Martin and Memphis

DOUGLAS YOUNG, A S
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A Baptist Preacher

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a book about King the other night and he said, "Negroes have been shying away from King." The book I wanted, the bookseller said, just wouldn't sell in his store.

King "lost" several other prominent Negro Civil Rights campaigners when he attempted to tie up the Civil Rights movement with the war in Vietnam. The emergence of such radicals as Stokely ("We want black power!") Carmichael and H. Rap Brown — who began grabbing off headlines once reserved for King alone — seemed to have set King off in publicity competition which, it seemed, sometimes placed talk in front of thought. Even as early as the Watts Riots of 1965, certain so-called "militant, young Negroes" were putting King and his non-violent movement down. But, King kept doggedly on. There were times, when he flirted with threats of violence on the part of others — if his non-violent program proved ineffectual; but, in the main, he maintained his course in a near-straight line.

He maintained it, that is, until the other day in Memphis, when a protest march he was leading fell apart. A small number of hoodlum-minded "militants" suddenly decided to get violent, to loot, and to riot. Staging a mini-version of the Watts Riots, they put Martin Luther King to rout. He fled the scene like a defeated warrior. There was a suggestion that the riot had been planned by radicals who want to wipe out King and his non-violent philosophy, all of its merits and gains be damned. There is fear in Washington, D.C., that the same will happen when (if) King stages his "Poor People's" protest demonstration. It has been said, in fact, that Carmichael is counting on just such a fiasco, after which he will seek to "take over" as "the No. 1 Negro leader." Reader's Digest reveals, quoting King-alde Rev. Andrew Young, that King has begged "extremists": "If you can't adopt non-violence and join us, let us try our way until the first of August. And if we fail, then you can take over with another approach."

In any event, Martin Luther King said the day after the Memphis blow-up, "Riots are a part of today's society."

What a terribly-horrible thing for the champion of non-violence to say! Did Mahatma Gandhi ever cop out like that?