

FBI Memo Told Of Helping Fan Ghetto Strife

Houston Chronicle
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11/4/76 And NARDA ZACCHINO

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Washington — The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in a secret 1969 memorandum to Director J. Edgar Hoover, took substantial credit for the "high degree of unrest" that it said existed in the black ghetto of southeast San Diego.

Bringing Hoover up to date on bureau counterintelligence efforts to disrupt black nationalist organizations it characterized as "hate groups," the FBI's San Diego field office reported in the Sept. 18, 1969, memorandum:

"Shootings, beatings and a high degree of unrest continue to prevail in the ghetto area of southeast San Diego. Although no specific counterintelligence action can be credited with contributing to this overall situation, it is felt that a substantial amount of the unrest is directly attributable to this program."

The memo and related documents, obtained by the Los Angeles Times from the Senate Intelligence Committee, reveal an intensive effort by the FBI to foster and capitalize on the enmity between the Black Panther party and the US organization in San Diego at a time when the two militant black groups were warring openly.

From late May through August of 1969, the warfare took the form of two killings, the wounding of four others, shotgun and rifle attacks and a bombing.

James B. Adams, deputy associate director of the bureau who has testified extensively before congressional committees on the discontinued counterintelligence effort, said Saturday the purpose never was to promote violence.

"We were not trying to get people to kill each other, but to disrupt these groups, to reduce their effectiveness," he said. "I don't know of any action that was designed to produce violence."

But the documents, which the bureau turned over to the Senate Intelligence Committee, and an investigation by the Los Angeles Times in San Diego indicate that the FBI program at least nurtured the hatred that sparked the shootouts.

Adams said, "this violence was taking place before we got in the act."

The first Panther-US shooting incident in San Diego appears to have taken place on May 23, 1969, when John Arthur

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Savage, 21, a Black Panther, was shot dead in San Diego.

Three months earlier, the FBI's San Diego office proposed, and Hoover approved, distributing bogus cartoons showing the U.S. organization considered the Panthers ineffectual and corrupt.

"These are clever cartoons which belittle the Panthers and should further differences among Black Panther leaders and members," Hoover said in approving the scheme.

Adams said the violence-prone Black Panthers and the US organization were pitted against each other in an effort to prevent them from joining forces.

He acknowledged that only a "very thin line" separates such activity from the actual promotion of violence. But he emphasized that bureau headquarters sought to avoid violence by demanding approval of such schemes.

He said the wording of the San Diego field office's memo to Hoover should have been challenged by FBI headquarters.

The effort in San Diego included these actions:

- An "intensive interview program" directed at Black Panthers, though the FBI said that "specific tangible results are very difficult to assess."

- Making anonymous telephone calls to a high official of the Roman Catholic church protesting a priest's participation in the Black Panthers' breakfast program for ghetto children. The priest was later transferred, a colleague said, because of his work with the Panthers.

- Drawing and distributing cartoons that belittled US and Panther leaders with the hope of furthering differences between the groups and eroding their foothold in the black community.

In the Sept. 18, 1969, memo to Hoover, the FBI's San Diego field office noted that the new US headquarters there had suffered extensive damage as a result of the explosion of a pipe bomb on Aug. 30, 1969.

"It is believed that the Black Panther party is responsible for the bombing," the memo said. "Efforts are being made to determine how this situation can be capitalized upon for the benefit of the counterintelligence program and any possibilities will immediately be submitted for approval by the bureau."

The same pipe-bombing incident is cited by the FBI as support for its contention that the counterintelligence effort sought to head off violence, not

foster it.

The Sept. 28 memo reported to Hoover: "Information concerning the possibility of US headquarters being bombed on the weekend of 8-30-69, was furnished to the San Diego Police Department prior to the actual bombing. It is felt that the furnishing of this information might have been a major factor in precluding any injury of innocent persons at the time the actual bombing took place."

The bombing, which occurred in early morning when nobody was in the building, caused no injuries.

The chairman of US in San Diego from 1968 to 1974, Sukumu, said the organization had no advance word of the bombing.

Adams of the FBI said the bureau did warn the San Diego Police Department.

The head of the San Diego Police homicide unit, Lt. Ed Stephens, who investigated the bombing, recalled no such warning. He said the head of the police intelligence unit also had no such recollection. He said "anybody" in the department could have been warned by the FBI.

The Sept. 18 FBI memo also said an anonymous telephone call had been placed to an "auxiliary bishop" to protest the Black Panthers' breakfast program and a priest's participation in it.

"The information to the bishop appeared to be favorably received," it said.

Although the Senate committee inked out the names of the clerics, the Times established that the auxiliary bishop was Rev. John Quinn, now bishop of Oklahoma, and the priest was Rev. Frank Curran.

Neither Bishop Quinn nor Msgr. I. Brent Eagen of the bishop's office recalled receiving such an anonymous phone call. Rev. James Gallas contended that Curran "was bounced, kicked out of this diocese" because of his work with the Panthers.

Adams, in commenting on the FBI's counterintelligence effort against the Black Panthers, said it should be examined in the context of events six years ago.

"Violent activities were being conducted by the Black Panther party at that time," he said. "They were responsible for the murder of about 20 police officers" around the nation.