

## 42nd Annual USC Celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

FEATURING

# MLK/FBI

## A Screening and Conversation with Sam Pollard

Tuesday, January 17, 2023, at 7 p.m.  
Norris Cinema Theatre  
University of Southern California

### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- *MLK/FBI* is a documentary by Sam Pollard. It is the first film to document the extent of the FBI's surveillance and harassment of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Sam Pollard is an award-winning New York-based filmmaker whose many credits include *Lowndes County and the Road to Black Power* (director), *Four Little Girls* (producer), and *When the Levees Broke* (producer).

### THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was one of the leading organizations of the U.S. civil rights movement. Founded in the late 1950s to coordinate civil rights protests across the U.S. South, SCLC was created as an organization of affiliates, with members being community organizations, churches, and other existing groups across the region. SCLC advocated nonviolent direct action such as boycotts and marches. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the SCLC's first president. Other founders and early staff and leaders included Bayard Rustin, Ella Baker, C. K. Steele, and Medgar Evers.

SCLC played a leading role in landmark civil rights campaigns and actions, including the anti-segregation Albany Movement, alongside the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); the Birmingham desegregation campaign; the 1963 march on Washington; and organizing and advocacy that led to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act.

The SCLC is still operating today, as a national, non-sectarian, interfaith advocacy organization committed to nonviolent action to achieve social, economic, and political justice.

### THE FBI

The FBI is the part of the U.S. government that investigates cases where federal laws may have been violated. Its mission is to "protect the American people and uphold the Constitution of the United States." Current priorities stated on the FBI's website include protecting the U.S. from terrorist attacks; foreign intelligence, espionage, and cyber operations; cyber criminal activity; public corruption; transnational criminal enterprises; significant white-collar crime; and significant violent crime. Another current priority named by the agency is protecting civil rights, which the agency pursues through investigating possible violations of federal civil rights laws, including investigating hate crimes and interference with access to healthcare clinics.

USC Visions & Voices USC Cinematic Arts

USC BLACK STAFF  
& FACULTY CAUCUS

USC Student Affairs  
Center for Black Cultural and Student Affairs

USC Fisher  
Museum of Art

The FBI was founded as the Bureau of Investigation (BOI) in 1908. The agency's early concerns included anarchists, in the wake of the 1901 assassination of President William McKinley, corrupt public officials, and gangsters. The FBI received its current name in 1935.

The FBI is a part of the U.S. Department of Justice and a member of the U.S. Intelligence Community. Results of FBI investigations are reported to the U.S. Attorney General, U.S. attorneys' offices in federal judicial districts, and/or the Director of National Intelligence.

## J. EDGAR HOOVER

J. Edgar Hoover was the director of the FBI from 1924 to 1972. He developed the FBI into the powerful government agency we know it as today, instituting processes for selecting and training agents as well as establishing a scientific laboratory for investigating crime and overseeing the agency's operations under eight U.S. presidential administrations.

In the early decades of his leadership of the FBI, Hoover was popular among many Americans for working to protect America from communists, Nazis, and gangsters. In the later years of his tenure, Hoover drew increasing criticism for his authoritarian style of leadership and for persecuting his critics and the civil rights and Leftist movements he deemed radical.

Prior to joining the FBI, Hoover earned degrees in law from George Washington University, was a file reviewer at the Department of Justice, and, as a special assistant to a U.S. Attorney General, oversaw mass arrests and deportations of suspected communists, anarchists, and other "radicals." The conservative Hoover had "a bone-deep antipathy to the American left," wrote Margaret Talbot in a recent *New Yorker* review of the new J. Edgar Hoover biography by Beverly Gage, one of the experts featured in *MLK/FBI*.

After Hoover died, Congress set a term limit of 10 years for FBI directors.

## COINTELPRO

COINTELPRO, or Counterintelligence Program, was an FBI program that was conducted from 1956 to 1971 to disrupt and weaken social movements—or, in the words of Encyclopedia Britannica, "to discredit and neutralize organizations considered subversive to U.S. political stability."

COINTELPRO's targets included the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the American Indian Movement, the Black Panther Party, the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, and the Ku Klux Klan. Surveillance, infiltration of organizations, and anonymous mailings were signature tactics of COINTELPRO.

The secret program was exposed by the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI in 1971 and investigated by a Senate committee in 1975. The committee's report stated, "Many of the techniques used would be intolerable



J. Edgar Hoover in the 1916 George Washington University Law School yearbook.



J. Edgar Hoover at his desk



@USCVandV

VISIONSANDVOICES.USC.EDU

in a democratic society even if all of the targets had been involved in violent activity, but COINTELPRO went far beyond that.” The FBI’s own website says, “COINTELPRO was later rightfully criticized by Congress and the American people for abridging first amendment rights and for other reasons” ([vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro](http://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro)).

## ABOUT SAM POLLARD

Sam Pollard is an Emmy Award winner and Oscar nominee whose 100 films include *Lowndes County and the Road to Black Power* and documentaries for HBO, PBS, and the Discovery Channel such as *Four Little Girls*, *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*, *Slavery by Another Name*, *Sammy Davis, Jr.: I Gotta Be Me*, *ACORN and the Firestorm*, *Why We Hate*, and *Atlanta’s Missing and Murdered: The Lost Children*. Pollard directed two episodes of the groundbreaking television series about the civil rights movement *Eyes on the Prize*. He is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and on the faculty at NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts. Pollard lives in New York City.

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Were you surprised by any of the information presented in the documentary? If so, what surprised you?
- Do you think the FBI is surveilling social justice movements and leaders today? If so, who do you think might be being surveilled, and why?
- Why do you think the FBI sees surveilling social movements as part of its job?
- Is humiliation or morality being used to undermine any leaders today? How so? Why?
- One of the speakers in the documentary says the surveillance of MLK produced “pieces of information we shouldn’t have.” What do you think of the idea of “information we shouldn’t have”? Is there some information that should be private or not publicly known? Why or why not?
- How has history changed how we view Martin Luther King, Jr., and J. Edgar Hoover? Are there government or activist leaders today that you think will be viewed differently by future generations than they are viewed by most Americans today?

## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- *Eyes on the Prize*, a PBS series on the civil rights movement | Streaming on [Kanopy](https://www.kanopy.com/)
- Classes and screenings at the USC School of Cinematic Arts | [cinema.usc.edu](https://cinema.usc.edu)
- Classes in the USC Department of American Studies and Ethnicity | [dornsife.usc.edu/ase](https://dornsife.usc.edu/ase)



Sam Pollard

Photo: Simbarashe Cha

## VOCABULARY CORNER

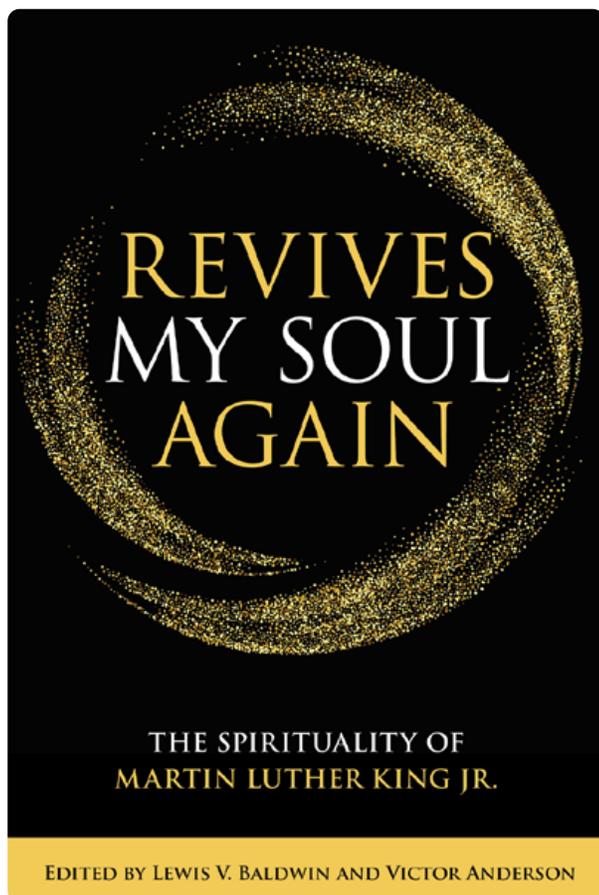
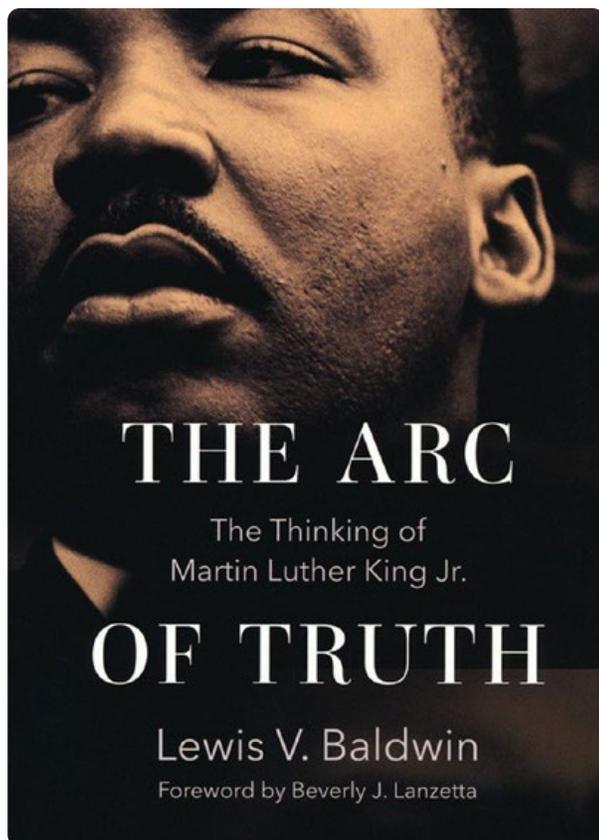
As defined by Merriam-Webster ([m-w.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com/)):

**coalition** – a temporary alliance of distinct parties, persons, or states for joint action

**communism** – a system in which goods are owned in common and are available to all as needed; a theory advocating elimination of private property

**the Left** – those professing views usually characterized by desire to reform or overthrow the established order especially in politics and usually advocating change in the name of the greater freedom or well-being of the common man; a radical as distinguished from a conservative position

**nonviolence** – abstention from violence as a matter of principle; the quality or state of being nonviolent; avoidance of violence



- Upcoming Visions and Voices events, including
  - 1/27–28** [Losing Ground @ 40](#)
  - 2/1** [SOUL! 2023: Producing to Power in the 21st Century](#)
  - 2/8** [Uprooted: The Journey of Jazz Dance—Screening and Conversation](#)
  - 2/15** [A.I.M by Kyle Abraham: An Untitled Love](#)
  - 2/21** [An Evening with Nikole Hannah-Jones](#)

## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

**Christina Snider** of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](https://libraries.usc.edu) but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

### BOOKS

- Lewis V. Baldwin, [The Arc of Truth: The Thinking of Martin Luther King Jr.](#) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022).
- Lewis V. Baldwin and Victor Anderson, [Revives My Soul Again: the Spirituality of Martin Luther King Jr.](#) (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2018).
- David J. Garrow, [The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From “Solo” to Memphis](#) (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2015).
- Gerald McKnight, [The Last Crusade: Martin Luther King, Jr., the FBI, and the Poor People’s Campaign](#) (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

### JOURNALS

- [African American Review](#)
- [Black Scholar](#)
- [Ethnic and Racial Studies](#)
- [Journal of African American History](#)
- [Western Journal of Black Studies](#)

### DATABASES

- [Civil Rights Digital Library](#)
- [Oxford African American Studies Center](#)
- [Black Freedom Struggle in the United States](#)
- [Black Studies Center](#)
- [Say It Plain, Say It Loud: A Century of Great African American Speeches](#)

### STREAMING MEDIA

- [USC Libraries Research Guide—Black American Documentary Films](#)