

Hoover Shadow Lingers

Kelley Seeks to Restore FBI's Lost Esteem

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First in a series

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"The J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building," proclaim the words lettered in gold over the entrance to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's massive new headquarters flanking Pennsylvania Avenue.

And the architecture— austere, monolithic, overpowering its surroundings by sheer force—seems to have recreated in concrete the famed bulldog image of the man who headed the FBI for 48 years.

As one irreverent FBI agent says: "It's like he couldn't take it with him, so he stayed."

There is point as well as wit to the remark. Although Hoover has been dead for 3½ years, his shadow still falls over every corner of the organization he created. To millions of people, Hoover and the FBI remain synonymous.

Once, that link was the FBI's greatest strength. Now, it has become a liability triggered by disclosures that Hoover involved the bureau in illegal acts of intimidation and surveillance and a cavalier disrespect for individual rights and personal privacy.

The result has been to leave the FBI's reputation so tattered that many question its

continued ability to function effectively as the principal law enforcement arm of the federal government.

Clarence M. Kelley, the veteran, but little-known lawman who now holds Hoover's old job, knows this, probably better than anyone. A great many people—from President Ford and Attorney General Edward H. Levi through the FBI's 8,600 rank-

says, is to restore the confidence of those who "believed in motherhood and the FBI."

That is why in his speeches and congressional testimony, he keeps hammering at one theme—a plea for the American people to stop judging the FBI by the abuses of the past and look at it instead as it is today and as it will be in the future.

"This is Clarence Kelley's

It's an awe-inspiring task, since Hoover single-mindedly transformed the FBI from a corrupt minor appendage of the Justice Department into the world's most legendary police force. His G-Men were the ultimate gangbusters—the nemesis of bank robbers and kidnapers, of Nazi saboteurs and Communist spies, of petty crooks and master criminals.

Now, as the legend has come under increasing scrutiny from Congress and the press, a new and darker portrait of Hoover has emerged. It is that of an able, even brilliant law enforcement bureaucrat who stayed too long on the job.

This was the Hoover who ruled his agents through an authoritarian set of petty and capricious rules, who made arbitrary decisions about what persons and organizations were threats to national security and who used the resources of the FBI to harass and intimidate them by frequently unlawful means.

Of the many details making up this revised portrait, the one that stands out most vividly was Hoover's campaign against the late Martin Luther King Jr. He apparently ordered the sending of a "poison pen" letter to King, detailing embarrassing incidents about King's personal life and, in the interpretation

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and-file agents—look to Kelley to steer the FBI through its troubles and restore its lost public esteem.

Kelley, now 64, has been struggling with this task ever since he came to Washington in July, 1973, after more than a decade as police chief in Kansas City, Mo. His aim, he

FBI now. Clarence M. Kelley's. It's no one else's," insists one of his aides. But, in trying to get this message across, Kelley, whose name is hardly a household word even in Washington, must counter the impression that the Hooverian spirit still rules the FBI.

FBI, From Al

of some, inviting him to commit suicide.

The King letter unleashed a fire storm of demands that Hoover's spirit be exorcised from the FBI by stripping his name from the new building. Inevitably, the attacks on Hoover have given new currency to the once heretical suggestion that the FBI is a vastly overrated organization.

Many charge that the FBI's reputation resulted less from its actual crime-fighting accomplishments than from skillful public relations. Hoover, they charge, shunned the hard cases and went after those easy shots that would pad the FBI's arrest record or reap a windfall of favorable newspaper headlines.

The "public enemies" brought down by the FBI in its glory days—the John Dillingers, "Baby Face" Nelsons and "Pretty Boy" Floyds—are now dismissed as colorful but essentially minor-league gunmen.

Even Hoover's most fervent crusade, his Cold War drive against communist subversion, is said to have been inspired less by fears of a threat to national security than by recognition of communism as a popular target that would win political support for the FBI.

The extent to which this skepticism has influenced public attitudes is underscored by a recent Gallup Poll. It indicated that in the decade between 1965 and 1975 the number of Americans with a "highly favorable" image of the FBI plunged from 84 per cent to 37 per cent.

In wry recognition of the public's disenchantment, Kelley notes in recalling the FBI's long search for newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst: "First, everybody said, 'Why can't you catch Patty Hearst?' Then, when we caught her, they said, 'What took you so long?'"

The public skepticism is a source of great sadness for Kelley, who was an FBI agent himself for 20 years before he went to Kansas City. "I was asked to become chief in Kansas City because I was from the FBI," he recalls. "It was always the case that the FBI name was a high recommendation for trust and responsibility. I don't want that reputation sullied."

But sullied it has been, and many of Kelley's old colleagues in local law en-

forcement think he made a big mistake by not moving ruthlessly and decisively to cleanse the taint.

As one says, "On the day he moved in, he should have demanded the keys to all the closets and gone through every one. Then, he should have thrown all the skeletons out onto Pennsylvania Avenue and ripped Hoover's name off the wall before anyone else had time to think of the idea."

However, that's something that Kelley could never do—even if he wanted to. He is keenly aware that one place where the Hoover legend remains intact is inside the building that bears the late director's name.

In private conversation, most FBI agents say they are shocked, saddened or at least puzzled by many of the things Hoover did. They agree that both the bureau and Hoover's own memory would have been served far better if he had retired 10 years before his death. Some even say bluntly that he was virtually senile in his final years.

Still, their ultimate judgment on "the Old Man" is revealed by the fact that almost every agent who served in the bureau during his time keeps an autographed picture of Hoover on his office wall.

J. W. (Jack) Burns, a veteran agent who now heads the FBI field office in Butte, Mont., is probably speaking for most his colleagues when he says:

"I considered Hoover an autocrat who did many things that were unnecessarily cruel. But remember one thing. It was Hoover and no one else who made law enforcement in the United States an honorable profession. So I think it's a damn shame to see people forget the total record and select isolated incidents to tear him down."

"If they take his name off the building, you might as well tear it down," Burns warns, "for there would be a mass exodus out of the building that would mean the end of the FBI."

Because this loyalty to Hoover's memory is a fact of life within the FBI, Kelley has no choice other than to try to work around it. Besides, purges and shakeups simply are not his style. Bill Reed, his executive assistant and one of the few outsiders brought into the FBI by Kelley, describes his approach in this way:

"Kelley would rather let the record rest on future per-

formance. He believes that in any healthy organization the capacity for change should continue constantly to grow. But he feels that such change should be evolutionary and routine, not dramatic or traumatic. You're not going to see any cataclysmic upheavals under him—only gradual and steady change."

Originally, when he was appointed director, Kelley seemed like a casting director's dream for the role of the nation's top policeman—gilt-edged credentials earned during a lifetime in federal and local law enforcement and a manner, at once tough and avuncular, that stamps him indelibly as the embodiment of the honest cop.

After sizing up these attributes, former Deputy Attorney General William D. Ruckelshaus characterized Kelley as a man with the potential to do for the FBI what Pope John had done for the Roman Catholic Church.

Despite this advance billing, Kelley just wasn't the type to come on like gangbusters, even at the FBI. In addition, he arrived in Washington preoccupied by his wife's illness. She had bone cancer, and for two years, until her death in November, an obviously distracted Kelley spent much time commuting between Washington and her bedside in Kansas City.

The confluence of all these factors has prevented Kelley from imposing himself on the public consciousness in a way that would erase memories of Hoover. And, as the FBI's reputation has continued to decline, there is a tendency within the Washington power structure to regard him as a bit of a bumbler—a man out of his depth in the world of congressional investigating committees and bureaucratic infighting.

However, this is essentially an outsider's view based on random, surface impressions. Inside the FBI, at a level beyond the glance of casual critics, Kelley is moving in his careful, deliberate way to make some very big changes.

Domestic intelligence, the area where the FBI got into deep trouble, has the top priority. Here, Kelley and his key aides have no choice other than to seek ways to keep watch on violence-prone dissidents and potential subversives without abusing the rights of innocent citizens.

Kelley has also instructed his agents to forget the old

emphasis on fattening the bureau's arrest statistics by pursuing petty cases and to concentrate instead on "the big ones" like organized crime, white-collar crime and major thefts.

Where Hoover used the FBI's matchless training and technical records resources as weapons to dominate local police forces, Kelley is trying to realign the relationship to make the state and city police feel more like partners than poor relations.

Blacks and other minorities, systematically excluded from the bureau in Hoover's day, are now represented in the ranks of agents; and Kelley is actively trying to recruit more. The FBI now has 37 women agents, all hired since Hoover's death.

In many ways, the most radical change attempted by Kelley has been the introduction of what he calls "participatory management." This is an almost unheard-of concept in law enforcement; and within the FBI, accustomed for so long to Hoover's one-man rule, it is outright revolutionary.

The bureau has long had a group known as the executive conference composed of the approximately 15 top-ranking officials. In Hoover's day its members could go for months without laying eyes on the director.

Now, the conference usually meets with Kelley twice a week for what one participant calls "a no-holds-barred, across-the-board discussion of everything that's going on. Everybody brings up his big problems of the moment, and everybody has the chance to put in his two cents' worth."

Inevitably, some critics see the system as yet another sign of Kelley's lack of control. His reliance on the executive conference, they say, only indicates the degree to which he is dependent on Hoover-trained loyalists who run the day-to-day activities of the bureau.

In this respect, the names mentioned most frequently are Associate Director Nicholas Callahan, the second-in-command, and Deputy Associate Director James Adams, who supervises all the bureau's investigatory activities. They are unquestionably the pair that Kelley relies on most heavily, with Adams, in particular, touted as a sort of crown prince whom Kelley may someday try to tab as his successor.

Both are also regarded as proteges of John Mohr, a retired Hoover aide who virtually ran the bureau in the old man's last years. Although on the sidelines now, Mohr maintains close personal relationships with Callahan, Adams and other old cronies in key positions, and lower-ranking FBI agents tend to view him as a puppet master pulling the strings on bureau policy from outside.

"That's a crock of crap," says Callahan. "John Mohr hasn't had a thing to do with this organization since the day he retired. There is a new director here, and he directs the FBI. There is no old clique or old guard functioning in the shadows—unbeknown or contrary to Mr. Kelley's objectives or new ideas."

Adams, who also denies the Mohr stories, adds: "It might be closer to the truth to ask whether an old guard outlook persists. After all, all of us on the top echelon are Hooverites, since we came up in the FBI during the years that it was his bureau."

But, he continues, "we couldn't do things in the old Hoover way even if we wanted to. Hoover himself couldn't, even if he were to come back in the full vigor of his youth. The bureau has simply grown too big, and there's too much going on."

"Kelley understands this," Adams continued. "His way has been to pick the people he wants in key positions, to give them a lot of leeway and to keep in close touch with them and their problems. This isn't understood by the press or people on the outside. It's not even clear to our men in the ranks; and, as a result, you keep hearing that Kelley hasn't got control. But the truth is he's very much in control."

And Kelley himself says: "By relaxing the old rigid



By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

Ford Chatting with Kelly at dedication of new FBI building in October.

centralized direction, I know that I've led some people to say 'He's losing control.' But I have no fears on that score. I

don't want executives who only feel comfortable in the sanctuary of decisions from the top, and I don't see the

slightest sign that anyone is using his freedom to thwart my goals."

NEXT: Life in the FBI.