

Hoover Criticizes Conference As Casting FBI as 'Defendant'

By Charles Krause

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J. Edgar Hoover has attacked the credibility of a group of scholars, lawyers and journalists whose Conference on the FBI, starting today, is expected to set off another round of criticism of the bureau and its 76-year-old director.

Hoover said the FBI had been cast in the role of "defendant" before the conference even began and that critical remarks already made by some of the participants clearly indicated the FBI was due for a roasting.

Refusing an invitation to "strongly defend the bureau and its role," Hoover said in a letter dated Oct. 7, "... We are declining in view of our serious doubt that any worthwhile purpose could be served by an FBI representative attending an inquiry casting him in the role of defendant before even the first fact is brought out, and condemned

by the 'judges' before trial begins.

"It simply is asking too much that any FBI representative appear personally under those circumstances."

Hoover's letter to Duane Lockard, chairman of the politics department of Princeton University, was released on the eve of the conference sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and the Committee for Public Justice.

The latter group, formed last summer, includes such outspoken Hoover critics as former Attorney General Ramsey Clark; Borge Marshall, a Justice Department official during the Kennedy administration; Roger Wilkins, nephew of NAACP President Roy Wilkins and ex-official of the Justice Department and former Sen. Charles Goodell of New York.

Lockard acknowledged that a majority of the conference's 55 participants are critical of the FBI, but he said most of them recognized the necessity of the federal law enforcement

agency and that many would defend some of the bureau's more controversial practices. He added that several of the FBI's unequivocal supporters, including a representative of the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI, had been invited.

The conference is billed as a "nonpartisan, objective attempt to understand the structure of the FBI and its role and powers in American society."

Although questioning the impartiality of the conference, Hoover said in his letter that neither he nor the agency is "a law unto ourselves." He said the FBI is bound by laws and regulations, many of which may be unpopular, and is closely monitored by the executive and congressional branches of government.

Hoover said a fact-finding poll among all living Presidents, Attorneys General, congressmen and others with whom the FBI is responsible would result "in the approval of the great majority of them."



J. EDGAR HOOVER
... letter defends FBI