

Frank Mankiewicz and Tom Braden

Hoover press interviews largely obscure truth

WASHINGTON — The exquisite bad taste of J. Edgar Hoover's recent press interviews had largely obscured not only the lack of truth in what Hoover has had to say but also the Federal Bureau of Investigation's reluctance to obey the law, including the law which requires government agencies to end racially discriminatory hiring practices.

Hoover's attack on Robert Kennedy, whom he may have thought was a safe target by now, backfired badly.

Former colleagues of Kennedy's in the Justice Department, speaking for a number of past and present law-enforcement officials, took Hoover sharply to task for falsely maligning him. They added pointed reminders that it was Kennedy who began the government's effort against organized crime, over the strong objections of Hoover, who maintained well into the '60s that there was no such thing as organized crime.

As for The Director

As for Hoover (or, as he prefers to be called, The Director) and his casual bigotry about Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, the less said the better.

The curious thing in the whole performance, however, was The Director's statement that he had to get the support of President Johnson in order to fend off Atty. Gen. Kennedy's desire that the FBI hire more agents from minority groups.

Throughout the interview, The Director maintained that he had increased minority hiring in the FBI while not lowering his standards. In fact, he has not substantially increased minority hiring, and he has at least changed his standards. Moreover, until threatened by a congressional investigation, he has tried to conceal the fact.

Hoover told The Washington Post in the first interview that Atty. Gen. Kennedy tried to get more black agents hired and, falsely, added that Kennedy, in order to accomplish this purpose insisted that the bureau drop its standard that agents be either attorneys or accountants.

Hoover went on to say that he told Ken-

nedy he would hire agents of all colors, but would not lower his standards.

FBI refused information

Both we and our colleague Carl Rowan tried then to get from the FBI the number of black agents — as well as total employees — in 1961 and today. For two weeks, the FBI refused to say, claiming at various times that it did not have the information or that it would give it out on a "need-to-know" basis only. In fact, of course, the FBI—like every agency—is required by law to keep such records and, more important, is required by the Freedom of Information Act to make the information available to press and public.

When we threatened to take the matter before the subcommittee on government information, whose chairman Rep. John Moss, D-Cal., wrote the Freedom of Information law, Hoover capitulated.

It turned out the FBI did have the information. In 1961 the FBI had 11 black agents out of 5,873. Today, after nearly a decade of civil rights advances, there are 51 out of 7,910. That is less — far less — than 1 per cent and it represents probably the worst record of any agency in government.

Not only that, but it occurred during a period in which The Director in fact lowered his "standards"; no longer is a law or accounting degree required. During the same period other parts of the Justice Department equaled or exceeded the government-wide standards.

Elsewhere in the FBI — apart from agents — the record is equally poor. Even counting low-rank secretaries and file clerks — with a 60 per cent annual turnover — in the total FBI work force of 18,592, the number of black employees is up from an astounding 48 in 1961 to 1,521 today. And there is not one single black "supergrade" — supervisory — employe of the bureau.

Hoover's false charges so far have been against two dead men, two federal prisoners and two racial minorities. Under the circumstances, it is understandable why he would rather talk about his dogs — they have few friends and don't talk back.