

HOOVER:

By Lee Krenis More

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Publicly, J. Edgar Hoover reviled homosexuals as "sex deviants."

But privately, the man who ruled the Federal Bureau of Investigation for 48 years until his death in 1972 was a heavy gambler and a homosexual who sometimes dressed in women's clothes — and was blackmailed for his proclivities by the mob.

These are among the incendiary allegations made in *The Secret File on J. Edgar Hoover*, airing Tuesday on PBS' *Frontline*.

Much of this has been documented elsewhere: The program begins with an account of Hoover's "expense-free" life — annual vacations to Florida and California disguised as official business and paid by taxpayers; hotel, restaurant and nightclub bills picked up by rich friends.

And some who knew Hoover and studied his career say the show just revives unsubstantiated rumors.

William Corson, a former counter-intelligence official who worked with Hoover, says allegations that the FBI chief was gay are "crap."

"This kind of stuff is the fantasy of people who are trying to sell," Corson told *Newsday*.

Still, some stories are new, details presented by people who claim to be eyewitnesses. They tie Hoover's personal life to a blackmailing that allowed organized crime to flourish.

One example: Hoover's gambling. He was known to frequent racetracks, where he made a show of betting at the \$2 window.

But *Frontline's* sources say he also placed illegal bets through friends who dealt with mobster Frank Costello. If Hoover won, he was paid; if he didn't, the bet was forgotten.

In this way, *Frontline* argues, Hoover let him-

self be compromised by the very people he should have investigated.

Historians long have wondered why Hoover remained unenthusiastic after the Kennedy administration declared war on the mob. Some say Hoover, to keep arrest rates high, ignored criminals who were hard to catch.

Others point to Hoover's ties to gangsters through friends like gossip columnist Walter Winchell; Sherman Billingsley, owner of the glitzy Stork Club in New York City; and Lewis Rosenstiel, a former bootlegger who founded Schenley Industries and was close to mob boss Meyer Lansky.

“
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”
— Susan Rosenstiel, in PBS *Frontline* report

Hoover's most compromising friendship, *Frontline* says, was with Clyde Tolson, the young agent he promoted with unusual speed to assistant director of the FBI.

The two bachelors were lifelong companions. They maintained separate houses but ate most meals together, spent weekends together and vacationed together. In his will, Hoover left Tolson his house and nearly all his money. Tolson is deceased.

Gossip about the two was common. Behind his back, some referred to Hoover as "J. Edna" and to his second-in-command as "Mother Tolson." But the sexual gossip wasn't printed.

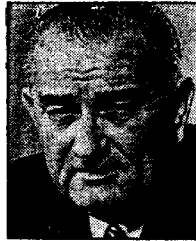
Susan Rosenstiel, ex-wife of Hoover's friend, tells *Frontline* that one night in the late 1950s, communist-hunting lawyer Roy Cohn invited the Rosenstiels to a suite in Manhattan's Plaza Hotel.

"We went in and there was this gentleman, he was dressed as a woman and Roy introduced me. He said 'I'd like you to meet Mary.'" It was J. Edgar Hoover, wearing "a black chiffon dress, very short with ruffles and black lace stockings and high-heeled shoes and a black curly wig and black false eyelashes."

The program also discusses the politics of blackmail and intimidation.

Ex-FBI agent G. Gordon Liddy, later one of the Watergate burglars, describes how Hoover would send him to inform elected officials the FBI had come across embarrassing information about them — and that it was being removed from the files.

Adds former Vice President Walter Mondale: Hoover would say, "Don't worry, I know about it but you're OK." I think it was subtle blackmail, and they did, too."



UPI
JOHNSON: Said he owed his presidency to Hoover

Documentary says mob, homosexuality, gambling dominated his private life



IN 1942: FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover, right, with top aide Clyde Tolson. They ate meals together and spent weekends and vacations together.

One of Hoover's largest files concerned JFK.

It began in the 1940s, when Kennedy was a young naval officer romancing Inga Arvad, a Danish woman who had socialized with Hitler and was suspected of being a Nazi spy.

Years later, the file included results of phone taps and bugs revealing Kennedy's pal Frank Sinatra had asked Chicago mob boss Sam Giancana to falsify ballots to swing Illinois to the Democrats in the 1960 election.

Kennedy, against the advice of his advisers, reappointed Hoover the day after he took office.

By contrast, Lyndon Johnson always had been close to Hoover. They were neighbors when Johnson was in Congress and regularly traded gossip.

Frontline says Kennedy offered Johnson the vice presidency "as a goodwill gesture, believing he would turn it down." When he didn't, "the Kennedy brothers were horrified and closeted themselves in a hotel room."

Evelyn Lincoln, Kennedy's secretary, tells *Frontline* she overheard them as they looked for a way to rescind the offer.

But Hoover, Lincoln says, had fed Johnson information about Kennedy's womanizing so Kennedy was "boxed in."

This may explain Johnson's later cryptic remark, to Richard Nixon, that he owed his presidency to J. Edgar Hoover.

Lee Krenis More writes for *Gannett Rochester Newspapers*.