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Catalogue of Accusations Against J. Edgar Hoover

By CHRISTOPHER LEHMANN-HAUPT

Even in an era of studies highly critical of J. Edgar Hoover, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation from 1924 until his death in 1972, Anthony Summers's new biography, "Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover," sets a new standard of what might gently be called revisionism.

If we are to believe the book's most extreme allegations, then Hoover is indirectly responsible for the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. As Mr. Summers sees it, members of the Mafia hired Lee Harvey Oswald. They were fed up with the Kennedys for harassing them through the Attorney General's office, a double-cross in their minds because they had helped to elect the President by delivering phony votes in Chicago.

And why in Mr. Summers's version of history was the mob at liberty to kill President Kennedy? Because its members had neutralized the F.B.I. for decades by blackmailing its director. They knew of his homosexuality. They possessed photographs of him performing a deviate sex act. They had seen him at parties in drag. They had done him expensive favors. And so, writes Mr. Summers, Hoover simply denied the existence of the Mafia and concentrated his forces on rooting out Communists instead.

These are the most astonishing of the author's accusations, but they barely surpass a half-dozen or so others, the most extreme of which are that Hoover ignored an early warning of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; that he conspired with Lyndon B. Johnson to blackmail the Kennedys into designating Johnson as John Kennedy's running mate, and that the director himself was the victim of a Watergate-era break-in by the White House plumbers that may even have involved a plot to murder him.

This is not to mention relatively minor details like the author's suggestion that the writer Joseph P. Lash may indeed have slept with Eleanor Roosevelt in the Chicago hotel room that F.B.I. agents bugged in 1942; or that in 1952 Hoover spread the rumor that Adlai Stevenson was homosexual, or that the reason Congressman Gerald R. Ford was the F.B.I.'s "man" on the Warren Commission was "compromising information on Ford" picked up from a

bugged hotel room.

As for Hoover himself: sexual deviance aside, he is portrayed as alcoholic, bigoted, megalomaniac, addicted to gambling, mentally unstable and prematurely senile. He apparently dreamed of being the head of a worldwide police agency and never got over being denied control of the Central Intelligence Agency. He accepted valuable gifts from people who wanted to influence him. He felt he deserved the Nobel Prize and was particularly enraged when the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was named the 1964 laureate.

How seriously, if at all, are we to take this portrait of Hoover, which formed the basis of the recent television report "The Secret File on J. Edgar Hoover"? One of Mr. Summers's previous books, "Goddess: The Secret Lives of Marilyn Monroe," was not unimpressive for its welter of evidence on the actress's clandestine ties to John and Robert Kennedy. In researching his book on Hoover, the author conducted more than 800 interviews and consulted much previously concealed documentation.

Yet there is a slapdash quality to the writing and presentation of "Official and Confidential." Mr. Summers writes that on the day that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Hoover was in New York for the weekend, attending a football game at Griffith Stadium between the Washington Redskins and the Philadelphia Ea-

gles, "not far off" from where the intelligence chief, William Donovan, was watching the Brooklyn Dodgers play the New York Giants. The author adds, "Long before the final toll was in ... he was on his way by air to Washington." Griffith Stadium was named after the family that owned the Washington Senators baseball team and was of course situated in the capital.

He writes, "Even today, few outside the F.B.I. understand Edgar's record system," yet he neglects to explain how files were actually organized. He writes, "At 29, Edgar was lonely and under stress," as if he knew first hand Hoover's feelings nearly three-quarters of a century ago. To evoke the quality of Hoover's relation to his deputy and supposed lover, Clyde Tolson, he quotes a passage from a novel by Robert Ludlum.

More seriously, Mr. Summers's documentation is unsatisfying. To

Official and Confidential

The Secret Life
of J. Edgar Hoover

By Anthony Summers

Illustrated. 528 pages. G. P. Putnam's Sons.
\$25.95.

A lawman's story is told in terms of sex and blackmail.

back up many of his charges he cites single sources, yet fails to weigh for the reader their reliability. He neglects to frame his discoveries of new evidence, leaving us to figure out for ourselves from ill-organized and impenetrable source notes whether his findings are first or secondhand.

He warns, "Where sexuality is concerned, one must be careful in attaching labels to people." Then he quotes Dr. Harold Lief, professor emeritus of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania and past president of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis, to the effect "that Hoover had a personality disorder, a narcissistic disorder with mixed obsessive features." Dr. Lief continues: "I picked up some paranoid elements, undue suspiciousness and some sadism. A combination of narcissism and paranoia produces what is known as an authoritarian personality. Hoover would have made a perfect high-level Nazi." And where had Dr. Lief "picked up" his evidence for this sweeping assessment? Not from any direct examination of Hoover, but instead, as Mr. Summers himself explains, "on the basis of the information in this book."

None of this disproves Mr. Sum-

mers's conclusions, of course. But it lends his case a sticky patina of sensationalism. You even begin to rebel after a while at the hectoring of Hoover for his reputed homosexuality, even though his reported homophobia makes his exposure seem deserved, and even though, as Mr. Summers puts it, "A homosexual F.B.I. Director, in charge of the nation's internal security, was a classic target for any hostile intelligence service — especially that of the Soviet Union."

Still, the case that "Official and Confidential" makes is so overwhelming in its detail and extensiveness that it has to be acknowledged as an impressive swamp of negativity about J. Edgar Hoover. Out of its depths future commentators may grope for the light.