

decades by fear and extortion. Some of the most profound decisions affecting the future of the United States were made, not on the basis of principles or the merits of argument, but were based upon secret police methods of coercion.

There is a strong implication in the Summers book that, when the traditional blackmail and extortion methods did not work, Hoover had no qualms about resorting to murder. Hoover's power struggle with the Kennedy brothers, John and Robert, was resolved only by assassins' bullets. An even stronger case is made by Summers that Hoover was in some way involved in the assassination of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. While it would be foolish, in light

of all the evidence now publicly available, to presume that Hoover was solely responsible for those three tragic murders, the vital role of the Hoover FBI in covering up the assassinations was so important, that it is hard to conceive that he was not at least a major player in setting up the executions in the first place.

Hoover's personal attitude toward the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King was demonstrated by the director's itinerary the days after John Kennedy and Martin Luther King were shot: He went to the race track, arm-in-arm with his sometime homosexual lover, FBI Deputy Director Clyde Tolson.

Summers: Dismantle the FBI's blackmail files

Author Anthony Summers released the following comments on his probe of J. Edgar Hoover on Feb. 16:

Readers will be appalled, first, to discover for themselves that Hoover's abuses were every bit as bad as his critics claimed. And once they take that on board, I think it will dawn on them that, for decade after decade, this man succeeded in pulling the wool over the eyes of the American people. They will realize the leading role he played in using the threat of Communism within the United States—a threat which even he came to dismiss in private—to keep the nation in a state of panic. This was a pervasive fear, one which distorts American political life to this day. Readers will realize too that the man who held himself up as a God-fearing standard-bearer of morality, democracy and the American Way was in reality the very opposite—a hypocritical, corrupt man who institutionalized the suppression of essential freedoms. . . .

Hoover was able to pressure Presidents and make them aware of his power in such a way that even when they wanted to remove him, they couldn't. . . . Hoover created his own massive propaganda department at the Bureau, building himself up, through the '30s and '40s, as a national figure. As one President after another discovered, you can't just turn around and fire a national icon. More importantly, Hoover became an asset to those in power. Every President from Roosevelt to Nixon—Eisenhower came closest to being the honorable exception—used the FBI in ways that, if known at the time, would have seemed unacceptable to most citizens. By doing so, those leaders essentially delivered themselves into Hoover's hands. . . .

Newly released White House tapes show that the Nixon administration had been worrying—panicking even—

about what Hoover had in his files. Later, during the Watergate probes, investigators were told there had been plans to break into Hoover's home before he died—perhaps even to murder the man. The morning Hoover died, when the undertakers arrived, they found men swarming through his house, ransacking the place. Hours earlier, according to neighbors, two men were seen removing a heavy load wrapped in a quilt. Someone, evidently, thought the director had squirreled away some of his secrets at home. Meanwhile, despite orders to seal his office, many files were spirited away from FBI headquarters before Nixon's new acting director could get to them. Some were destroyed by Hoover's longtime assistant Helen Gandy. Others were reportedly kept by his aide and lover Clyde Tolson, and retrieved by the FBI when he in turn died.

The lesson to be learned

A congressional inquiry failed to find out for sure what happened to the secret and sensitive files that were removed from headquarters. I suspect most were destroyed. But there's no doubt that the massive file systems still maintained at the FBI contain information that should never have been collected in a democratic society. Some of it would probably harm prominent people still alive, and certainly there is data that could smear the memory of revered politicians now dead. It is small consolation that much of the information the FBI gathered was baseless gossip. I would second the call Anthony Lewis made in the *New York Times* recently, that the Clinton administration should promptly force all agencies to disgorge their files on American citizens on request of the citizens involved. This should be the case anyway—had the Reagan and Bush administration not castrated the Freedom of Information Act. Finally, and most important, we must show that the lesson of Hoover's abuses has been learned. We should prohibit the investigation of Americans because of their beliefs or associations.