

TALES OF THE FBI

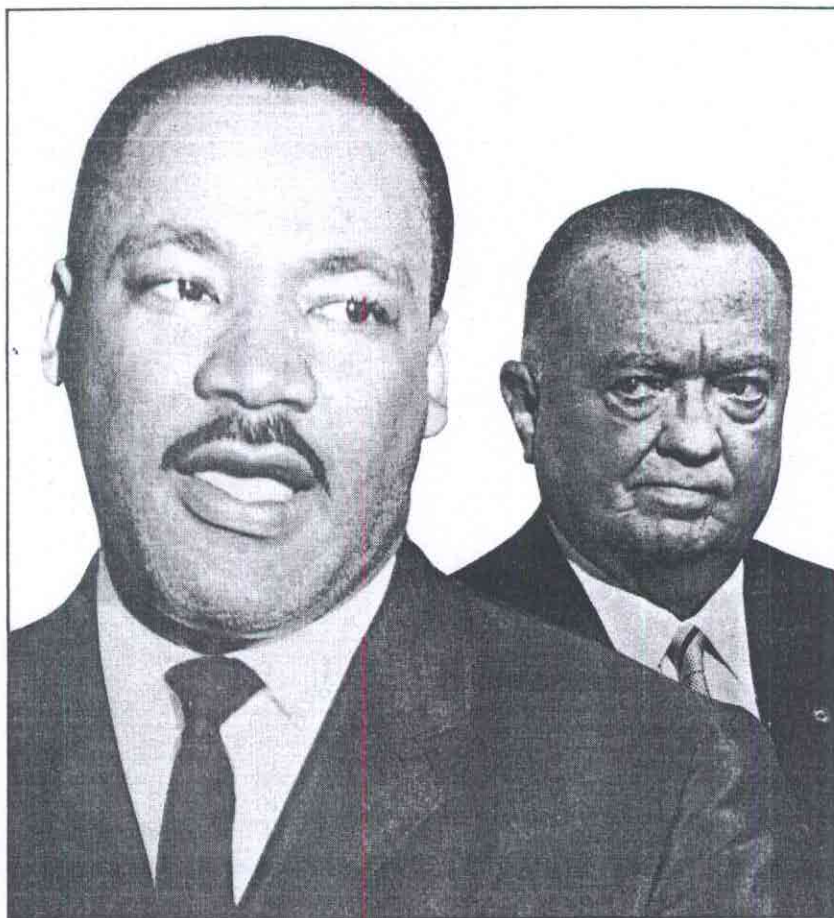
Some of the rumors were a decade old, and others had grown steadily in recent months, but only last week were the allegations of FBI misdoing finally made official. In a two-day hearing by a Senate select committee on intelligence, investigators spelled out a series of FBI activities remarkable for their illegality and sheer nastiness. The most striking was an unrelenting campaign against Martin Luther King Jr. that included an anonymous letter warning darkly that "there is but one way out for you." This was only one of a number of poison-pen notes the G-men sent to their targets: one such letter told the husband of a white woman working for the civil-rights movement that his wife was sleeping with black co-workers, and another tried to stir bad blood, if not mayhem, between two groups of Chicago blacks by suggesting that one had put out a contract on the other's leader.

"No meeting was too small, no group too insignificant to escape the FBI's attention," Sen. Walter Mondale concluded last week. From 1956 to 1971, when it was discontinued, the FBI's Cointelpro (for counterintelligence programs) mounted 2,300 projects against hundreds of thousands of citizens and a jumble of "black hate," "white hate" and even women's consciousness-raising groups. The projects—designed to gather information and spread confusion—were notably ineffective, said committee staffers, producing "results" only 22 per cent of the time.

'ROAD MAP TO DESTRUCTION'

In the bureau's defense, assistant deputy director James Adams pointed out that Cointelpro had functioned mostly during the turbulent '60s, when "cities were being burned and universities were being bombed." The White House and Congress, he told the committee, had wanted the FBI to act but had not "provided any instructions of what to do and what not to do." At least some of the FBI's misdeeds—notably, its surveillance of a dozen organizations at the 1964 Democratic nominating convention—had been performed with the consent and sometimes at the specific command of Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon. Nonetheless, said Mondale, much of the FBI activity "was kept from the Congress and the Justice Department and all of it was kept from the American people." It was, he declared, "a road map to the destruction of American democracy."

In part because he had criticized the



King and Hoover: Wiretaps, bugs and a poisonous pen pal at the FBI

FBI for not protecting black civil-rights workers in the South, Martin Luther King became the FBI's Private Enemy No. 1. Director J. Edgar Hoover publicly called King a "liar" and privately labeled him a "degenerate"; King's nonviolent Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Hoover declared, was a "black hate group." In 1964, counterintelligence chief William C. Sullivan* wrote Hoover that it was time to knock King "off his pedestal," and in the following years the bureau made more than 25 such attempts. It maintained a total of eight wiretaps and sixteen bugs on King, producing thousands of hours of tapes—including some of his reported motel-room dalliances; it tried to persuade a college not to grant him an honorary degree, and it unsuccessfully urged an American cardinal to block an audience with Pope Paul VI. The bureau even gave some thought to developing a black leader to succeed King once he was discredited.

The FBI's greatest outrage against King was an anonymous note that, committee staffers said, he interpreted as an attempt to drive him to suicide. "King, there is only one thing left for you to do," read an excerpt from the letter—written,

*No relation to the former assistant director, William A. Sullivan.

by one account, 34 days before King was to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, and delivered with a tape (presumably of his motel indiscretions). "You know what it is. You have just 34 days in which to do it. (This exact number has been selected for a specific reason.) It has definite practical significance. You are done. There is but one way out for you."

'NO CHRISTMAS CARD'

The authorship and intent of the letter were disputed; Sullivan, in whose files a copy was found, denied writing it and protested that it was a plant. Adams, who said that the 34 days referred not to the prize but to Christmas, challenged the suicide theory and guessed that the letter might be read as a message to repent. FBI sources suggested that it might have been intended to shame King into giving up his prize or resigning his chairmanship of the SCLC, or both. "Well, it certainly was no Christmas card," said Church, who termed the letter "improper and grotesque."

The FBI pursued King to the grave—and beyond. When the civil-rights leader went to Memphis to lead a boycott in 1968, the FBI gave some thought to leaking to the press the fact that King was staying at a white-owned hotel. There is



Reprise of a nightmare: Hours after his announcement (left), Reagan comes eyeball-to-muzzle with a toy gun in Miami

no evidence that the FBI followed through, but the information did appear in local papers, and King moved to the black-owned Lorraine Hotel—where he was assassinated on April 4. After his death, a proposal reached Congress that his birthday be declared a national holiday. To try to head it off, the FBI scheduled briefings for friendly legislators on King's character—meetings at which the tapes would presumably be featured—but committee staffers were uncertain whether they ever took place.

Many of Cointelpro's other targets were in the New Left, and in 1968 headquarters chided its field offices for not exploiting the leftists' "moral depravity." Helpful hints followed: agents could publish leaflets on the New Left leaders at various universities ("naturally, the most obnoxious pictures should be used"), plant rumors that some radicals were actually FBI and police informers, circulate student newspaper articles advocating drugs and sex, and send out anonymous letters notifying parents of their offspring's political activities. Whenever possible, the FBI directive said, the letters should contain photographs of the students in demonstrations where there was "an obscene display."

Where "moral depravity" did not already exist, it was invented—and the St. Louis office, under J. Wallace LaPrade, was particularly inventive. In January 1970, a memo to headquarters initiated by LaPrade suggested that they go after an officer in ACTION, a local civil-rights

organization, whose husband "remains aloof from her racial and New Left activities and is suspicious of her relationship with the Negro males in ACTION." LaPrade got a go-ahead, and the husband got a handwritten note from a mysterious "soul sister." "Look man," it said, "I guess your old lady doesn't get enouf at home or she wouldn't be shucking and jiving with our black men in ACTION, you dig? Like all she wants to intergrate is the bed room and us black sisters ain't gonna take no second best from our men. So lay it on her, man or get her the hell off Newstead [Street]." By June the couple had separated, and St. Louis told headquarters: "This matrimonial stress and strain should cause her to function much less effectively in ACTION." LaPrade was later promoted to head up the New York field office, the largest in the nation.

'LUST-FILLED EYES'

Sexual infidelity was a popular theme among Cointelpro letter writers. Another missive from the St. Louis office warned a woman that her husband, a member of the so-called Black Liberators, "been making it here with Sister Marva Bass and Sister Tony and than he gives us this jive bout their better in bed then you are." Charges of adultery victimized right-wingers, too; one Ku Klux Klansman's wife received a pious communication from "a loyal klanswoman" to the effect that her husband was misbehaving with a certain Ruby, known by her

"lust-filled eyes and smart-aleck figure."

The bureau also sent an anonymous letter to Jeff Forte, head of Chicago's Blackstone Rangers, since renamed Black P. Stone Nation, a powerful black-activist gang. "The brothers that run the [Black] Panthers blame you for blocking their thing," it said, "and there's supposed to be a hit out for you." As Adams told it, the FBI merely wanted to put the Rangers on guard—but others thought the ploy had risked a gang war. A bureau memo indicated that the FBI had considered warning the Black Panther Party of a Rangers' plot, but "it was not felt this would be productive, principally because the BPP at present is not believed as violence prone as the Rangers." The bureau's plan, concluded committee member Philip Hart, seemed designed "to encourage the Rangers to shoot some or all of the Panthers."

The bureau was probably guilty of far more, committee staffers said. But even if Congress fails to uncover any more dirty tricks, last week's litany of transgressions had badly stained the bureau's once upright public image. "I've been told for years by . . . members of my own family that this is what the bureau has been doing all this time," a shaken Senator Hart told committee investigators. "I assured them . . . it just wasn't true. [But] what you have disclosed is a series of illegal actions intended to deny certain citizens their First Amendment rights—just like my children said."

—SANDRA SALMANS with ANTHONY MARRO in Washington