

50 years later: Newsday's MLK assassination coverage

By Newsday staff

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On April 4, 1968, civil rights icon the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated outside the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. King was in Memphis to support a sanitation workers' strike, and although his safety had become a constant concern, according to a top aide King said only the day before, "I'd rather be dead than afraid." Fifty years later, we mark the occasion by taking a look at Newsday's coverage from the April 5, 1968 edition.

Advertisement

Newsday's cover

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DEATH IN MEMPHIS Less than an hour after the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was shot to death in Memphis, his wife, Coretta, above, nearly in a state of shock, is led from a car near her Atlanta home last night. In one of the last photos before his death, the Rev. Dr. King, left, receives court order Wednesday barring a protest march in Memphis. (Stories, other photos on Pages 2, 5, 46, 86-90 and 1A.)

Bullet Kills Rights Chieftain In Tenn.; Hunt White Man

Story on Page 2

In one of his last photos, King is smiling and looking undeterred upon receiving a court order the day before barring a protest march in Memphis, Tenn. Coretta Scott King is led from a car near her Atlanta home less than an hour after her husband's death.

Martin is dead. God help us all. We kill our conscience, we cut open our soul.
—James Farmer, former national director of CORE

Sniper Kills King in Tenn.



Memphis Police Stand Guard Last Night on Balcony of Motel Where the Rev. Dr. King Was Shot

UPI Telephoto

White Suspect Being Hunted

Associated Press

Memphis, Tenn.—The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., apostle of nonviolence in the civil rights movement, was killed here yesterday, apparently by a white sniper.

Police issued a bulletin for a dark-haired white man from the Memphis, Tenn., Police Chief Frank Holloman announced early today that "certain evidence has been found which we believe will be helpful in apprehending the assassin."

Holloman said the assassin was a white male, between 26 and 32 years of age, standing six feet tall and weighing 165-175 pounds.

Police radios said had dark to sandy hair, medium brown skin, dark eyes and was wearing a black suit and white shirt.

On his arrival in Memphis, Clark said that "substantial leads" had been developed in the search for the killer.

He said he had been in touch with the FBI and the one lead "We've got some substantial leads," Clark said, after flying here from Washington. He said he was "very hopeful" that the assassin would be apprehended.

The 39-year-old Nobel Peace Prize winner was struck by a single bullet from a 30.06 Remington pump rifle with a telescopic sight, fired from the window of a communal bathroom in a flophouse across the street from his hotel. He was standing on the balcony of the Lorraine

The scene in Memphis

Before the world knew the name James Earl Ray — who was arrested two months later at a London airport — police were looking for a young, dark-haired white man leaving the scene. King was struck by a single bullet from a 30.06 Remington pump rifle with a telescopic sight, fired from the window of a communal bathroom in a flophouse across the street from his hotel.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson said he and others in the Rev. Dr. King's party were getting ready to go to dinner when the shooting occurred.

"King was on the second-floor balcony of the motel," the Rev. Mr. Jackson said. "He had just bent over. If he had been standing up, he wouldn't have been hit in the face."

The Rev. Dr. King had just told Ben Branch: "My man, be sure to sing 'Blessed Lord' tonight and sing it well." A shot then rang out, the Rev. Mr. Jackson said. The Rev. Mr. Jackson said the only sound the Rev. Dr. King uttered after that was: "Oh!"

LI Negroes Recall JFK, Mourn King

By Mike Quinn and Bill Kaufman

Mrs. Josie Ward, a Negro, sat in a front pew of the Holy Cross Baptist Church in North Bellmore, N.Y., and her voice trembled to crack as she talked and tears were visible in her eyes. "It shock me up, it's terrible," she said. "It's like when President Kennedy died, yes like President Kennedy."

Members of the church choir were reciting a spiritual for the coming Sunday day, "Jesus Paid It All." "When He Calls My Name," it went: "I want to be ready/ for that day/ for that day/ I want to be ready/ for that day when He calls my name."

Other Negroes on Long Island also likened the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. to that of President John F. Kennedy, at the corner of 73rd and Clark Ave., Farmingdale, said: "It's just one of those tragic things. We're all sorry when one of those things happens, like when President Kennedy died. King was a great leader."

John Head, 23, a Hofstra University student, of 100 Foster St., Glen Cove, said: "I had a lot of respect for him. In the summer, I would look to him when I felt I was being wronged and he would hold me back from violence. I can say he was a man of peace and this is a



LI Whites Tell of Grief, Fear

By Mai Karman and Jerry Parker

A number of white Long Islanders expressed sorrow last night over the death of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., and some also said they feared that his assassination would touch off violence across the nation.

"Horror, just horror, that's my reaction. It's a disgrace," said Mrs. Kay Sander, a white Queensbury woman. "I can say that he was a great admirer of his, but he was a man of peace and this is a

terrible, terrible thing that has happened to him." Students at Hofstra University spontaneously organized a memorial service on the steps of the university library this morning, and the Episcopalian Bishop of Long Island, the Rev. Jonathan C. Sherman, called for prayers at all churches in the diocese Sunday, "to thank God for this courageous soldier of peace and equal rights, for his work and his witness, our share in the prejudice and complacency that resulted in his death . . ."

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Friday, April 5, 1968

LIers react

Newsday published separate stories with reactions from African-American and white Long Islanders.

From the story titled, "LI Negroes Recall JFK, Mourn King"

*John Head, 23, a Hofstra University student, said: "King had a lot planned for the summer. I would look to him when I felt I was being wronged and he would hold me back from violence. The same thing was true of Kennedy. They were killed because they did not believe in white supremacy."

*An 18-year-old electronics technician in New Cassel, who did not want to be identified, spoke of the Rev. Dr. King's death.

"I'll put it this way," the youth said, "he was the ice for the long hot summer." The young man added, "We're going to see the Civil War over again. It's going to make the [Black] Muslims stronger. There was another Martin Luther who preached for peace. After he died, there was war too."

*A group of Negroes were watching a newscast on television in Al and Mel's Variety Store in Westbury. Barbara Nelson, a beautician, said, "I think it means more violence, possibly here ... and other places."

George Mack, another of those watching the broadcast sadly observed: We just lost a great man. He hated nobody. It's as bad as when President Kennedy died."

From the story titled, "LI Whites Tell of Grief, Fear"

**"Horror, just horror, that's my reaction. It's a disgrace," said Mrs. Kay Sanker, a white Oceanside housewife. "No, I can't say I was a great admirer of his, but he was a man of peace and this is a terrible, terrible thing that has happened to him."

*Said Joseph Elliot, a bartender in Baldwin: "It's awful. Those southerners, they're wacky anyway. He shouldn't have gone down there."

**"I felt he was one of the few guys trying to look after the problem without violence," said Ralph Hess, 37, of Valley Stream, an airlines employee who was spending the evening at a Baldwin bowling alley.

"It's going to hurt," he said, "I'm afraid there's going to be a lot of trouble."

LBJ Summons Rights Leaders, Pleads for Rejection of Violence

Combined News Services

Washington—President Johnson called on all Negro men and all races—to "stand their ground to deny violence; to stand their ground to win its victory" in the wake of the slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The President's statement was issued after a hastily summoned meeting at the White House of civil rights leaders, government officials and members of Congress.

Great personal tragedy struck the South when news of his son's death at the death of the Negro apostle of non-violence, assassinated by a gunman last night in Memphis, reached him. He said he had been in absence his plans to fly to Honolulu later in the day for Vietnam policy talks.

The President said that when he heard last night "the terrible news of Dr. King's death my heart went out to his people especially to the young Americans who,

I know, must wonder if they are to be denied a fullness of life because of the color of their skin." He said he had called to the White House the leaders of the



VIGIL. Part of a group of several hundred young Negroes in Austin, Tex., kneel in prayer last night in memory of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Their demonstration took place in front of the Texas State Capitol.

LBJ reacts

President Lyndon Johnson said that when he heard "the terrible news of Dr. King's death my heart went out to his people — especially to the young Americans who, I know, must wonder if they are to be denied a fullness of life because of the color of their skin."

His statement was issued after a hastily summoned meeting at the White House of civil rights leaders, government officials and members of Congress. He said he had called to the White House the leaders of the Negro community for consultation, and went on to say: "No words of ours — no words of mine — can fill the void of the eloquent voice that has been stilled."

Johnson Leads Tributes to Dr. King

—Continued from Page 5
Luther King. But more important, say a few for our own country, which all of us lost."

Richard M. Nixon—"Dr. King's death is a great personal tragedy for everyone who knew him and a great tragedy for the whole nation."

Sen. George J. McCarthy (D-Minn.)—

"Not only have his people lost a noble and good man but all people, especially Americans, have lost a great friend who can only grieve."

Wilkins, executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, added, "The whole thing strikes you as very stupid on the part of each side. They want the application of the principles of Dr. King to the whole nation with this violent and senseless act. That's where Dr. King's doctrine of nonviolence right there in his face. They shot him down like a dog."

Former, former national director of the Congress of Racial Equality, stressed that the killing of Dr. King must not lead to more bloodshed. Farmer said in a prepared statement: "We kill our con-

science, we cut open our soul. I can't say what is in my heart—anger, fear, love for him and sorrow for his family and the friends of black people."

Humphrey predicted that the slaying of the civil rights leader will bring new strength to the cause for which King fought. Humphrey said, "The cause which he represented will now find new strength. Fall and equal opportunity shall be his living monument."

King spoke to a predominantly Negro audience to pay for King's family, "more important," he added, "than a career for our own children." The son of Dr. King, who was in Indianapolis on the last leg of a three-city presidential campaign swing through Indiana. In an envelope, King wrote: "I am deeply shocked in my own heart the same kind of feeling. A member of my family was killed. He died by a white man who has been made an effigy in the United States to go beyond this. What we need in the United States is . . . a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer in our country, whether they be white or whether they be black."

Former Vice President Nixon sent a telegram to Mrs. King which said: "Dr. King's death is a great personal tragedy for everyone who knew him and a great tragedy for the nation."

McCarthy, a close friend of the Rev. Dr. King, called the assassination a "tragedy for all Americans."

McCloskey, former presidential campaign speech in San Francisco, asked for a moment's silence dedicated to the Rev. Dr. King.

Other reactions registered throughout the country included:

George Wallace called it a "senseless, regressive and backward step."

Sen. James O. Eastland (D-Miss.)—

"Violence is to be deplored. It does not solve anything."

Biggs (D-La.)—"Violence has no place in America. Anywhere. By anybody."

Jackie Robinson—"Oh my God, I'm frightened. I pray to God this doesn't end up in the street."

Whitney Young, executive director of the National Urban League, "We pay tribute to Dr. King. We shall hear its call as long as love and justice have any claim on our hearts."

Dignitaries react

***Richard Nixon**: "Dr. King's death is a great personal tragedy for everyone who knew him and a great tragedy for the nation."

***Jackie Robinson**: "Oh my God, I'm frightened. I pray to God this doesn't end up in the street."

***James Meredith**, first African-American student at the University of Mississippi: "This is America's answer to the peaceful, nonviolent way of obtaining rights in this country."

*Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP: "The whole thing strikes you as very stupid on the part of crackpots. They've upset the applecart of the President, of the Congress and of the whole nation with this violent and senseless act. They threw Dr. King's doctrine of nonviolence back in his face. They shot him down like a dog."

*Nassau County Executive Eugene Nickerson: "What a terrible tragedy. The voice which spoke for peace and for freedom has been stilled. But we shall hear its call as long as love and justice have any claim on our hearts."

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