



How did people view Martin Luther King after his death?

King was the target of many threats during his life, but this didn't stop him from carrying on his work. In April 1968 he was planning a campaign to focus attention on the poverty of black and white Americans. He took time out to visit Memphis, Tennessee, to lead a march in support of a strike of local dustmen. On 4 April he was shot dead on a motel balcony.

Despite appeals from the federal government and other civil rights leaders for calm, there were outbreaks of violence and unrest across America. There was a day of national mourning on 7 April. All flags flew at half-mast. There were processions and gatherings in stadiums and parks in New York, Newark, Houston, San Francisco, Pittsburgh and other cities in honour of Dr King.

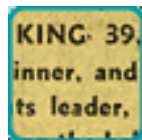
James Earl Ray was the main suspect in the murder. Ray escaped abroad and was stopped at London's Heathrow Airport on 8 June. He pleaded guilty in March 1969 and was given a 99-year prison sentence. He later proclaimed his innocence, saying he was a victim of a government cover-up, but the case was not reopened. Many conspiracy theories have come out since, suggesting that King was killed because of his opposition to the Vietnam War or that J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, wanted to dispose of King.

After the assassination, President Johnson declared: "Martin Luther King has been struck down by the violence against which he preached and worked. Yet the cause for which he struggled has not fallen". Did other people feel the same? What were their reactions to the murder? How did they sum up their feelings about Martin Luther King and his work for civil rights?

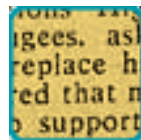
Examine these sources to find out more:



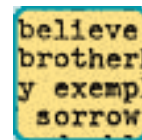
Robert Kennedy's announcement of the death of King



News report of the assassination, 5 April 1968



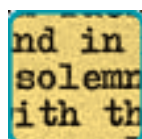
Reaction from world leaders, 6 April 1968



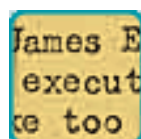
Letter to the United Nations from the US government



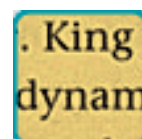
President Johnson's statement on the death of King



Report on the atmosphere in New York, 10 April 1968



Letter about James Earl Ray, 18 July 1968



Men share their memories of Dr King