



The Hunt for Red Menace: Evidence is Immaterial

COINTELPRO Media Operations

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COINTELPRO

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover initiated COINTELPRO, the acronym given the FBI's Counterintelligence Program, in August 1956. COINTELPRO was designed to "increase factionalism, cause disruption and win defections" inside the Communist Party U.S.A. The FBI program was later enlarged to include disruption of the Socialist Workers Party (1961), the Ku Klux Klan (1964), Black nationalist groups such as the Black Panther Party and the Nation of Islam (1967), and the entire New Left, including community and religious groups (1968).

Hoover was certainly obsessed with counter-subversion and a conspiracy view of history. He was convinced the civil rights movement was the result of communist subversives agitating normally docile Blacks into protesting segregation. Hoover even demanded his agents find out who was behind the women's movement, apparently assuming he could eradicate the global feminist awakening by ferreting out a small cabal of malcontents.

Inside the FBI there developed a core group of agents with authoritarian tendencies who adopt the theories, and sometimes the practices, of the the paranoid nativist right-wing. This view was institutionalized while Hoover was FBI director, and a self-perpetuating network carries on the tradition today following his death.

David Kaplan of California's Center for Investigative Reporting called COINTELPRO "the largest known program yet in domestic suverillance." Kaplan observed that "between 1965 and 1975, the FBI opened more than 500,000 intelligence files on more than one million Americans, according to a Congressional report.... Among the Bureau's targets: Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam War Groups, and the underground press."

In the Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities, COINTELPRO was castigated in no uncertain terms:

=== "COINTELPRO is the FBI acronym for a series of covert action programs directed against domestic groups.

=== "Many of the techniques used would be intolerable in a democratic society even if all of the targets had been involved in violent activity, but COINTELPRO went far beyond that...the Bureau conducted a sophisticated vigilante operation aimed squarely at preventing the exercise of First Amendment rights of speech and association, on the theory that preventing the growth of dangerous groups and the propogation of dangerous ideas would protect the national security and deter violence.

Richard Criley of the National Committee Against Repressive Legislation, himself a victim of government surveillance abuse, has chronicled the enormity of privacy violations by the FBI and their use of informants:

=== "In the City of Chicago alone, from 1966 to 1976, the FBI employed (at a cost of \$2.5 million) over 5,000 secret undercover informers to operate within civic and political organizations which were violating no laws. For 16 years (1960 to to 1977), the FBI employed 1,600 informers to infiltrate one small political group, the Socialist Workers Party (at an estimated cost of \$26 million). Such was the national pattern.

=== "The information gathered by the FBI's informant network was supplemented by illegal wiretaps, letter openings, burglaries of office files, secret examination of bank records, clippings from newspapers, and physical surveillance. At the FBI and other government offices, vast files of organizations' political policies and individuals' opinions were catalogued according to their degrees of presumed "dangerousness" in the FBI's secret "Security Index."

=== "Thousands of individuals in the FBI Index were targeted for round-up and detention in case of a "national emergency," although it is still unclear what constituted a "national emergency." The FBI created this detention list in the 1940's, even before the legislation was passed providing any statutory authority (the Emergency Detention Act of 1950)."

COINTELPRO violated constitutionally-guaranteed rights in a carefully calculated manner, and was essentially anti-democratic in design and implementation. Allowed to evolve towards its logical conclusions, COINTELPRO would have engendered an authoritarian environment limiting basic liberties.

Only a handful of the tens of thousands of pages of COINTELPRO documents reviewed by

researchers for various lawsuits had any mention of criminal activity. When the FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania was raided in 1971 by unknown antiwar activists, the pilfered files revealed the following startling statistics: 1 percent of the files were devoted to organized crime, mostly gambling; 15% regarded bank robberies, rape, murder and interstate theft; 30% were manuals and official bureaucratic non- investigative documents; 14% were devoted to draft resistance and AWOL military personnel; and a 40% were devoted to political surveillance and investigations of alleged subversion and security risks. Two of these political cases involved right wing groups, ten cases involved immigrants, and 200 cases involved political activists on the left.

Sometimes the collusion between the FBI and the far-right had violent results. Civil rights activists Jim Peck and Walter Bergman were brutally beaten by the Ku Klux Klan in May of 1961 when buses carrying freedom riders were ambushed in Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama.

Former Ku Klux Klan member Gary Thomas Rowe, Jr. was an FBI COINTELPRO informant who in 1975 testified before a Senate committee that he had warned local police and Federal agents that the ambush would take place. Peck and Bergman filed lawsuits shortly after the 1975 Senate testimony

Neither local police or federal agents intervened in the ambush, and in fact the Birmingham Police Department informally agreed to allow the Klansmen up to 20 minutes in which to assault the Freedom Riders before police would arrive on the scene.

Peck was beaten unconscious outside the Birmingham bus station while Bergman was assaulted while the Freedom Ride buses were in Anniston, Alabama where one of the buses was destroyed by a firebomb. Bergman, 84 at the time of his court victory, was confined to a wheelchair, in part due to injuries resulting from the beating. Despite his injuries, Bergman still firmly believed his participation in the Freedom Rides was worthwhile, and contributed to "opening up the South to free travel by people of all races." The lawsuits resulted in judgements against the government of \$25,000 and \$35,000 for Peck and Bergman.

Evidence is Immaterial

Contrary evidence was no impediment to Hoover pursuing his right- wing paranoid vision. In 1969 the FBI special agent in San Francisco wrote Hoover that his investigation of the Black Panther Party revealed that in his city, at least, the Black nationalists were primarily feeding breakfast to children. Hoover fired back a memo implying the career ambitions of the agent were directly related to his supplying evidence to support Hoover's view that the BPP was "a violence prone organization seeking to overthrow the Government by revolutionary means".

Hoover made his real agenda clear in a later memo instructing agents that the "Purpose of counterintelligence action is to disrupt BPP and it is immaterial whether facts exist to substantiate the charge."

The FBI's relentless disregard of evidence in pursuit of its ideological enemies fits Winston Churchill's description of the fanatic as "one who can't change his mind and won't change the subject." It would be comical if it weren't so tragic. The results of this authoritarian fanatocism by government intelligence agents can be deadly. In the late 1960's, according to testimony and documents produced in a lawsuit filed in Chicago, the FBI informant in the Illinois Black Panther Party was unsuccessful in encouraging the BPP members to bomb buildings and rob stores. So the FBI tipped off local police that the Panthers were heavily armed and supplied a floorplan of their apartment. The ensuing police raid left Panther leaders Fred Hampton and

Mark Clark dead. The few guns found were later discovered to have been legally purchased. An FBI memo noting the deaths requested a bonus for the informant.

COINTELPRO Media Operations

Journalists were not only unwittingly fed disruptive information by the FBI during its COINTELPRO operation, but in many cases, journalists also willingly cooperated with the FBI knowing they were participating in counterintelligence programs. This section is drawn from a series of articles by the author and using research materials provided by the Public Eye COINTELPRO indexing project.

An analysis of COINTELPRO documents showed the FBI's use of newspapers, radio stations, and television stations was much greater than previously suspected. A separate COINTELPRO media program was in operation from at least 1956 to 1971; and documents reveal FBI offices in 16 cities were requested to compile lists of cooperative and reliable reporters for COINTELPRO use. The New Haven, Connecticut office alone submitted a list of 28 media contacts. Media operations were carried out by agents in an additional seven cities. The FBI media program was especially active in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Milwaukee.

The COINTELPRO media program violated every single clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution by: harassing religious groups, attacking progressive newspapers, preventing free speech, disrupting peaceable assemblies and interfering with citizens' rights to petition the government for redress of grievances. That journalists actively participated in subverting these First Amendment guarantees is frightening, and dispels the notion that in America, the press is always an objective watchdog protecting citizens' rights from governmental excesses.

Targets of the FBI media program included:

- The Communist Party-USA, especially its Black members and groups;**
- Black nationalist organizations such as the Black Panther Party and Nation of Islam;**
- New Left groups such as Students for a Democratic Society, Socialist Workers Party, Youth Against War and Fascism, Progressive Labor party, and anti-HUAC coalitions;**
- Anti-war groups, especially those on campuses;**
- Various media ranging from Liberation News Service to the New York Post.**

In some cases the FBI covertly fed information to unwitting reporters; but in many instances journalists worked with the FBI and promised not to reveal that the Bureau had suggested coverage or provided information. Some reporters went further and actually volunteered to assist the Bureau in counterintelligence operations -writing articles designed to damage a specific FBI- targeted individual, organization or event. One Chicago newspaperman toured the Chicago FBI office and "indicated that he was always ready and willing to be of service to the Bureau." An L.A. journalist was recommended for further tasks after cooperating "in a very successful counterintelligence operation," according to FBI files.

Print and electronic media journalists agreed to ask activists embarrassing questions supplied by the FBI; in fact, the FBI circulated to select journalists a list of 44 questions designed to provoke members of the CP-USA. Documents reported that in several instances journalists supplied news films or tapes to the Bureau. Reporters would phone the FBI to report upcoming events scheduled by targeted groups, and in at least three cases, journalists worked as volunteer

agents. A Mr. Hall, a Boston reporter, embarrassed the Bureau by publicly claiming a special clearance from J. Edgar Hoover himself. Hall was scolded for being overzealous and was cut off from leaked information for several months as a punishment.

The most frequently-reported operation involved the FBI supplying a cooperative reporter with information designed to harass an activist and cause public embarrassment. For instance, in 1966 the FBI provided the Chicago Daily News with information that a local Black communist leader owned a ghetto apartment house with building code violations. The resulting article was picked up locally and nationally, resulting in tremendous loss of credibility for the activist. The effectiveness of this type of operation was underscored in an FBI memo:

=== "The New York Office has noted that public statements by columnists and the press have a considerable effect on the Party. Some have caused the Party to delay work for days at a time in an effort to answer charges made, and to discover the source of the information printed.

Among newspapers cooperating in this type of operation were the New York Daily News, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Philadelphia Inquirer, Chicago Tribune, and the Los Angeles Herald Examiner. Hearst chain newspapers were frequently cited as cooperative, and on one occasion the FBI ordered its Bureaus to collect data to assist a Newhouse chain reporter.

Television stations WHDH in Boston, KTTV in Los Angeles, and WCKT in Miami were active in COINTELPRO/ Miami's WCKT-TV worked closely with the FBI in preparing a 30-minute color documentary on the Nation of Islam. "Each and every film segment produced by the station" was submitted to the FBI to insure that the FBI was satisfied "and that nothing was included" which in any way would "be contrary" to FBI interests.

The FBI used a variety of techniques in its media program. Disruptive information was provided to unwitting reporters, sometimes arriving in letters signed with fictitious names. Information damaging to an activist group would be sent in envelopes bearing that group's return address to encourage internal bickering.

The FBI arranged phone call and letter campaigns to force cancellation of radio and television appearances by progressives. Coverage of private meetings was suggested, often to use the press presence as a disruptive element.

Cooperative reporters were given information revealing embarrassing incidents, secret plans, or internal disputes. Often the material was revealed in a way that implied the source was a disgruntled group member.

Clippings from newspaper articles were anonymously sent to reporters to encourage similar coverage. Once the FBI planted an article in U.S. News and World Report and then distributed clippings to other journalists. Sometimes the FBI would reprint articles for greater distribution, or plant articles critical of one activist and sent clippings to rivals. The FBI even wrote its own articles and printed cartoons for dissemination to newspapers.

It is obvious from the documents that every media operation had to be cleared by FBI headquarters in Washington, and most, if not all, required the personal approval of J. Edgar Hoover. The FBI clearly was aware it was violating constitutional rights and took great care to prevent the program from being revealed publicly.

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MEDIA WITH CONTACTS COOPERATING IN COINTELPRO OPERATIONS

Hearst newspaper chain

Associated Press (NY)

New York Daily News

New York Daily Mirror

Chicago Daily News

Chicago Tribune (Ron Kosiol)

Cleveland Plain Dealer

Milwaukee Journal

Los Angeles Examiner

Los Angeles Evening Herald Express

Los Angeles Herald Examiner

Newark Star Ledger

Philadelphia Inquirer

Newhouse chain (D.C.)

U.S. News and World Report

Chicago American

Chicago Courier

Arizona Daily Star

Jackson Daily News (Mississippi)

The Youngstown Vindicator (Ohio)

Buffalo Courier Express

Buffalo Evening News

KTTV-TV (Los Angeles

WCKT-TV (Miami)

WHDH Radio & TV (Boston)

ABC-TV (Chicago)

WBZ Radio (Boston)

KYW-TV (Cleveland)

WJW-TV (Cleveland)

WELW Radio (Ohio)

Four Chicago TV stations

(names deleted)

FED DISRUPTIVE INFORMATION

Sandy Smith, Chicago Tribune *

Edmund J. Rooney, Chicago Daily News *

Michael Kirkhorn, Milwaukee Journal *

Jack Steele, Scrips-Howard *

Polish Daily News, Detroit *

Charles E. Davis, Jr., Los Angeles Examiner

Boston Record American

Pittsburgh Press

Seattle Times

Washington Daily News

TWENTY EIGHT COOPERATIVE MEDIA

(Compiled by New Haven, CT FBI) *

The Hartford Courant

New Haven Register

New Haven Journal-Courier

WELI (New Haven)

WNHC-TV (New Haven)

WICH (Norwich)

Norwich Bulletin

WSUB (Groton)

WNLC (New London)

New London Day

Greenwich Times

WNLK (Norwalk)

Norwalk Hour

Stamford Advocate

WSTS (Stamford)

Bristol Press

Meriden Journal

Meriden Record

New Britain Herald

WNAB (Bridgeport)

Bridgeport Post

Bridgeport Telegram

Middletown Press

WLAD (Danbury)

Danbury News Times

WICC (Fairfield)

WMMM (Westport)

The Town Crier (Westport)

Waterbury Republican American

*** Of 16 FBI offices requested to provide lists of "established and cooperative news media sources which have been or may be used in connection with counterintelligence action," only the New Haven office's list has been released. A list of 20 Ohio contacts was released, but all names were blotted out. The 16 FBI offices are:**

Boston

Buffalo

Chicago

Cleveland

Detroit

Los Angeles

Milwaukee

Minneapolis

New Haven

New York

Newark

Philadelphia

Pittsburgh

St. Louis

San Francisco

Seattle

Documents reveal COINTELPRO media operations in these other cities:

Albany

Cincinnati

Dallas

El Paso

Jackson, MS

Miami

Phoenix

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