



J. Edgar Hoover in 1961

The Truth about J. Edgar Hoover

by [Mel Ayton](#)

Since the death of J. Edgar Hoover in May 1972 stories about him have continued to fascinate the American public. Initially characterized as a true American hero who spent a lifetime battling crime, his legacy during the past decade has undergone a startling transformation. Recent books, television documentaries, and television movies have promoted the idea that America's leading crime fighter was steeped in corruption, trampled over the constitutional rights of American citizens, blackmailed members of Congress, engaged in illegal electronic surveillance activities, was himself blackmailed by the Mafia, and engaged in perverted sexual activities.

But what is the truth about America's greatest crime-fighter? Did Hoover associate with Mafia bosses and perhaps assist them in avoiding prosecution? Did mobsters blackmail him? Did he, in turn, blackmail U.S. politicians? Did he, in particular, blackmail JFK? And was Hoover a closet homosexual and cross-dresser?

Hoover's Rise

The FBI's origins lie in the crime-ridden Roaring Twenties when the United States was rife with lawbreakers. It was against the law to make or consume alcohol and yet millions of Americans refused to recognize this fact. The distillation and distribution of alcohol became big business involving millions of dollars and corruption of public officials on a scale unheard of either before or since.

Criminal gangs competed for the business of supplying the public what it wanted. Violence was inevitable as gangsters moved into territories owned by competing gangs. The violence and corruption was significant in the growth of the American Mafia.

The United States had no national police force at this time, but Congress decided that a federal force was necessary to deal with a law-breaking situation that was becoming too big for state and city police forces. Congress chose a small department within the Justice Department headed by an unknown professional bureaucrat by the name of J. Edgar Hoover.

When Hoover took over the newly formed Federal Bureau of Investigation its resources were limited and Congress had not yet passed laws to strengthen the authority of its agents. Under the leadership and persuasive skills of Hoover, the department expanded to become a world-famous and internationally acclaimed institution. Hoover's "G-men" became national heroes as they captured notorious criminals such as John Dillinger, Ma Barker, Machine-Gun Kelly and leading members of criminal gangs. The titles "Public Enemy No. 1" and "The Ten Most-Wanted" list originated with the bureau. Hoover became a national hero, in part because of his publicity skills and his ability to persuade politicians and presidents to expand the authority of the FBI. Hoover did everything in his lobbying and blackmailing powers to see that Congress was generous with the bureau's budget. Hoover also strictly monitored anything that extolled the virtues of the FBI, from books, television and radio serials, to Hollywood movies. Hoover was partly successful because he changed crime fighting into a science. He instituted fingerprint files and laboratories to analyze forensic evidence, stipulated that FBI applicants had to have a college degree and insisted his agents had to practice a high personal moral code. During the Second World War, the bureau successfully fought efforts at sabotage and subversion by the Germans and they could proudly point to the fact that not one instance of sabotage on the U.S. mainland was successful. After the war the FBI was also successful in detecting and arresting many Soviet spies. Hoover was convinced there was an international left-wing conspiracy to take over the world and, during the late 1940s and 1950s, most of his energies were devoted to rooting out anything that smacked of communism or socialism. Recent research has suggested that the idea of subversion by the Soviets was not all in the imagination of right-wing politicians or the conservative FBI director. There is a wealth of evidence to confirm that the Soviets were actually using every means available to infiltrate the U.S. government and any other institution in the United States that had political and cultural influence. Hollywood was a particular target for communist cells. However, many lives were

destroyed because of the paranoiac hysteria that often accompanied right-wing Congressional efforts to "clean up" the movie industry.

Hoover and the Mafia

It has been alleged that, during this period of anti-Communist fervor, Hoover had been blind to the existence of a national crime syndicate even though a 1950s Congressional investigating body led by Sen. Estes Kefauver had produced a mountain of evidence proving this fact.

After the nationally televised Kefauver hearings, Hoover still insisted that there was no such thing as the Mafia and as a consequence there was a period of consolidation of the criminal organisation and a period of growth for Mafia "families" in every major city across the United States.

Some critics argue this was entirely in keeping with Hoover's basic conservative philosophy that respected the importance of states' rights.

Similarly, when there was a move in Congress to make him the head of a nationalized police force, he rejected the idea and testified against it. In an interview with *U.S. News & World Report* (December 21, 1964), he argued, "I recently made the statement that I am inclined toward being a states' righter in matters involving law enforcement. That is, I fully respect the sovereignty of state and local authorities. I consider the local police officer to be our first line of defense against crime, and I am opposed to a national police force...The need is for effective local action, and this should begin with whole-hearted support of honest, efficient, local law enforcement."

Anthony Summers, in his book [*Official and Confidential*](#), claimed Hoover deliberately refused to crack down on organized crime because he was being blackmailed by the Mafia for living a secret life as a homosexual. Summers believes that Hoover was blackmailed after powerful Mafia boss Meyer Lansky, an associate of Frank Costello, obtained photographs of the FBI boss in a compromising position with his friend and top aide, Clyde Tolson. Summers's "proof" about Hoover's homosexuality comes from a number of witnesses who told him that they had seen such photographs. Former members of the Mafia or Mafia associates told of how Lansky pressured the FBI director into leaving the criminal organization alone.

That Hoover was a homosexual did not originate with Anthony Summers, however. Beginning in the 1920s, a number of Hoover's agents speculated about their boss's sexual preferences. They noted how, from the 1920s up to the time of their deaths in the 1970s, Hoover and his friend, Clyde Tolson, went everywhere together.

Throughout his period in office Hoover used the FBI to squelch rumors that he was homosexual. He was vigorous in his approach because he believed the allegations impugned his good name and integrity. FBI agents often intimidated his detractors. Hoover ordered them to demand that the rumor mongers "put up or shut up." It is clear that Hoover was confident no evidence existed of any indiscretions.

Summers's strongest source for Hoover's alleged homosexuality is Susan Rosenstiel, the fourth wife of Lewis Solon Rosenstiel, a mobster and distilling mogul. She claims to have witnessed Hoover in drag at two orgies at New York's Plaza Hotel in 1958 and 1959. Sen. Joseph McCarthy's former aide, Roy Cohn, a known homosexual, was (allegedly) also present. Rosenstiel's story could not be corroborated as all the participants present at the parties are now deceased.

Hoover biographer Richard Hack has quoted an interview given by Roy Cohn shortly before his death from AIDS. Cohn said, "(Hoover) wouldn't do anything, certainly not in public, not in private either. Hoover was always afraid that someone who he saw, where he went, what he said, it would impact that all-important image of his. He would never do anything that would compromise his position as head of the FBI – ever. There was supposed to be some scandalous pictures of Hoover and Tolson – there were no pictures. Believe me, I looked. There were no pictures because there was no sexual relationship. Whatever they did, they did separately, in different rooms, and even then, I'm sure Hoover was fully dressed."

Anthony Summers's "evidence" of Hoover's homosexuality lacks veracity according to two of Hoover's most acclaimed and authoritative biographers. Richard Gid Powers and Athan Theoharis both believe Summers's sources are not credible. Athan Theoharis said that the popularization of Hoover's homosexuality was the result of "shoddy journalism."

Powers also questioned the reliability of many of Summers's witnesses quoted in the book. Powers said that Hoover was such a hated figure that many people were prepared to believe the worst about him and to "badmouth" him. Powers cites John Weitz, a former wartime secret service officer, who, according to Summers, was at a dinner party in the 1950s when the host showed him a picture and identified Hoover having sex with another man. Weitz did not himself recognize Hoover and he refused to identify the party host. Nor did Summers ever see the photograph. Another "witness" to the existence of the photograph was JFK conspiracy fantasist, Gordon Novel, who Summers admitted was a "controversial" figure.

Athan Theoharis successfully demonstrated, in his book [*J. Edgar Hoover, Sex, and Crime*](#), that Summers's claims were not credible. Theoharis stated that no evidence exists that would prove Hoover and Tolson were sexually involved. Theoharis also believes Tolson was heterosexual, citing reports by a number of Tolson's associates. Theoharis believes that the likelihood is that Hoover never knew sexual desire at all. Richard Hack, on the other hand, presented evidence in his 2004 book [*Puppetmaster – The Secret Life Of J. Edgar Hoover*](#) to prove Hoover had a sexual relationship with Hollywood actress Dorothy Lamour and a possible intimate relationship with Lela Rogers, mother of actress Ginger Rogers. When asked about rumors of a Hoover/Tolson homosexual relationship Hack answered, "Oh, I know it wasn't. I know he wasn't." Hack's view is that the mere fact that Tolson and Hoover allowed themselves to constantly be seen in public, meant they could not have been more than close colleagues. Hack said, "It became clear to me as I went deeper into the man's psyche that if they were indeed lovers, they never would have been seen together."

Of Rosenstiel's claim that Hoover was homosexual, Theoharis wrote, "Susan Rosenstiel...was not a disinterested party. Although the target of her allegations was J. Edgar Hoover, she managed as well to defame her second husband with whom she had been involved in a bitterly contested divorce that lasted 10 years in the courts. Her hatred of Lewis Rosenstiel had led her in 1970 to offer damaging testimony about his alleged connections with organized crime leaders before a New York State legislative committee on crime." Furthermore, she was a convicted perjurer and received a prison sentence.

Theoharis's research is supported by FBI Assistant Director Cartha DeLoach who said Rosenstiel blamed Hoover for supplying her husband with damaging information used in her

divorce trial. Furthermore, according to DeLoach, she had been peddling the Hoover "drag" story to Hoover's critics for years without success -- until Anthony Summers came along.

DeLoach and Theoharis are also supported by writer Peter Maas who discovered a fatal flaw in Summers's rendition of events with regard to the cross-dressing story at the Plaza Hotel. Maas said that in the period following the alleged incident at the Plaza Hotel Hoover assigned FBI agents to investigate Lansky who supposedly had the photos of Hoover in a compromising position. When the FBI office in Miami complained that an investigation would be hampered by lack of manpower Hoover wrote back, "Lansky has been designated for 'crash' investigation. The importance of this case cannot be overemphasized. The Bureau expects this investigation to be vigorous and detailed." Maas also wrote that when he asked Lansky's closest associate about the photo, the old man replied, "Are you nuts?"

Therefore, according to Maas, this memo severely undermines Summers's thesis that Hoover could not act against mobsters because they "had the goods" on him.

And Susan Rosenstiel's credibility is also undermined by her interview to a BBC documentary team. When questioned by Anthony Summers about her observations at the Plaza Hotel she said the person in drag "LOOKED LIKE J. EDGAR HOOVER." (Emphasis added) After a prompt by Summers she agreed that it was definitely Hoover. It is clear that Rosenstiel's story is less than convincing especially when her claims are considered; Hoover was allowing himself to be observed by someone who could have destroyed his career and compromised him for the rest of his life.

Hoover was adept at blackmail. He used incriminating information his agency collected about prominent people to maintain his hold on office. The question must be asked: Would a man with so many enemies put himself in a position to be blackmailed by parading himself around a hotel dressed as a woman? Furthermore, Hoover's life revolved around the bureau -- would he put his career at risk by such actions?

Despite the clear implication in the book that Rosenstiel's story was true, Summers eventually stated that he merely reported what Rosenstiel said, along with what others claimed. He said he held, "no firm view one way or the other" as to whether she told the truth.

Oliver "Buck" Revell, a former associate director of the FBI, has observed that if the Mafia had had anything on Hoover, it would have been picked up in wiretaps mounted against organized crime after Appalachin. There was never a hint of such a claim, Revell said. Furthermore, Hoover was himself under secret surveillance for his own protection and such behavior would have been reported.

The flimsy "evidence" against Hoover's sexuality was described by former FBI Intelligence Division Assistant Director W. Raymond Wannall, as, "(emanating from) dead witnesses, a perjurer, a Watergate burglar, and principally a British author, Anthony Summers, whose allegations against a previous American public servant, repeated in a London newspaper, resulted in an open-court retraction, apology and payment of a substantial sum in damages."

(Author's note: Summers alleged CIA official David Atlee Phillips had been involved in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The British newspaper *The Observer* published excerpts from the book, Phillips sued, and *The Observer* admitted in open court that "there was never any evidence" to support Summers's allegations. The paper apologized to Phillips and paid £22,500 in damages.)

Wannall questioned why, if "there were such a photograph with which to blackmail Hoover," was it not used "from 1961 to 1972 when 10 Cosa Nostra "family bosses" were arrested and convicted, when organized crime convictions based on his investigations totalled 131 in 1965, 281 in 1968, and escalated to 813 the last year of his life?"

There are more compelling reasons to explain Hoover's pre-1961 poor record on dealing with organized crime. Until 1961, there was no federal law authorizing or enabling the FBI to investigate organized criminal activities or groups such as the Mafia. It was not until 1961 that Congress passed a law granting such authority. It is also true that, after local authorities raided the 1957 meeting of Mafia chieftains from across the U.S. in Appalachia, N.Y., Hoover instituted a "Top Hoodlum" program. Several organized crime figures were arrested long before Congress passed the 1961 law, under individual laws already in effect. Notwithstanding these facts, it is true Hoover's war on organized crime did not really take off until the ascendancy of Robert Kennedy as head of the Justice Department.

To those who knew both men, including Cartha "Deke" Deloach, George Allen, and Charles Spencer, Hoover's relationship with his friend was chaste. Allen said, "Tolson was sort of Hoover's alter ego. He almost ran the FBI. He's not only a brain, but the most unselfish man that ever lived. He let Hoover take all the bows all the credits...They were very, very close because he needed Clyde so much. He couldn't have done the things he did without Clyde." Spencer said, "Oh, Christ I heard rumors about them a thousand times. All around, every place, and I think it's just the result of people unable to believe that two men could be as dedicated to their country as those two were. It wasn't just speculation and it was worse than rumors. It had to be developed by jealous and envious people that were out to do somebody in. Their demeanor was always flawless. Very businesslike. The best way I can put it is that Clyde Tolson was the associate director of the FBI. He lived 24 hours of every day, seven days a week for the full year as associate director of the FBI. It was a director and associate director relationship."

Cartha Deloach worked closely with Hoover for over 20 years and became the third ranking FBI agent. Deloach dismissed stories about Hoover's alleged homosexuality stating, "I think it's significant to note that no one who knew Hoover and Tolson well in the FBI has ever even hinted at such a charge. You can't work side by side with two men for the better part of 20 years and fail to recognize signs of such affections."

The real reason why Hoover did not investigate the Mafia throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s is that he had a genuine fear that his agents would be corrupted by the criminal organization. The FBI was the only love of Hoover's life and he protected and defended it as a father does with a son. On more than one occasion he made reference to the fact that state and local law officers had been corrupted by the mob.

There was also a self-serving reason. Throughout his leadership of the FBI, Hoover had been unwilling to tackle any major initiative unless he had been assured of success. Fighting organized crime, to Hoover, did not provide that guaranteed success. As Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. wrote, "Former FBI agents laid great stress on Hoover's infatuation with statistics. He liked to regale Congress with box scores of crimes committed, subjects apprehended, and crimes solved. Organized crime did not lend itself to statistical display. It required a heavy investment of agents in long tedious investigations that might or might not produce convictions at the end. The

statistical preoccupation steered Hoover toward the easy cases: bank robbers, car thieves, kidnappers and other one-shot offenses."

Most importantly, it was Hoover's obsession with "Communist subversion" that drew his complete attention and he was aided and abetted in this by successive post-war administrations and Congresses. He believed communism to be the main threat to the "American way of life." According to Richard Hack, "It didn't matter if there were Mafia out there. They weren't going to bring the government down, they were just making money illegally and there were lots of cops to deal with that."

It was this desire to keep the fight against communism at the top of the political agenda that led to his clash with the first attorney general who saw the Mafia as public enemy No. 1.

Hoover and the Kennedys

The Kennedys were the most compelling of J. Edgar Hoover's targets. For over 30 years he dug into the lives of the Kennedys for political leverage. Beginning with Joseph Kennedy Sr., Hoover knew that information about the family would eventually come in useful. As ambassador to Great Britain during the Second World War, Kennedy had an important position in President Roosevelt's Administration and when the ambassador fell out with Roosevelt, the President turned to Hoover to provide him with details of Kennedy's promiscuous private life.

However, Kennedy maintained his friendship with the FBI director and jumped at any opportunity to praise Hoover publicly. FBI files also record that Joe Kennedy acted as an FBI informant providing the FBI with names to investigate.

Hoover compiled a file on Joseph Kennedy's second son, the future president, from the moment the young naval intelligence officer engaged in a relationship with a married woman, Inga Arvad, whom the bureau suspected of being a Nazi spy (a number of FBI memos confirm that there was no truth to the allegations). The FBI bugged one of the hotel rooms where JFK and Arvad met, but no proof was found that either he or Arvad had been engaged in spying activities.

However, the fact that Ambassador Kennedy's son had been conducting a scandalous relationship with a married woman was more than enough information for Hoover to savor.

Over the years JFK's career moved from the House of Representatives to the Senate then the presidency in 1960. By that year Hoover had become the symbol of law and order in the United States. Hoover's file on the young president grew, delineating numerous liaisons with women.

The file also recorded campaign contributions from Mafia bosses.

Hoover ordered the accounting of files in the spring and summer of 1960 when it seemed likely Kennedy would be the Democratic nominee for president. On July 13, 1960, FBI official Milton Jones prepared a nine-page memo for Assistant Director Cartha DeLoach, "...The Bureau and the Director have enjoyed friendly relations with Sen. Kennedy and his family for a number of years...Allegations of immoral activities on Sen. Kennedy's part have been reported to the FBI over the years...they include...data reflecting that Kennedy carried on an illicit relationship with another man's wife (Inga Arvad) during World War Two; that (probably January 1960) Kennedy was 'compromised' with a woman in Las Vegas; and that Kennedy and Frank Sinatra have in the recent past been involved in parties in Palm Springs, Las Vegas and New York City."

After Kennedy was elected president, Hoover realized that a good way of keeping check on his amorous activities was to cover Peter Lawford's activities. Throughout the period of Kennedy's

presidency, FBI agents had been ordered to keep surveillance on Lawford's comings and goings and to make a written record of any affairs the President had.

On taking office, President Kennedy knew that the FBI Director had become a national institution, a man who held a great deal of information about millions of citizens, including himself. It would take a brave president to get rid of him. On more than one occasion Kennedy responded to queries about why he did not get rid of the aging bureaucrat by answering, "You don't fire God." One of the first acts of his new administration was to reappoint Hoover.

Throughout the Kennedy presidency Robert Kennedy, the new attorney general, was constantly reminded of Hoover's secret files. Hoover made a point of sending RFK memos containing scurrilous information about family members or colleagues as a way of telling the Kennedy brothers that the director should be treated with respect.

Hoover hated the Kennedys, believing them to be moral degenerates. The situation did not improve when RFK became Hoover's new boss. However, there was never any direct confrontation between the new attorney general and the crusty FBI director. And as Hoover was protective and respectful of the Office of the Presidency he was at all times civil and obedient to President Kennedy. Although he was irked at orders from RFK, he never challenged the attorney general. Hoover's bureaucratic instincts told him that it would be futile to challenge the President's brother and closest confidante.

In the past Hoover's relationships with attorneys general had been founded upon their unwillingness to challenge the FBI Director's semi-autonomous position within the Justice Department. Attorneys general had allowed Hoover to govern the FBI without interference and to report directly to the president. The situation changed after the appointment of Robert Kennedy; Hoover was forced to deal directly with the President only through the office of the attorney general. RFK placed a direct telephone link on Hoover's desk and made it plain that the director was his subordinate. When Robert Kennedy took office at the age of 35, Hoover was 65 years old and knew he did not have to retire until Jan. 1, 1965 when he would have reached the age of 70. Hoover therefore did not want to directly challenge RFK and risk a premature end to his career.

Nevertheless, the relationship was adversarial. On one occasion Hoover said to an aide, "They call him 'Bobby'!" It was evident to those close to the FBI Director that Hoover would not enjoy working with a young activist like Kennedy. Hoover was the quintessential bureaucrat who lived by rules. The young attorney general frequently broke the rules by appearing at meetings in shirtsleeves. He generally encouraged a relaxed and informal atmosphere within the Justice Department. Hoover, on the other hand, frequently remonstrated with subordinates who did not adhere to the appropriate dress code. And, if an agent was found to have had extra-marital relations, he was immediately transferred to a less prestigious posting.

FBI Agent Courtney Evans, who was appointed by the Kennedys to be the FBI liaison with the White House, felt that Hoover and RFK were too much alike to be effective colleagues. "When I looked at Bob operating in 1961," Evans said, "I figured that's the way Hoover had operated in 1924...the same kind of temperament, impatient with inefficiency, demanding as to detail, a system of logical reasoning for a position, and pretty much of a hard taskmaster."

There was probably an element of jealousy in Hoover's relationship with RFK. Hoover believed that nationally organized crime did not exist and felt there was no evidence that it did. When

Robert Kennedy became attorney general, those agents who had been assigned to investigate organized crime were immensely overjoyed. They knew Robert Kennedy was a committed crime fighter who would throw all the resources of the Justice Department behind fighting the Mafia. Because of his previous work as a counsel to Senate investigating committees, Kennedy understood, as few officials did in the 1950s, the true nature of the mob. It was not a loosely knit band of non-violent criminals who served the public's harmless appetite for gambling but instead a powerful and insidious organization in U.S. society. In fact Kennedy knew that the Mafia, through its control of many labor unions, greatly affected the welfare of every man woman and child in America.

The scope and success of RFK's campaign against organized crime was unprecedented. As Arthur Schlesinger Jr. ([*Robert Kennedy And His Times*](#), 1978) wrote, "Subversion was out. Organized crime was in. Hoover grudgingly went along."

There were a number of other reasons why the relationship with the Kennedys got off to a bad start. Although Hoover had been friendly with Joseph Kennedy he had little respect for his sons whom he considered to be upstarts. Hoover knew about John Kennedy's womanizing and took the view that he was unfit for public office and that his character was weak. Hoover had been a lifelong bachelor, mother-dominated, and raised with strict puritanical and Calvinist strictures. JFK's liaisons, faithfully reported on by Hoover's agents, obviously upset the FBI director's moral equilibrium.

Hoover's knowledge of John Kennedy's affair with the Danish beauty, Inga Arvad, had been useful in his relationship with Joseph Kennedy. However, it was not until the presidential election of 1960 that Hoover began to take a deep personal interest in the Senator's private life. He became disgusted with reports emanating from Las Vegas, a favorite Kennedy stopover in the presidential campaign. A report in 1960 to Hoover described orgiastic goings-on during the filming of the Sinatra Rat Pack's movie *Ocean's 11*. The report stated, in part, "Show girls from all over town were running in and out of the senator's suite."

Hoover also had a photo of Sen. John Kennedy leaving the home of his wife's secretary, Pamela Turnure, in the early hours of the morning. It was the secretary's landlords, the Katers, who informed the director and the couple began a vigorous campaign to reveal Sen. Kennedy's adulterous acts. However, the media largely ignored their campaign. An extreme right-wing magazine called the *Thunderbolt* published their story and this gave Hoover the excuse to bring it to the attention of the Kennedys.

This is an excellent example of how Hoover operated. Hoover could not use his subtle blackmailing techniques by referring to his agents' reports. The Kennedys would have been outraged that the FBI director had been snooping on them. However, if scandalous material had been disseminated through other organs, Hoover could righteously say that he was bringing the offending material to their attention and "protecting" them.

Hoover knew he could act contemptuously at times. He well understood the respect and admiration that leading groups in the United States held for him. In fact his popularity remained at an all-time high. Kennedy's close victory also meant the new president could not act boldly in changing the status quo. As Robert Kennedy said, "It was important as far as we were concerned that (Hoover) remained happy and that he remain in his position because he was a symbol and the President had won by such a narrow margin and it was a hell of an investigative

body and he got a lot of things done and it was much better for what we wanted to do in the South, what we wanted to do in organized crime, if we had him on our side."

Even though Hoover maintained a civil attitude to the Kennedys during John Kennedy's presidency, he and the Kennedys worked together in an atmosphere of hatred and mistrust. It was the knowledge of one of President Kennedy's girlfriends that led Hoover to believe he could intimidate and embarrass the President. FBI reports indicated that Judith Campbell Exner had frequent contacts with President Kennedy from the end of 1960 to mid-1962. (They actually met earlier when Kennedy was running for president and were introduced by Frank Sinatra.) The reports said that Campbell was a close friend of gangster, Johnny Rosselli, and Chicago mob boss, Sam Giancana, and she saw them often during this period. Hoover became concerned that the Mafia would use this connection to gain influence with the President. He also no doubt felt that this was a golden opportunity to make Kennedy aware that he knew about the affairs under the guise of keeping track of criminal figures. Hoover sent identical copies of a memorandum, dated Feb. 27, 1962, to Robert Kennedy and Kenneth O'Donnell, assistant to President Kennedy. The memo stated that information developed in connection with an FBI investigation of Johnny Rosselli revealed that Rosselli had been in contact with Campbell. Hoover's memo also stated that a review of the telephone calls from Campbell's residence revealed calls to the White House.

On March 22, 1962, Hoover had a private luncheon with President Kennedy. There is no record of what transpired but, according to White House logs, telephone contact between Campbell and Kennedy occurred a few hours after the luncheon. Historians are in agreement that it is likely Hoover used this meeting to apprise the President of how reckless and dangerous it was to be connected to a woman who was also friendly with members of the Mafia. Hoover was using subtle blackmail.

In the two years and 10 months of Kennedy's presidency, Hoover had only been invited to White House functions a dozen times. Hoover was also unhappy that he could no longer contact the President directly as he had done under previous presidents. His relationship with both RFK and JFK was dangerously cunning to say the least. Yet there is nothing in the record that Hoover tried to harm President Kennedy by leaking information even though the FBI director relished the opportunity to show Kennedy that he knew a lot of secrets.

Athan Theoharis has described Hoover as an "astute bureaucrat" who, "recognized that a direct attempt at blackmail could compromise his tenure as director. So he volunteered information only after it was already public...or had been obtained incidentally to a wiretap installed during an authorized criminal investigation (such as the information involving Kennedy's contacts with Judith Campbell, obtained through a wiretap on organized crime leader Johnny Rosselli). A sophisticated blackmailer, Hoover only hinted at the FBI's ability to monitor personal misconduct."

In effect, there was a stand-off between the President and the FBI director. Hoover's secret files contained information that could have done irreparable damage to the Kennedy administration: JFK's womanising, CIA/Mafia attempts to kill Castro, JFK friend Frank Sinatra's links to mob bosses, and Sinatra's efforts to enlist the Mafia to help in the 1960 presidential campaign. Kennedy on the other hand could have fired Hoover at any time during his 1,000-day presidency. Kennedy could also have embarrassed the director for not recognizing the

importance of organized crime and not responding, initially, to equal-rights directives within the FBI. Effectively, it was a "Mexican stand-off."

It would be Robert Kennedy's efforts to protect his brother from a scandal that solidified Hoover's hold on his job. During the summer of 1963 RFK asked Hoover to help in persuading Congressional leaders to desist in linking their investigation of corrupt practices by Senate Secretary Bobby Baker to members of the JFK Administration. Baker was accused of influence peddling and during the investigation of his affairs it was revealed he had been supplying leading Congressmen with "party girls." One particular woman, West German Ellen Rometsch, who was taken to the White House by Kennedy friend Bill Thompson for an intimate meeting with JFK, was in a position to bring down the Kennedy presidency. Robert Kennedy enlisted the assistance of Hoover who spoke to Congressional leaders about the damage the Baker revelations would do to both Democrats and Republicans. The investigation continued but without reference to the Quorum Club which was the center of Baker's enterprise.

Hoover was now assured he had enough information to hold the upper hand in his dealings with the Kennedys and this may account for RFK's acquiescence in Hoover's request to tap the telephones of Martin Luther King Jr. It now became impossible for JFK to get rid of Hoover. He would have to wait until his re-election in 1964 and Hoover's statutory retirement in January 1965 before he could rid himself of a dangerous subordinate. However, JFK's assassination and the elevation of Hoover's friend Lyndon Johnson to the presidency, put an end to the threat hanging over Hoover's head.

Hoover's Legacy

Hoover ran the Bureau for nearly 48 years prior to his death on May 2, 1972. When he became director in 1924, it was called the Bureau of Investigation and was inefficient and scandal-ridden. But, according to most Hoover biographers, the new director quickly turned it into an efficient and uncorrupt policing agency. Hoover abolished political appointments, recruited highly educated agents, instituted centralized fingerprint and statistical files, developed a crime laboratory and founded a highly acclaimed training academy. As investigative reporter and Hoover nemesis Jack Anderson wrote, "J. Edgar Hoover transformed the FBI from a collection of hacks, misfits and courthouse hangers-on into one of the world's most effective and formidable law enforcement organizations. Under his reign, not a single FBI man ever tried to fix a case, defraud the taxpayers or sell out his country."

Those who knew Hoover throughout his life are divided in their judgments of the man. To some, Hoover was a patriotic and dedicated public servant who believed in American democracy and built the finest crime-fighting agency in the world. He was neither arrogant nor a megalomaniac. Former agents of the bureau speak of Hoover as a man who instilled in them the highest qualities of service and pride in the agency's work.

Hoover defenders also explain why he remained a bachelor. According to Richard Hack, "For J. Edgar Hoover to be as powerful as he was, to maintain that image, he gave up his personal life. It became his personal life. There was no other life."

Hoover's admirers characterize him as a friendly man of great humor who enjoyed being with people. Actor James Stewart is typical of a group of acquaintances who described Hoover in this way. Stewart characterized Hoover as a man who, "...liked to be with people, and I thought

always that he was very easy to be with and it always surprised me...he was so easy to be with and so easy to talk to...I had the feeling that I was with a very strong, determined man, always." Hoover's detractors, on the other hand, have described the director as a man trapped in his past – a past that glorified in a WASP America. Hoover's American ideal was not in keeping with any progressive cause or a toleration of foreigners, radicalism, and left-wing politics.

Detractors characterize Hoover as a man who had a lot of prejudices, disliking Jews, African-Americans and "pseudo-liberals"; as a man who saw enemies of the state everywhere and it was his God-given right to protect the nation. To these critics Hoover was, essentially, the major threat to American liberties. They describe him as a man who spent too long in the job, becoming increasingly senile, angry and personally corrupt, misappropriating government time, money, services and equipment for his own ends and for having accepted gratuities from Dallas millionaires Clint Murchison and Sid Richardson.

Critics of Hoover point to the extensive use of illegal investigative techniques including "black bag jobs," illegal break-ins) wiretaps, bugs and illegal mail-openings. Although Hoover often ordered his agents to commit aggressive and sometimes illegal acts against individuals and organizations engaged in legitimate political activities, it was clear to many that some of Hoover's practices must have been, if not condoned, at least allowed by every president he served under. The presidents Hoover served under cannot escape blame.

As a law enforcement agency, the bureau had all the resources needed to eavesdrop and wire tap citizens suspected of breaking federal laws. But those same resources were also used to uncover evidence of immoral behavior by senators and congressmen and were savored by the presidents he served. Although Eisenhower disdained Hoover's methods he made no attempt to curb the awesome power the bureaucrat had accumulated. Nor did Nixon. Roosevelt and Johnson especially appreciated the information Hoover channeled their way, gleefully reading scandal-filled reports of their political enemies' private lives. During his years in the White House President Johnson included in his private conversations references to the private lives of congressmen that could only have come from surveillance.

Hoover did not see himself as personally corrupt, even though he had passed on many of his personal expenses to the bureau. When Hoover's expenses could not be stretched he accepted "hospitality" from businessmen. However, if one of his agents abused his expense accounts he would be severely disciplined. Hoover would also vacation with Clyde Tolson at the expense of the bureau and then arrange to have a brothel or illegal saloon raided so he could claim he was "working." There is also evidence that Hoover was guilty of tax evasion.

Hoover had been head of the FBI for decades and considered himself above reproach in giving himself some leeway in accepting relatively small gratuities. There is no evidence, however, that he enriched himself to the tune of millions of dollars through his position as head of the FBI. The fact that he and Tolson took annual "inspection" trips to the Miami area and Southern California and had his agents do work on his home and car were the most serious of his ethical lapses. The fact his estate was fairly modest was testimony to the fact that he had not been bought off in any significant way. And, in later years, he worried that he would not be financially secure in his old age and accepted what was common and legal up to the 1970s --honorariums accompanied by large checks.

Allegations of Hoover's greed can also be tempered by his refusal to accept higher paying jobs that were always on offer from large corporations. At one point in his career Hoover had been offered a lifetime job by billionaire Howard Hughes but turned it down. Hughes told Hoover that he could set his own salary. Instead, Hoover wished to remain with his true love: the directorship of an institution that he had personally built.

Hoover was not a Soviet-style secret policeman. Nor was the FBI a kind of Gestapo. But Hoover and the bureau did evade public scrutiny, invade the private lives of Americans, and resisted democratic control. Under Hoover's COINTELPRO program the FBI "neutralized" the American Communist Party by infiltrating agents and destroying the reputations of many of its leaders. It infiltrated New Left student groups and made every effort to disrupt the activities of its members. As the civil-rights movement grew, the FBI pinpointed every group and potential leader for intensive investigation. The FBI wrongly accused the NAACP of harboring Communist-controlled agents within its leadership. The Congress of Racial Equality, the Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee, and the Black Panther Party were listed by the FBI as "Black-Hate" type organizations and selected for covert disruption of their political activities. One of the most vicious FBI attacks was made against Martin Luther King Jr. with Hoover personally conducting the efforts to destroy the civil rights leader's reputation.

Hoover's defenders, however, claim that this period in American history, when riots and dissent appeared to usher in anarchy and revolution, called for extra-legal measures to deal with the problem. While not excusing Hoover's lack of proportion in dealing with the problems, they remind critics that a great fear existed in the country that society had been threatened with a breakdown in law and order. They also remind critics that Hoover came under considerable pressure in the 1960s by U.S. presidents who were anxious to deal with anti-war riots and civil-rights disturbances, believing that every time a riot or disturbance occurred it lost them votes. Hoover believed his vendetta against political dissent, his reaching beyond the law to prevent lawlessness and anarchy was within the mandate set down by higher authorities.

J. Edgar Hoover was a complex and contradictory individual. He set high standards for his agents yet was himself less than circumspect when it came to using taxpayers' money for his own ends and he was capricious in his dealings with agents.

Hoover was a decisive man, strict and authoritarian – precisely what the bureau needed in the 20s and 30s. But as he grew older, he did not adapt to changing times. His autocratic style became increasingly challenged by the new demands of a 1960s liberal America. As historian Michael O'Brien opined, "(Hoover was) ...an aloof, smug, narrow-minded, martinet with an imperial ego...."

When his body lay in the Capitol, politicians came forward to extol Hoover's patriotism, his defense of the "American Way" and his single-minded obsession in making the FBI the No. 1 crime-fighting agency in the world. But they were also secretly relieved to see his passing. And, three years after his death, the U.S. public was so outraged that such vast reservoirs of power could be wielded by an unelected "civil servant" that Congress became determined never to allow it to happen again, passing a statute that restricts the FBI director's tenure to 10 years. Hero or villain, America will never see another J. Edgar Hoover.