

WASHINGTON—F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover kept "official and confidential" files, separate from other bureau records, on celebrated Americans. Through the Freedom of Information Act, I have obtained contents of half a drawer: a 700-page portion of the sanitized file, spanning 18 years, on John F. Kennedy.

Mr. Hoover's Kennedy file consists mainly of threats and mutterings from nuts and kooks, with referrals to the Secret Service for protection, that make one sympathize with the object of so much mindless hatred. Relatively little gossip; the prurient will be disappointed.

Historians of the Presidential campaign of 1960 will find of interest the possibility that Robert Kennedy paid a half-million dollars between the election and the inauguration to a person bringing a lawsuit against the President-elect, and the Kennedy's ability to keep the charges and payment secret.

In a memo to Attorney General Kennedy dated June 4, 1963, portions of which have been deleted, Director Hoover wrote: "When this suit was filed in New York just prior to the President's assuming office you went to New York and arranged a settlement of the case out of court for \$500,000. All papers relating to this matter, including the complaint, allegedly were immediately sealed by the court."

Let the Kennedys think the bureau was ignorant of the details of the suit. Mr. Hoover went on: "In this connection, my memorandum of February 5, 1961, transmitted to you a copy of an article which appeared in the January 31, 1961, issue of 'Le Ore,' a weekly magazine published in Turin, Italy. The article contained a woman's charges that her engagement in 1951 to John Kennedy was broken off at the insistence of his father, who found her refugee background unsuitable.

Two months later, on Aug. 9, Hoover aide Courtney Evans advised his boss: "It would seem advisable to let the Attorney General know that further

J. Edgar's Private Files

By William Safire

efforts are being made to peddle copies of these documents even though the originals have been sealed in the court record." Hoover noted: "Do so by memo to A.G."

The F.B.I. might have been misled completely, but if this is true, the campaign drama must have been fierce; in retrospect, it certainly seems like an innocent matter on which to spend a half-million dollars in hush money. The incident shows how the world has changed since 1960, when a broken engagement worried candidates, and a President-elect could send the Attorney General-designate to court to pay off a complainant in absolute secrecy. If true, it would also help explain why Mr. Hoover was President Kennedy's first appointment.

A more significant matter — the White House connection with the

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Mafia gangsters who were hired by the C.I.A. to assassinate Fidel Castro — is referred to in an Aug. 17, 1962, internal F.B.I. memo, and corroborates the story told by Judith Campbell Exner, denied by Kennedy secretary Evelyn Lincoln:

"... we picked up information connecting John Roselli [since-murdered Mafioso] with Judith Campbell who we have determined has been in telephonic contact with Sam

Giancana, Chicago gangster, and with other underworld figures. In addition, she is the individual who has been in telephone contact with Evelyn Lincoln, the President's secretary at the White House. . . . The information concerning Campbell's contacts with the President's secretary has been furnished previously to the White House and the Attorney General."

There are lighter moments in this file. When Nikita Khrushchev sent President Kennedy a few cases of wine, an F.B.I. memo of Sept. 21, 1963, relates "the Secret Service requested that the Laboratory examine the wine for possible 'anti-personnel' drugs which cause a personality change." The lab found no drugs, and the memo concludes with a bureaucratic lip-smacking: "The wine was consumed in the examinations."

The most curious moment involved a quirk of technology. A woman whom the F.B.I. calls a "substantial citizen" was talking to her brother on the telephone early in 1961 when the line went dead and she reported "she was cut in on another telephone call. She said she recognized the President's voice. . . . The conversation related to the awarding of medals . . . it would be necessary to cut down on the number of awards; that there weren't that many good men. . . ."

The thunderstruck woman hung up, called her brother back and found that he, too, had overheard President Kennedy's conversation. Loyally, they called the F.B.I. which threw up its hands when it came to crossed wires: "This appears to be no more than a routine situation wherein the telephone company lines have malfunctioned."

Occasionally human, alternately flattering and subtly threatening, sometimes nutty and usually properly protective, J. Edgar Hoover's private file on John Kennedy tells us a little about our leaders and a lot about ourselves, way back then. Not a bad idea to air it out.

Pardon, Alice