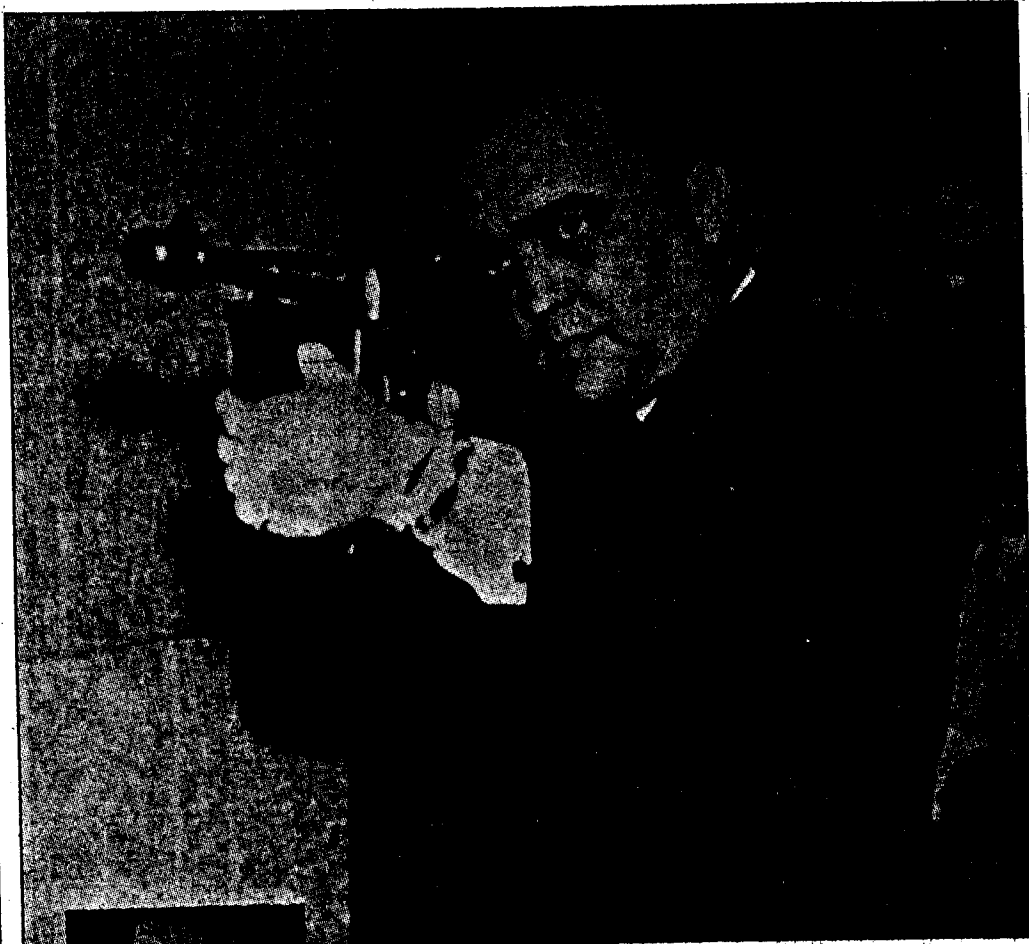


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PEOPLE



Biographer Anthony Summers alleges J. Edgar Hoover (above) was photographed having sex with long-time aide Clyde Telson (left), and the photo was used to blackmail Hoover into leaving the mob alone.

Hunting Hoover's Secret Life

Tale of paranoia, excess, blackmail

BY ALICE KAHN

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

J Edgar Hoover wore a dress. Thanks to Anthony Summers' new book, "Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover" (Putnam, \$25.95), we know it was a black flouncy number accessorized with black lace stockings and high heels.

This is not what Summers wants us to remember about a project that took him five years and cost him all but \$50,000 of the \$750,000 advance he received.

On a book tour now, Summers is trying to focus attention on more than the FBI director's sexual and sartorial preferences. He insists that he's not the one focusing on the drag queen subplot. He even refused a request from People magazine that he be photographed next to a Hoover-looking bulldog in a tutu.

In the course of interviewing 850 people, Summers discovered a bit more about Hoover's 47-year reign as the nation's top crime stopper. It's enough to make you think the letters "FBI" stood for fakery, bullying and innuendo.

Summers says he learned that the head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation kept elaborate confidential files — often from illegal wiretaps and hidden cameras — on the sexual preferences, peccadilloes and most embarrassing moments of congress-



BY TOM LEVY/THE CHRONICLE

Summers says Hoover was a publicity-grubbing, hypocritical man who allowed gangsters to thrive and contributed to the massacre at Pearl Harbor.

men, presidents, journalists and just about anybody else he cared to control. He blackmailed early and often, according to Summers.

Just to list a few of the sensational ploys Summers says Hoover used: He made sure that FDR knew he had a file on Eleanor Roosevelt's sex life, including liaisons with a young man in a ho-

tel room; that Martin Luther King could not enjoy the Nobel Peace Prize that Hoover thought he deserved because Hoover showed him compromising photos two days before he accepted the prize; that JFK knew that Hoover had a file lending credence to reports of a concealed first marriage; that Lyndon **HOOVER: Page B4 Col. 1**

HOOVER: Accessorized With Lace

From Page B3

Johnson knew about the dossier on his illegitimate son, Steven; and that Richard Nixon knew Hoover had the goods on him for pre-Watergate wiretapping as well as a clandestine relationship with a Chinese gal pal.

Those he didn't have the goods on *thought* he did. It was fear of these files, of counter-blackmail, that kept revelations about Hoover's personal life out of the news during his lifetime.

While Hoover threatened other closet homosexuals in high places with ruin, he himself was so indiscreet, according to Summers, as to be photographed in the act with his longtime companion, FBI agent Clyde Tolson. As early as 1937, such photographs allegedly fell into the hands of mafioso Meyer Lansky and were used to control Hoover so that the Mafia thrived during Hoover's reign.

Summers describes Hoover launching an anti-pornography campaign in 1937, saying, "If we act now we can look forward to a new generation of young people with clean minds and healthy bodies living in a better, cleaner America." A year later, Susan Rosenthal, wife of millionaire mobster and Hoover buddy Lewis Rosen-

stiel, described seeing Hoover at gay orgies in New York hotel suites in black dresses, red dresses and feather boas.

"The face was completely recognizable," Rosenthal told Summers. "Hoover made an ugly woman."

Rosenthal gave similar testimony in 1970 to New York state crime investigators.

But there is much more here than Hoover's connection to red dresses and red scares. The book makes the overwhelming case that far from stopping crime or even communism, Hoover was a publicity-grubbing, hypocritical, unprincipled man who allowed organized crime to thrive while he destroyed the lives of thousands of innocent people. He didn't just allow it. He enjoyed the company of and the gifts from known mobsters.

This is the story of a 47-year abuse of power that contributed to the massacre at Pearl Harbor by Hoover's failing to pass news of the impending attack to the White House, that led to the ruin of congressmen like Cornelius Gallagher of New Jersey, G-men like Melvin Purvis and suicidal actresses like Jean Seberg; as well as to the gunning down of Black Panthers freed

Hampton and Mark Clark in Chicago.

Thrown in with the sensational and amusing details are other whispers, rumors and heavily documented charges. There is Gore Vidal's report that the racist Hoover was actually of black ancestry himself. There are stories suggesting that *somebody* — if not Nixon then operatives like E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy, who were close to him — may have used sophisticated CIA bump-off techniques to make it appear that the 77-year-old director died suddenly of a heart attack in 1973.

The book is such an encyclopedia of everything bad you ever wanted to know about Hoover that the silly gets mixed in with the deadly. We learn that Hoover was not only a snoop, but also a homophobic homosexual, a paranoid, an obsessive-compulsive and someone who needed heated toilet seats and fresh carnations each day.

Summers insists he is neither a scandalhonger nor a scholar. It's just journalism, folks.

He defends himself against criticism that he threw in serious charges of corruption and chicanery with the trivial accounts of mincing walks and sissy behavior, reports from OSS officers along

side gossip from aging Mafia molls. "I was trying to write a comprehensive account of my investigation," he says. "The alternative, to leave the details out, is not accurate either. That's not a faithful accounting of my research."

He wrote the book because Putnam, impressed with his previous works on the Kennedy assassination and Marilyn Monroe's death, asked him to do a comprehensive study of Hoover before the original sources died off.

But Summers, 50, an Oxford man, a Vietnam correspondent, a crime reporter and the Maury Povich of the BBC, had learned when working on the previous books that American journalists were not "Commie rats," as Hoover believed, but more damnably slobbs.

"I do not find nearly enough probing journalism in this country," he says.

Summers also feels that it's "unhealthy to let the rumors about Hoover go, and not resolve who he really was: an evil element." Plus, as Summers has learned from the doing the talk-show circuit, many Americans still regard Hoover as an icon from the good old days.

Before dismissing this foreigner's charge that we are a nation of high-tech boobs, consider his contention that not only could it happen again — it has.

"Look at Iranagate," he says. "It's unconscionable that Bush was allowed to pardon Weinberger just when it was all going to come out. If ever there was a stench . . ."