

Mike Royko

The FBI: How Low Can It Go?

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The man didn't even ask it as a question. It was as if he was just thinking out loud.

While he glanced through his newspaper he said: "I wonder if the FBI had King killed. Or if they just covered up for the people who hired Ray to do it."

I heard a lot of talk like that during the late 1960s. But usually from young white radicals or black militants.

This time, though, it came from a middle-aged man with middle-of-the-road

Mr. Royko is a columnist for the Chicago Daily News.

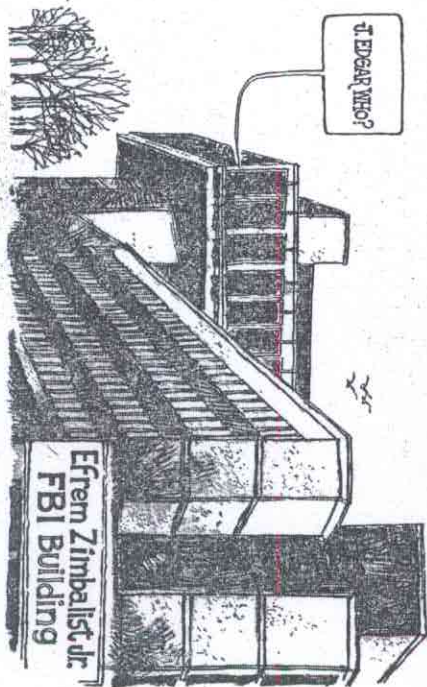
political beliefs, a short haircut, a mortgaged house, mid-sized car, 9-to-5 job and a couple of kids in college.

If somebody else had suggested anything like an FBI plot to him six or seven years ago, he would have said: "You are paranoid."

But now this very straight person was wondering if an American Nobel Peace Prize recipient had been bumped off by the nation's most respected police agency. And he almost took it for granted that if they didn't do it, they covered up some kind of conspiracy by others who had it done.

A few years ago, my answer would have been something like: "Don't be ridiculous." But now all I could say was "I don't know."

Plots that used to be found only in paperback fiction are now turning into



By Mike Peters for the Dayton Daily News

somber reports out of Capitol Hill, so what's unbelievable?

How about Sam Giancana, one of Al Capone's professional heirs, plotting international murders with the CIA. The average citizen, if called in for a tax audit, is treated like an embezzler. But the CIA did personal favors for Sam the Psychopath.

Or White House aides trying to think of ways they could get Jack Anderson doped up in public, or maybe lured into bed with some guy named Bruce.

So who is to say that somebody is nuts for wondering whether J. Edgar Hoover would stoop as low as to have Martin Luther King knocked off?

It is not clear that Hoover, the sainted cop, was even more unbalanced, vicious and dangerous than his few detractors used to claim.

In the past, we were given small glimpses of the real Hoover personality by disenchanting ex-FBI agents who wrote occasional books about their experiences.

They described Hoover's bloated ego, racism, narrow moral standards and petty hatreds.

But these personally flawed men were usually dismissed as eccentricity. After all, he got John Dillinger, didn't he?

There was also the talk about Hoover's use of embarrassing files to blackmail

political figures into letting him retain his powerful job.

But blackmail is hard to document. It would be a brave senator who would call a press conference to accuse Hoover of having candid shots of him frolicking in the Sneakaway Motel.

Now we find that the occasional glimpses of the real Hoover weren't real after all. He was even worse.

You've got to be a real hater to suggest to a man—as the FBI did to King—that he kill himself or face public disgrace.

And you've got to be a real creep to do it through an anonymous poison pen letter. The writers of such letters rank right up there on the sick-scale with the anonymous telephone-breather.

Don't bother to tell me that the writing of such letters is a long way from an actual act of violence. You just try signing your name to a letter that tells a political figure to kill himself or face the consequences. The FBI will have you in front of a federal judge in the time it takes to say: "Ha, ha, I was kidding." They believe people who make such threats are potentially dangerous. Who am I to argue with them?

And when a person who is warped enough to do such things also has vast police powers, just how potentially dangerous is he?

Think about that the next time the movie "Z" is on television. And keep reminding yourself, as you watch it, that it is not a Washington documentary. It is hard to feel the difference.