



Written by [John F. McManus](#) on January 4, 1999

## Honoring the King Myth

In 1983, shortly after Congress approved the bill which would create a national holiday honoring the late civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., former New Hampshire Governor Meldrim Thomson sent a letter to his old friend Ronald Reagan, urging the president not to sign the bill for a holiday honoring “the memory of a man of immoral character whose frequent associations with leading agents of communism is well established.”



In response to Thomson, the president wrote: “On the national holiday you mentioned, I have the reservations you have, but here the perception of too many people is based on an image, not reality. Indeed, to them the perception *is* reality.” (Emphasis in original.) In other words, Reagan knew that Martin Luther King, Jr. was, in reality, unworthy of national adulation. Nonetheless, on November 2, 1983, he put his signature on the bill and the holiday became law.

### Communist Connections

Since, as Reagan candidly observed, the perception of King had become the reality, it makes sense to go back and look at the stark reality of the man J. Edgar Hoover once dubbed “the most notorious liar in the country.” During the Kennedy administration, King’s connections with Communists were well known to both JFK and his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy. In fact, Bobby Kennedy — with his liberal credentials overflowing — directed the FBI to institute surveillance of King, including wiretaps of telephone calls. While much of the information gathered by the FBI remains sealed by court order until 2027, some of it has come to light.

On December 8, 1975, for instance, the *Washington Post* pinpointed New York attorney Stanley Levinson as the “important secret member of the Communist Party” who was discovered by the FBI to have been King’s mentor, financier, and confidante for 12 years. The Levinson relationship began during King’s meteoric rise to national prominence. In her memoirs, King’s widow described Levinson’s contributions to her husband’s work as “indispensable.” Levinson even wrote speeches for King.

In 1957, perhaps stimulated by Levinson, King attended and taught at a training school in Tennessee where he was photographed with Communists Carl and Anne Braden, Abner Berry, and Aubrey Williams.

In 1960, King hired one Hunter Pitts O’Dell to his staff. When O’Dell’s position as a member of the National Committee of the Communist Party was revealed in 1961, King supposedly fired him. But it turned out that rather than discharging this key Red, he had transferred and promoted O’Dell to a higher post within King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference. When O’Dell was again exposed, King went through the same routine of announcing his dismissal. But a check by United Press International found him still employed by King’s organization.

### Stumping for Hanoi

On April 4, 1967, King demonstrated the influence Communists in his organization (such as “principal



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aide" Fred Shuttlesworth) had enjoyed when he savaged U.S. policy in Vietnam during a fiery speech at Riverside Church in New York. King went so far as to liken the conduct of U.S. forces in Vietnam to that of the "Germans ... in the concentration camps of Europe." *Life* magazine characterized the speech as "a demagogic slander that sounded like a script for Radio Hanoi." Syndicated black columnist Carl Rowan wrote that King "has alienated many of the Negro's friends and armed the Negro's foes." Leftist John Roche of Americans for Democratic Action fame claimed that the speech showed that King had "thrown in with the commies." The *Washington Post* commented that the speech "had diminished his usefulness to his cause, to his country, and to his people."

But not everyone was appalled by King's inflammatory rhetoric. Writing in the Communist Party's *Political Affairs*, Party public relations chief Arnold Johnson enthusiastically quoted King as describing the United States as the "greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." The Communist press had earlier extolled King's violence-producing marches and demonstrations, events that customarily led to property damage and loss of life in black neighborhoods.

In October 1988, J.A. Parker of the Washington-based Lincoln Institute, an organization of black conservatives, refused to buy into the phony image of King and pointed to evidence showing that King had been "under communist discipline." Parker insisted that the "King holiday is an insult to all Americans — black or white." And he launched a drive to have Congress repeal it. A Congress representing truth and the interests of all Americans would do exactly that.



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