



Drawing by David Levine

## *J. Edgar Hoover: A Librarian With A Lifetime Lease*

*2/25/68* By **Richard Harwood**  
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**F**RIDAY MORNING at the civilized hour of 10, John Edgar Hoover boarded an armored limousine for his annual courtesy call at the Capitol.

His hosts were members of a House Appropriations subcommittee whose chairman, Rep. John Rooney of New York, has been terrorizing big-spending bureaucrats for years.

He has never terrorized Hoover,

however, and there is a reason for that. Like most of the great men of Washington, Rooney reacts to The Director with both schoolboy awe and political wariness.

"I have never cut his budget and I never expect to," the 13-term Congressman explained a few weeks ago. "The only man who ever cut it was Karl Stefan, a Republican from Nebraska who had this job before me. When Stefan went home for election that year, they nearly beat him because he took away some of Hoover's money. When he came back he told me, 'John, don't ever cut the FBI budget. The people don't want it cut.' I've always followed that advice. It's a real fine outfit and their budget is tight."

The United States Senate is even more skittish in its dealings with The Director. It no longer bothers to review the FBI budget. Whatever Hoover and Rooney want, Sen. John McClellan (D-Ark.) explains, is acceptable to Senate appropriators.

### The Only . . .

**HOOVER'S** privileged status in the Federal Establishment is manifest in other ways. He is the only Federal executive of less than Cabinet rank who is paid (by a special act of Congress) \$30,000 a year. He is the only Federal executive of any rank who will retire (by a special act of Congress) on full pay. He is the only Federal executive who (by presidential fiat) has a lifetime lease on his job. And he is, of course, the only man besides the President among the 6.5 million people on the Federal payroll who is supplied with a bulletproof limousine—in this case a Cadillac—for commuting around town.

"He's too big to handle," the late Attorney General J. Howard McGrath once lamented to a friend. History has tended to bear out that judgment. In the 1920s, Hoover survived upheavals and scandals that gravely tarnished the reputation of the Department of Justice. In the 1930s, he endured the taunts and enmities of powerful Senators who accused him of cowardice,

publicity-seeking and unethical tactics such as wiretapping.

His preoccupation with domestic communism, his friendship with the late Sen. Joseph McCarthy and his role in the Harry Dexter White case earned him the distrust of civil libertarians in the 1950s and the lasting enmity of the late House Speaker Sam Rayburn. In more recent years he has been at the center of controversies involving unlawful eavesdropping and the alleged inability of his agents to cope with the Cosa Nostra and civil rights crimes as effectively as they cope with car thieves.

These public relations traumas have sometimes nettled Hoover. In 1964 he retaliated against one of his critics, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., with the charge that Dr. King "is the most notorious liar in the United States." In 1965 he publicly questioned Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach's veracity by saying there was "not a word of truth" in Katzenbach's claim that the FBI was engaged in bureaucratic infighting over the organized crime issue. The next year, Hoover and former Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy engaged in a "you're a liar" exchange over the authorization for FBI eavesdropping in the early 1960s.

### Library of Dossiers

**THROUGH IT ALL**, however, Hoover has survived and his agency has flourished. Today it is 50 per cent larger than the Department of Labor and spends eight times as much money (\$200 million a year) as the administrators of the Model Cities Act. It has, over the past half century, waged war with mixed success on bawdy houses and white slavers, gangsters, spies, saboteurs, un-Americans, car thieves, lynchers and, most recently, The Mob.

In that process, Hoover has emerged—in the words of an anonymous FBI agent—as the chief archivist in the United States of "other people's filth." His dossiers record the crimes, frailties and political beliefs of millions of his fellow citizens. They contain (or so it is believed) the unspoken and perhaps unspeakable records and rumors of the private follies and indiscretions of the major figures, past and present, in the Washington political establishment.

This enormous library has become a monument to Hoover's career, a major source of his political power and an indispensable tool for the thousands of investigators under his command. Finally, it has become the one unifying symbol of Hoover's life and career

and, in a sense, a key to the riddle of The Director.

### Sang in the Choir

**HE BEGAN LIFE** as a frail child, fearful of snakes (as he often recalled later) and intensely attached to his mother.

He was also a quick child, who delivered groceries and ran all the way, who sang in the choir and won a New Testament for getting to Sunday School on time 52 weeks in a row. His industry and reliability set him apart even then from his playmates in Seward Park, the civil servants' colony in Southeast Washington where he was born on New Year's Day, 1895.

At Central High School, the coaches told him to try out for the debating team instead of football and he did. He liked to drill on the parade ground with the student cadet corps and when he graduated the school yearbook said: "A gentleman of dauntless courage and stainless honor." His classmates called him "Speed" because, like Horatio Alger, he seemed always in a hurry to get wherever it was that he might be going.

Prophetically, his first job was as a cataloguer in the Library of Congress and he was so good at it, legend has it, that a co-worker observed: "I'm sure he would be the Chief Librarian if he stayed with us."

Instead, he got a law degree at night school and in 1917 obtained a

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clerkship in the Department of Justice. That was the turning point in his life. It meant he was exempted from military service in World War I, even though he was a 22-year-old bachelor and—presumably—able-bodied at the time. He was given a draft deferment (as an "essential" civilian) and within two years was busily engaged in the compilation of political dossiers, a task that was to become a major professional preoccupation in his life.

In a period of 100 days in 1919 he and his associates put together 60,000 biographies on political "radicals" and "anarchists" who were the special targets of the Justice Department in that troubled postwar period. From those modest beginnings, the FBI's collection of dossiers was expanded to nearly five million individual files by 1956 (the last year for which any detailed figures are available). They included, at that time, dossiers on 426,000 "internal security" cases and vast collections of information on Washington political figures.

The volume of material in the Hoover library is barely hinted at by the crude figures on the number of files. Its extent is better reflected in a recent report on File No. 92-62170, the FBI's dossier on Fred B. Black, a Washington business consultant and political operator, who is now appealing an income tax conviction. The Black file is wordier than "War and Peace"—3244 pages—and contains, among other things, verbatim accounts of his conversations with prominent men in public life, including White House officials. They were gathered through the techniques of electronic eavesdropping.

### Aversion to Pornography

FRANCIS BIDDLE, Attorney General in the early 1940s, has given in his memoirs another glimpse of the kind of material at Hoover's disposal.

"I sought to invite his confidence," Biddle wrote, "and before long, lunching alone with me in a room adjoining my office, he began to reciprocate by sharing some of his extraordinary broad knowledge of the intimate details of what my associates in the Cabinet did and said, of their likes, their weaknesses and their associations . . . I confess, that within limits, I enjoyed hearing it. His reading of human nature was shrewd, if perhaps colored with the eye of an observer to whom the less admirable aspects of behavior were being constantly revealed."

One irony in all this is that Hoover,

by all accounts, has a deep aversion to pornography. His sympathetic biographer, Mildred Houghton Comfort, has described his distaste for "filthy talk" and "crude stories." As a fraternity man in college, Mrs. Comfort wrote, he "took a dim view of such antics as crap games, poker and drinking bouts."

This is reflected in current FBI policies. A couple of years ago a young clerk in the FBI headquarters here was accused by an informant of spending a night with his girl friend. An extensive investigation was launched which involved a detailed interrogation of the girl herself. The clerk ultimately was fired for unbecoming conduct.

Hoover's agents even censor the transcripts they derive from their eavesdropping activities. Euphemisms or blank spaces are known to have been substituted for obscenities or the intimate dialogue between unsuspecting men and women.

### Transcripts Made Available

UNFORGIVING OUTRAGE over human frailties sometimes colors Hoover's testimony.

During an appearance before the Rooney subcommittee two years ago, Hoover digressed from a discussion of communism, campus radicals and opposition to the Vietnam war to denounce a prominent Negro who had been "convicted of sodomy, a violation of the Selective Service Act and was an admitted member of the Young Communist League . . . He admitted sodomy. He was apprehended in Pasadena, Calif."

Two years earlier, in the midst of Hoover's squabble with Dr. King, FBI officials offered Washington journalists transcripts of a tape recording made in a hotel room occupied by Dr. King and others. The FBI claimed that the recording provided evidence of Dr. King's "moral turpitude." One recipient of this material was the Washington Star, a newspaper that has maintained a close relationship with Hoover since the 1930s when one of its editors, Rex Collier, began a comic strip lauding the exploits of the FBI.

Hoover, Rep. Rooney reports, "tells us a lot of confidential things about people like 'Rap' Brown, Stokely Carmichael and peaceniks. Don't ask me what kind of things because I won't tell you."

The White House is similarly



briefed. Kenneth P. O'Donnell, who dealt with the FBI for President Kennedy, recalls that "whenever we'd ask for a name check on some appointee we'd get back 25 pages on how often he took a drink and things like that."

### Roots of Power

**O**NE THEORY—and it is a plausible one—is that the agency's capacity for obtaining and supplying information of this kind underlies both the FBI's professional success and Hoover's great political power.

As a former White House assistant to President Johnson has put it: "No one (in Government) knows what Hoover may have on him. Maybe his file on some Congressman is pretty superficial. But people assume otherwise and it has an inhibiting effect."

A Western Congressman has said substantially the same thing: "Sure it's intimidating. Everybody on the Hill is convinced they've got a big file on all of us. Not that anyone up here is a Communist or anything like that. You couldn't be in public life with that kind of a record. But such things as sexual indiscretions might be in his files."

Sen. Joseph Clark (D-Pa.) has gone further. The FBI's files, he once said, are a potential threat to American democracy because of the "threat they pose by way of blackmail, direct or indirect, on anybody who has the effrontery to say anything unkind about J. Edgar Hoover."

The crucial significance of the FBI archives in the agency's operations have been sometimes overlooked because of the myths that have grown up about the nature of the FBI. The "gang-buster" legends of the 1930s and the "spy-catching" legends of later years are still memorialized in the folklore, in books, articles and television programs.

(Efrem Zimballist Jr., the star of the current TV program "The FBI," represents in Hoover's mind and in the popular mind "the image that people have of the FBI. I want our special agents to live up to that image." Hoover has also said: "I certainly would not want to have any of the beatniks with long sideburns and beards as employes of the Bureau . . . No member of the Mattachine Society or anyone who is a sex deviate will ever be appointed to the FBI.")

Despite the TV images, however, "gang-busting," "spy-catching" and vio-



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lence are not the daily lot of the ordinary agent. In the entire history of FBI, only 12 agents have been killed by hostile gunfire.

"Our special agents, in a broad sense," Hoover has said, "are really salesmen. They interview the presidents of large banks, the chairmen of the boards of large corporations, longshoremen and laborers. They have to sell themselves to them to get their confidence to obtain the information they need."

This quest for "information" has permeated Hoover's career and the opera-

tions of his agency. Thus it is counted as one of his most lasting achievements that over the past half-century he has collected the fingerprints of 80 million Americans. He has also collected the criminal records and arrest records of several million men and women, records that are supplied by police departments all over the United States. Today these records are being fed into computers at the FBI's National Crime Information Center, which began operation last year and which is assembling an "index of documented operational information on crime and criminals, national in scope."

#### Network of Informers

**I**N ADDITION, Hoover and his agents have put together a large and prolific network of paid, professional informers who supply volumes of secret information on the activities of organizations ranging from the Ku Klux Klan to the Communist Party. It is claimed that Hoover knows the name of every Klansman and every

Communist in the United States and there is reason to believe the claim.

A former U.S. Attorney tells of an incident a few years ago in which two members of a three-man Communist cell in Pittsburgh turned out (unknown to each other) to be FBI informers.

A State Department official in the Kennedy Administration describes a conversation with Hoover about the problem of keeping track of American Communists. "Hoover," according to this official, "leaned back in his chair and said 'Don't worry about it. There wouldn't be any Communist

Party in this country unless I kept them above ground with money and people. We want to keep it that way. We don't want them going underground.'"

The FBI's infiltration of the Klan has been equally effective, from all the evidence. FBI informants have been present at the murder of several civil rights activists in the South in recent years and have supplied the eyewitness information on which arrests were made.

When traditional methods of information collecting have failed, the FBI has used other techniques, such as wiretapping and electronic eavesdropping. William Hundley, former head of the Justice Department's Organized Crime Division, has said that virtually all of the FBI's information on organized crime has come from eavesdropping devices.

However obtained, the vast archives at Hoover's disposal enable the FBI to supply such agencies as the Atomic Energy Commission with a complete life history on any job applicant in the

United States for as little as \$1045. His men can run a simple name check for \$1.05.

#### A Sedentary Man

**A**LTHOUGH INFORMATION-GATHERING is, in fact, the FBI's chief role, many misconceptions have grown up about Hoover and his agents.

The agency's brief encounters with the John Dillingers of the world in the 1930s, for example, led to the notion that FBI men were or should be professional gunslingers.

Hoover in real life, however, did not fit that image. He has always been a sedentary man, resembling more a librarian than the brawny cop on the beat. That is what the job required—an administrator, not a bouncer.

Nevertheless, such Hoover critics as the late Sen. Kenneth McKellar of Tennessee taunted him in the 1930s for never making an arrest and for not risking his life in alleyways. The Chicago Tribune sneered at him in 1936: "He is of medium height, inclined to be chubby and of dark complexion . . . He has a piercing glance, which those who have left his service say is the result of practice before a mirror. (He) walks with a rather mincing step, almost feminine."

One of Hoover's admirers responded in Liberty Magazine that "the compact body, with shoulders of a light-heavyweight boxer, carries no ounce

of extra weight—just 170 pounds of live, virile masculinity."

These and similar irrelevancies have inspired controversies that have followed Hoover much of his life. One of his idolators, Mildred Comfort, wrote that he is "a modern knight errant . . . whose chivalry demanded that he rid his country of kidnapers, dope addicts and highjackers, and most of all, of un-Americans." The late Sen. George Norris, on the other hand, regarded him in 1940 as "the greatest hound for publicity on the American continent."

### Political Skills

**T**HE AVAILABLE FACTS, however, suggest that he is neither knight errant nor publicity hound, but rather a somewhat quaint, lonely and isolated man with highly developed political skills, skills that enable him this year to celebrate his 55th anniversary on the Federal payroll, a feat of longevity matched or exceeded only by such venerables as the Selective Service director, Lewis B. Hershey, and the Senate's nonagenarian, Carl Hayden of Arizona.

He lived alone with his mother in Seward Park until he was middle-aged. Since then, virtually his only close companion has been his assistant, Clyde Tolson. They are inseparable friends and have created an atmosphere at the top of the FBI that evokes for former White House assistant Bill D. Moyers "the last vestiges of 19th century civility."

That atmosphere, however, is also flavored with 20th century politics.

"Hoover," says a former member of the FBI executive conference (made up of the agency's top officers), "is very good at knowing which way things are going."

That is borne out in his career. He played an important role in the Palmer raids against "un-Americans" after World War I but in later years mollified civil libertarians by denouncing the entire episode. He vehemently opposed wiretapping in the 1920s and 1930s in response to congressional criticism but covertly continued to wiretap with the amused approval of President Franklin Roosevelt.

He made a virtue of being a political neutral but, according to his good friend Walter Trohan, chief of the Chi-

cago Tribune's Washington bureau, he sometimes did political chores at Roosevelt's direction. In the 1930s, Trohan recalls, Roosevelt ordered Hoover to help round up votes from newspaper publishers to get an Associated Press franchise for the pro-Roosevelt Chicago Sun-Times.

In the 1950s he wrote testimonial letters for such "anti-Communists" in Congress as Sen. Karl Mundt (R-S.D.).

### Friends of Presidents

**W**HEN PRESIDENT KENNEDY came to office, he plucked a pro-Kennedy man from his ranks, Courtney Evans, to provide liaison with the White House. The day after Kennedy's death, he replaced Evans with Cartha (Deke) DeLoach, a friend of President Johnson.

When controversy over the FBI's eavesdropping began to surface in 1965, he persuaded Acting Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach to sign—after the fact—authorizations for about 60 "bugs" Hoover's men had in-

stalled. (In exchange, Katzenbach reportedly laid down three conditions: that time limits on "bugging" be imposed, that each "bug" must be justified and that when Katzenbach became Attorney General all "bugs" would be removed.)

It has taken political skills of this kind for Hoover to survive the waves of criticism that have washed over him during the years. Thirty years ago he was the target of such conservative organs as the Chicago Tribune and the New York Daily News, which said in 1940: "If Congress doesn't want an American OGPU (the Soviet Secret police agency), Congress had better ask itself whether it hasn't been giving Hoover too much money."

### Lonely Opposition

**T**WO YEARS LATER Hoover became a lonely figure in the Government in his opposition to the enforced relocation of Japanese-Americans from the West Coast. As Joseph Kraft has written, the plan was "endorsed by many men notable for their sensitivity to the cause of civil liberties, Earl Warren and Walter Lippmann among them. And who was against it? Perhaps most vigorously of all, J. Edgar Hoover." For his part in that affair, Hoover earned the praise of the American Civil Liberties Union, as he was to earn it some years later for the FBI's defense of civil rights in the South at a time when that was unpopular.

Controversy still dogs him. Dr. King and others have often accused him in recent years of insensitivity to the civil rights problem in the South. His role in the illegal "bugging" activities of the early 1960s has been widely criticized.

Even some of his former associates—people who speak of him as "Mister" Hoover and brook no criticism of him—are beginning to wonder if he is not "out of touch" with the country and with the agency. He has never been outside the United States and today rarely leaves Washington.

To others such as Trohan, however, he remains an admirable and alert figure who worries about the misuse of the FBI's frightening files "in other hands," who can jokingly call an old acquaintance "comrade" and who stands "as a kind of St. Paul—a real apostle."

No one, however, claims to know The Director fully. A former FBI official who worked with him for years expressed the common uncertainty:

"Is he the kind of man I would want in a foxhole with me in war? I would have to say no, simply because after all those years I have no idea what kind of man he really is. Nobody knows him."