

There are many enduring popular fictions about the FBI - ~~THE~~ the best J. Edgar Hoover and his staff of publicists provided by the ever-thoughtful taxpayer could invent.

~~THEY~~ One of Hoover's lesser-known talents, ~~was~~ was self-publicity, centered around self-fabricated stories of personal bravery and unflinching, successful pursuit of wrong-doers. Government employees ghost-wrote widely-publicized, widely-distributed books bearing his visage and name, books not conspicuous for their modesty. There were radio and TV programs, planted newspaper stories and leaks to the favored. Hoover ever supplied the materials for books about himself when he knew the authors would write glowingly and uncritically. Simultaneously, when I was exposing the FBI's deficiencies, he refused to send me a press release already published.

Perhaps the single most persisting and most diligently perpetuated falsehood about the FBI is that its "reports" are always secret, and that there is no agent who wouldn't go to a martyr's death to preserve their sanctity.

This has never been true. In the overwhelming majority of criminal cases it should always be true. In political cases the files are used as propaganda. But the FBI will go to court to deny files required by law to be available to the people if those files can embarrass it or expose its shortcomings and dishonesties. I have one such case on its way to the Supreme Court now. In it the FBI swore to the court- to the same judge who presides over The Watergate - that its files are available inside the government only and then on a need-to-know basis exclusively.

Hoover's personal spying on Americans he didn't like became public with disclosures of his relentless pursuit of personal information on the assassinated black leader, Dr. Martin Luther King. He played tapes of King's conversations for racists members of Congress. Hoover delighted in titillating Lyndon Johnson with choice gossip from the FBI's secret files.

Access to FBI files has never been denied to friendly private investigators who paid it back with favors in the form of little jobs the FBI didn't want to do. Years ago, when a friend was being challenged in exercising his right to a ~~per~~ commercial property, I asked ~~them~~ another friend, a private investigator, if he could offer

help to the friend with the problem, about to be litigated. Overnight ~~my~~ the lawyer of my friend who was being sued had the contents of the FBI's secret file on the man who was suing him, a man who had not committed any crime and should not have ~~any~~ had any police dossier.

It is in criminal matters that the FBI can buy and repay favors. Here former FBI agents who have resigned or retired and set up private investigative agencies often have an inside track. This supposedly secret data is handled so loosely that I have had access to FBI criminal files fourth hand.

All pretenses to the contrary, there was nothing exceptional in John Dean having access to the Watergate evidence that was evidence against Nixon when Dean was Nixon's White House counsel.