.<sup>8</sup> However, the role of competing notions of religion has received little attention. Scholars of the FBI have acknowledged King's religious groundings but have often overlooked Hoover's professed religious commitments or dismissed them as insincere. While the field has not taken Hoover's faith seriously, during Hoover's lifetime most Americans did.<sup>9</sup> Hoover publically proclaimed that the Bible was foundational in the FBI's organization and mission. He emerged as one of the most respected and influential spiritual Cold War warriors, helping to frame the fight against communism as, first and foremost, a spiritual battle. As he noted in 1960: it was "Soviet Rule or Christian Renewal."<sup>10</sup>

Hoover and his G-men pursued their campaign against King as a cosmic struggle of dueling faiths: a Christian republic defending itself against the virus of King's godless religion of social revolution. It was a crusade for Hoover and company, a battle for the moral and religious authority to determine the safety and direction of the nation. The Bureau's attacks on King aimed not simply to cause the minister personal and political embarrassment, but also to publically discredit King's ministerial commitments and religious authority during a time when religious fidelity was synonymous with national security. The investigation of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the first of its kind, noted the religious scope of the Bureau's skullduggery against King. The committee's landmark 1976 report noted that the FBI's effort

to neutralize King touched “on virtually every aspect of Dr. King’s life” including attacks on King’s religious authenticity as well as overtures to local faith communities, national and international religious organizations and “leading Protestant ministers.”<sup>11</sup> Elder Michaux provides a window into both the religious nature of the Bureau’s campaign against King as well as the “leading Protestant ministers” who were “*call[ed] into service*” to aid the same.

Finally, and closely related, the Elder’s role in the FBI’s efforts to stop King highlights how black clergy articulated and followed competing ideologies of black liberation during the modern civil rights movement.<sup>12</sup> African American religion and politics has always been disputed ground, expressing and pursuing a range of religious and political options, some of which prove to buttress black freedom struggles, others that hinder them, as well as all points in between. Far from just simple personal jealousies, these conflicting paths grew out of profound ideological and theological differences.<sup>13</sup> Focusing solely on the Bureau’s surveillance and hostility toward black religions assumes that black religious practices are always viewed as politically subversive. Such a narrow view forecloses the examination of other ways black religious folk engage the state and racial progress. The dispute between Michaux and King makes this clear. The Elder was committed to the state and Cold War spiritual mobilization.<sup>14</sup> He dismissed King’s “social gospel” goals of achieving black equality through profound change to American social, economic, and racial customs. He deemed this systemic approach not only futile but also as a departure from true Christianity. Michaux used his media fame to preach that America was a Christian nation where the sin of racial inequality resided in individual souls, not the soul of the nation. The best way then to overcome anti-black racism was for the church and state to mobilize collectively and promote individual Christian conversion and revival. All other views were to be disrupted and silenced as un-American. The Elder’s partnership with the FBI against King puts this contested saga on full display.

### The Makings of a Bureau Clergyman

The FBI’s approval and endorsement of Michaux’s ministry was widely heralded. Religious broadcasters from J. Frank Norris to Norman Vincent Peale unashamedly sought the public sanction of the Bureau; however, few were as successful as Michaux.<sup>15</sup> The FBI even publically endorsed Michaux’s ministry. On September 20, 1951, more than twenty thousand gathered at Washington, D.C.’s Griffith Stadium—the home of Major League Baseball’s Washington

Senators—to celebrate the Elder’s more than twenty years of religious broadcasting. Michaux invited Hoover, but the FBI director was unexpectedly called out of town. Nevertheless, Hoover made certain to dispatch agents to the event and even sent Michaux a flattering Western Union telegram. “I wish to extend to you my heartiest congratulations,” the \$1.55 (approximately \$15.00 today) direct telegram raved. “In the last twenty years . . . your dedication and devotion, as well as your timely messages, have been a real inspiration to countless thousands. Keep up the good work.” Agents made certain the telegram, along with one from presidential hopeful General Dwight Eisenhower and U.S. Attorney General J. Howard McGrath, was read aloud to the multitude of listeners on CBS radio and the admiring crowd gathered at the stadium affair.<sup>16</sup> It was no secret; the FBI and Michaux played for the same team.

The FBI embraced Elder Michaux as a Bureau clergyman for several related reasons. First, the Bureau affirmed his adamant commitment to Cold War spirituality. The Elder was born in 1884 in Newport News, Virginia. He ran a successful seafood business until he was converted in 1917 and became a minister in the Church of Christ (Holiness). He eventually split from the denomination and formed his own independent Church of God.<sup>17</sup> However, he remained committed to two core beliefs: the Christian origins of America and the theology of holiness. Similar to other Cold War spiritual juggernauts, Michaux believed the individual soul was the primary theological, social, and political unit of global society. All forms of sin and evil were cosmic forces warring against the individual soul. Personal spiritual failings and bankruptcies yielded societal ills, which in turn put the soul of the nation in danger. Only salvation and sanctification, Michaux sermonized, could enable believers to resist and “live above” the cosmic forces that caused personal moral failings such as crime, communism, and racial and economic inequality. Therefore, the Elder adamantly preached that individual Christian regeneration, not the restructuring of prevailing social, political, or economic arrangements, was the sole solution to all evil and social injustice. Only Christian conversion could bring about social harmony and justice and perfect America’s Christian republic.<sup>18</sup>

Hoover, a former Sunday school teacher, completely agreed with Michaux’s Cold War gospel. He believed America was a Christian nation that was best preserved through individual regeneration. As early as 1942, Hoover preached to the public, “I am sure that if more emphasis were placed on the Gospel of Salvation, and less on social justice, the latter would become a great reality.” The only cure for America’s ills, the FBI director attested, was “the changing of men’s

hearts . . . [and] the return to the faith of our fathers." Conversion, he argued, was the only path to "real and lasting social justice."<sup>19</sup> Both Michaux and Hoover firmly believed that there was nothing plaguing America's Christian democracy that a spiritual awakening could not fix.

Second, Michaux's status as a Bureau clergyman was made secure by the use of his trailblazing media ministry to preach a Cold War gospel. The converted businessman and minstrel show actor believed radio was pivotal for the nation's spiritual revival. "Radio," he declared, "is the greatest asset religion has ever had in reviving those who have forsaken the church." He moved his ministry from his native Virginia to Washington, D.C., in 1929 and launched "The Radio Church of God" on local station WJSV.<sup>20</sup> The show was hallmarked by old-time religion, Michaux's charisma, and his signature jazzy tune, "Happy Am I." One admirer dubbed the radio show "a mixture of old time religion and modern jazz."<sup>21</sup> Listeners testified to the show's infectious jazzy appeal. *Variety* noted that "Elder Michaux's gospel routine places religious evangelism into the entertainment category." The entertainment journal compared him to Aimee Semple McPherson, calling him "unconsciously one of the best radio entertainers extant." *The Radio Guide* called the preacher and his show "a marvel," concluding, "No feature on the air is talked about more." Similarly, *Billboard* dubbed his radio ministry, "one of the most novel programs on the air."<sup>22</sup> The show was so popular, when CBS bought WJSV in 1932, the new owners canceled every program, except "The Radio Church of God." CBS made Michaux's radio show a nation wide sustaining time (free air time) program, broadcasted over the network's national chain of fifty-eight stations and occasionally on the British Broadcasting Corporation.<sup>23</sup>

As the Cold War heated up, the Elder's radio show did as well. By 1949, "The Radio Church of God" was garnering an average of approximately twenty thousand listeners in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area alone (a slightly higher average than storied radio preacher Charles Fuller's D.C. audience).<sup>24</sup> In 1951, the *Associated Negro Press* christened the "foot-tapping" radio show "by far the most famous and successful of its kind in the nation." The national and international news agency surmised that the show "touches the hearts of millions of ardent listeners."<sup>25</sup>

The Elder complemented his trendy radio ministry with a trailblazing television show. DuMont Laboratories launched commercial television in Washington, D.C., on WTTG-TV on November 29, 1946. Within months, the fledgling network offered Michaux free airtime with the hope that the preacher's radio popularity would translate to

television. He became the first minister (black or white) to have his own weekly television show and the first African American to star in his own television series.<sup>26</sup> DuMont broadcasted the live thirty-minute Sunday evening show across its national network, while Washington's Channel 5 aired the show locally at 6:00pm.<sup>27</sup> The Elder's television ministry was acclaimed. *Billboard* noted that the television show "reproduces the practical down to earth religion for which he is famous." DuMont station engineer and general manager Les Arries, Jr., recalled that Michaux "put on one heck of a show." More than four decades after the show ended, the industry insider maintained that the trailblazing television program "would survive, I think, even in today's times, because it wasn't just religion. It was really good entertainment."<sup>28</sup>

The Elder's suite of media ministries established him as one of the nation's leading religious media entrepreneurs and Cold War spiritual warriors. The entrepreneurial preacher even parlayed his radio and television success into the establishment of seven thriving Church of God congregations along the East Coast.<sup>29</sup> The long reach of radio and the novelty of television coupled with his own growing denomination assured that the nation heard a spirited Cold War gospel preached by a charismatic black clergyman; emanating, no less, from the nation's seat of government. The FBI could hope for no more. As the FBI director wrote to the televangelist in 1950, "Whenever I am home, I always endeavor to follow you on television . . . I think that you have been making a very fine contribution."<sup>30</sup> America's first televangelist was a Bureau clergyman.

Michaux's view on America's racial hierarchy also made him a valuable Bureau clergyman. Similar to Hoover, he proclaimed a "colorblind" gospel that denied the existence of institutionalized anti-black racism in America. The Elder's broadcasted sermons often proclaimed, "There is no such thing as 'colored' Christians and 'white' Christians" or "God knows no people by race or color," and his favorite, "God is love and we should love everybody, black, white, brown, yellow, or red."<sup>31</sup> However, the Elder stopped far short of advocating legal racial equality. Rather, he proffered that God had ordained America's racial hierarchy. One of Michaux's nationally broadcasted sermons in 1958, which was transcribed and released by the *Associated Negro Press* news wire, best describes his racial commitments.

In 1619, God caused 20 Negroes to be brought here, and landed on the shores of America that they might be trained in the intellectual culture of his White brother who had hundreds of years of training in the way of life before his black brother. The first



thing he had to do was to train his black brother how to work with his hands, for he was a heathen. To do this, he had to enslave him . . . [until] God saw that he was ready to take his place in a higher bracket in civilization.<sup>32</sup>

The experience of slavery and anti-black racism, according to Michaux, was not only good for African Americans; it was God's plan. People of African descent were born inferior, trailing the "intellectual culture of [their] White brother" by centuries. Slavery was God's way to save the souls of Africa's black "heathens." To be sure, Christianity was practiced in parts of Africa for centuries. Nevertheless, the Elder viewed America as synonymous with Christianity and progress, Africa with ignorance and backwardness. American slavery and subsequent salvation would enable those of African descent to ascend to the "higher bracket" of civilization, a place white citizens seemingly occupied at birth. Eradicating anti-black racism then required the individual salvation of blacks, followed by the resulting social progress toward middle-class status and values. When whites recognized and approved the patriotic Christian progress of black Americans, racial equality would be reached. Equality was something black people had to earn, a feat only the land of the free and the home of the brave made possible. The legality of inequitable power relations between African Americans and whites was of no consequence. All that mattered was the power of conversion. Michaux's preaching made it clear: African Americans progressed *because* of America's Christian democracy, not in spite of it. As if to settle the matter once and for all, he concluded, "Let us bury the hatchet; pray and sing with our White brother—GOD BLESS, AMERICA, A LAND THAT I LOVE."<sup>33</sup>

Michaux's religio-racial views dovetailed with U.S. Cold War propaganda. The image of America's race relations was an important ideological ground upon which the nation attempted to project and defend itself as a Christian Democracy.<sup>34</sup> The State Department and the Department of War (Department of Defense after 1949) utilized a great deal of race propaganda (radio, pamphlets, and film) to convince those at home and abroad that America was indeed a Christian democracy, a nation that had not only triumphed over past racial sins, but was dedicated to racial progress and equality. The most effective spokespersons of this America were, of course, African Americans themselves.<sup>35</sup> Black clergy and black Protestantism were particularly important. Government propaganda assumed a public reverence for black Christian practices, making aspects of black Protestantism the ideal rituals through which to make pronounced political messages. Accordingly, popular government propaganda often featured African

American clerical figures and parishioners utilizing black religious forms to extoll the “progress of the Negro” in Christian America.<sup>36</sup> Michaux’s blackness then further authenticated this gospel of American benevolence and racial progress, even as his own religious celebrity and social mobility served as evidence of the same. This was, in part, Michaux’s power and appeal to the state: in speech and body he corroborated U.S. Cold War propaganda and its accompanying religious and racial fantasies. He was the American racial nightmare and dream, all in one being.

This assured Michaux’s place among the Bureau’s anointed. Special agents warmly described him as a popular minister who was a “very vigorous exponent for race segregation. He believes everybody, White, Black, Yellow or Red has a definite place in life and *that each should keep their place.*” “In that way,” Agent Nichols assured his superiors, Michaux is “handling the segregation problem.”<sup>37</sup> Hoover shared the Elder’s belief in innate black inferiority. He consistently refused the Department of Justice’s urgings to hire black agents because, he swore, to do so would require the Bureau to lower its standards. Black applicants would be welcomed when they could prove themselves worthy in Hoover’s eyes. Therefore, the director thoroughly enjoyed the black preacher’s racial principles. The boss even sent the Elder an autographed 8 × 10 headshot, inscribed: “To Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux, May God grant you strength and guidance to continue your forthright battle for Christian principles.” Michaux displayed the autographed photo in his church office.<sup>38</sup> It sent a clear message to visitors: the FBI fully endorsed Michaux’s ministerial views. Similarly, Hoover sent the Elder a personal letter praising his ministry. “My dear Elder . . . It is folks like you who are doing so much not only to aid the *individual* but to make our country a better place in which to live.”<sup>39</sup> Michaux’s focus on redeeming the souls of black folk while affirming American racial norms made him one of Hoover’s favorite clergymen.

Finally and closely related, the FBI also saw the utility in Michaux’s enduring popularity with whites. The Elder’s penchant for using his media ministry to save souls while attributing anti-black racism to black biological inferiority and sinfulness attracted many white followers throughout his long ministry. The *Washington Evening Star* reported in 1938 that “ten thousand white men and women crowded an outdoor amphitheater in Berlin, PA to hear his [Michaux’s] call to salvation.” *Variety* estimated that on average, 30 percent of those who attended Michaux’s revivals were white. In addition to his outdoor services, the *Radio Guide* concluded that the “appeal” of Michaux’s Sunday morning church services “transcend[ed] race and creed.” The

periodical's two-part feature story, entitled "Colored Evangelists and White Converts," described the Elder's worship services as a "throng" of blacks and whites, with the latter outnumbering the former.<sup>40</sup>

White popular opinion even anointed Elder Michaux *the* spokesman and power broker for all of black America. In 1938, the *Washington Evening Star*, the city's newspaper of record at the time, incredulously concluded, "For all his colored skin and his skimpy education, Michaux . . . is a national power."<sup>41</sup> This perspective endured. When Simeon Booker became the first black reporter at the *Washington Post* in 1951, he asked his white editor who was the "leading Negro" in the nation's capital. Without hesitation, the editor bypassed a plethora of leading local leaders. Neither Black Club women Mary Church Terrell—who was in the midst of leading an antisegregation campaign in Washington, D.C.—nor Nannie Helen Burroughs made the list. Mordecai Johnson, the first black president of the renowned Howard University, and Congressman Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., known then as the congressman of black America, suffered the same fate. Rather, the white newsroom exec promptly told Booker that the "leading Negro" in the capital city was none other than "Elder Michaux."<sup>42</sup> The Elder's perceived stature as the "leading Negro," in the nation's capital no less, made him, in many ways, the Bureau's ideal black clergyman.

In all, Michaux's commitment to Cold War spirituality and the racial status quo, as well as his religious media celebrity, blackness, and inter-racial appeal made him a compelling moral and religious authority. It also made him a Bureau clergyman, a status that set him on a collision course with Martin Luther King, Jr.

### King's Dream vs. Michaux's Bible

The FBI's religious commitments influenced the decision to begin a direct investigation of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. For years, J. Edgar Hoover was convinced that atheistic communism, not religious fervor, was fueling the fight for black equality. The religious crusade for civil rights was largely a ruse for a communist conspiracy to destroy the Christian republic. "The Negro situation," he testified before Congress in 1958, is "being exploited fully and continuously by Communists on a national scale."<sup>43</sup> Hoover viewed this purported communist infiltration not simply as a political debate, but as an attack on America's Christian heritage. It was the duty of the FBI, he told his employees in 1961, to "reaffirm" the Bureau's "Christian purpose . . . to *defend* and *perpetuate* the dignity of the Nation's Christian

endowment . . ."<sup>44</sup> Christianity was the bedrock of the nation's heritage, and the FBI was "the main line of resistance against all enemies of our heritage." Hoover insisted that the FBI soldier on, taking "strength in the Biblical quotation, 'If God be for us, who can be against us.'"<sup>45</sup> The FBI director saw his army, in part, as an agency of spiritual propagation and the nation's first line of defense against all "godless" forces. He expected ministers to join the FBI "on the front line . . . in the fight against communism" by helping to "preserve the dignity of man as the image of God and to mold the individual to be a worthy citizen in a democracy."<sup>46</sup>

King did not fit the bill. The civil rights leader confronted the "Negro situation" with religious calls for black equality even as he kept two former members of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), Stanley Levison and Jack O'Dell, in his inner circle. Therefore, in 1962, the FBI began a formal investigation of Reverend King to determine if he was simply a misguided cleric who had fallen under the influence of godless communism, or if King was actually a committed communist in clerical disguise bent on destroying the nation's Christian heritage. As one high-ranking Bureau agent later put it, "We wondered whether he [King] was, to use Lenin's phrase, 'a useful idiot' or someone acting on his own and deliberately attempting to foment riot and insurrection."<sup>47</sup> Regardless, Reverend King was clearly out of line. He was a threat to America's Christian foundation, and it was the FBI's duty to protect the nation from him.

However, the FBI lacked corroborating evidence. On August 23, 1963, Assistant Director William Sullivan, the head of the Bureau's Division Five (Domestic Intelligence), drafted a comprehensive analysis on the "exploitation and influence by the Communist party on the American Negro population." After more than a year of investigation, the resulting sixty-seven-page brief entitled "Communist Party, USA-Negro Question" concluded that the Communist Party had completely failed to influence the black civil rights crusade. Agent Sullivan spearheaded a COINTELPRO against the Communist Party beginning in 1956, severely weakening the party. Levison and O'Dell had long left the CPUSA. Furthermore, the civil rights movement King led was too religious for communist infiltration. King was neither a "useful idiot" nor a communist in clerical garb. The boss, however, refused to believe the report. He chastised Division Five. King could not be a clergyman. Only atheistic communists desired to overthrow the nation's Christian status quo.<sup>48</sup>

The momentous March on Washington (MOW) occurred just five days later; it changed everything. The inability of Division Five to obtain direct evidence of communist influence in the civil rights

movement, coupled with King's growing fame as the nation's moral and religious conscience, incited Hoover even more. Following King's thunderous "I Have A Dream" speech, the nation's top cop admitted that he held King "in complete contempt." King was a religious fraud. The director's professed animus toward King took on biblical proportions. As one of Hoover's most trusted agents described, "Shortly after King's star ascended to these breathtaking heights, Hoover developed an intense animosity toward the civil rights leader, one that grew, like the biblical mustard seed from a small kernel into a huge living thing that cast an enormous shadow across the landscape."<sup>49</sup>

It was a long and persistent shadow indeed. The director's religious conviction that King was a communist enemy of the state completely shaded Division Five's verdict on the matter. After King articulated his dream, Hoover in turn dictated his own vision to Division Five. King was an atheistic revolutionary that needed to be destroyed. Despite lacking evidence, "Everybody in the Division," Agent Sullivan later testified, "went right along with Hoover's policy." After the MOW, a compliant Agent Sullivan pivoted toward Hoover's view. Division Five had simply failed to "put the proper interpretation upon the facts which we gave to the Director." Facts are not meaningful by themselves, Agent Sullivan noted. "They are somewhat like stones tossed in a heap as contrasted to the same stones put in the form of a sound edifice." Identifying King as public enemy number one became the cornerstone of national security. As Agent Sullivan wrote to his direct superior two days after the MOW, "Personally, I believe in the light of King's powerful demagogic speech yesterday [*sic*] he stands head and shoulders over all other Negro leaders put together when it comes to influencing great masses of Negroes." The Bureau, he continued, should "mark" the preacher "as the most dangerous Negro of the future in this Nation from the standpoint of communism, the Negro, and national security." "The nation," Agent Sullivan noted, "was involved in a form of racial revolution," and King was the leader. King was "a very real security problem to [the] country." Therefore, Sullivan concluded, it was "unrealistic" for the Bureau to "limit" their investigation of King to "legalistic proof or definitely conclusive evidence that would stand up in testimony in court or before Congressional Committees." The nation's top law enforcement agency devoted itself to stopping King by any means necessary, the law be damned.<sup>50</sup>

Hoover rejoiced in the Division Five's repentance, calling them "enlightened." "I have struggled for months to get over the fact the Communists [are] taking over the racial movement but," Hoover complained, the domestic intelligence division had simply refused to

"see it." Nevertheless, the pleased director wrote, "I am glad . . . that 'light' has finally, though dismally delayed, come to the Domestic Int. Div."<sup>51</sup> Division Five had an awakening. It would follow Hoover's convictions, no turning back.

The Bureau shifted its investigation of King from focusing solely on his supposed communist ties, to a crusade that would expose King as a "clerical fraud." The Bureau's blitzkrieg aimed to reveal that while King "purport[ed] to be a minister of the gospel," he was actually a "fraud, demagogue, and moral scoundrel" who was preaching a false gospel of American spiritual bankruptcy and racial inequality. The FBI commenced an onslaught on King, Agent Sullivan later testified, that resembled techniques they used against "Soviet Agents." The campaign had one guiding principle: "no holds were barred."<sup>52</sup>

Calling Michaux into service was one gesture the Bureau utilized. On September 25, Agent Sullivan returned from a leave to draft a memo indicating Division Five's next steps. The memo was "prepared not on official office memorandum but rather on plain bond" paper so the contents would not be included in the Bureau's "official record." Agent Sullivan's "plain bond" memo recommended that the G-Men alert all FBI field offices, federal agencies, and prominent officials to the Bureau's renewed and intense focus on King and the civil rights movement. He reiterated King's status as "the strongest of the Negro leaders" and "the most dangerous and effective Negro leader in the country." "We need to renew our efforts and keep the pressure on and leave no stone unturned," he noted. Hoover inscribed his infamous and authoritative "o.k." on the document.<sup>53</sup> On the same day, the G-Men called Michaux into service.

Michaux immediately launched a coordinated public critique against King and the gospel the civil rights minister preached. On September 25, Michaux preached a radio sermon from the nation's capitol on CBS Standard and FM radio affiliates criticizing the MOW and King's address. The homily opposed the march of "Saint Martin Luther King"—the name the Elder derisively gave King—and the historic "I Have a Dream" speech. The Elder took Luke 11:1–2 (commonly known as The Lord's Prayer) as his sermon text. Michaux preached that racial equality would only materialize when God's rule was established in people's hearts. "Yes," the Elder quoted King, "righteousness will flow like a mighty stream." However, the Elder qualified, only "when the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—but not until then according to God's Word." Advocating for legislative change was futile. Changing hearts was the only way to bring about racial equality. "God's will must be done on this earth before you are made equal," Michaux preached.

"God spoke through His Prophet and told us," he reminded his audience, that the day when "the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will sit down together at the table of brotherhood . . . will come but not until his kingdom comes and his will is done on the earth as it is in Heaven." He closed the sermon, and seemingly settled racism in America, by telling his listeners to cease marching and simply "seek to do the will of God and be blessed. May God bless you. Amen."<sup>54</sup> King had a dream, but Michaux had the word of God.

Using radio to combat King's televised speech was cunning. Radio remained a key medium in American life, especially as a battleground for the nation's varying civil rights agendas. Radio persisted as the most effective medium for disseminating propaganda to the masses. Even King knew this. As late as 1967, King told dinner guests at the National Association of Television and Radio Announcers Convention that in his "years of struggle north and south," he came to learn that the masses, especially those who had been "denied and deprived educational and economic opportunity," were "almost totally dependent on radio as their means of relating to the society at large." He continued, "They do not read newspapers" and "television speaks not to their needs, but to upper middle class America." Michaux banked on this maxim for his Bureau-sanctioned opposition to King and the MOW. The preferred narrative was clear: the best way to overcome racism was to live a holy life and pursue the conversion of individuals, not social revolution. It was one thing to hear this from white evangelists like Billy Graham, but it was a weightier matter to hear it from a pioneering black cleric.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to the masses, the Elder and the Bureau also targeted the White House with the sermon. Michaux transcribed the sermon and sent it to President Kennedy. "Inclosed [*sic*]," he wrote to JFK, "you will find a copy of the sermon I preached over the air concerning the March on Washington August 28, 1963. I felt that you would like to know the opinion more or less of those who reach the ears of the Public [*sic*] on such a vital subject." King's star was rising, but Michaux reminded President Kennedy that he was the preeminent black cleric. "For thirty years I have been on the air on many of Columbia's Broadcasting Stations (CBS) and have also broadcasted over the major networks in this country and England." He closed with a gesture to distinguish himself from the godless and unpatriotic, signing the letter, "Respectfully yours in the service of God and country, Elder L.S. Michaux, Pastor." As the Kennedy White House moved closer to King, the Bureau and Michaux wanted the President to know that King's gospel was false and was not representative of

the majority of the nation's Christians, especially black Protestants. Michaux's sermon offered his gospel as the true religious and patriotic path to racial equality for one nation under God. King spoke for some, but not the patriotic children of God. King and the gospel of nonviolent direct action received a great deal of media attention on account of the march. However, Michaux assured the White House, the gospel of revival and soul salvation held the hearts and minds of Christian America. The White House had a choice: side with King's godless rabble-rousing or Michaux's Cold War revivalism.<sup>56</sup>

The White House took notice. Louis Martin, deputy chairman of the Democratic National Committee (1960–69) and political advisor to presidents Kennedy and Johnson, advised the White House to respond to Michaux. Martin, whom the *Washington Post* crowned "the godfather of Black politics," coyly described his job as securing and preserving "the prestige and the stature of the President of the United States among the blacks." He advised and guided the White House on several notable black appointments including the first black Supreme Court Justice, the first African American to hold a White House cabinet position, and the first black woman appointed to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Martin was, simply put, all things black politics in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Aware of Michaux's prominence, he urged the White House to respond to the sermon.<sup>57</sup>

The White House never issued an official response to the Elder, but the Kennedy administration was far from idle. Within approximately two weeks of Michaux's sermon, on October 10, a concerned Attorney General Robert Kennedy finally relented and granted the FBI a long-awaited gift: permission to conduct technical surveillance on King. The President's brother authorized the FBI to wiretap King's home "or at any future address to which he may move." The G-Men interpreted Kennedy's approval broadly. In addition to King's home, the FBI also installed wiretaps and microphones in King's hotel rooms across the country and the home of friends with whom King occasionally resided. The Bureau also installed technical surveillance on the Atlanta and New York offices of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The goal of the comprehensive coverage was to use King's political plans and/or private activities to prove that he was not a committed clergyman but was in league with godless communists.<sup>58</sup>

The Elder's sermon stirred a pot that was already boiling. He successfully utilized the nation's public bullhorn to provide air cover for the FBI. He discredited King's religious commitments and corroborated the intel the Bureau was serving the Kennedy administration. King was an enemy of the Christian state, a godless subversive that



warranted surveillance and containment. Michaux called both King's religious motivation and advocacy for racial equality into question. King's dream was not a biblical exposition or admonition for the nation to heed but the naïve and perhaps sinister ruminations of a demagogue. The Kennedy administration heard the message loud and clear. The FBI was granted permission to use electronic surveillance to monitor King's every move and utterance. The Bureau's collusion with Michaux was a success. The FBI returned to this wellspring when Hoover and King had a very public spat. The Elder, once again, came to the Bureau's aid.

### **"You Owe Mr. Hoover an Apology"**

On November 18, 1962, King accused the Bureau of being a tool of white supremacy. Following his sermon at New York's Riverside Church, the guest preacher chatted with a *New York Times* reporter in the church's vestry. As he removed his vestments, he told the journalist that the FBI was shrouded in white supremacy. "One of the great problems we face with the FBI in the South is that the agents are white southerners who have been influenced by the mores of the community," King noted. "If an FBI man agrees with segregation he can't honestly and objectively investigate." King believed the FBI could prosecute civil rights violations "if there was a determined effort," but the Bureau was plagued with the same racism it was charged with investigating.<sup>59</sup>

Hoover was outraged. The boss periodically refuted King's allegations, often proclaiming that such claims were as "bigoted" as the KKK. However, the director's reprimands never mentioned King by name. Attacking a private citizen, a famous minister at that, was risky. Instead, Hoover continued to tell the press and Congress that the civil rights movement was under the influence of godless communists. It was a movement of subversion and destruction, simply un-American. Real Americans were vigilant and faithful to God. Such personal piety was not only necessary for the survival of America's democracy; it was the very purpose of life. "The goal of life," he told the *New York Times* on September 23, 1964, was embodied in the Bible. "Micah chapter six verse eight," the Sunday school teacher recited, "'And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'"<sup>60</sup> The civil rights movement was marching on, but according to Hoover, it was not walking with God.

Despite such veiled responses, the boss still could not leave the issue alone. King's indictment, according to Hoover's closest aides, was seared in the boss's mind. He waited to pounce. The director found his

occasion on November 18, 1964, the anniversary of King's statement. The timing was apropos. King was enjoying the burgeoning success of his book *Why We Can't Wait*. Following the book's publication, the publisher and reviewers, including the *New York Times*, anointed King "the moral leader of America." Earlier that fall, King had been crowned the winner of the Noble Peace Prize, an ultimate testament to his national and international moral authority. The boss had had enough. His rage spilled over during a three-hour meeting with eighteen reporters from the National Women's Press Club (WPC), headed by noted White House reporter Sarah McClendon. Hoover began the routine news briefing by offering what one agent in attendance described as Hoover's "standard lecture" of "canned data" delivered in a "staccato" style. Then suddenly, Hoover broke routine and began to address the FBI's civil rights record. The harangue announced not only that Martin King had ties to godless communists, but that the civil rights leader had refused to meet with him and had instructed black southerners not to cooperate with the FBI. King was no minister or righteous spokesman. He was, Hoover concluded, "the most notorious liar in the United States" and "one of the lowest characters in the country." One of Hoover's agents immediately passed him a note pleading, "Don't you want to say this off the record?" Hoover promptly threw the note in the trash.<sup>61</sup>

Hoover's accusations made front-page news. The following day, King responded in kind. In a telegram to Hoover (later made public), the civil rights minister maintained his criticisms of the FBI, while accusing the director of "maligning" his "integrity." King's official public statement, however, was more biting. He dismissed Hoover's accusations as the ramblings of a paranoid old man who had "faltered under the awesome burden, complexities, and responsibilities of his office. Therefore," King concluded, "I cannot engage in a public debate with him. I have nothing but sympathy for this man who has served his country so well."<sup>62</sup>

The FBI possessed no such sympathy for King. The next day the Bureau sent him a threatening "anonymous" package, challenging his status as a minister. The bundle consisted of an edited audio recording and a letter. The aural mix was prepared by FBI laboratory audio tech John Matter. It contained several of King's extramarital sexual encounters and an ominous letter. The written missive, drafted by Agent Sullivan on unwatermarked paper, claimed to be from a fellow black Christian who questioned King's Christianity. The letter volleyed, "I will not dignify your name with either a Mr. or a Reverend or a Dr.. You are no clergyman... you could not believe in God and act as you do." The note continued, "The Church organizations

that have been helping—Protestant, Catholic, Jews will know you for what you are—an evil abnormal beast.” King and his associates were “pretend[ing] to be ministers of the Gospel.” King’s evil, the angry epistle concluded, was so severe “Satan could do no more.” The writer threatened to expose King if he did not seemingly commit suicide, refuse the Noble Prize, or at least bow out of the civil rights movement.<sup>63</sup> The Bureau used the pseudonymous mix and missive to attack King for what they perceived as his lack of religious and clerical commitments.

King, with no knowledge of the letter, lobbied leaders such as Dorothy Height of the National Council of Negro Woman and the captains of the SCLC, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Urban League, and countless ministers to issue statements criticizing Hoover and the FBI’s stance on civil rights. According to an FBI wiretap, King told one minister that Hoover should be “hit from all sides.”<sup>64</sup>

The Bureau responded by coordinating with its own clergy to hit King “from all sides.” On the morning of Monday, November 23, 1964, two days after the Bureau sent King the notorious package, Michaux met with Director Hoover and Deputy Associate Director Agent Carl “Deke” DeLoach at FBIHQ.<sup>65</sup> “Deke” was the Bureau’s third in charge and, like Agent Nichols before him, served as the liaison to the White House. He became a member of President Johnson’s inner circle. The President even had a direct private phone line installed at Agent DeLoach’s house, right next to the G-Man’s bed. One agent described him as Hoover’s “protégé, almost a son,” and “he, more than most, had Hoover’s confidence.” In addition to his dealings with the White House, he led the Bureau’s Crime Records Division—the Bureau’s public relations arm. He used his characteristic smoothness and sophistication to shape the Bureau’s image via FBI publications and courting public opinion leaders like Michaux.<sup>66</sup>

It is unclear who initiated the 11:00 a.m. Monday meeting. The Bureau was, however, in the midst of a tenacious campaign to find journalistic and religious allies for its crusade against King. On the same day as the meeting with Michaux, Hoover sent presidential aide Bill Moyers two letters containing disparaging information on King’s associates. The Bureau also attempted, but failed, to conscript journalists from the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Atlanta Constitution*, *Chicago Daily News*, and *Newsweek* to print transcriptions of FBI audio surveillance of King’s private hotel room activity. The Bureau also reached out to Edwin Espy, the general secretary of the National Council of Churches. The Bureau “confidentially” informed him that King “left a great deal to be desired . . . from the standpoint of personal conduct.” The same counterintelligence efforts were made with clergy from the Baptist World Alliance. The journalists and ministers refused

to collaborate publically with the Bureau.<sup>67</sup> Michaux, however, was more amenable to the Bureau's media strategy.

Agent DeLoach described Michaux as having a record of being "quite cooperative and friendly over the years," and the Elder did not disappoint. During the morning meeting, Michaux assured Hoover and Agent DeLoach that he was "distressed to learn of Martin Luther King's false statements against the Director and . . . wanted to do something about the situation." The Elder vowed that he and his followers were strong supporters and believers in Hoover and the G-Men. They were, he pledged, "Hooverites." They saw King, on the other hand, as "an insincere individual who was concerned only with self aggrandizement," with a proven record of being "a liar," while Hoover was "one of the great leaders of our time." The Elder, at one point, desired to act as the "intermediary between the Director and Martin Luther King." However, he gave up on the idea. King was not trustworthy. The Elder explained, in opposition to King, "his theory of civil rights involves the ability of the Negro to qualify or deserve any newly won freedoms." He continued, "It is wrong for the Negroes of today to demand things they do not deserve." The Elder "deplored the activities of CORE in demonstrations, sit-downs, etc." Such activities, he claimed, did "the Negro no good." Marches and pressure groups could not bring about black equality; only regeneration and the resulting self-improvement of black Americans could earn that right.<sup>68</sup>

The day after Michaux's visit to headquarters, Hoover made similar comments during his acceptance of the first annual Sword of Loyola Award from Loyola University Chicago. The Catholic university bestowed upon Hoover "a replica of St. Ignatius of Loyola's sword." According to the award committee, the sword was the symbol of "the distinctive spiritual qualities associated with St. Ignatius of Loyola: courage, dedication, and service." Loyola dedicated his sword "to the service of God," making St. Ignatius and his sword icons "of becoming a spiritual soldier of Christ." The award committee of laywomen and men, academics, and priests maintained that Hoover "personified" these characteristics and was, therefore, the ideal first recipient of the symbolic sword.<sup>69</sup> He was a spiritual Cold War warrior. His acceptance speech, "Time for Decision," noted that "pressure groups" were led by nonbelievers, "Communist and moral degenerates," who protested and boycotted under the guise of "liberty when they really mean license." There was little doubt to whom Hoover's jeremiad was referring. The balm the nation needed, Hoover sermonized, was not more collective action, but revival. "We must return to the teachings of God if we are to cure this sickness," he preached with the sacred sword by his side. This, he maintained, was faithful to

“the American way.” America had a decision to make: return to God or suffer the impending chaos. It was Hoover’s way, that is God’s way, or follow King and the civil rights movement down the path to destruction. The homily was “heartily endorse[d]” in Congress and later entered into the *Congressional Record*.<sup>70</sup>

Exactly seven days later, Bureau clergyman and Quinn AME pastor Reverend Archibald Carey brokered a meeting between King and Hoover (along with their respective aides) to help settle their public dispute. The singular meeting between the two men was set for December 1, 1964, at 3:30 p.m. in Hoover’s “lavish” thirty-five-foot long formal office at FBIHQ. The one-hour gathering was very cordial. A late arriving King maintained that his criticisms of Hoover and the FBI were misquoted and misrepresented. “My only complaint,” King quickly hedged, “is the fact that I have seen FBI agents who have received civil rights complaints, consorting the next day with the local police officers who have been changed with brutalities.” He continued in a conciliatory tone, pledging that he had never launched a personal attack on the director. He simply tried to give voice to black frustration. King then reassured the director that his strong Christian beliefs would never allow him to yield to the “crippling totalitarian disease” of communism.<sup>71</sup>

Hoover, however, would hear none of King’s Christian testimony. The director abruptly interrupted the preacher’s confession of faith, launching into a fifty-five-minute monologue from behind his elevated desk. Hoover was known to burst into such long soliloquies from behind his perch when he did not particularly trust an office visitor. The director became garrulous when King spoke of his faith. Hoover, similar to the pseudonymous letter the FBI sent King, admittedly refused to call King “Reverend.” Instead, he lectured “Mr. King,” on the dangers of communism and the FBI’s long history of civil rights work dating back to the 1920s when the FBI, according to Hoover, “put the fear of God” into the KKK. The boss then assured his audience that he favored the desegregation of public accommodations and schools (it was, after all, the law) but strongly opposed school busing to accomplish it. Finally, Hoover offered King some advice: black leaders should focus their efforts on black voter registration and job training, not militancy and protest. Society and employers—especially the Bureau—could not lower their standards to accommodate African Americans. They had to prove themselves worthy.<sup>72</sup> Hoover was the decorated guardian of Christian America and thus the self-appointed sage of the black freedom struggle.

King departed the hour-long meeting and issued a prepared press statement from Hoover’s reception room. The Reverend King

told the throng of waiting reporters—including James McCartney of the *Chicago Daily News* who was offered FBI transcriptions of King's hotel surveillance while he was waiting for King and Hoover's meeting to conclude—that the meeting was “very friendly, very amicable” and that the two sides had reached “new levels of understanding.” King hoped the public would “forget the confusion of the past and get on with the job.”<sup>73</sup> For the Bureau, King was the job. The FBI continued its attempts to prevent the publication of articles favorable to Dr. King while it struggled to persuade “friendly” news sources to print unfavorable articles and public rebukes of King. The G-Men found little success among journalists.<sup>74</sup>

The Elder, however, was once again happy to oblige. Michaux returned to headquarters on December 9, 1964 (eight days after King's meeting with Hoover), determined to lionize Hoover, help the Bureau, and publicly chastise King for bearing false witness. After meeting with the boss and the Bureau's chief propaganda officer, Agent DeLoach, it was decided that Michaux would “issue to the wire services a public letter which he would write to King . . . and state that the Director and the FBI have been extremely effective in the civil rights movement. He will also call upon Reverend King to issue a public apology to the Director so that Negro people may realize who their friends are.” Michaux believed the open letter was a must because King had “led many uneducated Negroes to believe that the FBI was not properly performing its responsibilities,” namely the defense and perpetuation of America's Christian heritage. Such falsehoods in the black community, Michaux maintained, only hurt black people because “a lack of cooperation . . . prevented the FBI from fully doing its job” on behalf of the nation's black citizens. DeLoach concluded the meeting noting, “I thanked the Elder for his interest concerning the Director and the FBI and told him that he, of course, could call upon us at any time for assistance.”<sup>75</sup>

Michaux, with the dubious assistance of the FBI, composed a four-page open letter to King on December 22, a few days after King returned from receiving the Noble Peace Prize in Norway. The release of the open letter was coordinated with the distribution of the Bureau's “strictly confidential” report on King's “immoral” personal conduct to a critical mass of politicians and government agencies, including the White House, Vice-President Elect Hubert Humphrey, the secretaries of state and defense, the CIA, the United States Information Agency, four military intelligence offices, and the National Science Foundation.<sup>76</sup> Michaux's dispatch served to buttress the Bureau's two-page report on King. It was one thing for the Bureau to oppose King in the

halls of power. It was even more consequential for the Bureau's concerns to be publically corroborated by a black celebrity minister.

The Elder's public missive rebuked King while extolling Hoover's Christian witness. King may have won the coveted Noble Peace Prize, but Hoover, Michaux reminded King, was the inaugural recipient of the prestigious "Sword of Loyola." Hoover was not just the director of the FBI; he was also a faithful soldier in the army of the Lord.<sup>77</sup> The Elder lectured King on the proper relationship between the FBI and the civil rights movement. He presented his findings as independently verified. "In my investigation, I found that the duty of maintaining law and order in the civil rights demonstrations . . . is the primary responsibility of local and state law enforcement agencies . . . The FBI is solely an investigating agency as distinguished from a peace officer or police agency, and is without authority to maintain peace or provide protection." He then rattled off a complimentary listing of FBI statistics and anecdotes concerning the number of civil rights cases the FBI had investigated in the pursuit of civil rights justice. He assured King, "In my investigation I included a visit to Mr. Hoover's office and had these above facts all confirmed."<sup>78</sup>

"Under these circumstances," Michaux admonished King "you being the recipient of the famous Nobel Prize which brands you as the prince of Peacemakers among men of this day, portraying the image of Christ, I suggest that you apologize to Mr. Hoover for your suspicious remarks . . ." It was King, Michaux argued, who instigated the whole affair. "Your statement based on suspicion only was a grave error on your part . . . And Mr. Hoover was provoked to call you a notorious liar." The Elder proposed that the answer to the dilemma was simple: "If you apologize to Mr. Hoover and the thirteen thousand FBI Agents if [*sic*] will be Mr. Hoover's duty to accept and to apologize to you." More than this, Michaux directed King to "cooperate with and aid the FBI." It was a Christian duty. The Elder concluded his public scolding by quoting Hoover's acceptance speech at the Sword of Loyola award ceremony. Michaux had an advance copy of the evangelistic speech, compliments of the Bureau. "America stands at the crossroads of destiny in which we shall all finally stand or fall together," Michaux quoted. "Man is blessed with the liberty to choose between opposing factors . . . between God and the Devil . . . As Americans we should learn to trust God, to know His teachings and to live in His ways. This is truly a time for decision."<sup>79</sup>

In reality, Michaux did not conduct an investigation of the FBI; he simply illegally laundered the Bureau's data. Following the Elder's

November and December meetings with Hoover and Agent DeLoach, the Bureau illegally provided him with two documents meant for Bureau employees only: an internal monograph on civil rights and a flattering catalogue of FBI "accomplishments in the field of civil rights." In violation of federal law, the Elder simply copied the Bureau's confidential data, inserted it into his open letter, and sent the letter to King and the press, original spelling errors and all.<sup>80</sup>

The Elder substantiated the Bureau's labor while authenticating his own status as the prophet of black Protestantism. He presented the debate between Hoover and King as one of ultimate significance. Hoover was God's man and the FBI was an instrument of righteousness. In contrast, King was being used as a tool of the Devil and the godless, or worse King was the embodiment of godless evil. The nation could not serve two masters. Americans could not support both their FBI and King's civil rights movement. It was either righteousness or godlessness. The fate of the nation depended on it.

Michaux's epistle was purposeful propaganda, not an olive branch. The Elder admitted as much to Agent DeLoach. When Agent DeLoach showed Hoover a copy of the letter, Agent DeLoach noted, "Attached is the letter issued by Elder Michaux in connection to the Martin Luther King matter. He give us considerable credit concerning civil rights accomplishments but, as I mentioned on the phone, goes too far in his request that after King apologizes he calls upon you also to apologize. The Elder has mentioned that he, of course, realizes that King will never apologize."<sup>81</sup> The valeted letter allowed the Bureau to leak information concerning its Christian commitments and civil rights work while receiving a black clerical endorsement at the same time.

Michaux and the Bureau were relentlessly committed to the cause. After the major papers did not print their open letter in its entirety, the Elder preached a sermon that echoed the same. News coverage was not lacking this time. On Sunday, January 3, 1965, the first Sunday of the New Year, Michaux explained to more than four hundred worshipers as well as journalists and thousands of radio listeners that the "breach" between Hoover and King was one that only King could bridge. With a sardonic tinge, he explained it was King's responsibility because "King is the prince of peace-makers." The "feud," the Elder explained, was dire, one that "threatens America." King's recalcitrance opened "an avenue through which the Communists can infiltrate this country," and all black citizens would be blamed as the "avenue" of Communist infiltration and exploitation. Subsequently, Michaux reasoned, "This thing can cause the Negro in America to be put back 100 years." An apology from King, Michaux argued, "will not only lift him up, but will lift us up with him."<sup>82</sup> The Bureau and Michaux colluded



to preach a sermon that made the issue plain: King was the avenue of godless communists' infiltration. He had to repent and apologize; authentic black Christianity, race progress, and most importantly national security depended on it.

The following day, on January 4, Hoover thanked Michaux for the sermon. "I read the account of your sermon for January 3<sup>rd</sup> as reported by the *Washington Post and Times Herald*, and want to take this opportunity to thank you for your support of my administration of the FBI. Your straightforward remarks concerning this Bureau's role in civil rights matters are a source of encouragement." Nothing was more encouraging than having the national press parrot the Bureau's own views under the guise of a minister. Hoover closed his thank you note, "You may be assured my associates join me in expressing appreciation."<sup>83</sup> The boss was well pleased.

A "most friendly and cooperative" Michaux visited Agent DeLoach at FBI headquarters a few weeks after the January 3 sermon. The Bureau had just received fresh transcriptions from bugs in King's New York City hotel rooms. The Elder brought his own intel as well. He presented DeLoach with "numerous letters which [sic] he had received which expressed support for the Director and were against King." Michaux reportedly told Agent DeLoach the "numerous" letters were "certainly an indication of the very fine support that Mr. Hoover enjoys." Michaux departed headquarters at the close of the hour-long meeting but not before he "reemphasized his sincere admiration and respect for the Director."<sup>84</sup>

The next day Hoover wrote a personal letter to Michaux thanking him again. "I was pleased to learn of your visit with Assistant Director DeLoach yesterday," Hoover wrote. The director was thrilled to learn that Michaux had received letters that supported the G-Men. "This response," Hoover asserted, "is most encouraging and is indicative of the straightforward manner in which you discussed this Bureau's role in the civil rights field." Hoover closed the thank you note, "You may be assured that I am indeed appreciative of your efforts in this regard."<sup>85</sup> The Bureau and Michaux sowed a sermonic seed that yielded a harvest of good will for the Bureau.

However, the black press felt differently. Many African Americans viewed Michaux's public attack against King in defense of Hoover as nothing short of blasphemy. An editorial in the *Baltimore Afro-American* saw no value in Michaux's stance against King. There are "certain institutions," the region's leading black paper noted, that one should never rush to attack, "motherhood, togetherness, Saturday night at the movies, and in some situations Martin Luther King." King was an "institution" representing the coordinated religious fight for

black equality. The weekly admitted that "Dr. King is not always right," but he was nonetheless the "spiritual leader" of the civil rights movement and, therefore, untouchable. The *Afro-American* was perplexed as to why the Elder, a fellow minister, would attack King. The only thing Michaux accomplished by siding with Hoover was "removing himself from the mainstream of thought" in the black community. Even worse, Michaux publicly "indicated a division within the ranks" of black Christian leadership. He committed the unpardonable sin.<sup>86</sup>

An editorial in the *Chicago Defender* followed suit. "Elder Michaux has been an effective force for good in the community," the national weekly admitted, "but we believe he is in error in these attacks on Dr. King." The paper treaded lightly, "There is a danger in criticizing the action of any minister." However, the editorial pivoted, "this is a danger we must accept." The *Defender* maintained that the Elder's stance was "petty and ill-founded" even as it provided "aid and encouragement to our enemies." The missive concluded, "We believe that Elder Michaux, whatever his reasons, is hurting the civil rights movement, not helping it."<sup>87</sup> This was, after all, the Bureau and the Elder's shared goal.

Letters to the editor were less diplomatic. E. B. Henderson of Michaux's native Virginia was flabbergasted. Michaux was uneducated and did not belong to any "organization of ministers" or civil rights groups such as the "SCLC, NAACP, or the Urban League." He had no right or credentials to be a leader in the black community, let alone criticize King. The Elder, Henderson wrote to the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, was just like white fundamentalists Billy Hargis and Carl McIntyre. Michaux may have a large following; however, "The Elder," Henderson wrote, "is no Moses."<sup>88</sup> Joan Arlington held no punches when she wrote to the *Chicago Defender*. "Rev. Michaux," she pronounced, "should excuse himself from our 20<sup>th</sup> Century society and join the old Ku Klux Klan organization."<sup>89</sup> To many African American citizens, the Elder's defense of the FBI and attacks on King made him a byword of backwardness in an era of racial progress.

Michaux and the Bureau, nonetheless, continued their sacred ambush. On Thursday, April 1, 1965, Elder Michaux and more than one hundred of his Church of God parishioners converged on Baltimore, Maryland to launch an FBI-approved protest against King. King and the executive board of the SCLC were in the city holding meetings inside the Lord Baltimore Hotel. They were fresh from the triumphant voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery. They gathered at the Lord Baltimore to plan the Summer Community Organizing and Political Education project (SCOPE). The campaign included a voter registration drive across the South and an economic boycott of the state of Alabama.

SCOPE aimed to organize and register black voters as well as galvanize support for the 1965 Voting Rights Act as it moved through Congress. SCOPE, King announced in a press release, would be "one of the most intensive attacks ever conceived to fight disfranchisement, educational deprivation, and poverty." The Bureau, Michaux, and his rambunctious followers were opposed to the plan and its advocates. The morning of the protest, Michaux told Agent DeLoach that the Noble Prize winner was nothing but a "fuss maker' instead of peace maker." Michaux blamed the civil rights minister for the deaths of a number of people, including "Negroes." "Frankly," the Elder reportedly lobbied the Bureau, King was just "a selfish individual that was agitating for himself rather than for the good of the Negroes."<sup>90</sup> Agent DeLoach did not need to be convinced.

The Bureau clergyman and his Church of God faithful publicly registered this opposition in front of the entrance of the Lord Baltimore at 10:00 a.m. Agent DeLoach dispatched FBI agents from Baltimore's Civil Rights Division. The local G-Men watched from afar and made certain that Michaux and crew were not arrested, hindered, nor removed by hotel security. They provided Michaux and the protestors with the kind of protection the FBI continually and deliberately denied King and his civil rights protesters. The hovering agents jotted down, "approximately 100 to 125 Negroes dressed in burlap over their usual clothing and wearing burlap on their heads picketed the Lord Baltimore Hotel." The "singing, chanting, marching, and sack clothed" protestors were equipped with signs displaying various messages including, "God Save America." The sacred musicality of their disdain signaled their deep abiding faith in God and the righteousness with which they pleaded their cause. Their course attire of "sackcloth" denoted mourning and the dire need for King and the SCLC to repent of their sins, lest God forsake the nation.<sup>91</sup>

Michaux joined the marchers' religious chorus as he distributed prepared remarks seemingly approved by the Bureau. A pack of startled white and black journalists flipped through the boilerplate press packet as they hurled questions at the Elder: "Why are you picketing Dr. King?" Michaux told a reporter from the *New York Times* that a boycott against Alabama manufactured goods would "destroy the progress the Negro has made" and "throw thousands of Negroes in Alabama out of work and into breadlines." He then told the *Afro-American* columnist that a boycott "would bring about dissatisfaction among both white and colored people and would hurt the colored people of Alabama." As protesters paraded signs reading, "Russian Termites," Michaux announced that King's radical proposal made clear that the SCLC was riddled with "Communist

infiltrators" who had turned their back on God. Like termites, the SCLC was bent on destroying America's Christian infrastructure from the inside. One journalist retorted, "Are you saying, sir, that Dr. King has turned his back on God?" Michaux baldly explained, "Well I say Dr. King has turned his back on the plans that God gave him to lead his people." True Christian leadership guided people to salvation, not politically motivated boycotts. "That's why," Michaux told the throng, King "is wrong and why the boycott cannot work." Scandalized white observers, a columnist noted, murmured about "all those colored people picketing Dr. King." Impervious, Michaux withdrew from the press to rejoin the marchers. The protestors pounded the pavement and bellowed the religious refrain: "I'm Praying for You."<sup>92</sup>

The religious protestors made quite the scene. SCLC, one of the foremost black Christian protest organizations in the country, was being confronted with a black Christian protest. Michaux and company left little doubt: King's discontent with America was not universally embraced within black Protestantism. King's gospel was false. Divine presence and approval were not with King, the SCLC, nor their godless "communist" plans. God's anointing and favor resided with Michaux, his Church of God followers, and their colorblind gospel of personal conversation. In the eyes of many, divine approval was certainly debatable. However, FBI approval was not. Michaux marched in lockstep with the Bureau.

Michaux's Lord Baltimore Hotel protest coincided with a shift in the Bureau's campaign against King. Roughly three weeks after the demonstration, the FBI terminated the wiretap at King's home. The Bureau's documentation of its partnership with Elder Michaux also concluded in the fall of the same year. By October 1965, the Atlanta FBI field office, after years of failed recruitment, had finally convinced an undisclosed black itinerant minister and the SCLC's pious accountant, James A. Harrison, to become paid informants. The religious Harrison had heard so much about King's ties to communism that he became concerned. Harrison, admittedly after much prayer, agreed to provide the FBI with personal information on King and SCLC's plans for the remainder of King's life. In exchange for his faithful service, Harrison was rewarded with the assurance that he was in service to God and country, accompanied by a monthly Bureau salary ranging from \$450 to \$600 (a contemporary economic status of about \$4,000 to \$8,000 a month). Therefore, the Bureau adjusted its strategy against King, moving labor and energy away from Michaux's public attacks—an SCLC outsider—to the devout Harrison, an inside mole.<sup>93</sup> Michaux continued to preach over the radio and remained a favorite at the Bureau. However, the

G-Men no longer called Michaux into "service" against King. He was a faithful "special correspondent," but his job was done.

And it was a job well done. By early 1965, the Bureau's campaign against King began to bear fruit. King felt the heat and he knew the culprits. He sent several ministers to FBIHQ on his behalf. Their task was simple: vouch for King's religious fidelity and convince the Bureau to cease its "massive effort to discredit" him. Their efforts, however, were futile. Every minister received the same script from the FBI. The Bureau repeatedly denied the existence of any crusade. Agent DeLoach even told one of King's emissaries, Reverend Archibald Carey Jr., that "the FBI had plenty to do without being responsible for a discrediting campaign against Reverend King." In fact, Agent DeLoach told Reverend Carey the Bureau had actually tried to help King's Christian crusade. "The Director," he lectured, "[gave] Reverend King some very good advice insofar as [King's] moral responsibilities were concerned." It was a fine fiction. The Bureau publically denied orchestrating a "discrediting campaign against Reverend King" while it privately rejoiced over the same. Following his meeting with Reverend Carey, Agent DeLoach satisfyingly noted, "It is obvious that King is becoming very disturbed and worried . . . else he would not go to such great efforts to have people approach the FBI."<sup>94</sup>

King was rightly concerned. A leading national public opinion poll showed that the public was increasingly siding against King and with Hoover and the Bureau. King was voted *Time* magazine's Man of the Year in early 1964. However, following his public spat with Hoover at the end of the year, the foremost public opinion firm found that "a cross section of the American public" largely sided with Hoover over King. Harris and Associates, Inc., led by Louis Harris the first presidential pollster, found in a 1965 survey that 50% of the public "sympathized" with Hoover, while only 16% identified with the Nobel Peace Prize winner. Overall, ". . . three times as many people sided with the FBI head as did with the Negro civil rights leader." Reported in the *Washington Post*, the poll noted that despite "civil rights controversies" and related criticisms by the likes of the internationally renowned King, Hoover maintained "the solid backing of nearly eight of ten Americans. . . ." Harris and Associates noted that King was increasingly viewed as a threat to national security, while the FBI boss remained "a powerful symbol of law and order, a pillar of security in an uncertain nation and world."<sup>95</sup> The public confirmed what the Bureau had been preaching: FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was the prophet of a secure and righteous nation, with the power to determine who was godly and who was a godless enemy of the state. King was clearly deemed the latter.

Michaux certainly aided this outcome. The entrepreneurial preacher shrewdly employed his popular mass media empire and celebrity status to aid the Bureau's crusade to destroy King. Michaux—the purported "leading negro" in the nation's capital—utilized his status to broadcast that the black civil rights leader was a religious fraud. The Elder illegally laundered FBI intell to portray his fellow black minister not as a clerical patriot or leading spokesman of black discontent, but as a subversive con determined to take the nation down the road to chaos and perdition. Such accusations only served to justify the FBI's attack on King and the public's distrust of the civil rights leader.

In the process, Michaux articulated a black public faith that not only dismissed King and his claims that racism was endemic to America, but also authenticated Cold War spirituality. America was a Christian state where racial progress and equality were the norm. The Elder assured his followers and listeners that the FBI not only guaranteed such advancement, but that the Bureau actually made it possible. Michaux used his multimedia platform continually to laud Hoover and his Bureau as the "pillar" and protector of the nation's Christian soul. He heralded Hoover as a Christian statesman and his FBI as the legitimate Christian extension of the state. The Elder cooperated with the Bureau not only to reinforce this shared vision of American Christianity, but also to identify and defeat its enemies: people like the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

Michaux and Hoover remained relatively close for the remaining three years of the Elder's life. Approximately a month after Michaux's Lord Baltimore protest, the FBI director nominated Michaux to serve on the President's Commission on Crime in the District of Columbia. The commission was to conduct hearings and investigations concerning all aspects of the District's law enforcement, crime, criminal justice, and rehabilitation. On May 14, 1965, Hoover met with U.S. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach and President Johnson to recommend Michaux, among others, for one of the prestigious spots on the President's committee. The President wanted a "blue ribbon" committee of professionals: attorneys, scholars, retired corporate executives, and experienced federal appointees. The Elder was none of these, but in Hoover's eyes he had the one necessary qualification: he was a Bureau clergyman.<sup>96</sup>

Hoover remained attentive to Michaux's personal life as well. The Elder was no longer working in concert with the FBI, but his status as a close and cherished partner was secure, no matter what was going on at the Bureau. When Mrs. Mary Michaux died on October 28, 1967, Hoover sent the widowed preacher a personal note of sympathy. Hoover penned the letter as he was implementing a black COINTELPRO, a

nationwide routinization of the kind of service Michaux provided: to “expose, disrupt, misdirect, [and] discredit” black freedom fighters. The director attempted to lift the spirits of the grieving preacher as he tasked his Bureau with preventing the rise of a dreaded “black ‘messiah.’” “My dear Elder,” the Hoover wrote to the black preacher, “I was indeed sorry to learn of the passing of your wife and want to express my heartfelt sympathy.” The lifelong bachelor concluded, “May your fond memories of your life together bring you comfort in your sorrow. My thoughts are with you during your bereavement.”<sup>97</sup> The director’s compassionate letter attempted to lift the spirits of the grieving preacher while he tasked the Bureau with preventing the rise of, what he called, a dreaded “black messiah.” The FBI consoled Michaux while it tormented countless African American freedom fighters.

Similarly, the FBI reached out to the Michaux family when the Elder died. Following a stroke, the Elder perished in the hospital on October 20, 1968, six months after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. The Elder was eighty-four years old.<sup>98</sup> His remains lay in state at his D.C. church before being transferred to his native Virginia for the funeral. Followers came from across the country to say goodbye. The funeral crowd overflowed into the street and a nearby parking lot. Notable attendees included the mayor of Newport News, Virginia, and Virginia congressman Thomas Downing.<sup>99</sup> Hoover sent his condolences. The boss paid his respects to the fallen Michaux as the FBI was forcefully working to prevent black liberation groups and leaders “from gaining respectability.” A seemingly grieving Hoover wrote to the Elder’s sister, “I was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of your brother and want to extend my heartfelt sympathy to you and your family. His *contributions* will never be forgotten, and I hope you will find solace in knowing his was a full and rewarding life. Sincerely yours, J. Edgar Hoover.” Hoover’s sympathetic and laudatory note was proclaimed from the pulpit over the Elder’s deceased body for all to hear and witness. In death as in life, it was readily apparent: Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux was a Bureau clergyman whose service and *contributions* were greatly appreciated by Hoover and his FBI.<sup>100</sup>

Michaux’s partnership with the FBI as a Bureau clergyman invites scholars to pursue new directions in studies of the FBI and religion in America. Surveillance does not tell the whole story. The Bureau was not uniformly hostile to Protestantism, only the Protestantism it deemed subversive. The FBI enjoyed cordial working relationships with countless Protestant clergy who, like Michaux, shared the Bureau’s worldview. They crowned these men “Special Service Contacts” and “Special Correspondents,” and periodically called

them into service to help defeat “enemies of the state” and maintain America’s racial, political, economic, and social order. Bureau files tell the stories of these anointed men and the tales of their public gospel labors on behalf of the FBI, faith, and country. Such scholarly inquiry has the potential not only to disclose the various ways the Bureau called ministers into service, but also expand our narratives of how the Bureau engaged and utilized religion in America to achieve the aims of the state. This discovery may reveal that the legal and public measures the Bureau used were as troubling and challenging to democratic practice as their more notorious illegal and covert endeavors. This broader narrative is essential for a more complete and coherent account of the historic and contemporary relationship between the FBI, religion, and the state.

## Notes

1. All FBI documents obtained through the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act, unless otherwise noted. I could not have obtained the documents without the generous support of the Danforth Center on Religion and Politics, the American Council of Learned Societies, The Louisville Institute, the Wabash Center, and The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. L. B. Nichols to Mr. Tolson, office memo, cc: Mr. Holloman, Mr. Jones, “Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux,” January 23, 1956, 94-4-2848-illegible. Original copy filed in 62-66723-4; “FBI Pledge for Law Enforcement Officers,” *The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Vol. 6, No. 12 December 6, 1937, 1–2. Hoover noted that “all the Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation” were required to recite, sign, and execute the pledge. Hoover was Lutheran, but then joined the Presbyterian Church during his youth. See Hoover’s diary in J. Edgar Hoover Personal Estate Collection, National Law Enforcement Museum, Washington, D.C. Hoover expressed his view of the role of religion in the nation and the Bureau in countless articles and interviews. See for example, Hoover, “Indispensable Supports,” *The Sunday Visitor*, February 17, 1963; “FBI Chief Tells of Bible’s Role in His Life,” *The Sunday Star*, January 2, 1972, A6. On Nichols, see his obituary in, the *Washington Post*, “Louis Nichols Dies, Was No. 3 at FBI,” June 10, 1977 and his interview in Ovid Demaris, *The Director: An Oral Biography of J. Edgar Hoover*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: Harper’s Magazine Press, 1975), 65–76. L. B. Nichols to Mr. Tolson, United States Department of Justice memo, “Memorandum for Mr. Tolson,” September 16, 1941, no file number; Nichols to Tolson, office memo, September 20, 1951, 94-4-2848-8. On YMCA and racial segregation see, Susan Kerr Chandler, “‘Almost a Partnership’: African-Americans, Segregation, and the Young Men’s Christian Association,” *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 21, no 1 (March, 1994).



2. Some have referred to Michaux as “Solomon Lightfoot Michaux;” however, I am using the name Lightfoot Solomon Michaux according to the U.S. Census notes and Church of God histories. See 1910 U.S. Census, Newport, Warick Virginia Roll/T624\_1650, Page 6A. Enumeration District 0120 FHL microfilm/ 1375663; the Church of God at Williamsburg, “Who We Are,” <http://www.thechurchofgodatwilliamsburg.org>, accessed August 21, 2015; Michaux began visiting the FBI in 1941. During World War II, he worked with the G-Men to extol the FBI as a paragon of Christianity, patriotism, and racial progress while discrediting and slandering a number of “subversive” black civil rights advocates from the National Negro Congress and the Regional Council of Negro Leadership. The FBI credited the preacher with being “instrumental on more than one occasion in rendering us a real service.” See, for example, L. B. Nichols to Mr. Tolson, U.S. Department of Justice memo, “Memorandum for Mr. Tolson,” September 16, 1941, no file number. Nichols to Tolson, memo, September 20, 1951, 94-4-2848-8; Michaux based his view on Romans 13:1–7. See, “Elder Michaux’s View on Church and State . . .” No date, archive, The Church of God at Williamsburg, “Who We Are,” <http://www.thechurchofgodatwilliamsburg.org>. Accessed August 21, 2015; L. B. Nichols to Mr. Tolson, office memo, cc: Mr. Holloman, Mr. Jones, “Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux,” January 23, 1956, 94-4-2848-illegible, original copy filed in 62-66723-4; Teletype Telegram, Michaux to Hoover, April 15, 1956, Bureau File, 94-4-2848-22; On number of agents see, Athan G. Theoharis, *The FBI & American Democracy: A Brief Critical History* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2004), 174; On Cold War ideas of political and domestic “containment,” “spiritual mobilization,” “spiritual insolvency,” and religious “anxiety” see respectfully, Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, fully rev. and updated 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 16–17; Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America’s Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 15–16; Andrew S. Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

3. Nichols to Tolson, office memo, September 20, 1951, 94-4-2848-8; L. B. Nichols to Mr. Tolson, cc: Mr. Holloman, Mr. Jones, office memo, “Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux, January 23, 1956, 94-4-2848-illegible, original copy filed in 62-66723-4, italics mine.

4. See, for example, Sylvester A. Johnson and Steven Weitzman, eds., *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security before and after 9/11* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017); Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500–2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom*, 1st ed.

(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: W. Morrow, 1986); David J. Garrow, *The Martin Luther King, Jr., F.B.I. File*, Black studies research sources: microfilms from major archival and manuscript collections (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1984); David J. Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King, Jr: From "Solo" to Memphis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1981).

5. There are two exceptions to this scholarly trend. Studies of Catholicism and Mormonism have thoroughly examined the respective cordial working relationships between white Catholics and white Mormons and the FBI. However, the analysis of the role of race, that is the construction of whiteness, and racism are not a part of these studies. For a sample of such work, see David Weddle, "The Gang That Couldn't Smoke, Drink, or Shoot Straight: How the Mormon Mafia Turned the FBI's L.A. Office into the Laughing Stock of Law Enforcement," *California* 13 (October 1988); James F. Garneau, "The Director and His Eminence: The Working Relationship and Questions of Church and State as Reflected in Cardinal Cushing's FBI Files," *American Catholic Studies* 114 (2003): 37–53; Steve Rosswurm, *The F.B.I and the Catholic Church, 1935–1962* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009). Scholars have been slow to examine any similar relationships among Protestants. Michael McVicar's forthcoming monograph, tentatively titled *God's Watchers: Domestic Intelligence Gathering and Religious Activism from the Cold War to the War on Terror*, will be a much needed addition to the field, pushing scholars beyond "hostility studies" of religion and the FBI. Other scholars have examined the relationship between scholars of religion and the FBI. See, for example, Nancy T. Ammerman, "Waco, Federal Law Enforcement, and Scholars of Religion," in *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict*, ed. Stuart A. Wright (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Steven P. Weitzman, "Religious Studies and the F.B.I.: Adventures in Academic Interventionism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81 (December 2013): 959–95. However, these studies do not analyze the role of race nor do they examine African American religious actors.

6. Belmont to Ladd, letterhead memo, "Special Service Contacts Semiannual Report," October 16, 1953, 67–045–1732, Office of the Director, J. Edgar Hoover Official and Confidential File, File 14, Box 9, RG 65, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.; SAC, Minneapolis to Director, FBI, letterhead memo, "Special Service Contacts Minneapolis Division," March 26, 1952, 67–HQ–466236. See Michaux File, 94–HQ–2848 for his membership on the Special Correspondents List. On the FBI's elective affinity and convergence with conservative Christianity,

see Rosswurm, *The F.B.I and the Catholic Church, 1935–1962*, 13. For a broader look at the Special Correspondents' List and its significance, see Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: Norton, 2001), 383–84; Ivan Greenberg, *Surveillance in America: Critical Analysis of the F.B.I., 1920 to the Present* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2012), 101; Athan G. Theoharis, ed., *From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover* (Chicago: I. R. Dee, 1991), 303–4; Ann Mari Buitrago and Leon Andrew Immerman, *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been in the F.B.I. Files? How to Secure and Interpret Your F.B.I. Files* (New York: Grove Press, 1981), 208.

7. The word American is placed within quotations based on Marla Frederick's insightful analysis on how scholars in the field use the term as normative. She writes, "Too often white religious practice by default has been categorized as 'American religion' while the study of African American religious practitioners sits solely under the category 'black religious studies.'" Accordingly, "Whiteness in the study of American religion has operated as a normative category." See Marla Frederick, *Colored Television: American Religion Gone Global* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 5. The only scholarly biography of Michaux is Lillian Ashcraft Webb, *About My Father's Business: The Life of Elder Michaux* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981). The book does not discuss the interworkings of the preacher's close relationship with Hoover and the Bureau. Suzanne E. Smith's forthcoming monograph on Michaux will be a much welcomed and needed addition to the study of religion in America.

8. See Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King, Jr.*; Garrow, *The Martin Luther King, Jr., F.B.I. File*; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*; Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500–2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Sylvester A. Johnson, "Dreams and Shadows: Martin Luther King, Jr., the FBI, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference," in Johnson and Weitzman, *The FBI and Religion*.

9. Rosswurm, *The F.B.I. and the Catholic Church, 1935–1962*, 2. Few biographers take Hoover's faith seriously. One exception to this trend is Richard Gid Powers, *Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover*, 1st ed. (New York: Free Press, 1987). Powers argues that Hoover's faith, along with his school and neighborhood, shaped the director's worldview as a child.

10. See, for example, Hearings before the Committee on Un-American Activities House of Representatives 80th Congress First Session, Part 2, *Testimony of J. Edgar Hoover, Director Federal Bureau of Investigation* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 26, 1947); Francis

Spellman and J. Edgar Hoover, *Communism Is Un-American/Communism Is a Menace*, reprinted from *The American Magazine* (New York: Constitutional Educational League, 1946). See also "FBI Chief Tells of Bible's Role in His Life," *Sunday Star*, January 2, 1972, A6; J. Edgar Hoover, "Soviet Rule or Christian Renewal," *Christianity Today*, November 7, 1960, 8–11.

11. Frank Church, Chairman U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, Book 3* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 23, 1976), 82, 131, 133, 142. The report does mention the title of a few clergy the FBI attempted to reach with such endeavors including the Pope, while Francis Cardinal Spellman is mentioned by name. The Bureau also made overtures to the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches. For a brief look at the FBI's effort to discredit the civil rights movement and King with officials of the National Council of Churches, see James F. Findlay, Jr., *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950–1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

12. For a sample of useful typologies, see Peter J. Paris, *Black Religious Leaders: Conflict in Unity*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

13. Wallace Best, "'The Right Achieved and the Wrong Way Conquered': J. H. Jackson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Conflict over Civil Rights," *Religion and American Culture* 16 (2006), 217–18. Michaux's biographer, for example, dismisses the Elder's dispute against King as "egotistical frustration," instead of a dispute with real ideological and theological differences. See Webb, *About My Father's Business*, 83.

14. Scholars of this Cold War spiritual mobilization have neglected to examine the roles of race (whiteness) and that of black clergy. See, for example, Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015); Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*.

15. Norris was so desperate to be connected with Hoover in the public eye that he lied concerning his visit to the FBI. On Norris's various efforts, see, for example, L. B. Nichols to Director, letterhead memo, September 5, 1941, and *The Fundamentalists*, August 15, 1941, both in Office of Assistant to the Director, Louis B. Nichols Official and Confidential

Files, Box 15, RG 65, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md. On Peale's relationship, see Bureau File, 62-HQ-77416.

16. In addition to remarks from Hoover, Eisenhower, and McGrath, Michaux also received well wishes from Federal Security Administrator Oscar R. Ewing (who also attended the event), CBS Vice President Earl H. Gammons, as well as Clark Griffith who was the owner of the Washington Senators baseball team. Fellow CBS radio personalities from *The Jack Benny Show* and *Amos 'n' Andy* also sent along congratulatory notes. Hoover to Michaux's home at 17112 R. Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., cc: Agent Jones, Western Union telegram, 6:47 p.m., September 20, 1951, 94-4-2848-10. On contemporary cost, see Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "Measures of Worth," *MeasuringWorth*, 2012, [www.measuringworth.com/worthmeasures.php](http://www.measuringworth.com/worthmeasures.php), accessed January 26, 2017. On other congratulatory notes, see Jones to Nichols, office memo, September 24, 1951, 94-4-2848-9; *Washington Post*, September 22, 1951, 7; *Chicago Defender*, October 6, 1951, 2; *Associated Negro Press* press release, Church News: Washington, "Thousands Pay Tribute to 'Happy Am I' Preacher at Griffith Stadium," October 3, 1951, in Chicago Historical Society, Claude A. Barnett Papers: *Associated Negro Press, 1918-1967*, File, "Radio Church of God, Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux, July 13, 1934-September 16, 1956. The *Associated Negro Press*, interestingly, omitted Hoover's name from their catalogue of well-wishers.

17. On early years, see *Radio Guide*, May 5, 1934, May 12, 1934; *Washington Evening Star*, July 10, 1938, 3A; Chancellor Williams, "The Socio-Economic Significance of the Store-Front Church Movement in the United States since 1920" (Ph.D. diss., American University, Washington, D.C., 1949), 51-57.

18. Michaux quoted in, *The Radio Guide*, May 12, 1934; Minutes from the Elders and Deacons Meeting at Newport News, Va., Thursday, November 23, 1967; Williams, "The Socio-Economic Significance of the Store-Front Church Movement in the United States since 1920," 48. My elucidation of Michaux's Cold War ministry borrows from Steven P. Miller's definition of "evangelical universalism." See Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, Politics and Culture in Modern America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 9; See also May, *Homeward Bound*, 17; Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 16. For a longer look at Michaux's ministry, see Webb, *About My Father's Business*, 33-37.

19. J. Edgar Hoover, "An American's Privilege," speech delivered at the annual banquet of the Holland Society of New York, November 1942, reprinted in the *Catholic Review*, November 27, 1942; *Our Sunday Visitor*,

May 22, 1950, reprinted from *Redbook Magazine*. See also J. Edgar Hoover, "Crime Begins at Home," *Redbook Magazine*, October 1946.

20. Quoted in *Associated Negro Press*, "The 'Happy-Am-I' Preacher as Seen in His Radio Pulpit on the Potomac," n.d., Claude A. Barnett Papers, Chicago Historical Society. On early years, see *Radio Guide*, May 5, 1934, May 12, 1934; *Washington Evening Star*, July 10, 1938, 3A; Williams, "The Socio-Economic Significance of the Store-Front Church Movement in the United States since 1920," 51–57. On acting career, see E. Nelson Palmer, "Elder Michaux and His Church of God: A Sociological Interpretation" (Fisk University Charles S. Johnson Papers, Social Sciences Documents, Section 3 Row 6 Box 6 Folder 5, 1944–1947), 37. Palmer uses the term "'end man' in a minstrel show." Special thanks to Jamil Drake for bringing this unpublished paper to my attention.

21. *Washington Evening Star*, July 10, 1938, 3A; July 11, 1938; *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 6, 1934, A3; *Radio Guide*, May 12, 1934, 5, 34; Raymond Julius Jones, "A Comparative Study of Religious Cult Behavior among Negroes with Special Reference to Emotional Group Conditioning Factors, Graduate School for the Division of the Social Sciences, Howard University Studies in the Social Sciences, Vol. 2, No. 2." (M.A. thesis, Howard University, 1939), 91–100.

22. *Variety*, September 19, 1933, 35; August 7, 1934, 32; *Radio Guide*, May 5, 1934, 5, 34; May 12, 1934, 5, 34; *Billboard*, June 26, 1937, 11.

23. *Washington Evening Star*, July 10, 1938, 3A; July 11, 1938; *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 6, 1934, A3; Williams, "The Socio-Economic Significance of the Store-Front Church Movement in the United States since 1920," 57, 86–87. CBS dropped Michaux from many of its stations by the outbreak of war in Europe as a result of the ministry being dogged by accusations of financial mismanagement. The Mutual Network picked up Michaux's show on their national network. On CBS stations, see Palmer, "Elder Michaux and His Church of God," 11. On Mutual, see *Associated Negro Press*, press release, Church News: Washington, "Thousands Pay Tribute to 'Happy Am I' Preacher at Griffith Stadium," October 3, 1951.

24. On number of listeners, see the radio industry study, American Research Bureau, *The Washington Radio Audience, October 15–31, 1949*, ed. James W. Seiler (Washington, D.C.: American Research Bureau, 1949). A special thank you to Philip Goff for sharing this source with me. N.B.: In a letter to the author dated April 3, 2015, the FBI claimed, "records which may have" pertained to Charles Fuller "were destroyed in February 2005... under the supervision of the National Archives and Records

Administration (NARA) and the FBI Records Retention Plan and Disposition Schedule which has been approved by the United States District Court for the District of Columbia and are monitored by NARA." FBI to author, letter, Subject: Fuller, Charles Edward, April 3, 2015, in author's possession. After the author initiated further inquiry, the FBI revealed that said file number was an FBI headquarters' domestic security case file number 100-100627. According to the FBI Records Retention Plan and Disposition Schedule, by 1981, FBI Headquarters had opened more than 480,000 domestic security case files, measuring more than 7,000 cubic feet. Of the nearly half million domestic security case files, the District Court ordered the Bureau to retain permanently all cases the court's appraisal deemed "exceptional," cases with multisections, cases with eighteen or more serials (separate pieces of information), all informant cases, and all cases with an organization or institution as the subject. All others, however, could be destroyed when thirty years old. Therefore, the destruction of Fuller's domestic security file may indicate that it was small. However, as a result of the court-ordered retention plan, researchers and scholars will never know the extent to which nor why the FBI was concerned and/or engaged with Fuller. Moreover, the information the Bureau did obtain on the evangelist and the means to do so are also lost. FBI to author, letter, Subject: Fuller, Charles Edward, June 18, 2015. On retention plan, see National Archives and Records Service, *Appraisal of the Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation: A Report to Hon. Harold H. Greene, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, Submitted by the National Archives and Records Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, November 9, 1981, Amended, January 8, 1982* (Washington, D.C.: General Services Administration, National Archives and Records Service, 1981), Appendices, 100-Domestic Security.

25. *Associated Negro Press*, press release, Church News: Washington, "Thousands Pay Tribute to 'Happy Am I' Preacher at Griffith Stadium," October 3, 1951.

26. Many scholars of religion in America have long held the consensus that Rex Humbard became the first minister/evangelist to host his own weekly television show in 1952. See, for example, *God in America*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/godinamerica/timeline/>, accessed January 31, 2017. However, Michaux's weekly show was launched four years before Humbard's series. Michaux's local run outlasted its national broadcast. After four total years on the air, the show folded in 1951 when the DuMont Television Network began broadcasting the show of another Bureau clergyman: Bishop Fulton Sheen. On Michaux's show, see *Billboard*, November 27, 1948, 10; December 27,

1948, 12; David Weinstein, "Du Mont in Washington, D.C.: Out on a Limb," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 16 (1997), 379–81; Hal Erickson, *Religious Radio and Television in the United States, 1921–1991: The Programs and Personalities* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1992), 71. For more on the DuMont Television Network, see David Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network: DuMont and the Birth of American Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

27. *Billboard*, November 27, 1948, 10; December 18, 1948, 12; December 27, 1948, 12; December 3, 1949, 10; Weinstein, "Du Mont in Washington, D.C.," 379–81.

28. *Billboard*, November 27, 1948, 10; December 27, 1948, 12; Weinstein, "Du Mont in Washington, D.C.," 381.

29. See Webb, *About My Father's Business*, on various churches.

30. Hoover to Michaux, letter, 94-HQ-4-2848-7.

31. Quoted in *Associated Negro Press*, press release, "Is the Negro Treated Right in America?" June 4, 1958, in Chicago Historical Society, Claude A. Barnett Papers; Williams, "The Socio-Economic Significance of the Store-Front Church Movement in the United States since 1920," 48–49, 90; quote from FBI Informant in FBI File, 100-WFO-28088.

32. Quoted in *Associated Negro Press*, press release, "Is the Negro Treated Right in America," June 4, 1958.

33. Quoted in *ibid.* Caps in original.

34. On the concept of religio-racial, see Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2017). Historians of the twentieth-century United States such as Barbara Savage, Mary L. Dudziak, and Carol Anderson have persuasively shown the centrality of race—both whiteness and blackness—and the importance of black clergy and Protestantism during the Cold War. However, scholars specifically examining the relationship between U.S. religion and the Cold War have been very slow to recognize the same. See, for example, Kruse, *One Nation under God*; Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*.

35. Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 56. See also Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the*



*African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

36. Barbara Dianne Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938–1948* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 144.

37. L. B. Nichols to Mr. Tolson, U.S. Department of Justice memo, "Memorandum for Mr. Tolson," September 16, 1941, 94-4-2848-2; Nichols to Tolson, memo, June 27, 1943, 94-4-2848-4. Italics mine.

38. Dean Fischer, "J. Edgar Hoover Speaks Out with Vigor," *Time* 96, (December 14, 1970), 28; Michaux to Hoover, letter, May 31, 1952; Hoover to Michaux, letter, June 4, 1952, 94-HQ-4-2848-12. There were a few black employees who were appointed "special agents," but as SAC Wayne Davis noted, these men did not meet the Bureau requirements of a college degree nor graduation from the FBI academy. Instead, "They were actually drivers and messengers and gardeners and what have you." Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI, Inc., 2008, "Interview of Former Special Agent of the FBI Wayne G. Davis, Brian R. Hollstein, Interviewer," June 18, 2008, 27; "Director Hoover and Diversity in the FBI," April 23, 2016, accessed July 27, 2017, <http://jerriwilliams.com/episode-013-wayne-davis-director-hoover-and-fbi-diversity/>. The DOJ finally forced Hoover's hand in 1962 when he sent two black men, Aubrey C. Lewis and James Burrow, to the FBI training academy and hired them as Special Agents. On Special Agent Lewis, see "The Negro in the FBI," *Ebony*, September 1962. SAC Wayne Davis and Special Agent John Carey followed in 1963. For more on Hoover and hiring black agents, see Powers, *Secrecy and Power*; Demaris, *The Director*; Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *The F.B.I. A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

39. Hoover to Michaux, letter, April 18, 1956, Bureau File, 94-4-2848-22. Italics mine.

40. On white attendees, see *Washington Evening Star*, July 10, 1938, 3A; *Variety*, September 18, 1934, 52; *Radio Guide*, May 5, 1934, and May 12, 1934.

41. *Washington Evening Star*, July 10, 1938, 3A, and July 11, 1938.

42. On Terrell's leadership, see Beverly W. Jones, "Before Montgomery and Greensboro: The Desegregation Movement in the District of Columbia, 1950–1953," *Phylon* 43, (1982). On Simeon Booker, see Howard

Bray, *The Pillars of the Post: The Making of a News Empire in Washington* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1980), 165. See also Simeon Booker and Carol McCabe Booker, *Shocking the Conscience: A Reporter's Account of the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 43–46.

43. Reprinted in *Congressional Record Appendix*, 109 Congress, August 5, 1963, A4978–A4979.

44. J. Edgar Hoover, "A Christmas Message," *Investigator*, Christmas 1961. Italics mine.

45. J. Edgar Hoover, "Message from the Director to all Law Enforcement Officials," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, November 1964.

46. J. Edgar Hoover, "Wholly Loyal," *Crusader*, June 1961, 15.

47. *Report of the Department of Justice Task Force to Review the FBI Martin Luther King, Jr., Security and Assassination Investigations*, January 11, 1977, 113–14, found in Martin Luther King, Jr., Main File, 100–106670 Section 103; Cartha D. DeLoach, *Hoover's FBI: The Inside Story by Hoover's Trusted Lieutenant* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1997), 202. See also FBI Secret Monograph, *The Communist Party and the Negro, 1953–1956*, October 1956; Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King, Jr.*

48. *Report of the Department of Justice Task Force to Review the FBI Martin Luther King, Jr., Security and Assassination Investigations*, 116–18; U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans*, Book 3, 104–7.

49. Fischer, "J. Edgar Hoover Speaks Out with Vigor"; DeLoach, *Hoover's FBI*, 200.

50. William C. Sullivan to Alan H. Belmont, memo, "Communist Party, USA, Negro Question; IS-C," August 30, 1963, and William C. Sullivan to Alan H. Belmont, unofficial memo, "Communist Party, USA, Negro Question; Communist Influence in Racial Matters," September 25, 1963, 100–106670, in *Report of the Department of Justice Task Force to Review the FBI Martin Luther King, Jr., Security and Assassination Investigations*; U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Supplementary*

*Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, Book 3*, 104–7, 134–35; William C. Sullivan to Alan H. Belmont, memo, “Samuel Riley Pierce, Jr.,” January 8, 1964, reprinted in full in Victor Navasky, “The FBI’s Wildest Dream,” *Nation* 226, (June 17, 1978), 716–18.

51. See Hoover’s handwritten comments on William C. Sullivan to Alan H. Belmont, memo, “Samuel Riley Pierce, Jr.,” January 8, 1964, reprinted in full in Navasky, “The FBI’s Wildest Dream.” See also Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King Jr.*, 68.

52. U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, Book 3*, 81–82, 108; Sullivan to Belmont, memo “Samuel Riley Pierce, Jr.,” January 8, 1964. For a periodization of the Bureau’s campaign against King, see Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 100.

53. William C. Sullivan to Alan H. Belmont, unofficial memo, “Communist Party, USA, Negro Question; Communist Influence in Racial Matters,” September 25, 1963, 100-106670 in *Report of the Department of Justice Task Force to Review the FBI Martin Luther King, Jr., Security and Assassination Investigations*.

54. “Sunday Radio Logs,” 1963–1967, *Washington Post, Times Herald*; Transcript of Michaux’s sermon in John F. Kennedy Presidential Library: The White House Central Files, Series, Human Rights–Equality of the Races: Federal Government–Organizations, March on Washington, Folder: Gen Hu 2/Fg. Several white evangelicals including Billy Graham joined Michaux in this view. See, for example, Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*; Curtis Evans, “White Evangelical Protestant Response to the Civil Rights Movement,” *Harvard Theological Review* 102 (April 2009): 245–73.

55. The transcript of King’s speech is available at the King Center archives, see, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/mlk-addresses-national-association-radio-announcers#>. See also Martin Luther King, Jr., “Transcript: Transforming a Neighborhood into a Brotherhood, Recorded Live by R.C.A. Records at the National Association of Television and Radio Announcers Convention–R.C.A. Dinner, Atlanta, Friday, August 11, 1967,” *Jack the Rapper* 13 (January 11, 1989). Only CBS carried live television coverage of the MOW, but only the speeches were televised live, not even the musical performance of Bob Dylan made the

live broadcast. Later, NBC and ABC televised heavily edited recaps of the MOW. King's speech gradually grew in cultural significance. On the importance of radio during the civil rights movement, see Brian Ward, *Radio and the Struggle for Civil Rights in the South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

56. Michaux, Washington, D.C., to President John F. Kennedy, The White House, letter, September 25, 1963, in John F. Kennedy Presidential Library: The White House Central Files, Series, Human Rights–Equality of the Races: Federal Government–Organizations, March on Washington, Folder: Gen Hu 2/Fg.

57. "Louis Martin Oral History Interview I," transcript, May 14, 1969, by David G. McComb; "Louis Martin Oral History Interview II," transcript, June 12, 1986, by Michael L. Gillette, Electronic Copies, LBJ Library; *New York Times*, "Louis E. Martin, 84, Aide to 3 Democratic Presidents," January 30, 1997; Simeon Booker, "New Negro Power Structure in D.C.," *Jet* 27, February 1965, 21. Louis Martin, Deputy Chairman, Democratic National Committee, to Lee C. White, memo, December 4, 1963, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library: The White House Central Files, Series, Human Rights–Equality of the Races: Federal Government–Organizations, March on Washington, Folder: Gen Hu 2/Fg. Martin successfully advised Johnson to nominate Robert Weaver—the first African American to hold a cabinet level position in the White House (the first Secretary of Housing and Urban Development), Thurgood Marshall as the first black Supreme Court justice, and St. Louis native Frankie Freeman—the first black woman appointed to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. For more on Freeman, see her autobiography, Frankie Muse Freeman and Candace O'Connor, *A Song of Faith and Hope: The Life of Frankie Muse Freeman* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, distributed by University of Missouri Press, 2003).

58. On wiretaps and bugs, see U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, Book 3*, 115–23.

59. *New York Times*, November 19, 1962, 21; Cartha D. "Deke" DeLoach Oral History Interview I, transcript, January 11, 1991, Michael L. Gillette, Electronic Copy, LBJ Library. See also, *Washington Post, Times Herald*, November 19, 1964, A1; Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis*, 54–55, 122–27.

60. For one example of Hoover's indirect rebukes of King, see J. Edgar Hoover, "The Role of the F.B.I. in Civil Rights Disputes," *Yale Political*, 2 (August 1963): 12, 31–32; *New York Times*, September 23, 1964, 40.

61. Cartha D. "Deke" DeLoach Oral History Interview I; William C. Sullivan and Bill Brown, *The Bureau: My Thirty Years in Hoover's F.B.I.* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1979), 139; DeLoach, *Hoover's FBI*, 206. See also, *Washington Post*, *Times Herald*, November 19, 1964, A1; Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis*, 122–27. On *Why We Can't Wait*, see Martin Luther King, *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); *New York Times*, May 22, 1964, 32, and July 26, 1964, BR1. On Hoover's penchant to hold grudges and obsession with winning any and all debates, see Powers, *Secrecy and Power*. King also publically criticized Hoover in May 1964. See, for example, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, May 2, 1964, 10.

62. King to J. Edgar Hoover, Western Union telegram, November 19, 1964, in Michael Friedly, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The FBI File*, ed. David Gallen, 1st ed. (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1993), 272; *Washington Post*, *Times Herald*, November 20, 1964, A2; *U.S. News and World Report*, "Martin Luther King's Reaction," November 30, 1964, 58.

63. U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans*, Book 3, 160–61; Sullivan and Brown, 142; Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis*, 124–26; Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The Cointelpro Papers: Documents from the F.B.I.'s Secret Wars against Domestic Dissent* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 97. For the story of one of King's purported paramours, see Georgia Davis Powers, *I Shared the Dream*, 1st ed. (Far Hills, N.J.: New Horizon Press, 1995). The entirety of the FBI's letter to King was recently discovered by Beverly Gage and reprinted in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*. Beverly Gage, "What an Uncensored Letter to M.L.K. Reveals," *New York Times Magazine*, November 11, 2014, accessed November 16, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/16/magazine/what-an-uncensored-letter-to-mlk-reveals.html>.

64. FBI memo, December 1, 1964, in Friedly, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 280–83; Sullivan and Brown, 142; Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis*, 124–26. The Southern Regional Council did indeed release a statement supporting King. See the front page of the

*Norfolk Journal and Guide*, November 28, 1964. A. Phillip Randolph, Whitney Young of the Urban League, Dorothy Height of the NCNW, NAACP head Roy Wilkins, and CORE's James Farmer also publically expressed their support of King and also met with President Johnson. See *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, November 21, 1964, C1; Soon after, however, Wilkins appeared on CBS's *Face the Nation* and called Hoover "a good public servant" and that a call for his dismissal was unnecessary because Hoover had enjoyed a "long and distinguished career." See *Washington Post, Times Herald*, November 23, 1964, A8. Noted Mississippi minister Ed King led a "bi-racial" coalition supporting King and calling for Hoover's resignation. See *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, November 28, 1964, A17.

65. C. D. DeLoach, Washington, D.C., to Mr. Mohr, Washington, D.C., memo, November 23, 1964, Elder L. S. Michaux, Bureau File 94-HQ-4-2848-27; M. A. Jones to Mr. DeLoach, memo, February 24, 1965, Elder Michaux, Negro Religious Leader, Washington, D.C., Bureau File 94-HQ-4-2848-32.

66. Jones to DeLoach, memo, "Elder Michaux Negro Religious Leader Washington D.C.," February 2, 1965, 94-4-2848-32; Cartha D. "Deke" DeLoach Oral History Interview I; Lee C. White Oral History Interview II, transcript, February 18, 1971, by Joe B. Frantz, Electronic Copy, LBJ Library; Interview of Former Deputy Director of the FBI Cartha D. "Deke" DeLoach, transcript, by David G. Binney, May 1, 2007, Electronic Copy, Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI, Inc., Oral History Program; Sullivan and Brown, 61-70; Will Haygood, "The Man from Jet," *Washington Post Magazine*, July 15, 2007. On Crime Records Division, see Buitrago and Immerman, *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been in the F.B.I. Files?*, 171.

67. See U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans*, Book 3, 152; Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis*, 124-26; Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle*, 87-88. Espy, according to Bureau files, swore not to give King another cent. Ben Bradlee, *Newsweek's* Washington bureau chief, refused even to examine the transcript of the recordings, let alone accept it as a news source. According to Bureau files, Bradlee was outraged, stating that if the FBI carried out such acts against King, surely they would do the same to any other person for personal gain. Bradlee informed Attorney

General Nicholas Katzenbach about the whole ordeal who immediately flew to President Johnson's ranch to inform the President. Johnson, in turn, told the FBI that Bradlee could not be trusted. See Bray, *The Pillars of the Post*, 109–10.

68. C. D. DeLoach to Mr. Mohr, memo, "Elder L. S. Michaux," November 23, 1964, Bureau File, 94-HQ-4-2848-27.

69. *Sword of Loyola* Program, November 24, 1964, in J. Edgar Hoover Personal Estate Collection, National Law Enforcement Museum, Washington, D.C.; "Hoover's Sword of Loyola, 1964," *Loyola University Chicago Digital Special Collections*, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.lib.luc.edu/specialcollections/exhibits/show/loyola-traditions/item/320>.

70. Speech reprinted in *Congressional Record Appendix*, February 4, 1965, 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, Record A511.

71. On the Reverend Archibald Carey, see Dennis C. Dickerson, *African American Preachers and Politics: The Careys of Chicago* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011). See the similar accounts of the meeting in U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, 164–68; DeLoach to Mohr, letterhead memo, "Martin Luther King Appointment with Director 3:35 p.m., 12-1-64," December 2, 1964, and J. Edgar Hoover to President Johnson, letter, December 2, 1964, both in Friedly, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 294–307; Andrew J. Young, Jr., Oral History Interview I, transcript, June 18, 1970, by Thomas H. Baker, Electronic Copy, LBJ Library; Cartha D. "Deke" DeLoach Oral History Interview I, DeLoach, *Hoover's FBI*, 210; Sullivan and Brown, 101, 140; *Washington Post, Times Herald*, December 2, 1964, A1, and December 5, 1964, E15. See also Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis*, 122–24, 129–30, 271.

72. *Ibid.* Years later Hoover boasted, "I never called him reverend." See Fischer, "J. Edgar Hoover Speaks Out with Vigor." FBI phone taps revealed that King said of his meeting with Hoover, "the old man talks too much." See Sullivan and Brown 140–41. On Hoover's monologues, see, for example, James Phelan, "Hoover of the FBI," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 25, 1965, 23–33; Demaris, *The Director*.

73. *Washington Post, Times Herald*, December 2, 1964, A1, and December 5, 1964, E15; also in Friedly, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 291. On McCartney, see Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 130.

74. U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, 82.

75. C. D. DeLoach to Mr. Mohr, memo, "Elder Michaux Negro Religious Leader," December 9, 1964, Bureau File 94-HQ-4-2848.

76. Some newspapers did mention the letter, but no major paper published it in full. See, for example, the front page of the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, January 9, 1965, 1, and *Washington Post, Times Herald*, December 23, 1964, C1. The full letter is contained in Bureau File 94-HQ-2848-29. On Bureau report, see Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 133.

77. Michaux to Martin Luther King, letter, December 22, 1964, Bureau File 94-HQ-2848-29.

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*

80. C. D. DeLoach to Mr. Mohr, memo, "Elder L. S. Michaux," November 23, 1964. Bureau File, 94-HQ-4-2848-27. See also FBIHQ 105-340953. In addition to the FBI's civil rights activities, DeLoach also provided Michaux with the "current home address" of his old friend and ally Special Agent Louis Nichols. See, C. D. DeLoach to Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux, letter, November 30, 1964, Bureau File 94-HQ-42848-26; Michaux to Martin Luther King, letter, December 22, 1964, Bureau File 94-HQ-2848-29; J. Edgar Hoover to Michaux, letter, January 4, 1965, Bureau File 94-HQ-42848-30.

81. C. D. DeLoach to Mr. Hoover, memo, December 23, 1964, Bureau File 94-HQ-4-2848-29.

82. *Washington Post, Times Herald*, January 4, 1965, A-20; also in Bureau File 94-4-2848-30.

83. J. Edgar Hoover to Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux, letter, January 4, 1965, Bureau File 94-4-2848-30.

84. M. A. Jones to Mr. DeLoach, memo, February 24, 1965, Elder Michaux, Negro Religious Leader, Washington, D.C., Bureau File 94-HQ-4-2848-32; U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence*



*Activities, Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, Book 3, 120. On Michaux's admittance to receiving letters that "applauded King," see Parke Rouse, Jr., "Happy Am I!" Commonwealth, July 1965, 30–33.*

85. J. Edgar Hoover to Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux, letter, February 24, 1965, Bureau File 94-4-2848-31.

86. *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 6, 1965, 5.

87. *Chicago Defender*, May 1, 1965, 8.

88. *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, March 13, 1965, 9.

89. *Chicago Defender*, January 2, 1965, 9.

90. *New York Times*, April 2, 1965, 24; *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1965, 2; Martin Luther King, Jr., "Let My People Vote," n.d., in Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1954–1970, Part 1: Records of the President's Office, Folder: 27:35, May 1964–School Desegregation, a Few Years After. King Library and Archive at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia; DeLoach to Mohr, memo, April 1, 1965, 94-4-2848-3.

91. *New York Times*, April 2, 1965, 24; *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 10, 1965, 1; U.S. Department of Justice FBI, internal security memo, Baltimore, Maryland, April 5, 1965, Reverend Lightfoot Solomon Michaux, Bureau File 100-442529896. The *Afro-American* stated the protest was smaller than one hundred. I have chosen to go with the estimates of the *New York Times* and the FBI field report as their estimates agree.

92. *New York Times*, April 2, 1965, 24. U.S. Department of Justice FBI, internal security memo, Baltimore, Maryland, April 5, 1965. *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 10, 1965, 1.

93. On wiretaps and the Bureau's shift in focus, see U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, Book 3, 116, 121. On James Harrison, see Paul Good, "An Uneasy Life for Man who Spied on King," Atlanta Journal-Constitution, November 16, 1980, 1A, 16A; Garrow, *The F.B.I. and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 174–75, 286 n.2.*

94. DeLoach to Mohr, memo, "Dr. Archibald J. Cary, Jr., Reverend Martin Luther King," May 19, 1965, 161-2040-30.

95. *Washington Post, Times Herald*, February 17, 1965, A8. In the Harris poll, 21 percent were not sure, while 13 percent agreed with neither. King's overall public approval rating dipped tremendously when he publicly condemned America's involvement in the Vietnam War. At the SCLC Convention on August 12, 1965, King made a conciliatory and tepid statement calling for an end to war in Vietnam, noting there was no "blame" to be had. However, he infamously indicted the United States for the war in Vietnam at New York's Riverside Church on April 4, 1967. For 1965 statement, see [http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/statement\\_by\\_king\\_at\\_the\\_sclc\\_convention.1.html](http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/statement_by_king_at_the_sclc_convention.1.html). For 1967 sermon, see [http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/kingweb/publications/speeches/Beyond\\_Vietnam.pdf](http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/kingweb/publications/speeches/Beyond_Vietnam.pdf)

96. Jones to DeLoach, memo, "District of Columbia Crime Commission," May 13, 1965, 62-110232-6; Hoover to Attorney General, memo "District of Columbia Crime Commission Suggested List of Names," May 14, 1965, 62-110232-3. *Washington Post, Times Herald*, July 17, 1965, A1, A5. Johnson, despite Hoover's recommendation, did not choose the preacher.

97. On black COINTELPRO, see Director to SAC Albany, Counter-Intelligence Program Black Nationalist-Hate Groups Internal Security, August 25, 1967, 100-448006-1, and Director to SAC Albany, Airtel memo, "Counter-Intelligence Program Black Nationalist-Hate Groups Racial Intelligence," March 4, 1968, 100-448006-17, both in Churchill and Vander Wall, *The Cointelpro Papers*, 92, 108-11. On the Bureau's renewed effort to recruit "racial informants," see FBI Internal Monograph, *Development of Racial Informants*, September 1967. On the death of Mrs. Michaux, see *Washington Post, Times Herald*, October 29, 1967, D4; J. Edgar Hoover to Michaux, Washington, D.C., letter, October 30, 1967, Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux File, Bureau File 94-4-2848-34.

98. *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 7, 1968, A1; *Washington Post, Times Herald*, October 21, 1968, A1.

99. *Washington Post, Times Herald*, October 21, 1968, A1; October 22, 1968, B4; October 28, 1968, B8; *Journal and Guide*, November 2, 1968, B27.

100. Director to SAC Albany, Airtel memo, "Counter-Intelligence Program Black Nationalist-Hate Groups Racial Intelligence," March 4, 1968, 100-448006-17, in Churchill and Vander Wall, *The Cointelpro Papers*,

108–11; J. Edgar Hoover to Ruth Michaux, Washington, D.C., letter, October 21, 1968, Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux File, Bureau File 94-4-2848-35, italics mine; *Journal and Guide*, November 2, 1968, B27.

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**ABSTRACT** This article explains how the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) partnered with African American minister Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux to discredit and neutralize Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. The Elder, the nation's first minister (black or white) to have his own weekly television show, colluded with the Bureau to shape public opinion against King and cast doubt upon King's religious commitments and activities. Michaux was, what I call, a Bureau Clergyman: a minister who was an FBI "Special Service Contact" or on the Bureau's "Special Correspondents Lists." Far from secret informants, black and white male clergy in these official Bureau programs enjoyed very public and cooperative relationships with the FBI and were occasionally "called into service" to work in concert with the FBI. The FBI called upon Michaux and he willingly used his status, popular media ministry, and cold war spirituality to publically scandalize King as a communist and defend the Bureau against King's criticisms. In the end, the Elder demonized King, contested calls for black equality under the law, and lionized the FBI as the keeper of Christian America. The story moves the field beyond the very well known narratives of the FBI's hostility towards religion and reveals how the Bureau publicly embraced religion and commissioned their clergymen to help maintain prevailing social arrangements. Michaux's relationship with the FBI also offers a window into the overlooked religious dimensions of the FBI's opposition to King, even as it highlights how black clergy articulated and followed competing ideologies of black liberation during the civil rights movement.

*Keywords:* The Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, Elder Michaux, Martin Luther King, Jr., Televangelism, Surveillance