

PARADE'S SPECIAL

Intelligence Report

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Files Shed New Light on Sammy and the FBI



Strimberg/Globe

Sammy Davis Jr. in 1960 with wife No. 2, the Swedish actress May Britt: Their interracial marriage made the entertainer a target of the late FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover (below)

Last month in London, a number of his famous friends staged a tribute to Sammy Davis Jr., and Liza Minnelli gave her own benefit performance a few weeks later at London's Royal Albert Hall. Both concerts raised money to fight cancer—the disease that claimed Davis in 1990 at age 64—and both were occasions to remember Sammy not only as a great entertainer but also as an emotional man who loved everyone.

Unfortunately, his bursts of emotion sometimes got Davis into trouble. On one such occasion, at a 1967 benefit for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Davis said from the heart: "All races must learn to live together in a peaceful manner." This, remarkably, drew the wrath of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

According to newly revealed FBI records, Davis' statement was duly entered in a secret file that Hoover kept on the entertainer. The file tagged him as a "black nationalist" engaged in "questionable activities." As evidence, it also cited a tapped phone conversation between Davis and Dr. Martin Luther

King Jr. The civil rights leader merely had asked Davis to organize and participate in celebrity benefits, yet Hoover viewed it with dark suspicion.

But what really stuck in Hoover's craw, the records indicate, was the diminutive entertainer's 1960 marriage to the shapely Swedish actress May Britt. The following year, CBS invited Davis to participate



AP/Wide World

in a special program on social problems. When the TV network later withdrew its invitation, the FBI chief personally inserted an entry in Davis' file and noted triumphantly that the reason was Sammy's "questionable morals."

However, sources familiar with Hoover's methods suggest—though there's no hint of it in the files—that he may have brought quiet pressure on CBS executives to withdraw their invitation.

J. Edgar Hoover died in May 1972. At a Republican rally three months later, Sammy Davis Jr. hugged President Nixon in a public display that enraged many black leaders and Hollywood liberals. Though rarely in agreement with the liberals, Hoover no doubt rolled over in his grave.