

Harry Jones Jr.

Mr. Nixon's FBI Nominee: A Profile ^{Post} 6/9/73

KANSAS CITY, Mo.—If Clarence M. Kelley, President Nixon's choice for FBI director, receives any flack before the Senate Judiciary Committee, it probably will be over his Kansas City police department's record in race relations in the 12 years Kelley has been its chief of police.

In other respects, the 61-year-old ex-FBI agent has been virtually free of criticism. He is generally regarded by most Kansas Citians as incorruptible, resistive to political pressures, innovative, warm but strong in personal relationships, possessing a good sense of humor, self-disciplined and as lacking in vanity as any public official around. He is a man's man, a cop's cop.

The writer is an investigative reporter for the Kansas City Star.

His resignation has been demanded by persons of influence only once—immediately after the rioting in April, 1968, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Several black community leaders called for his resignation while passions were still high, for six blacks had been killed. They did not persist in the demand long, however, and the great bulk of whites in the city applauded what they regarded as the firmness his department had employed.

A five-member commission appointed by Kansas City's former Mayor, Irl W. Davis, a liberal Democrat, to investigate the causes and nature of the disorder, gave Kelley a clean bill of health personally while mildly scolding the police for some of the incidents. Kelley himself acknowledged that mistakes had been made but generally praised the police force for their performance. Only a few of the policemen had stood out as inexcusably inept or over-reactive.

Thursday, as various Kansas Citians of both races were interviewed about Kelley's nomination, black leaders were generally cool or hostile in their remarks, while whites were almost universally laudatory or, in the case of some of the stronger liberals, silent.

Kelley's basic problem in race relations has been that while he has tried to be responsive to the many legitimate black complaints, he has been



By Charles Del Vecchio—The Washington Post

President Nixon with Clarence M. Kelley.

fearful of displaying what he feels might be interpreted as weakness by his predominantly white police force. Their morale has been extremely important to him.

Kansas City's population is about 20 per cent black. Its police force consists of only 99 blacks out of a total of 1,300. Three blacks are captains, nine are sergeants. As low a ratio as this is, it is considerably better than it was when Kelley became chief and he has tried strenuously to recruit blacks.

Kelley has acknowledged an awareness of the dangers of having red-necks in the police ranks and over the years has quietly tried to weed them out and reassign them to non-sensitive duties. But Kansas City's police force is recruited mainly from high school graduates in the city and nearby rural areas. Eliminating or isolating all the racially-prejudiced police in town is as

difficult as solving a Mafia murder.

The square-jawed, ruggedly handsome Kelley is a native Kansas Citian whose boyhood in Kansas City's East side, as he has recalled it, was normal, middle-class and a little dull. He finished in the upper third of high school class and hit .300 as an outfielder in an advanced amateur league until his inability to hit curve balls persuaded him to drop baseball. He was graduated from the University of Kansas in 1936 and what was then the University of Kansas City Law School in 1940. He joined the FBI a few months after graduation.

He was appointed chief of police in Kansas City in 1961 at a time when the police department there was trying to recover from a series of demoralizing near-scandals in which five high-ranking officers had been indicted by a county grand jury. One under indictment was the former chief. None of the indictments resulted in convictions, but Kelley's first chore was to restore public confidence in the police department and the police officers' sense of self-esteem.

Confronted with several high-ranking old-liners who would have preferred a chief up from the ranks (for varying reasons), he slowly reorganized the department in such a way that the undesirables found themselves with less and less authority while those he thought he could trust were gaining more and more responsibilities.

Except for the discovery of a five-man police burglary ring in 1963, the department has remained scandal-free the 12 years Kelley has been chief. Meanwhile, he has managed to show a flair for innovation in police science and technology.

"It borders on heresy to say that maybe police have never really been adequately attuned to the times or suitably administered," he told the fourth annual seminar of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration in Washington in May of last year. "I firmly believe that people in police fields have not recognized adequately that change is occurring around them at an unprecedented rate."

This was no idle remark. He has demonstrated in a variety of ways that the police must adapt to new technology. He instituted the first day-and-night helicopter patrol for any major city in the country in 1968. The same year he computerized the department so that policemen could receive almost instant information in the field and would respond more quickly on police calls. He established a metro squad that brought Kansas City police equip-

ment and technology into investigations of major crimes anywhere in the six-county, two-state metropolitan area.

He hammered away at improving police-community relations first with store-fronts in tension areas, then, when those didn't work, stationing community relations officers in all the police stations to respond when needed.

He has displayed sternness with wrong-doers on the department but has fallen under criticism periodically by defending too staunchly, in the opinion of critics, those officers whose mistakes were, to his thinking, of the mind rather than the heart. He told a police recruit class in 1969:

"I want to warn you that we will have two ways of looking at any problem you may get into as officers. One type of problem is one which involves anything such as acceptance of a bribe or other matters of great moral turpitude. This is a matter of the heart, something you do knowingly. I can not abide a thief. I can not abide a liar. These are the errors of the heart, which go to the center of a man's character. Such errors will be severely judged.

"There are also errors of the mind, mistakes of judgment. For those you will be criticized. If such errors accumulate, you will run into serious trouble. Such errors are in a different category, however . . ."

Ideologically, Kelley is more conservative than he is liberal, but his sensitivity to problems of minorities and the blacks especially has noticeably improved over the years. Politically he could declare himself Democratic or Republican and few Kansas Citians would be surprised whichever he picked.

"I don't believe in such activities as police roundups or vigilantes," he said in an interview in 1963. "I do subscribe to the theory that society has to place some restrictions on the police. The police, after all, constantly are depriving people of liberty. But the pendulum can swing too far the other way. There is no question that police activity can be hampered by a too-severe interpretation of constitutional rights. Sometimes this has made the job difficult."

How will he compare with J. Edgar Hoover, a man he often had spoken admiringly of and for whom he worked for 21 years? If his style in Kansas City does not change, he will probably be less aloof, less the martinet without losing the respect of his men, just as eager to maintain professionalism in the ranks and far better liked by outsiders.