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FBI Airs Disruptive Tactics

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The FBI made public yesterday previously secret documents describing the "counterintelligence" tactics it used in the late 1960s to disrupt and discredit such organizations as the Ku Klux Klan, the Communist Party and the Black Panthers.

The documents detail how the counterintelligence program, known as COINTELPRO, used such devices as portraying the Panthers as a black version of the Ku Klux Klan and the Klan as an "anti-Christ" organization hindering the Vietnam war effort.

Most of the documents con-

cern a campaign started by the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover in 1964 to disrupt the Klan. According to the documents, the FBI infiltrated the Klan with approximately 2,000 informants, set up an organization to act as a counterforce, fabricated news stories hostile to Klan leaders, and mailed large numbers of anonymous postcards intended to frighten Klan members into resigning.

The documents also reveal that the FBI considered trying to persuade the governor of Virginia, Mills Godwin, to take action against the Klan in 1966 for failing to pay state retail taxes on items sold at

Klan rallies. There was no indication in the documents about whether Godwin was actually approached.

Other documents reveal a campaign that started in 1954 against the American Communist Party which included anonymous mailings to Jewish members about anti-Semitic policies in the Soviet Union.

In yet another campaign, FBI informants induced Chicago officials to condemn a building serving as local headquarters for the American Nazi Party on the grounds of building code violations.

The documents, most of which are internal FBI memos

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and letters from 1964 through 1970, were obtained by a group of reporters under the Freedom of Information Act.

Clarence M. Kelley, the present FBI director, revealed last year that the counterintelligence program, which also allegedly was used against various anti-Vietnam war groups, was discontinued by Hoover in April, 1971, after the news media exposed some of its activities.

This exposure also prompted the Attorneys General during the time the programs were in force to deny that they were informed of them during their tenure at the Justice Department. However, the documents made public yesterday indicate that memos or letters referring to some of the counterintelligence activities were sent to the Attorney General's office on at least two occasions.

On Sept. 2, 1965, Hoover sent letters to Attorney General Nicholas deB. Katzenbach and to Marvin Watson, a special assistant to President Johnson, describing how the FBI had infiltrated the Klan and giving other examples of how "we also are seizing every opportunity to disrupt the activities of Klan organizations," Katzenbach said "I appreciate having the benefit of detailed information on this subject, and I hope you will continue to keep me up to date on it."

Katzenbach, who was contacted by The Washington Post in Armonk, N.Y., yesterday, reiterated that he had not been informed of the counterintelligence programs during his time in the Justice Department. The former Attorney General said that he had been aware of the FBI's infiltration of the Klan but knew nothing about the bureau's disruption activities.

He also said that he had no recollection of the 1965 letter from Hoover and noted: "The bureau used to send up that stuff by the truckload. I had almost all of it read by my assistants. Mr. Hoover liked to be flattered, and I had one

expert on how to flatter Mr. Hoover. The reply from my office sounds like the sort of thing he use to routinely send out."

On another occasion, Sept. 16, 1969, the documents indicate that a report on "the excellent results achieved through counterintelligence in smashing the Klan effectiveness in North Carolina" was sent to the then Attorney General, John N. Mitchell, the then deputy attorney general, Richard G. Kleindienst, and three assistant attorneys general.

Kleindienst, who has denied knowledge of COINTELPRO when he served as Mitchell's deputy and later when he was himself Attorney General, told The Washington Post yesterday that he had no recollection of seeing this report.

Like Katzenbach, Kleindienst noted that "I was getting about 30 pounds of stuff a day, and I didn't really read most of it."

The documents stress the discrediting of target organizations "through the cooperation of reliable news media sources."

The documents cite several instances where FBI agents were able to plant stories in the press about the Klan and, in one case, influence the filming of a half-hour documentary by a Miami TV station on the right-wing American States Rights Party.

One memo, dated Sept. 21, 1964, cited Ralph McGill, the late publisher of the Atlanta Constitution, as "a staunch and proven friend of the bureau" and suggested that "the bureau furnish McGill appropriate material on the nationwide activity of the Klan" for transmission to a Saturday Evening Post correspondent then working on an article about the Klan.

A memo dated Dec. 17, 1968, proposed that a "treatise in narrative form," prepared by the FBI and entitled "The Black Klan" be disseminated to "friendly news media" in a campaign against the Black Panthers.

Beginning with "this time

the color of the skin beneath the sheets has changed from white to black," the "treatise" went on to charge that the Panthers were similar to the Klan in terms of their emphasis on violence and appeals to racism. The main difference, the article concluded, was that the Black Panthers looked for financial and moral support to Communist backers like Cuba.

Although it has long been common knowledge that the FBI had heavily infiltrated the Klan, the documents show how deep the infiltration was. At one point in the 1960s, they say, FBI informants held high rank in seven of the country's 14 Klan groups and one actually headed one state Klan.

In 1966 a campaign was started to send anonymous postcards to known Klan members bearing such messages as, "Trying to hide your identity behind a sheet? Someone knows who you are," and, "Is your job safe even after everyone finds out you're a Klansman?"

One unusual disruptive weapon fashioned against the Klan was the FBI's creation of an organization called the National Committee for Domestic Tranquility.

The committee was designed as "a vehicle for attacking Klan policies and disputes from a low key, common sense and patriotic position" appealing to the sort of people from which the Klan traditionally sought support.

The committee issued a bulletin that appeared under the signature of Harmon Blennerhasset, an obscure historical figure who gave financial support to Aaron Burr. Under letterheads suggesting it had chapters in several states, it sought to create the impression that Klan leaders were in league with "the anti-Christ, the atheistic Communist" and interested only in their own profit.

The bulletin often tried to drive home its point by featuring in bold capital letters the slogan: "QUIT THE KLAN; AND BACK OUR BOYS IN VIETNAM."