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called to testify before Long's subcommittee. Extremely fearful that the Senate probe might uncover the Bureau's electronic activities, both Hoover and Tolson had grown suddenly conservative. Thus when Division Five's memo on the King microphone reached Tolson's desk on January 21, 1966, the Associate Director wrote on it, "Remove this surveillance at once. No one here approved this. I have told Sullivan again not to institute a mike surveillance without the Director's approval." Hoover himself added, "Yes, Right," to Tolson's order, and late that afternoon Sullivan's chief assistant, Joseph A. Sizoo, called New York to order that the bug be removed as soon as possible. New York, however, waited until King and his party left three days later to deactivate the bug. In the interim it recorded much information on King's personal activities, which was duly transcribed. On this note of anticlimax the era of hotel room microphones directed against King came to an end. Never again in the remaining two years of King's life would the Bureau install a microphone surveillance against him.[67]

4

Puritans and Voyeurs—Sullivan, Hoover, and Johnson

Much as chapter 2 drew certain conclusions about the first phase of the FBI's investigation of Dr. King, this chapter will consider questions raised by the story of the second phase of the King case.

In December, 1963, and January, 1964, the Bureau totally redirected its investigation of Dr. King. Throughout 1962 and 1963 the FBI had mainly feared the close relationship between King and Stanley Levison. Beginning in the winter of 1963–64, however, a major transformation took place. Division Five's memoranda began to contain explicit statements about a new purpose. The object now was to "discredit," "neutralize," or "expose" King.[1] Within a few weeks time, the seeming intent of the Bureau's activities changed from a concern with Levison's influence on King to a conscious and explicit

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desire to destroy King as a public figure. Why does this change take place? Why does the Bureau become so strongly committed to destroying King publicly?

There are a number of possibilities. Extending two of the perspectives considered in chapter 2, some observers say that the Bureau's behavior in 1964 and 1965 was simply an intensification of hostility toward King based on either (1) his preceived role as a public critic of the FBI, or (2) his close friendship with the supposedly dangerous Stanley Levison. The problems with each of these suggestions are substantial.

First, the essential weaknesses of the "criticism" case were detailed in chapter 2. Furthermore, the matter of King's public comments about the FBI reemerged only in late April, 1964, more than three months after the marked intensification of the Bureau's activities against him in December and January. Second, the idea that the Bureau's effort to destroy King was in any meaningful way related to King's tie to Levison fails on two points. At no time up through the end of 1965 did the Bureau plot any efforts to destroy or discredit Levison himself. More important, none of the 1964 and 1965 documents expressing the strong wish to ruin King ever really related that desire to King's friendship with Stanley.

Two other hypotheses, each more widely held and better documented, have been put forward. The first of these focuses upon the question of racism; the second stresses the thoroughgoing conservatism of the FBI's political stance.

The racism explanation is quite straightforward. It argues that the Bureau began its investigation of King, added the wiretaps, and then further intensified its activities throughout 1964 and 1965 not because King was a Bureau critic, or because he was connected to Levison, but because he was a black leader, indeed *the* black leader, pure and simple. This explanation has been suggested by a number of former officials and assorted writers. It has gained much acceptance in the black community. Like the criticism argument, this racism thesis comes in two versions—one, that Director Hoover's personal racism was the major factor, and, two, that the Bureau as a whole was thoroughly racist, and that that pervasive attitude was more crucial than anything particular to Hoover.

The Hoover version of this argument has been made most strongly by David Wise, who has written a number of books on the American intelligence community. Wise was heavily influenced by information from none other than William Sullivan. In yet one more effort to minimize his own role in the King case, Sullivan successfully argued to Wise that Hoover's personal racism lay at the bottom of things. After detailing Sullivan's comments that the "real reason was that Hoover disliked blacks," and had excluded them from the FBI, Wise concluded that "the FBI sought to discredit King because J. Edgar Hoover was a racist. Ultimately, Hoover battled King because King was black, and powerful, and his power was growing."[2] Sullivan made similar arguments to others, including the Church Committee, but no one else, including Sullivan himself in his own posthumous book, stated the argument as clearly and strongly as did Wise.[3]

The second version of the racism theory, that a pervasive racism infested the entire FBI, has been promoted by several former Bureau agents who became critics of the FBI and by black writers and leaders. Former agents Jack Levine, Robert Wall, and Arthur L. Murtagh all have spoken of what Wall termed "the endemic racism of the Bureau."[4] Similar explanations for the Bureau's stance in the 1960s, and particularly for its activities against Dr. King, have been suggested by black writers such as John A. Williams[5] and by some of King's former associates, such as Jesse Jackson.[6]

Hoover's racism is so widely documented as to require no extended comment here.[7] Further, the fact that much of the Bureau was hostile to blacks and that very, very few blacks actually worked as FBI agents until the early 1970s is also well proven.[8] Here again, however, an analyst needs to avoid the same error of inference that led many observers to propound the criticism theory: just because the Bureau was hostile to critics, and King was a Bureau critic, does not necessarily mean that that explains the Bureau's hostility toward him. Likewise, the fact that the Bureau and its Director were openly racist, and King was black, and prominent, does not necessarily mean that the effort to destroy him was principally rooted in that matter of skin color and bigotry. A closer look will show that the question of race, like the status of critic, did contribute in a moderate way to the Bureau's antipathy toward King, but that it no more

explains the Bureau's conduct against King in 1964–65 than does the criticism hypothesis make meaningful sense of the events of 1962–63.

One can find some evidence to support the proposition that the Bureau set out to destroy black leaders simply because they were black leaders. One example is the Bureau's conduct toward Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam (NOI), better known as the Black Muslims. The Bureau began wiretap surveillance of Elijah Muhammed's Chicago residence in 1957, with the authorization of Attorney General Herbert Brownell, on the grounds that members of the NOI "disavow allegiance to the United States" and "are taught they need not obey the laws of the United States." Furthermore, the Bureau claimed, "Allegations have been received that its members may resort to acts of violence," and the wiretap "will furnish not only data concerning the fanatical and violent nature of the organization, but also data regarding the current plans of the MCI ["Muslim Cult of Islam"] to expand its activities throughout the United States." When Elijah Muhammad bought a winter home in Arizona in 1961, a wiretap and a microphone were installed there. Both forms of surveillance continued for several years. The bug apparently was removed in June, 1965, and the wiretap a year later. When the Chicago surveillance ended is unclear. Mid-1960s Bureau documents lay heavy stress on the "violently antiwhite" character of the NOI, and both the organization and Elijah Muhammad were targeted for special attention when the Bureau established a "Black Nationalist Hate Group" COINTEL program in 1967 and 1968. The Bureau also had a strong interest in other Muslim leaders, such as Malcolm X, and played assorted COINTEL tricks on the organization as early as the late 1950s.[9] Furthermore, the Muslims were by no means the only black group, nor was Elijah Muhammad the only black leader, who received such close attention. Though Bureau files on the subject have not been released, groups such as SNCC and the Black Panther party also were intensively investigated in the mid- and late-1960s[10] In earlier days the Bureau had spared no effort to uncover "Communist infiltration" of the NAACP.

The public record is not full enough for a complete appraisal of FBI conduct toward the full range of black organizations and leaders. Even so, it is quite apparent that no other black leader came in for

the intensive and hostile attention that Dr. King was subjected to in the mid-1960s. While King certainly was not alone on the Bureau's enemies list, there are some striking indications that the FBI felt positively toward a number of prominent black leaders who were by no means "Toms." Among them were Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, and James Farmer. Though additional files remain to be released, present indications are that none of these other civil rights leaders was viewed with *any* of the antipathy that regularly and strongly was expressed toward King. As the events immediately following Hoover's public attack on King reflect, Bureau executives in their private discussions of how to move against King dropped a number of favorable references to men such as Wilkins.[11] Additionally, another indication that the Bureau's hostility was based on something other than race alone was Sullivan's effort to promote "the right kind" of black leader, someone like the unheralded Sam Pierce.[12] The Bureau and its hierarchy clearly did not express strong hostility toward *all* prominent black leaders, or even toward all black leaders who were in the forefront of the civil rights movement.[13] The principle of target selection was obviously more complicated than simply race, and the Bureau's intensified effort to destroy King was rooted principally in something other than the fact King was black.

Liberal academics have sought an explanation of how the FBI chose its targets that is more comprehensive than either the criticism or racism arguments. Several have contended that the Bureau identified its enemies, including Dr. King, on purely ideological grounds. The Bureau was strongly conservative, peopled with many right-wingers, and thus it selected people and organizations on the left end of the political spectrum for special and unpleasant attention. This view has been voiced by former Attorney General Ramsey Clark,[14] and by lawyer Charles Morgan. Morgan has applied it to the King case, writing that "it had to be ideology that made King numbers one through ten on Hoover's personal enemies list."[15]

The principal proponent of this conservatism thesis, however, has been Athan Theoharis, a one-time Church Committee consultant and a student of FBI surveillance practices. For the entire period of Hoover's directorship, Theoharis argues, Bureau executives "acted purposefully to advance their own political interests and to curb the potential influence of individuals or organizations whose political

views they found abhorrent." The "criteria governing FBI . . . investigations were ideological," and "King's major sin derived from his prominence, his ability to influence public opinion, and his holding political views to the left of the FBI director." Theoharis specifically contends that the attempt to discredit King was no mere "personal vendetta" on the part of Director Hoover, but a "bureau policy" that was the work of all major Bureau executives, whose "principal concern about King in fact stemmed from political conservatism."[16]

The conservatism thesis is a more successful depiction of Bureau conduct than either the criticism or racism hypotheses. Indeed, as chapter 6 will contend, the conservatism argument is one limited part of a broader perspective on the FBI, a perspective that will subsume all three narrower explanations of the three distinct phases of the King investigation. However, on the specific question of the Bureau's intensification of the King case in 1964 and 1965, the conservatism theory falls victim to the same fallacy that claimed the criticism and racism hypotheses. True, the Bureau was conservative, and looked with disfavor and suspicion upon those who were not, and true also that King as a political figure was far enough "left" to be deserving of Bureau concern. Here again, though, the assumption that King was targeted in the manner that he was because he was "left," and the Bureau hated leftists, impedes our understanding of why the King case developed as it did far more than it assists us. Much as chapter 2 was able to show that the criticism theory failed to account for the events of 1962–63 once all the relevant events were examined in rigorous chronological order, here again a careful examination of the events from late-1963 through 1965 will show that the motive in the King investigation after the wiretaps go on was different from both what it was prior to that time, and from the suggested explanations of criticism, racism, and conservatism.

Two great changes occur in Division Five's behavior after installation of the wiretaps on King's home. First, the concern about King's relationship with Stanley Levison declines greatly, almost to the point of vanishing. Second, a marked interest in King's personal life and sexual activities quickly emerges. The crucial event marking these changes is the December 23, 1963, headquarters "conference." The discussions there reflected both of these developments, plus the first appearance of another motif of the greatest importance—how King must be discredited, exposed, neutralized, or destroyed.

Few items on the conference's "agenda" had anything to do with the King-Levison relationship. Since most Bureau memos on King as late as eight weeks before the big meeting were full of references to Levison, that absence is a marked surprise. Replacing Levison was the very heavy, indeed predominant concern with personal information on King. How can the Bureau obtain such information? How can the Bureau use it to damage King publicly? Surviving documents about the conference do not explicitly reveal why there was this new focus on destroying King personally.[17]

The first indication that the Bureau was collecting and disseminating information on King's purely personal activities came in August, 1963. One memo on that subject was sent to Deputy Attorney General Katzenbach and Attorney General Robert Kennedy, and then on to President Kennedy by his brother. The material in that report apparently was culled from King's conversations that were overheard by the wiretaps placed on Clarence Jones in mid-July.[18] That memo is the only indication that the Bureau was aware of or interested in King's personal life prior to the taps on his home and office. Years later William Sullivan confessed that he had heard gossip about King's private activities from Georgia Senator Richard Russell, whose brother Henry was a prominent Montgomery, Alabama, pastor. Even so, there is no convincing evidence that a desire to obtain information on King's personal life was a prime reason for the Bureau's fall, 1963, request for the wiretaps.

All indications are that the focus of the December 23 conference was shaped by what the Bureau overheard and inferred from the first six weeks of the wiretaps on King's home and office in late 1963. That information itself, that very personal information, supplied both the predominant motive for the Bureau's new desire to destroy King, and the means by which Division Five believed it could accomplish that new goal. The transformation of the King case in the winter of 1963–64, then, and the new desire to discredit King personally, thus stemmed not from King's perceived role as Bureau critic, not from his tie to Levison, not from intra-Bureau politics, not from King's race and prominence, and not from King's adherence to left political views. It stemmed largely if not wholly from the reactions to and feelings about King's personal life that Sullivan and the other men

of Division Five developed immediately after the King wiretaps began.

Just as the December 23 conference was the first significant event after the wiretaps went on, the initial important development after the conference was the installation of the first hotel-room bug on Dr. King at Washington's Willard Hotel in early January. As the pertinent documents reveal and he himself later admitted, the initiative and decision to install that bug came from William Sullivan. Exactly why that microphone was implanted tells much about why the character of the Bureau's activities changed so drastically over so short a period of time.

Sullivan's memo of Monday, January 6, to Belmont explaining the installation of the bug stressed the "counterintelligence possibilities which thorough coverage of King's activities might develop" and Sullivan's hope that "positive results" would be achieved.[19] Thus it is extremely difficult to imagine that installation of the bug was motivated by anything other than the desire to obtain damaging information on King's personal activities, which had dominated the conference held less than two weeks earlier.

Confronted with this evidence ten years later, Sullivan claimed that the personal angle had played absolutely no part in his decision to install the bug. Instead, he asserted, he had been visited on Saturday, January 4, by Jack Childs, who had told him of a meeting that he had had the previous day in New York with Levison, King, and several other people. The subject had been SCLC's need for money, and whether Levison, King, and SCLC would be interested in accepting $90,000 from "Solo" without any questions about the money's source. Childs told him, Sullivan claimed, that Levison and King had wanted to consider the offer for several days before deciding. It was this firsthand information, that King and SCLC might well be on the verge of accepting Soviet money, that had prompted Sullivan to bug King's room at the Willard in the hope of hearing further discussions about whether to accept the offer. As it turned out, Sullivan later contended, the bug overheard no such discussions and "Solo" subsequently reported that King had instructed Levison to reject the offer with thanks.

Sullivan's story is fanciful and unsupported by any evidence. It is contradicted by Bureau memos from that same week reporting on

SCLC finances,[20] by Bureau indications that neither of the Childs brothers ever had direct contact with King, by the recollections of other Bureau executives close to Sullivan at that time, and by the Bureau's own reports of King's travels. There is every indication that Sullivan's story was merely another game effort to set himself apart from the seamier aspects of the King investigation.

If further evidence of the true purpose of the first bug is needed, one has only to look at what the Bureau did with the recordings it obtained. They immediately were played for Hoover; transcripts were quickly prepared, and DeLoach was dispatched with them to the Johnson White House. Then, a week later, Sullivan instructed the Milwaukee field office to install a bug in King's hotel room there so that further "entertainment" could be recorded. Hoover's pernicious remark about King's supposedly "obsessive degenerate sexual urges" indicated that his understanding of what the surveillance was designed to overhear was exactly the same as Sullivan's.[21]

All of the important Bureau memoranda from January, 1964, clearly show that Sullivan, Hoover, and the men of Division Five quickly became obsessed with Dr. King's sexual behavior and the possibilities of recording more of it. Those same documents also indicate a strong desire to circulate the information obtained on King to the White House, and perhaps to reporters as well. The Bureau's fixation was further evidenced by the extensive efforts to monitor King's February trip to Hawaii and Los Angeles, by the disappointment over the lack of "developments" in Hawaii, and by the unconcealed joy at what finally was recorded in Los Angeles. The tasteless pleasure that supervisor Phillips and others expressed over the thought of Robert Kennedy reading the results of that surveillance was but one more powerful indication of the extreme hatred of King that had developed in Division Five over the winter of 1963–64.[22]

From the time of that first Hyatt House surveillance up through the November, 1964, mailing of the anonymous poison-pen letter and tape, the Bureau's entire handling of the King case continued to reflect a predominant interest in collecting personally damaging information on King. True, Bureau files from the period also indicated an ostensible concern about the number of supposed "subversives" around King, but the worry was little more than a transparent affectation. This was reflected most clearly in the half-hearted effort

to paint Harry Wachtel as a dangerous figure, and in the cataloging of decades-old rumors about individuals such as Vivian, Reddick, Blackwell, and Daddy King. It became extremely visible in September, 1964, when the Savannah field office read headquarters' concern about subversives such as Wachtel literally, and proposed to bug the rooms of a number of leftists, only to have headquarters reply that no, that was not necessary. The true purpose of the microphone surveillances was repeatedly indicated in documents concerning them, with the multiple references to King's "personal activities" and the need to "expose" him. The handwritten afterthought, "in view of his association with Communists," inserted in Phillips's July, 1964, recommendation that more information on King's personal activities be gathered, was only the most sadly amusing example of this veneer.[23]

Most of the 1970s probes of the Bureau's handling of the King case have made some reference in their final reports to the fact that "the development of personal information that might be derogatory to Dr. King became a major objective of the surveillance effort."[24] Hardly any of these investigators, however, have chosen to ask precisely "why" this occurred. Although the Church Committee's final report remarked that "FBI officials believed that some of Dr. King's personal conduct was improper,"[25] no one has gone beyond this expression to state publicly the real reason why the Bureau's activities against Dr. King intensified in 1964–65. At bottom, the hostility of Sullivan, Hoover, and other Bureau officials toward King was motivated largely by their feelings about Dr. King's private life and especially his sexual activities.

This conclusion should not surprise anyone who has examined the excerpts from the Bureau's anonymous letter to King that have been made public.[26] It also will come as no surprise to anyone who knows much about the private attitudes of Hoover and especially Sullivan. Despite his disclaimers, it was principally Sullivan, even more than Hoover, whose animus was aroused by the information on King's private life. Sullivan led the way in transforming the King case from an investigation of Stanley Levison's influence to an all-out effort to destroy King. Sullivan's private feelings about King do not make pleasant reading, but an appreciation of them is necessary for any good understanding of *why* the Bureau moved against King as it did.

To the journalists and professors who visited his New Hampshire home throughout the years 1972–77, Sullivan portrayed himself as the only honest and liberal-minded man to have served in the top reaches of the FBI during the Hoover era. On the subject of King, Sullivan was consistent—and incorrect—in saying that the FBI had been investigating King even before Sullivan became head of the domestic intelligence division in June, 1961. Furthermore, Sullivan claimed that when he first took that post, "I was one hundred percent for King . . . because I saw him rising as an effective and badly needed leader for the black people in their desire for civil rights."[27] On top of that, Sullivan also told people that the Bureau never had had any solid evidence against Stanley Levison, and that he, Sullivan, had tried unsuccessfully to persuade Director Hoover that an investigation of King based on his contact with Levison was unjustified. Hoover, however, had been convinced that Levison was a Soviet agent and that King himself was either a conscious Communist or pro-Communist. True, Sullivan conceded, the Bureau did understand King to have said "I am a Marxist," but that meant very little, Sullivan argued.[28] The controversial Brennan monograph of October, 1963, which Sullivan had endorsed and supported at the time, was really a dishonest document that had been prepared only because Hoover had insisted on it, Sullivan claimed to interviewers in the 1970s. He himself had played no meaningful role in any of the activities against King, and what he had gone along with he had done only because he otherwise would have been fired. He told one close friend that he had never taken the initiative in expanding the King investigation, and that everything he had done had been in direct response to Hoover's orders. The truth was, Sullivan wrote on one occasion, "There was only one man at the bureau who made important decisions and the rest of us carried them out."[29]

Sullivan was especially vociferous in his denials that the mailing of the anonymous letter and tape to King had been his idea, or that he himself had either written or even known of the poison-pen letter. To the Church Committee and to other interviewers Sullivan repeatedly claimed that the initiative for the tape and letter had come from Hoover, that he had been instructed personally by Alan Belmont to have the composite tape prepared, and that Hoover himself had called to order that it be mailed to King from Florida. Sullivan

asserted that he had argued against the anonymous package. He had done so on practical grounds, not idealistic ones, contending that instead of getting Mrs. King to leave her husband and publicly denounce him, it would only alert King and his family to the activities the Bureau had been undertaking against him. On the specific matter of the letter, Sullivan claimed that a draft or copy of it later found in his files at the Bureau had been planted there by his enemies, and that it actually had been prepared by three unnamed supervisors.[30] The only initiative he was willing to take credit for was the January, 1964, idea of promoting Samuel R. Pierce as the "right kind" of black leader.[31]

Were these assertions a full picture of Sullivan's stance in the King investigation? As Sullivan himself revealed to a number of people, they were far from it. Did Sullivan truly believe that the Bureau should not have been investigating King, and did he actually have a positive regard for the civil rights leader? In reality nothing could have been further from the truth. Did Sullivan's later emphasis on the inconclusive nature of the information on Levison really mean that he had opposed the Bureau's probe? No.

Sullivan told one friend that he had been forced to realize that King was a worthless charlatan. He had been particularly upset that many people contributed money to King without knowing that the real man bore little resemblance to his public image. King pocketed some contributions, Sullivan inaccurately claimed, and he and his associates wasted many thousands more on uninhibited revelry and high living. Even worse, in Sullivan's opinion, King on occasion had paid women to have sex with him, and also had carried on sexual affairs with a number of married women. Sullivan also thought that King had aspired to be secretary of labor, that King had considered funneling civil rights funds into secret foreign bank accounts, and that King had considered soliciting money from hostile foreign governments by claiming that he would use it to advance Soviet goals in America. King's opposition to the Vietnam War, Sullivan asserted, had merely been an effort to win such Soviet funding. In short, Sullivan had become convinced that King was an undesirable person who knowingly was doing harm to the United States of America.[32]

Sullivan often mixed fact and fantasy in his rambling recollections of the King investigation. Many times he avoided referring to King by his actual name. In letters to his close friend and lawyer, Joseph

E. Casey, in the mid-1970s, Sullivan claimed that the Levison tie had not been sufficient grounds for investigating King, but that there had been four other solid grounds for the probe: embezzlement, employing prostitutes, alienating wives' affections from their husbands, and violation of the Mann Act. Sullivan thought that King was an immoral person and that the investigation was appropriate. But he believed that Hoover and the Bureau had been wrong in using Levison as the basis for the investigation. To not have pursued King would have been, in Sullivan's view, a dereliction of the FBI's duty to the American taxpayer. On one occasion, Sullivan said, he explicitly had told Hoover there were several defensible reasons for probing King. King, for instance, had embezzled or misapplied substantial amounts of money contributed to the civil rights movement. King also had violated prostitution laws in numerous places. In particular, Sullivan said, King enjoyed a white woman in one midwestern city whose nightly fee was $100. Furthermore, there was the May, 1964, Bureau report about King in Las Vegas that had originated with a prostitute there. Finally, Sullivan believed King also had alienated the affections of numerous married women.

Did Sullivan imagine that an investigation of any of these supposed and much-exaggerated offenses would have led to federal criminal charges against King or others? Apparently not, for his conclusion revealed that deep-down he had no regret for any of the actions the Bureau had undertaken against King. Anyone like King, Sullivan believed, had to be exposed in a most ruthless manner to the American people.[33]

Sullivan's denial that he wrote or knew of the poison pen letter to King is effectively rebutted by many of his own later comments on King. The anonymous missive was particularly notable for the virulent characterizations it flung at King—"a colossal fraud," "an evil, abnormal beast," and "your filthy fraudulent self." Likewise, many intra-Bureau memos repeatedly characterized King as a "moral degenerate," one of Sullivan's, and Hoover's, favorite appellations. Sullivan's later statements closely mirrored these earlier ones. King, he told one person, was one of only seven people (and the only black) he had ever heard of during his thirty years in the Bureau who was such a total degenerate. King, Sullivan wrote in the mid-1970s, was on his way to exposure and ruin not because of the FBI's hostility or by virtue of his tie to Levison, but because of unwise personal

conduct that was gross and animallike. The problem, Sullivan said in a 1976 letter to a Church Committee member, had been King's compulsive desire to lead the dual existence of a Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde.[34]

At the root of Sullivan's hostility toward King were two key ingredients: a Puritanism on matters of personal conduct and sexual behavior that stemmed from his own rural New England background, and a subconscious racism that was more the paternalistic superiority of a false white liberal than the open hatred of a rabid bigot. For all his airs of being the Bureau's house intellectual, Sullivan's narrow-mindedness on anything concerning sex was well known to those who worked with him. All agreed that it took very little to offend his sensibilities. Most knew better than to tell a ribald joke in Sullivan's presence. His closest colleagues were nor surprised when Sullivan was so deeply upset by the material that was obtained on King's personal life. Such pure enjoyment of physical pleasure, and outside of marriage, was beyond the pale in Sullivan's mind. It took no time at all for him to conclude that King was not fit to be a national leader. The country had to be protected from someone whose values were so different from those that, in Sullivan's mind, every decent American cherished. When the anonymous tape and hate letter failed to drive Mrs. King away from her husband, Sullivan was stunned. As one of his colleagues later described it, Sullivan could not imagine any family surviving such a blow.[35]

Sullivan's puritanical inability to accept King's style of living was combined with, and magnified by, a largely hidden racism that saw black people as inferior beings. They required constant guidance from the great white fathers, men such as himself, if they were to progress on the road of self-improvement. Thus Sullivan desired to choose the "right kind" of leader for American blacks, who otherwise of course would be unable to find "the proper direction."[36] Sullivan's racism also showed in his repeatedly vicious characterizations of King, the labeling of King as a "beast" and "animal." This racist attitude toward black people, and especially the sexuality of black people, can be traced back for centuries in the writings of white Europeans and Americans. As Winthrop Jordan has pointed out, such perverse views reflect an underlying belief that blacks are really beasts and that sex itself is essentially bestial.[37]

Many others in the Bureau shared Sullivan's obsession with King's private conduct, but for somewhat different reasons. Sullivan was truly horrified by what he learned of King, and he had difficulty speaking openly about it. Many of those around him, however, were so fascinated by King's activities they could not stop talking about them in extensive detail. These voyeurs, of course, displayed no small element of racism in their own bizarre fascination with the minutiae of King's personal life. They, however, viewed his activities as entertaining rather than alarming. If Sullivan viewed King as a depraved animal, the voyeurs saw him as an animal too, but one in a circus, one to be watched in performance.

Sullivan later charged that the headquarters' case supervisor was such a voyeur, but the most important person within the Bureau so fixated was Director Hoover himself. Hoover's obsession with the sexual behavior of others is legend, and accurate. The King case was no exception to the rule.[38] Some remaining boosters of Hoover, such as former Deputy Associate Director W. Mark Felt, admit Hoover's preoccupation with things sexual, but have tried to argue that Hoover, like Sullivan, was a Puritan, a man offended by such material rather than a voyeur who took perverse pleasure from it.[39] Hoover, however, spared no effort to collect and view all possible information about the sexual activities of prominent Americans. Bureau tales about this predilection are numerous. While Hoover did utter denunciations of virtually every possible sort of sexual conduct, his relentless collecting of such material revealed that his professed offense, unlike Sullivan's, was rhetoric rather than fact. While Hoover's primary fascination was homosexuality,[40] activities that were interracial, or that involved more than two people, also captivated him.

From 1964 on, Hoover often blabbered about Dr. King's sex life. Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark has testified about his own repeated exposure to this phenomenon, and Clark was far from alone in the experience.[41] With Hoover too, like Sullivan, the presence of a strong racism magnified the obsession with King's private conduct even further. In Sullivan this combination produced an overpowering urge to see King publicly destroyed. Hoover, however, could not generate as intense a hatred because his attitude toward King was that of the voyeur rather than that of the Puritan. True, Hoover

denounced King's behavior to anyone who would listen, and some who would not, but the performances always had an air of "isn't it awful; please show me more." Thus Hoover's voyeurism took place under the cover of an essentially false Puritanism, and his desire to disseminate the King information reflected a somewhat different motivation from that of Sullivan.[42]

While Sullivan's principal emphasis was on "exposing" King to the public, Hoover often seemed more interested in using the King material to entertain others whom he believed shared his desire for it than to destroy King himself. True, Hoover's instructions that the most damaging personal material on King be shown to Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson could be read simply as one more means of destroying King as an influential public figure. As Burke Marshall later mused, Hoover's motive could have been that such information "was going to change the way we dealt with him or convince us that civil rights was a bad idea or that Negroes were all evil people or something."[43] Alternatively, it can be argued that the predominant motive for such intragovernment dissemination of the material was not a desire to destroy King, but a more calculated ploy to increase the FBI's bureaucratic status by impressing the organization's superiors with its thorough knowledge of the private lives of prominent citizens, including, by implication, the very people who were being shown such material on others. Such a purpose would be rooted in an organization's rational desire to maximize its own status with and value to those who are its bosses. However, while each of these hypotheses has substantial plausibility, it appears more likely that Hoover's desire to disseminate the information to others was based largely on the same attitude that his own interest in the material was rooted in. Hoover's primary purpose in conveying the information on King to others, such as Lyndon Johnson, seems to have been grounded more in a simple enjoyment of titillating others with that which titillated himself than it was in a consciously planned design to destroy King's reputation within the government or to win bureaucratic prestige for the FBI as an organization. No doubt some admixture of all three of these motives was present, but entertainment likely was predominant over destruction or bureaucratic self-promotion.

Hoover's attitude toward the King material was more complicated than Sullivan's, but there was not much complexity to the reactions

of the two most important men to whom the Bureau disseminated its reports. Robert Kennedy was the offended Puritan. Lyndon Johnson was the entertained voyeur.

Kennedy was deeply shocked and surprised when he received the account of the February, 1964, microphone surveillance of King in Los Angeles and the summary of the earlier bugging at the Willard. Much as Division Five expected, Robert Kennedy saw no humor in King's joke about his recently assassinated brother. When the third-hand story of the Las Vegas incident was conveyed to him in early June, Robert Kennedy again was affronted. Although he never spoke about the subject even with some of his closest friends, Kennedy did discuss his reactions and feelings in the 1964 conversations with Burke Marshall and Anthony Lewis quoted in chapter 2. The passages where he detailed his thoughts about the personal information on King remain sealed, but Kennedy made his anger and resentment very clear. Burke Marshall, reflecting back on the matter several years later, commented that the material had affected Robert Kennedy's feelings toward King, "because Bob Kennedy just wasn't that kind of a person. He didn't understand that, you know, and he didn't like it. He wouldn't approve it." Despite that, Kennedy's overall evaluation of King, Marshall felt, had not been controlled by those reports. His bottom-line judgment had remained that King was a constructive leader.[44]

If Robert Kennedy had responded to the Bureau's information on King with offense and anger, Lyndon Johnson responded with a laugh and a grin. It had taken Hoover and DeLoach only a few weeks to learn that the new President greatly enjoyed the stories and tidbits about prominent people's private lives the FBI could convey to him. Within hardly any time at all Johnson was hooked.[45] By early 1964, when the material on King's private life was most voluminous, the flow of FBI reports to the White House far exceeded such transmissions during previous presidential administrations. King was not the only person who was the subject of such reports, but the hotel-room microphones that the Bureau used against him meant that Johnson received considerably more detailed accounts of King's private activities than of others.

Virtually all of Johnson's aides knew of his weakness for such material. Several will admit privately that he particularly enjoyed the information on King. More than with Robert Kennedy, the infor-

mation also had a strong negative influence on Johnson's political feelings toward black America's foremost leader. As White House Counsel Harry C. McPherson, perhaps the most sensitive and intelligent member of the Johnson staff, has remarked, the President became "terribly disappointed in King for good reasons or not," especially after King came out strongly against Johnson's Vietnam policy in 1967. "Hoover had supplied the President with a vast amount of scurrilous . . . defaming information about King," and while Johnson "was contemptuous of the tape," he nonetheless "was affected by the information on it."[46] When one aide attempted to defend King's sincerity on the issue of the war, Johnson reportedly replied, "God damn it, if only you could hear what that hypocritical preacher does sexually."[47] As Johnson's last attorney general, Ramsey Clark, wrote in 1970 about the Bureau's dissemination of the personal material on King, "The course of the civil rights movement may have been altered by such a practice. The prejudice may have reached men who might otherwise have given great support—including even the President of the United States."[48]

Johnson, like the Kennedys before him, had feared political damage if he became closely linked with King in the public mind and the FBI's material leaked. Stories on either King's private life or his relationship to Levison, the supposed "Communist financier," could prove very embarrassing. Some aides also say that Johnson had an oftentimes pronounced personal fear of what Hoover could do to Johnson himself, but that fear did not keep Johnson from manipulating the Bureau at least as much as it manipulated him.[49] The stellar example of this was the intelligence activities of DeLoach's "special squad" at the 1964 Atlantic City Democratic National Convention. Of all the Bureau's electronic activities against King in 1964–65, only this one was motivated by a desire for political intelligence. The initiative for this project came directly from the White House. Although Johnson often claimed to be a true-hearted opponent of electronic surveillance,[50] this sentiment was little in evidence when he was benefiting from the political information such FBI activities obtained for him, or when he was being entertained by the transcripts and recordings of King's personal life.

Whether Hoover's and DeLoach's intent in conveying such material to Johnson was rooted more in titillation and entertainment than

in a desire to destroy King or promote the Bureau's organizational status, Johnson clearly viewed the information far more as entertainment than as anything else. King and his closest friends knew that the Bureau hoped to use that material against him, but they did not appreciate then, and have some difficulty accepting even now, the extent of Johnson's awareness of the Bureau's activities, the amount of material that was conveyed to him, and the injurious effect that it had upon Johnson's political regard for King and the civil rights effort. As Ralph Abernathy recalls, "We looked upon the President as our friend, and we really didn't hold him responsible" for what SCLC knew the Bureau was up to. "We didn't look upon him as involved."[51] Little did they know that the Bureau was running amok not on its own, but with the active support and participation of the President himself. How much the Bureau's dissemination of its reports to Johnson, to many other executive branch officials, and, of course, to a number of people not even in government, such as the assorted religious leaders, lowered the amount of support that King and SCLC otherwise would have received from those personages is impossible to calculate. That it did reduce it, however, is unquestionable, and many well informed observers privately echo the statement by Ramsey Clark quoted above.

The flow of the Bureau's highly valued reports on King's personal life to the White House continued through 1964, through the early winter flap over Hoover's public attack on King, and on into 1965. Throughout those same months, the Bureau was undertaking its various efforts to "warn" other notables about King, and in some cases the activity actually was motivated more by just such an odd desire to "protect" someone than a wish to damage King. The most notable case of this was the effort to block King's audience with the Pope, for, as Division Five veterans explain it, a number of staunchly Catholic officials truly did want to protect the Pontiff from what they imagined would be the "embarrassment" he would suffer should he meet King and then the damaging material on King appear in the public press. In most cases, however, such as Sullivan's efforts with the National Council of Churches and Crime Records' activity with the Baptists, the rationale was simply to damage King.[52]

By early 1965 the Bureau's leadership was extremely disappointed

and surprised that no one had made available to the public any of the material believed damaging to King. This realization became especially pronounced in the wake of the December and January efforts to interest a substantial number of newsmen in the material, and in the aftermath of Sullivan's unsuccessful January talk with McGill.[53] All indications are that by the early spring of 1965 Sullivan had become so frustrated over the lack of success that he began to devote less and less personal attention to the efforts against King. Not only had no reporters printed anything, but none of the various attempts to persuade black leaders or church figures to undertake quiet efforts to replace or supplant King with someone else had shown any signs of success whatsoever.

Two important reflections of this disappointment and subsequent reduction of emphasis on the efforts against King were the late April, 1965, decision not to install a wiretap on King's new home, and a determination in May that nothing except public source information should be offered in response to a request from UPI reporter Al Kuettner for information on King.[54] Although the documentary record mirroring this great reduction in the intensity of the Bureau's desire to "get" King between January and May, 1965, is nowhere near as extensive as might be hoped, the extent of the reduction is easily visible both in the files themselves and in the decline in the number of overt activities being considered or undertaken against King.[55]

The continuing decline in the Bureau's interest in 1965 also was reflected in the four-month lull between June and October in efforts to acquire additional hotel-room recordings of King. Although the last months of 1965 witnessed a number of attempts to bug King's rooms, neither Sullivan nor any others protested in January, 1966, when the threat of Senator Long's probe caused Hoover and Tolson to order that no more microphones be used against King.[56]

From December of 1963 through the fall of 1965, however, the primary reason for the Bureau's intense pursuit of King was a virulent personal hostility toward him that was based upon the reactions of Bureau headquarters' personnel to the information obtained on King's private life, beginning in late 1963. Previous discussions and accounts of the Bureau's efforts against King have been understandably shy to voice this argument clearly. Most explanations that *have*

noted the crucial role that this personal conduct played, however, also have committed the error of "blaming the victim." It was not really Hoover's or Sullivan's or the Bureau's fault that the FBI set out to destroy Dr. King, such arguments have implied. It really was King's own fault, because it was his supposedly reprehensible conduct that provoked decent, moral, and patriotic Americans like Hoover into concluding that he would have to be "discredited" or "neutralized" as an influential public figure if the good of the country was to be protected.[57] These implications have been almost as pernicious as the initial responses of the Bureau itself, for the fault and explanation of the matter lies not in anything that King did, but in the exceedingly puritanical and intolerant conceptions of personal conduct held by men such as William Sullivan and in the voyeuristic impulses of men like Hoover.

Secondly, with the one exception of a statement by Jesse Jackson in 1970, all comments on the King case that have admitted the central role that Bureau reactions to King's personal conduct played in the intensification of FBI activities against him have failed to appreciate that for most of the people involved the motives underlying the collection and dissemination of the personal information on King were more complicated than a solitary desire to destroy the civil rights leader.[58] If one were to look solely at the unfortunate William Sullivan, it would be correct to conclude that the one purpose of the hotel-room bugs, the transcripts, and the tapes was to destroy King. The extreme hatred and hostility was the product of combining an intolerant Puritanism with a paternalistic but nonetheless vicious racism.

With other crucial actors, however, such as supervisor Phillips and especially Director Hoover, the orientation toward the information about King was not a simple matter of abhorrence. The explicit accounts of sexual activities and remarks were more intriguing, titillating, and entertaining than they were displeasing or disgusting, and while King of course had to be denounced for what he did, his activities also amused and diverted most Bureau personnel more than anything else they dealt with in a day's work. The voyeur cannot generate the same strength of hatred as the Puritan, and because the Bureau's, and indeed the wider government's, reaction to the King material was much more that of the voyeur than that of the Sullivan-

like Puritan, the story of the FBI's obsession with information on King's private life was necessarily more complicated than a single-minded interest in using it to destroy him. And even while Hoover himself represented the unconceded victory of the voyeuristic over puritanical, no such hypocrisy about the real value of the material was present in Lyndon Johnson. While no doubt both antipathy toward King and an organizationally rooted desire to promote the Bureau with the President each played a part in the concerted effort to furnish such information to Johnson, it also is clear on balance that Bureau executives correctly assumed that what appealed to their own earthy tastes would appeal to the unrefined sides of Lyndon Johnson as well.

In all likelihood the decline in the Bureau's efforts to gather and disseminate the damaging personal material on King in 1965 reflected both frustration at the inability to use the information publicly and a simple slackening of interest in something that no longer was as novel and intriguing as it had been in 1964. Throughout the summer and fall of 1965, even while occasional microphones continued to be installed, the files began to reflect an increasing interest in collecting information on SCLC's and King's plans not out of any honest fear of supposed Communists or out of a desire to gather material that could be used to embarrass or discredit King, but simply out of a desire to know ahead of time what events would be occurring in the civil rights movement. Why this focus was never present in the first three to four years of the investigations of King and the SCLC is a question that will be considered in chapter 6, but from the end of 1965 forward the FBI's investigation of King and SCLC entered a third distinctive stage, one where the collection of information largely for political intelligence purposes predominated. After the early focus on Stanley Levison, and then the two peak years of obsession with King's personal life, the third and concluding phase of the Bureau's probe focused on obtaining political information that could be disseminated to various offices of the federal government, including the White House. To aid in this effort, the Bureau took the initiative of acquiring a paid informant within SCLC. The story of that informant and the final phase of the King case is the subject of chapter 5.

5

Informant: Jim Harrison and the Road to Memphis

Recruitment of a live, human informant within SCLC had been discussed by the Bureau's Atlanta field office in 1963. The Atlanta agents viewed the talk about putting wiretaps on King's home and SCLC's office with more than a little ambivalence. They knew how burdensome an amount of paperwork a wiretap generated. A human informant, properly placed and coached, could supply the same information, and more, at a fraction of the cost and effort. Thus the Atlanta security squad several times had discussed with Division Five the pros and cons of making a recruitment pitch to someone already working for SCLC.

By the middle of 1963 the Atlanta agents had picked out the person in SCLC whom they thought the best candidate for recruitment