

not 3/11/73 . . . And for the FBI

In addition to the other things it told us, L. Patrick Gray III's testimony before the Ervin committee said a great deal about the nature of the task facing Clarence Kelley, the new FBI Director. Few would argue that the bureau was in perfect shape when Mr. Hoover died. The problem is that under Mr. Gray's unhappy stewardship—as revealed in the Gray testimony—the bureau got a large dose of just what it didn't need and precious little of what it did.

On the first count, one must go back to the better part of J. Edgar Hoover's legacy to see what has been damaged. It is no secret that the late FBI Director was not an easy fellow to deal with and that his pride and personal sense of legend were a tribulation to a long line of attorneys general. But he was nobody's patsy. He had a true sense of duty to his country, he was fiercely—even jealously—proud of the FBI's reputation for professionalism and he was the canniest prowler of the Washington jungle. If the bureau's reputation for the ability to flood the country with relentless automations backed by the latest scientific crime detection devices was overblown, it was not without some foundation in fact. The bureau could be very good when Mr. Hoover put his mind to it. And the FBI's greatest assets were Mr. Hoover's towering prestige and its own reputation for integrity and efficiency.

That is what has been compromised since his death. No White House functionaries in earlier administrations, no matter what their titles or proximity to the President, would have dreamed of summoning Mr. Hoover to do a "burn job" for them. But John Ehrlichman and John Dean could because they had taken a cynical measure of the man Mr. Nixon had sent over to modernize and enhance Mr. Hoover's legacy. Mr. Gray liked being Acting Director and wanted the permanent job after the election. And apparently the White House men cared more for the needs of the moment than they did for the 48-year record of integrity of the FBI. So when there was a hot job to be done, the head of the FBI was—in their view—just the man to do it. That was all there was to it.

Mr. Gray's description of events and his attitude toward them demonstrate just how ill-suited he was to preserve the bureau's integrity. He evidently did not have the wit to understand that the suggestion to destroy material from Howard Hunt's safe, material he got from John Dean in John Ehrlichman's presence, was wrong. "I had a belief," he told the committee, "they

were acting for the President . . ." And that was enough for him.

Even after it had become public knowledge that he had destroyed the documents, Mr. Gray clung to the pathetic belief that he could still lead the FBI. And six weeks after John Ehrlichman had decided to let Mr. Gray "hang there" twisting "slowly, slowly in the wind," Mr. Gray didn't know he was in trouble. Henry Petersen had to tell him.

Thus, Mr. Gray's bumbling innocence and his narrow, unquestioning loyalty have struck deep at the FBI's most precious asset: its reputation for integrity. For against this background of Mr. Gray's turn at the helm, it does little good for him or Richard Kleindienst or Mr. Ehrlichman to cite the man hours spent on the Watergate case or the number of field offices involved or the number of interviews conducted. It is entirely possible that the bureau's investigation was as rigorous and as thorough as it should have been, but the behavior of Messrs. Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Dean, taken with Mr. Gray's pliability and gullibility, makes that a hard, if not impossible, case to sustain.

So far as the unmet needs of the bureau following Mr. Hoover's death are concerned, they have pretty much gone unmet under his successors. Most of these needs are an outgrowth of Mr. Hoover's own prolonged tenure of office. The bureau needs modernization, for example. Fundamental questions should be asked about its functions—whether, for instance, it is wise to house crime fighting and certain national security responsibilities within the same organization. Similar questions ought to be raised about some of its modes of operation—such as using informers as *agents provocateurs*. Mr. Hoover's more anachronistic notions about race, communism and the youth culture should be abandoned. Personnel practices with regard to women, minorities, dress codes and employees' private lives have long been due for revision. And there are a lot of busy-work requirements for compiling statistics and putting in voluntary overtime that are demeaning to a great organization.

Although Mr. Gray made a few tentative moves in the direction of modernizing the bureau, much of that work remains to be done. And now there is more, simply because the best part of the Hoover legacy has been damaged. So Mr. Kelley takes over an awesome job. The rebuilding will take strength, patience, wisdom, professionalism and more than a little healthy skepticism about the various predatory species roaming the Washington jungle.