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Kelley Inherits FBI Transcript Goofs

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FBI chief Clarence Kelley, whose square jaw is replacing the late J. Edgar Hoover's bulldog visage as a symbol of law and order, has strengthened the FBI, restored its morale and corrected past abuses.

Our assessment of Kelley may be noteworthy, since we were the first to expose Hoover's excesses. We told how the FBI, under Hoover, kept files on prominent Americans, photocopied their private papers, obtained their bank records without subpoenas and even committed burglaries.

Now we have uncovered another scandal, which Kelley inherited. We have established that FBI transcripts, marked as evidence and distributed to prosecutors and judges, are loaded with errors.

With the help of Washington's renowned private detective Richard Bast, we have reviewed 150,000 words in FBI transcripts and have found more than 30,000 errors. One 136-page transcript contained 6,500 goofs.

Yet these transcripts were distributed for use in criminal and civil cases to various FBI offices, the Justice Department and the courts. Although an FBI

spokesman explained that the transcripts were merely rough drafts, they were stamped "evidence," not "drafts." The spokesman said no one had been damaged by the transcripts.

But the circulation of grossly erroneous transcripts as FBI evidence strikes at the heart of the judicial process. In the name of justice, proper precautions should be taken to ensure their accuracy.

Even more serious than the errors are the omissions. For example, the tapes contain references to crimes that should have been investigated, yet these crucial references don't appear in the FBI transcripts. Here are a few examples:

- Bast put Treasury agents together with a Mafia contact and taped the interview. The mobster gave evidence of a "violation of the mails." The tape was later transcribed by the FBI, but mention of the postal violation was omitted.

- Two references to a 10 per cent kickback, which a Mafia middleman had collected from a major New York shipping firm, were left out of the FBI transcript.

- In one tape, a Mafia courier tells how he and his pals had fooled FBI agents who had been

keeping them under surveillance. Under the noses of the agents, boasts the courier, the mobsters had smuggled in "enough explosives in the truck to blow up . . . Union Station." This part of the courier's confession doesn't appear in the FBI transcript.

- Discussion of two other crimes, involving fireworks brought in as "pest control pebbles" and name-brand cigarettes fabricated by the Mafia "with their machines in their warehouses," is mysteriously missing from the transcript.

- An underworld fireworks dealer describes how his boss "always hires a few of the fire marshals" to cover up criminal fireworks sales. This reference to bribery also is deleted from the transcript.

- On one tape, a federal agent quotes "a guy from AID" as saying that "everybody at every level is taking their cut" of U.S. shipments to Vietnam. Unaccountably, the FBI transcript turns the quote around. "Everybody never knows who's taking a cut," states the FBI version.

The transcripts are also littered with Keystone Kops errors. In a reference to gangster Paul Coppola, there is a line about putting "up a witness bond to appear at Paul Coppo-

la's trial." This appears in the FBI transcript as "up to Kichenape to appear in front of a Polish trial."

The term "bag man" is transcribed by the FBI as "bad man," and the crime of "skylocking" comes out "skylocking." A reference to "a soldier, you know, sneaks through enemy lines" is recorded in the transcript as a "sager who speaks the enemy line."

The phrase, "the rest of the members," is translated by the FBI astonishingly as "Richard Nixon." The name "Diddinger," perhaps in memory of past FBI glory, becomes "Dillinger."

The phrase, "I was fired, Mr. Simpkins," becomes "You despise Mr. Simpkins" in the transcript. An ex-FBI agent, William Turner, who wrote an unfavorable book about the late J. Edgar Hoover, is described in the tapes as "just interested in . . . prosecuting." But it appears in the FBI transcript as "just interested in . . . prostitution."

Among the comic mistakes are some that are chilling. At one point, a tape contains this warning from Bast about a mob informer: "To be quite frank, his life is in danger."

In the FBI transcript, the phrase reads: "Unintelligible."

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