

What if MLK knew death was coming?

Dallas-bound writer says too many questions remain about assassination

By **DAVID MARTINDALE**
Special Contributor

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech has always intrigued Steve Berry.

"When you listen to the entire speech that King gave the night before he was assassinated, it sounds like a man who knew he was about to die," the author says.



STEVE BERRY

Berry's best-selling novels, which feature series hero Cotton Malone, are entertaining action thrillers that attach wild "what if?" conspiracy theories to pivotal moments in history.

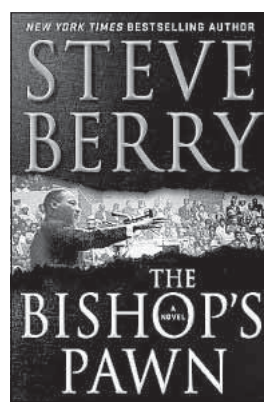
So it was in Berry's nature to ask some provocative questions. "What if King actually did know?" he says. "What if there's more to the story than we ever knew?"

The Bishop's Pawn (Minotaur, \$28.99) proposes that King was the target of an FBI plot overseen by J. Edgar Hoover. The book comes out just weeks ahead of the 50th anniversary of the April 4, 1968, murder in Memphis.

Berry's tale puts an eerie spin on King's final speech. In it, the civil rights crusader spoke of threats against his life and warned of "difficult days ahead." Then he proclaimed, "I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land."

The Bishop's Pawn, the 13th book in the series, also stands out because it's Cotton Malone's origin story. Malone, a former JAG lawyer, gets mixed up in the conspiracy in 2000, 32 years after the fact, during his first dangerous day with the Justice Department.

Berry, whose book tour brings him to Dallas



Plan your life

Steve Berry will discuss *The Bishop's Pawn* at two events Thursday:

■ At 11:30 a.m., he'll appear at Maggiano's Little Italy, 205 NorthPark Center, Dallas. Tickets, \$25-\$50, at bit.ly/DMNBerry.

■ He'll also appear (with *Dallas Morning News* writer Michael Granberry) at 7 p.m. at the Aaron Family Jewish Community Center, 7900 Northaven Road, Dallas. \$40; details at jccdallas.org/main/bookfest.

I would say, no, it's never too early to look at this story. It should have been investigated 50 years ago. It should have been dealt with properly then and it wasn't.

Of course, the book doesn't solve anything. It simply raises questions in folks' minds and points out things that they probably never knew. Hopefully it gets them to want to know a little bit more.

I also feel that I dealt with King's legacy very respectfully. I dealt with his message very respectfully. And the book offers a ray of hope at the end. I was very careful about that.

Why, after 12 books, did you choose to make this Cotton Malone's origin story?

I always intended to show how Cotton began, and this story was perfect for that. Early on, I wrote three novels for Cotton that were never bought, never published. But in the fourth try, *The Templar Legacy* [published in 2006], I changed him all around. That's when he became the Cotton we know now.

I remember how it happened. I was in Copenhagen, sitting at a restaurant called Cafe Norden in the square, and it all just came to me. "He's going to live over here. He's going to have a bookshop over here. He's going to retire from the government, but he's not quite as retired as he seems." Lucky for me, people like following him on his adventures. So I keep writing about him.

David Martindale is an Arlington freelance writer.

on Thursday, talked about *The Bishop's Pawn* by phone from his office in St. Augustine, Fla. **Maybe there wasn't a conspiracy to kill Martin Luther King Jr. But your book makes a compelling case that there should at least have been a more thorough investigation.**

It's the most uninvestigated murder of the 20th century. There has never been an apolitical, objective look at the death of Martin Luther King Jr. All three of the investigations that occurred were tainted in some way.

Some of the biggest questions involve James Earl Ray. There was so much reasonable doubt as to whether he was the assassin. It should have been a defense attorney's dream case. Yet he pleads guilty and then, three days later, recants his guilty plea.

And the biggest question of all has never been answered: Why was King killed? We have no idea. To say it was racism-fueled hatred just isn't enough. You can try to explain it away as "white man, black man, racism, he killed him because of that," but that's a flimsy reason for an assassination plot.

Even after 50 years, many who knew King and were involved in the civil rights movement are still alive and well. Any concern that someone among them might say it's still too early to turn the tragedy of King's death into an entertaining work of fiction?

BOOK REVIEW | HISTORY

Action-packed recounting of siege

'Gibraltar' explains how battle across Atlantic helped Colonies

By **DAVID WALTON**
Special Contributor

Most of us think of the American Revolution exclusively as an American event, and will be surprised, as this reviewer was, to learn that for much of the time the British were fighting the colonists, they were also under siege by the Spanish at Gibraltar — and that the actions that won them the Mediterranean led to their defeat in North America.

Gibraltar, Roy Adkins' and Lesley Adkins' action-packed recounting of "The Greatest Siege in British History" is one of those finely researched, richly detailed, seemingly narrow histories that opens surprising vistas in our understanding of great events.

The 1779-83 siege was Gibraltar's 14th, the second since Spain ceded Gibraltar and the Mediterranean island of Minorca to Britain "in perpetuity" under the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, which ended the War of Spanish Succession.

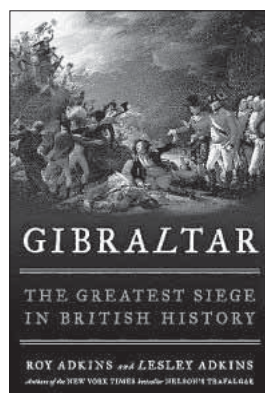
In 1779, Gibraltar was a tiny isthmus three-quarters of a mile wide and 3 miles long, only two-fifths of it habitable. The polyglot town of Gibraltar numbered 3,000 inhabitants, outnumbered by 5,400 military men and 1,500 military wives and children, far more than the land could support. For centuries, Gibraltar had been a trading center, and thrived on commerce.

This was a great age for sketching, letter-writing and journal-keeping, and much of the Adkinses' book derives from contemporary accounts. Setting defines action here, and we learn a great deal, all interesting, about the history, topography, climate, wind patterns and habitat of a place uniquely impregnable, and at the same time uniquely vulnerable — easy to defend, but also easy to isolate.

The authors begin in August 1781, three years into the siege, in England near the Isle of Wight, where a convoy is being loaded to relieve starving Gibraltar. In the center of the harbor lies the HMS Royal George, Britain's great-



A painting by J.S. Copley shows George Augustus Eliot, governor of Gibraltar, on horseback amid fighting.



Gibraltar
The Greatest Siege in British History
Roy Adkins and Lesley Adkins
(Viking, \$30)

est warship, intended to lead the convoy. A woman writing a letter observes that "the great vessel ... seems to sway not a hand-breath, nor to flutter a single pennant."

But in the time it takes her to write that sentence and look back to her window, the great ship has disappeared, silently capsized and sunk in just a few seconds, taking hundreds of people with it. The event was a sensation all over Europe, the greatest shipping disaster in history "until eclipsed by the Titanic."

In opening their book on a point of high drama, the Adkinses

also establish the themes of interconnectivity and indirect consequence that underlie their story. Two hundred pages later, with Gibraltar in desperation, they return to this episode. Command of the convoy has passed to Vice-Admiral George Darby, who for much of the past year had been keeping the French fleet blockaded inside the port of Brest.

As his ships departed, the French realized the blockade had lifted. They sailed for America "with twenty battleships, other warships, and a large convoy of supplies and troop reinforcement. This French fleet would be the deciding factor in forcing the capitulation of the army under Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown later in the year. While Darby's convoy sailed to save Gibraltar, across the Atlantic Britain lost America."

Siege narratives tend to be dreary and rarely draw out the best in human nature. Consider a sample of the Adkinses' chapter titles: "Shortages," "Smallpox," "Scurvy," "Bombardment," "Devastation."

Gibraltar XIV, however, was a very British siege, properly conducted, well fought, dominated by strong personalities and stupendous action sequences — a true epic, and one that would make a terrific miniseries. The Adkinses, whose

earlier books include *Jane Austen's England* and *Nelson's Trafalgar*, know how to extract some nugget of interest from even the bleakest of topics — for instance in how quickly, in just a day or two, victims of the most advanced and crippling cases of scurvy can recover after just a few swallows of lemon juice.

Or, in the celebrations over the French victory at Fort Mahon on Minorca, the invention of Mahonaise sauce, now called mayonnaise.

The Great Siege also contributed significant advances in military technology, marking the first use of exploding shells, or bombs, to demoralize the Spanish troops working on the advance lines. One witness called these "the most hellish device, that has yet been made for the destruction of mankind."

"Worse was to come," the Adkinses write. "Henry Shrapnel was an officer in the Royal Artillery who was at Gibraltar after the siege, and he ... invented a more deadly explosive shell, and consequently the word 'shrapnel' instead of 'splinters' came into general use to describe the lethal metal fragments from explosives."

Ah, progress.

David Walton writes and teaches in Pittsburgh.

AUTHOR TOURS

Elizabeth Kostova will discuss *The Shadow Land* at 2 p.m. Sunday at the Dallas Museum of Art, 1717 N. Harwood St., as part of Arts & Letters Live. Tickets \$25; discounts for educators, students and members of DMA and Dallas Institute of Humanities. dma.org/all or 214-922-1818.

Therone Shellman will sign *Third Eye Awakening* at 1 p.m. Sunday at Half Price Books, 5803 E. Northwest Highway, Dallas.

For Texas Bound II, **Ashley Wood, Jeffrey Schmidt, Julie White and G.W. Bailey** will read works by **Colum McCann, Julia Heaberlin, Marjorie Kemper, Thomas Adams and Harry Hunsicker** at 7:30 p.m. Monday at the Dallas Museum of Art as part of Arts & Letters Live. Tickets \$40; discounts for educators, students and DMA members. dma.org/all or 214-922-1818.

Jack Carr will discuss and sign *The Terminal List* at 7 p.m. Tuesday at Half Price Books, 5803 E. Northwest Highway, Dallas.

Alexandre de Vogüé, co-author of *A Day at Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte*, will speak at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 2719 Routh St., Dallas. Reception at 6 p.m. \$20 with discounts for institute members and students. dallasinstitute.org/a-day-at-chateau-vaux-le-vicomte.

Simone St. James will discuss *The Broken Girls* at 7 p.m. Thursday at Interabang Books, 10720 Preston Road, Dallas.

E.R. Bills will discuss and sign *Texas Far and Wide: The Tornado with Eyes, Gettysburg's Last Casualty, The Celestial Skipping Stone, and Other Tales* at 7 p.m. Thursday at Dallas Heritage Village, 1515 S. Harwood St., Dallas.

Latrenda Chirell Rush (*His Hem: A Touch of His Garment*) and **Shondra M. Quarles** (*The Teacher Who Didn't Want to Go to School*) will take part in the second Annual Write This Way: Indie Author Fest at noon Saturday at Ponchaveli Studios, 914 W. Commerce St., Dallas. bit.ly/dmnwritethis.

Vivian Thomson will discuss *Climate of Capitulation: An Insider's Account of State Power in a Coal Nation* at 7 p.m. March 24 at Interabang Books, 10720 Preston Road, Dallas.

Email mmerschel@dallasnews.com at least two weeks in advance.

BEST-SELLERS

National best-sellers are from *The New York Times* and reflect combined print and e-book sales. Parentheses indicate the book's position last week. A (*) denotes the book's first appearance on the list. A (-) denotes a book that has returned to the list.

FICTION

- (1) **The Great Alone**, by Kristin Hannah
- (*) **Hello Stranger**, by Lisa Kleypas
- (3) **Red Sparrow**, by Jason Matthews
- (2) **Fifty Fifty**, by James Patterson and Candice Fox
- (5) **An American Marriage**, by Tayari Jones
- (4) **The Woman in the Window**, by A.J. Finn
- (6) **Ready Player One**, by Ernest Cline
- (*) **Fatal Chaos**, by Marie Force
- (9) **Little Fires Everywhere**, by Celeste Ng
- (*) **Raspberry Danish Murder**, by Joanne Fluke
- (*) **One Last Time**, by Corinne Michaels
- (12) **Before We Were Yours**, by Lisa Wingate
- (8) **Still Me**, by Jojo Moyes
- (*) **Ruthless**, by Lisa Jackson
- (-) **The Fix**, by David Baldacci

NONFICTION

- (*) **I'll Be Gone in the Dark**, by Michelle McNamara
- (*) **Skin in the Game**, by Nassim Nicholas Taleb
- (1) **Educated**, by Tara Westover
- (2) **Fire and Fury**, by Michael Wolff
- (4) **Enlightenment Now**, by Steven Pinker
- (6) **Killers of the Flower Moon**, by David Grann
- (3) **Obama**, by Pete Souza
- (5) **Astrophysics for People in a Hurry**, by Neil deGrasse Tyson
- (14) **Born a Crime**, by Trevor Noah
- (11) **Leonardo Da Vinci**, by Walter Isaacson
- (12) **The Last Black Unicorn**, by Tiffany Haddish
- (9) **The Future of Humanity**, by Michio Kaku
- (10) **Horse Soldiers**, by Doug Stanton
- (-) **Sapiens**, by Yuval Noah Harari
- (8) **Everything Happens for a Reason**, by Kate Bowler