

Jack Anderson's Washington Merry-go-round—With Les Whitten

F Post 11-26-75

WASHINGTON — The FBI's undercover campaign to besmirch the late Dr. Martin Luther King was even more incredible than the recent Senate hearings revealed.

It began, as the testimony showed, with the late J. Edgar Hoover. The cantankerous FBI chief developed a boiling hatred for King during the turbulent 1960s.

Some suspect that Hoover became jealous of King's Nobel peace prize, an honor the old man coveted for himself. Others say Hoover simply became convinced, altogether falsely, that the civil rights leader was a communist sympathizer.

From close associates of both antagonists, we have now pieced together more of the compelling story.

Early in the 1960s, the FBI began monitoring King's activities. Some of his hotel rooms were bugged. One of the tapes contained a replay of an uproarious party, which he had attended at Washington's old Willard Hotel.

The FBI director and his trusted sidekick, Clyde Tolson, conspired together to send this embarrassing tape to King's wife, Coretta. The idea disturbed the subordinates who were ordered to carry out the blackmail plot. But in those days, no one in the FBI dared to stand up to the formidable Hoover.

Upon Hoover's instructions, the tapes

were doctored in the FBI lab to bring out King's voice, loud and clear. Then the tape was carefully cleaned of fingerprints or telltale evidence that might link it to the FBI.

The tape was packed in a seven-inch reel box, which was also sanitized of fingerprints. Hoover's orders were, as one aide recalls, to mail it "from a southern state" to Coretta King in Atlanta.

An FBI agent, unaware of the contents of the poisonous package, was dispatched by plane to Florida to mail it. This was the sole purpose of his plane trip.

The vindictive Hoover also ordered that a separate message, suggesting suicide, should be mailed to King himself. It was typed, according to one source, on an old typewriter, with a smudgy, red-and-black ribbon.

The civil rights leader later speculated that Hoover got the suicide idea from reports that King as a child had tried to injure himself following the death of a beloved grandmother. Our FBI sources doubt, however, that Hoover knew about this childhood incident.

In any event, the diabolical message suggested that King had only 34 days to take the "one way out." The 34 days coincided with the date he was supposed to receive the Nobel prize in Oslo.

Clearly, the suicide suggestion and the

scurrilous tape were timed to hit King with a one-two punch. But the FBI had not reckoned with the enormous workload at King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. For weeks, the group had been collecting tapes of King's speeches for posterity.

The FBI material, therefore, was buried in the pileup of tapes and mail. Dr. King showed up in Oslo, accepted the award and returned home, quite unaware that he had been invited by the FBI to kill himself.

As King's friends recall, it was Coretta who eventually opened the package from Florida. One friend has the impression that the letter was sent in the same package with the tape.

Coretta King played part of the scratchy, garbled tape and then called in her husband. King was aware that the FBI was trying to discredit him. He immediately concluded that both the tape and letter were the doing of the FBI.

Next day, he summoned some of his closest associates to his Atlanta offices. Among them were the Reverends Ralph Abernathy, Joseph Lowery and Andrew Young.

As they entered, King sighed: "You'd think the FBI would understand that we're trying to save America." The Nobel laureate showed his colleagues the letter. All agreed it was no mere crank note but a foolish FBI attempt to get

King to kill himself. Young recalls that King chuckled grimly over the preposterousness of the scheme.

The group also listened carefully to the tape, which was often inaudible. But King's voice could be heard making an occasional ribald crack. There was also audible evidence of a sexual interlude. They agreed, however, that King was not involved in this portion of the tape.

Then the civil rights leader, speaking sorrowfully, said he had previously felt he could count on the FBI to protect his rights. But no longer, he said, could the FBI be trusted.

Footnote: We were the first to report on May 24, 1968, that the FBI was bugging and badgering Dr. Martin Luther King. We reported that the FBI, among other things, had spread stories about his sex life.

At the request of King's associates, we investigated the FBI's smear charges against him and published our findings on October 9. The Senate hearings have now confirmed our revelations.

A REMINDER: There are only a few days left to participate in our search for a bicentennial slogan. All entries must be postmarked before midnight, December 1. The best one will be adopted by the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration. Send your slogans to SLOGANS USA, Box 1976, Washington, D.C.

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Hoover's Campaign Against King

**By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten**

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