

Hoover's Victims



Longer column (more names)
filed Hoo.

Jack Anderson

THE LATE Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wasn't the only innocent victim whom the FBI hounded.

There were several other names on J. Edgar Hoover's hate list; the old bulldog subjected most of them to FBI harassment. Indeed, Hoover merely had to develop a mild dislike for a person, and the FBI would begin breathing down his neck.

The quickest way for a free people to lose their liberty is to grant too much power to the policemen. Hoover overstepped his authority; he grossly misused the FBI. Since no government official can assume powers that the people don't bestow, the old G-man was acting illegally.

★ ★ ★

HERE'S HOW Hoover used the FBI to harass his enemies and smear his rivals:

• The New York Post's liberal editor, James Wechsler, was high on Hoover's hate list. When Wechsler sent a reporting team to Washington in 1959 to prepare a series about the FBI, the apprehensive Hoover assigned FBI squads to follow the reporters. Agents broke into the room of one reporter, hoping to find blackmail evidence. When none turned up, the frustrated agents talked of planting narcotics in the room. The plan was discarded, however, not because it was illegal but because it was risky.

• Hoover came to hate the late

Attorney General Robert Kennedy with a passion. After Kennedy visited two field offices, Hoover solicited affidavits from the agents about Kennedy's private remarks on wire-taps. The purpose was to portray Kennedy as a liar.

• The FBI chief had a running feud with Walter Bedell Smith, the late, distinguished Undersecretary of State. Hoover directed his agents to gather gossip about Smith and to spread rumors that Smith was having an affair with a top woman official. The patrician Smith got so enraged that he accused Hoover of wasting the taxpayers' money on rumor mongering and threatened: "I'll fight you all over Washington if I have to." Hoover backed down.

• The FBI director also engaged in bureaucratic warfare against another Attorney General, Robert Jackson. With documents in hand, Hoover tried to persuade President Franklin D. Roosevelt that Jackson was inefficient.

• Hoover conducted an ugly, "running memo" campaign against former Immigration Commissioner Joseph Swing who had the audacity to complain that Hoover wasn't cooperative. The FBI chief went personally to President Dwight Eisenhower with gossip about Swing.

J. Edgar Hoover used his enormous power as director of the FBI to uphold his viewpoints and to smear anyone he disliked.