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Panel Told of F.B.I. Plot To Discredit a Professor

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 18—The Federal Bureau of Investigation attempted to discredit a University of Chicago professor in 1968 who was later beaten by an unidentified assailant for his political views, according to F.B.I. documents obtained today from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

The F.B.I.'s mailing of an anonymous letter to officials of the University of Chicago as part of a counterintelligence operation was made public last Thursday by Attorney General Edward H. Levi in testimony before the committee. The Attorney General disclosed that he had once been a recipient of a counterintelligence letter aimed at discrediting a professor at the university.

Mr. Levi said he could not recall the letter, but learned of its existence after he became attorney General. He did not name the professor.

According to F.B.I. documents in the hands of the Senate committee, the letter was about Richard Isaac Flacks, then 37 years old and an assistant professor of sociology at the university.

Mr. Flacks had gained considerable attention in Chicago in 1968 and 1969 for his antiwar positions, his early involvement with Students for a Democratic Society, a radical organization, and his role in student demonstrations at the university.

On July 26, 1968, the special agent in charge of the F.B.I. field office in Chicago requested permission to send an anonymous letter to the board of trustees of the university and to The Chicago Tribune. In a memorandum, he wrote:

"The board of trustees, however, is composed of individuals such as John D. Rockefeller, whose wide interests might preclude any knowledge on their part of the New University Conference [an antiwar group]. The letter is intended to stimulate interest in the proposed activities of the [conference] . . . and to prod the board of trustees into some action against the New University Conference and Flacks."

The request was granted by the F.B.I.'s headquarters on Aug. 2, 1968. "This proposal has merit," bureau officials said, "as it may discourage Flacks or even result in his ultimate removal from the University of Chicago."

F.B.I. records indicated that the letter had produced no discernible results. It was signed by "a concerned alumnus" and noted at one point that "it is

difficult for me to understand why the University of Chicago would want to continue to employ an individual who is working for student rebellions."

On May 5, 1969, Mr. Flacks was attacked and beaten in his office in a university library building by a man who posed as a reporter for a newspaper he described as "The St. Louis Globe."

Mr. Flacks suffered two skull fractures and his right hand was nearly severed at the wrist during the attack. He said in a recent telephone interview that he still did not have the full use of his hand.

Mr. Flack's attacker has never been apprehended. There is no "St. Louis Globe," but both newspapers in St. Louis—The Post Dispatch and The Globe Democrat—said they had no reporter who fit the attacker's description and knew of no assignment to interview Mr. Flacks.

Press accounts of the incident quoted Chicago police detectives as speculating that the attack had political motives. Two months earlier members of a radical right-wing group called the Legion of Justice had attacked students during a sit-in at the university.

Mr. Flacks said in an interview that he felt "it was unlikely the F.B.I. was directly involved in the assault," but he added that he thought there was a "network" growing out from the bureau through the intelligence activities of the Chicago Police Department that might have been connected with the assault.

A spokesman for the Senate committee said it found no evidence that the bureau had been connected with the assault, but that he acknowledged that the "field investigation" of the issue. A member of the committee's staff did interview Mr. Flacks.

F.B.I. documents disclosed that the bureau prepared a report on the assault based on Chicago police interviews and that there was no indication in the report that the bureau had complicity in the beating.

A spokesman for the bureau replied, "Absolutely not" when asked whether the F.B.I. could have been even tangentially involved.

Several Congressional sources who have studied the F.B.I.'s counterintelligence program said they believed the Flacks case was representative of the violent atmosphere within which the bureau often carried out "its own disruption activities," as one source put it.