

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

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Hoover Hounded King, Others

The late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wasn't the only innocent victim the FBI hounded.

There were several other names on J. Edgar Hoover's hate list; the old bulldog subjected most of them to FBI harassment. Indeed, Hoover merely had to develop a mild dislike for a person, and the FBI would begin breathing down his neck.

More than one distinguished lawman, for example, was systematically smeared by the FBI because his name happened to be mentioned as Hoover's possible successor.

Sometimes the late FBI chief kept running memos on his victims—an FBI version of the old high school "slam books." Agents would record everything they heard about the unsuspecting subject, false or not, in a running log for Hoover's perusal.

The quickest way for a free people to lose their liberty is to grant too much power to their policemen. Hoover overstepped his authority; he grossly misused the FBI. Since no government official can assume powers that the people don't bestow, the old G-man was acting illegally.

It is essential to dig out Hoover's secrets. If they are buried with Hoover, a future FBI director will find it easier to imitate him.

Here's how Hoover used the FBI to harass his enemies and smear his rivals:

The New York Post's liberal editor, James Wechsler, was high on Hoover's hate list. When Wechsler sent a reporting team to Washington in 1959 to prepare a series about the FBI, the apprehensive

Hoover assigned FBI squads to follow the reporters. Agents broke into the room of one reporter at the old Raleigh Hotel, hoping to find blackmail evidence. When none turned up, the frustrated agents talked of planting narcotics in the room and notifying the Washington police drug squad. The plan was discarded, however, not because it was illegal but because it was risky.

Hoover came to hate the late Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy with a passion. After Kennedy had visited two FBI field offices, Hoover solicited affidavits from the agents about Kennedy's private remarks on wiretaps. The purpose was to portray Kennedy as a liar. One agent, who reportedly was pressured to distort his affidavit, refused to give one.

The FBI chief had a running feud with Walter Bedell Smith, the late, distinguished undersecretary of state. Hoover directed his agents to gather gossip about Smith and to spread rumors that Smith was having an affair with a top woman official. The patrician Smith got so enraged that he accused Hoover of wasting the taxpayers' money on rumor-mongering and threatened: "I'll fight you all over Washington if I have to." Hoover backed down.

The FBI director also engaged in bureaucratic warfare against another Attorney General, Robert Jackson, who later was appointed to the Supreme Court. With documents in hand, Hoover tried to persuade President Franklin D. Roosevelt that Jackson was inefficient.

Hoover conducted an ugly, "running

memo" campaign against former Immigration Commissioner Joseph Swing, who had the audacity to complain that Hoover wasn't cooperative. The FBI chief went personally to President Dwight Eisenhower with gossip about Swing. One unproved story was that the immigration commissioner was an alcoholic.

Nothing infuriated the old FBI curmudgeon more than talk of being replaced. At one time, Texas' Public Safety Director Homer Garrison was mentioned as a possible successor. Although Garrison had done nothing against Hoover, the G-man ordered agents to check into Garrison's past. When the investigation produced nothing derogatory, Hoover spread the word to his agents to give Garrison as little cooperation as possible.

Hoover also feuded with Detroit's respected police commissioner George Edwards who had suggested police chiefs should be more independent in their thinking about Hoover. When Edwards was named to the federal bench, the FBI chief sought secretly but unsuccessfully to block his nomination.

Two other prominent police chiefs, Chicago's Orlando Wilson and Los Angeles' William Parker, also got on the wrong side of Hoover. The FBI director instructed his aides to check every index in the FBI for negative information about the two lawmen. When this turned out to be unproductive, Hoover spread the word through his chief factotum, Clyde Tolson, that Parker was an "egomaniac" and Wilson was an "alcoholic." Neither charge was true. C 1976, United Feature Syndicate, Inc.

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