



Official and Confidential:
The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover

Anthony Summers

Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

Foreword

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Chapter 33

Chapter 34

Chapter 35

Chapter 36

Epilogue

Picture Section

Author's Notes

Source Notes

List of Abbreviations

Acknowledgments

Selected Bibliography

Index

Copyright

About the Book

Now the subject of a major Hollywood movie, Hoover was at the summit of power in the United States for almost fifty years. He created the FBI and ran it unchecked until his death.

Anthony Summers demolishes the epic myth to reveal a racist, blackmailer and deceiver, the puppet-master who manipulated many of the key events in modern American history. He used his bulging dossiers to bring pressure on those in political and public life – including the presidents he served. Yet he was a man with his own secrets. The Mafia reportedly found out that he was a closet homosexual and he was allegedly also a cross-dresser. Against that background, Hoover allowed the spread of organised crime, by pretending it did not exist. He suppressed evidence about the Kennedy assassination, and died holding some of Nixon's darkest secrets.

**OFFICIAL &
CONFIDENTIAL**

The Secret Life of
**J. EDGAR
HOOVER**

Anthony Summers



EBURY
PRESS

For Robbyn

I THANK THE close colleagues and friends who made this book possible. A full Acknowledgments section will be found in its closing pages. The project lasted for five years and demanded work on a scale I could not have hoped to achieve alone. Some 850 people were interviewed, and storage of the hundreds of thousands of documents required the addition of an entire new floor to my house.

On the investigative team, I am especially grateful to Dr Kathryn Castle, lecturer in American History at the University of North London, and her husband Paul Sutton, who spent a year in the United States carrying out extensive research. In San Francisco and Washington, Ingrid Young and Glyn Wright were real Sherlocks when it came to tracking down interviewees and obscure documents. In Ireland, with the assistance of Pauline Lombard, Jeanette Woods typed and retyped the manuscript and organized the ever-expanding archive.

The book was conceived by Putnam's president, Phyllis Grann, who lived up to her reputation as a legendary publisher. Also in New York, Andrea Chambers was a redoubtable editor and Marilyn Ducksworth managed promotion with skill I have never seen equalled. Allison Hargraves, the copy editor, dealt meticulously with a mountain of detail. At Gollancz in London, Liz Knights and Joanna Goldsworthy once again proved to be loyal friends, as well as top-flight publishers. That doyen of Manhattan agents, Sterling Lord, nursed me and the first edition of the book through tough times. This new edition is the result of an initiative by Ebury's Andrew Goodfellow, helped along as it progressed to reality by my agent and friend at Curtis Brown, Jonathan Lloyd.

I shall never be able to repay the debt of gratitude I owe to Robbyn Swan, the fine Washington journalist who joined the project expecting to conduct a handful of interviews, stayed four years - and captured my heart. We married, had three children and - two decades and three marathon book projects later - she is still working with me.

To Robbyn, much more than thanks.

A. S.
Ireland, 2011

FOREWORD

‘The information in your book made me want to retch. I don’t think I will ever believe anything about our form of government again – nor will I have confidence in anyone in office, ever. They named a building for him and it is still there?’

An American reader of Official and Confidential, to the author, 1993.

IN THE AUTUMN of 2011, with the Hollywood movie *J. Edgar* in the offing, a senior FBI official spoke publicly about an aspect of what the film might – perhaps – portray. During the making of *J. Edgar*, he said, director Clint Eastwood and star Leonardo DiCaprio had sought information about legendary Director Hoover’s relationship with Clyde Tolson, his longtime aide and companion.

Time was that to have addressed the question of Hoover’s sexuality would have been unthinkable in official Washington. Even now, Assistant Director Mike Kortan said only that ‘vague rumours and fabrications’ on the subject were backed up by ‘no evidence in the historical record ...’ The Society of Former Special Agents sniffed that a ‘kissing scene’ said to be in *J. Edgar* had led it to reassess the ‘tacit approval’ it had given to the movie. The J. Edgar Hoover Foundation was said to have told Eastwood that such portrayal would be ‘monumental distortion ... unfounded, spurious.’

In an era when homosexuality is out of the closet, such outrage is perhaps overheated. When this book was first

published in 1993, with the impertinence to report not only on the supposed homosexuality but on other exotica, there was not only fury from FBI old-timers but also a resounding national chuckle – shared even by the President.

In March that year, Bill Clinton rose to address the annual Gridiron Club dinner in Washington, D.C., traditionally an evening for topical satire. In the audience was FBI Director William Sessions, then fighting a losing battle against accusations of abuse of office, and the President gave him no encouragement. ‘I might have to pick an FBI Director,’ he grinned, ‘and it’s going to be hard to fill J. Edgar Hoover’s ... pumps.’

Everyone understood the allusion. For the past month, since hardback publication of this book, America had been tittering at the allegation that Hoover liked dressing up in women’s clothes. On television, Jay Leno and David Letterman made cracks, and the *Saturday Night Live* team performed a skit. *The New York Times* magazine devoted a serious commentary page to the implications, and John Updike penned a spoof for the *New Yorker*. In a later edition, in a reference to the transvestite in the movie *The Crying Game*, the magazine ran a cartoon featuring the ‘Jaye Edgar Hoover Building.’ From left to right, the joke took on a momentum of its own. *The Nation* ran a mock advertisement for an imaginary movie called *The Lying Game*, starring Hoover in slinky evening gown and bouffant wig. In the United States and England, the tabloids phonied up photographs of the Director dressed as a woman. The London *Times* offered a verse of doggerel and, months later, *Newsweek* waded in with yet another cartoon.

The concept of Hoover in drag seems likely to become a permanent fixture in the public mind. It also made me, very evidently, Public Enemy No. 1 of diehard Hoover loyalists. ‘For your part in the success of Anthony Summers’ book,’ one told my publisher, in a letter from Texas, ‘you should hang your head in shame. You have helped do what the

Communists could never do - destroy the character of a man dedicated to the ideals on which this nation is founded.' From Montana, an 'outraged' correspondent castigated the publisher for printing 'libellous, totally false remarks about a great American.' A New Yorker sounded off about 'lurid and ludicrous allegations set forth by unsavory witnesses.' Another complaint, from Brooklyn, used precisely the same phrase.

The use of identical words was no coincidence. All the letter writers quoted put pen to paper in the space of a few days, two months after the book came out. Three were former FBI agents, and the fourth was an agent's wife. I have no doubt that their spleen was orchestrated, just as the 'great American' himself used to orchestrate an outpouring of complaints to members of Congress, whenever there seemed the shred of a possibility that he might lose his job.

In early February 1993, when my publisher was about to launch *Official and Confidential*, an irate caller told the promotions department to watch out for an upcoming television show, on which the despicable Anthony Summers would get his come-uppance. On *Larry King Live*, sure enough, a coldly furious Cartha DeLoach, a surviving Hoover aide who features large in the book, came forth with an attack short on facts but stern as an Iranian *fatwa*. Not only was the book 'garbage ... innuendo ... lies,' but - and this was the intended *coup de grace* - I was a discredited journalist. Before the program I had spotted DeLoach hunched over a telephone, writing notes on a scrap of paper. Now, on live television beamed around the world by CNN, he read from a year-old *Washington Times* column that had accused me of lying and cowardice for my comments about a CIA official. The article was so inaccurate and malicious that, for the first time in my life, I had started libel proceedings.

Meanwhile, Lawrence Heim, of the Society of Former FBI Agents, fired off an enraged letter to the Chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting which had – like the BBC in England – broadcast a program featuring key allegations made in this book. As a major plank of his broadside, Heim also cited the distortions published in the *Washington Times*. So did Thomas Weaver, a former agent who protested to *Vanity Fair*, the magazine which had published a long extract from *Official and Confidential*. Heim mailed the 8,000 members of the Former Agents' Society an appeal for concerted action against me and my publishers. Happily, *Vanity Fair* supported me with courage and integrity, as had *Frontline*.

In May, in *Esquire* magazine, the writer Peter Maas was given three pages – in a feature euphemistically called 'Setting the Record Straight' – to try to demolish the parts of the book that deal with Hoover's sexuality, and the way it may have compromised the FBI's duty to fight organized crime. In his attack on me, Maas claimed that one person quoted had never been interviewed, and that the handling of another had been superficial. Neither accusation was true, and the 'never interviewed' individual had in fact been interviewed five times. The Maas piece was riven with error, yet *Esquire* denied me equal space for a rebuttal. Instead, it published a letter from me three months later – alongside correspondence from three men who sided with Maas.

The press at large devoted massive coverage to *Official and Confidential*, for which I am duly grateful. Few reporters or reviewers, however, appeared to have given the book a serious reading. Most concentrated on the passages about sex, which make up a small proportion of the work. The late Stephen Ambrose, then Director of the Eisenhower Center at the University of New Orleans, told *Washington Post* readers that I devoted an entire chapter to charging Hoover with responsibility for the intelligence

failure at Pearl Harbor. I made no such blanket charge. He wrote, too, that I imply Hoover had a hand in the death of Marilyn Monroe - something that has never featured in the wildest imaginings of anyone I know, let alone in this book.

In the London *Sunday Times*, Anthony Howard assailed me for ascribing President Nixon's inability to remove Hoover to the Director's knowledge of the President's relationship with a woman he met in Hong Kong. Not so. I also report the many other factors that led Nixon to fear, as he himself said in a recently released Watergate tape, that - if dismissed - Hoover might 'bring down the temple with him, including me.'

By far the loudest hoo-ha, however, was over the passage indicating that Hoover was homosexual, the information suggesting that he liked to wear female clothing on occasion and - far more important - the possibility that knowledge of such peccadilloes gave Mafia bosses a hold over the Director.

Detractors said that my sources on Hoover's sexuality were unreliable. They sniped at me for reporting the claims of Susan Rosenstiel, who said she had seen Hoover dressed as a woman, on the grounds that she was herself disreputable. They dismissed the comments of *mafiosi*, simply because they were *mafiosi*.

My sources on Hoover's sexuality include a well-authenticated eye-witness, a longtime personal friend of Hoover and his principal lover Clyde Tolson, and Hoover's psychiatrist's widow. After hardback publication, I heard from Marie Gladhill, whose father Vilhelm Buch was a Danish newspaperman based in Washington, D.C. 'Many Danes used to contact my father when they came to Washington,' Mrs Gladhill told me. 'I was present, in the early thirties, when he received a visit from a young Danish sailor about nineteen years old, who had recently been arrested - for some homosexual offense, I think. My father asked him how he had got out of jail. And the young fellow

laughed and said, "Mr Hoover got me out." And he told how Hoover had taken him home with him. As if to explain, he said, "Mr Hoover is homosexual"..."

In a speech to a writers' conference in the eighties, the novelist William Styron said that Hoover had once been spotted with his companion, Clyde Tolson, on the patio of a beach house in Malibu, California. 'There was the head of the FBI,' said Styron, 'painting the toenails of his longtime male friend.' Styron told me in 1993 that he received this information from a source he considered reliable. He believes the story to be 'absolutely true.'

Following publication of *Official and Confidential*, the *New York Post* reported that Hoover and Tolson were drawn into a 1966 probe of a nationwide extortion racket. A member of the U.S. Congress, two deans of Eastern universities, and William Church, the admiral in charge of the New York naval yards, were among the many victims of a blackmail ring that systematically entrapped homosexuals. Although not publicly named at the time, Clyde Tolson was one of the ring's targets, according to the *Post* story. A photograph of Hoover with one of the extortionists, according to the report, surfaced during the police inquiry - then vanished. While independent research has failed to confirm the account, *Post* reporter Murray Weiss said: 'I stand 100% behind everything I wrote'.

There has been a fresh development on the subject of the claim that a sex photograph of Hoover and Tolson was in the possession of James Angleton, the CIA Counter-Intelligence chief. Former intelligence officer John Weitz, like Angleton a veteran of the wartime intelligence organization OSS, revealed that it was Angleton who - years earlier - showed him a similar picture of the two men. Whether or not they were authentic, there can be little doubt that such photographs did exist, and that Angleton believed they could be used to intimidate Hoover ([see here](#)).

The most persistent criticism of *Official and Confidential*, however, has centered on the passage – just three pages long – in which I report the allegation by Susan Rosenstiel, a former wife of liquor millionaire Lewis Rosenstiel, that Hoover dressed in female clothes to take part in group sex with attorney Roy Cohn, her husband, and young male prostitutes. Hoover defenders maintained that Mrs Rosenstiel was not a credible source because she pleaded guilty to an attempted perjury charge in 1971. I told readers this but, unlike the critics, also explained the context. The very week the charge was brought, the New York State Legislative Committee on Crime had planned to produce Mrs Rosenstiel as a witness to her husband's links to the Mafia. The Committee's Chairman and Chief Counsel were outraged at the perjury development. The perjury charge was brought in connection with a 1969 civil suit – a move lawyers considered unprecedented and bizarre. Committee officials believed it was instigated by Rosenstiel himself, using his vast wealth and influence to obstruct the official inquiry by discrediting his former wife. Court records show the tycoon had used similar tactics in the recent past, to pervert the course of justice.

Those trying to discredit Mrs Rosenstiel claimed that she was 'reputedly an alcoholic with mental problems,' known as 'Snow White' in (unnamed) circles. During six years' work on *Official and Confidential*, including extended interviews with the woman, I found not a jot of evidence to support such accusations. Nor were such weaknesses even rumored until after publication of my book. On the contrary, the former Chief Counsel of the Crime Committee, New York Judge Edward McLaughlin, and Committee investigator William Gallinaro, found Mrs Rosenstiel an exceptionally good witness. 'I thought her absolutely truthful,' Judge McLaughlin told me. 'The woman's power of recall was phenomenal. Everything she said was checked and double checked, and everything that was checkable

turned out to be true.' Although this assessment of Mrs Rosenstiel is in this book, it was not quoted in a single newspaper.

Critic after critic, on the other hand, asserted scornfully that Mrs Rosenstiel was the only witness to speak of Hoover's alleged cross-dressing. In fact, the passage immediately following the Rosenstiel account consists of a similar report, by two witnesses who said they learned of Hoover's penchant for women's clothes at a different time and place from those described by Mrs Rosenstiel. The second two witnesses had never heard of Susan Rosenstiel, and their story was unknown to her.

Since publication, I have received FBI files on both Lewis and Susan Rosenstiel - files withheld during the years I worked on the book in spite of an early application under the Freedom of Information Act. They contain nothing to diminish belief in Mrs Rosenstiel. They do show that Hoover was interested in, and concerned about, the FBI handling of Lewis Rosenstiel, as early as 1939. They contain what appears to be the record of a first meeting between the two men in 1956, although other evidence suggests they met earlier. That year, when Rosenstiel asked to see Hoover, the Director saw him within hours. Mrs Rosenstiel alleged that Hoover brought pressure on politicians to help further her husband's business interests - and the file shows that the millionaire did lobby the Director's office about his business problems. In 1957, the unctuous Rosenstiel was assuring Hoover that 'your wish is my command.' Later, when Rosenstiel was sick, Hoover sent him flowers.

Susan Rosenstiel mentioned to me that she had once possessed a photograph of Hoover in the company of her husband's mobster friends. That she did have such evidence was confirmed following publication of this book by Mary Nichols of *The Philadelphia Enquirer*, who met Mrs Rosenstiel years ago. 'She did have suitcases of

photographs that she had hauled away from her marriage to Lewis Rosenstiel,' Nichols recalled. 'The ones I saw showed Hoover, lawyer Roy Cohn and Rosenstiel, at all sorts of social events with mobsters.'

As late as 2002, the journalist and author Ronald Kessler tried over several pages of a book on the Bureau to discredit both Susan Rosenstiel and the notion that Hoover's sexuality may have influenced his long failure to pursue organized crime. While striving to persuade readers that Susan Rosenstiel was a hopelessly unreliable witness, Kessler ignored statements of law enforcement professionals and others to the contrary that had appeared in the original text of this book and in an earlier version of this foreword. He quoted me as having written that another source was 'a former CIA counterintelligence chief,' an assertion that made me seem ludicrously careless, when I had in fact written accurately that the man had been 'linked to the CIA'.

When this book was first published, Hoover loyalists even attempted to contest the undoubted fact that Hoover failed to tackle organized crime until forced to do so late in his career. For those who need further convincing, I offer comments by three authorities, two of them senior FBI veterans.

Thomas Sheer, a Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's criminal division in New York in 1983, after Hoover's death, spoke of the daunting side of the Mafia threat at that time. 'We had to take a different approach,' he said, 'because of the enormous strength of organized crime in this area. I candidly believe the end result will be devastating for the five families, but it also raises questions about what the FBI has been doing for sixty years ...'

Congressional crime consultant Ralph Salerno, interviewed in 1993, said Hoover's position 'allowed organized crime to grow very strong in economic and political terms, so that it became a much bigger threat to

the wellbeing of this country than it would have been if it had been addressed much sooner. I think if they could have been attacked before they grew, before they got the wealth, before they got the knowledge, organized crime could have been nipped in the bud, and never would have grown as strong as it got to be in later decades.'

Neil Welch, an FBI Agent in Charge who became a legendary fighter against organized crime after Hoover's death, praised this book. '*Official and Confidential*,' he said, 'is a powerful indictment of both the presidents and the Congress which allowed one man to have such enormous power over the nation's law enforcement machinery - with no real accountability. FBI agents in the field could have been vastly more effective in their war on crime if the issues raised by *Official and Confidential* had been responsibly addressed in the public dialogue while Hoover lived.'

Publication of this book moved a former FBI Supervisor, Laurence Keenan, to write to me about another controversial episode - Hoover's handling of the assassination of President Kennedy. Sent to Mexico City to investigate the alleged assassin's visit there before the tragedy, Keenan had returned deeply frustrated. 'I remember arriving there two or three days after the assassination,' he recalled, 'with the authority to coordinate all the investigations by the FBI and the CIA. But my attempt to talk to the witnesses was aborted. I had the authority from Director Hoover to conduct the investigation. But on having telephone contact with Washington, I realized that these orders were somewhat paper orders - not to be taken literally. My efforts were frustrated from Day One. It was agreed that I should return to headquarters and submit my report. I went in and talked to the Director, and there really wasn't too much excitement. Because this was a foregone conclusion, that the investigation for all intents and purposes should be

wrapped up. Within days we could say the investigation was over. Conspiracy was a word which was *verboten*. It was not to be heard on anybody's lips. The idea that Oswald had a confederate or was part of a group or a conspiracy was definitely enough to place a man's career in jeopardy. The realization soon came to me that my efforts in Mexico City had been window dressing. I knew the FBI had the capacity and the facilities to conduct a world-class investigation. When the FBI was told to do something and had the backing of the front office - meaning Mr Hoover - there were no limits to what we could do. However, looking back, I feel a certain amount of shame. This one investigation disgraced a great organization.'

There should be no doubt, finally, about Hoover's blackmail of politicians. In 1993, in his memoirs, former British Home Secretary Roy - now Lord - Jenkins told of an extraordinary encounter he had with the Director in 1966. 'I suppose,' Jenkins recalled, 'he did not think it much mattered what he said to "Brits," and he talked with the wildest indiscretion. He denounced the Kennedys (Jack just three years dead, Bobby just two years away from being his nominal boss as Attorney General). He said he had somewhat, but not all that much, more respect for Lyndon Johnson. He implied that he had such detailed and damning material on every U.S. politician of note, particularly those of liberal persuasion, that his position was impregnable. No one could afford to sack or discipline him. The country was in a pretty terrible state, both morally and politically, but was just about held together by FBI agents, who patrolled it like a chosen race of prefects.'

On the day the first paperback edition of this book went to press, outraged by new information about Hoover's abuse of the Congress, U.S. Senator Howard Metzenbaum introduced a bill that would remove the Director's name from the headquarters of the FBI.

There was for a while something of a vogue for attacking the very genre of investigative books about living or recently dead figures, for dismissing their authors as money-grubbing literary predators. I have no time, certainly, for the sort of book that sometimes masquerades as non-fiction. 'There is a name for writers who claim privileged access to the inner workings of people they describe,' a *Time* correspondent wrote accurately in 1993. 'The name is novelist.' Others decry books of 'pathography,' defined by Joyce Carol Oates as life stories that 'mercilessly expose their subjects' and 'relentlessly catalog their most private, vulnerable and least illuminating moments.'

I prefer Lytton Strachey's more perceptive dictum, that 'discretion is not the better part of biography.' The fact is that the glimpses we now have of Hoover's private life are illuminating, in a way far more important than the easy snigger with which many journalists greeted publication of *Official and Confidential*. If the allegations I published are essentially accurate, then we may have discovered why a vastly powerful figure, a law enforcement supremo who could have strangled the American Mafia in its infancy, failed in his duty. Hoover failed, according to the claims I reported, because he was compromised by his sexuality.

Many may object that the thesis is shaky, that some of those interviewed may have embroidered the facts, even made them up altogether. This is a risk for every biographer, whether an academic with letters after his name, or an investigative journalist by training, as I am. Forget, for a moment, the huffing and puffing about Susan Rosenstiel. Witnesses of total rectitude, with impeccable credentials, are known to offer false stories on occasion. Any biographer, or any lawyer, knows that.

What would my critics have me do about the testimony to Hoover's homosexuality, or to his relationships with mobsters? Leave it out, because some will not believe it, or because some deem it distasteful?

Some non-fiction authors do give the craft a bad name. There are those who do not genuinely research their material to the absolute limits of endurance, ingenuity, and available funds. Such writers pad their books with some of the appearances of professionalism, long bibliographies, and notes suggestive of scholarship. An author who once spoke to me to make an appointment but never called back, went on to claim in his source notes that he had interviewed me at length. If publishers were to ask more searching questions and insist on the disciplines, such poseurs would have to shape up or quit the profession.

There were no short cuts in the writing of this book. The pages that follow represent five years of grueling work, not least by the team of scholars and journalists I hired to help me cover the vast terrain of J. Edgar Hoover's life. Our operation cost more than half a million dollars, which consumed virtually all the publisher's generous advance. I rarely permitted one account alone to carry a pivotal element of the story, and almost always, I required buttressing testimony. I was especially cautious if information failed to fit the overall pattern. If a statement was an uncorroborated claim, I let the reader know it. The full source notes, in the hardback edition, are exhaustively thorough.

Few professional authors much like the word 'definitive,' so prodigally employed by their publicists. History is by definition ongoing. Nevertheless, I believe I have got J. Edgar Hoover about right. As a foreigner, I had the advantage of starting the work with no bias, no feelings one way or the other about the man's virtues or sins. The result, whether people like it or not, is as honest a picture of this legendary American as the available facts, and hard work, permit.

My detractors, by contrast, used lies and distortion in their attempts to discredit me. As defenders of Hoover, they no doubt missed the irony - that their weapons were the

very ones their hero used to abuse his fellow citizens for so long. One must not be scared by their ranting, although we should be troubled by the influence their kind have over so much of the American media.

Over my desk, at home in Ireland, I keep a framed cartoon. It depicts a firing squad standing, rifles ready and aimed - at a typewriter. As these pages show, J. Edgar Hoover believed he could use his power to silence the press, to crush individual writers and thinkers, and to smother truth. Yet, even at the height of his power, there were always a few writers tapping away somewhere, irritating the hell out of him with their protest. May the oppressors always be so irritated. May the writers never be silenced.

Anthony Summers
Co. Waterford, Ireland, 1994 & 2011

1

October 1971, the Oval Office of the White House

THE PRESIDENT OF the United States, his Attorney General and key advisers are wrestling with an intractable problem. The problem is an old man, a man of whom the Chief of State is afraid.

RICHARD NIXON: For a lot of reasons he oughta resign ... He should get the hell out of there ... Now it may be, which I kind of doubt ... maybe I could just call him and talk him into resigning ... There are some problems ... If he does go he's got to go of his own volition ... that's why we're in a hell of a problem ... I think he'll stay until he's a hundred years old.

JOHN MITCHELL: He'll stay until he's buried there. Immortality ...

RICHARD NIXON: I think we've got to avoid the situation where he can leave with a blast ... We may have on our hands here a man who will pull down the temple with him, including me ... It's going to be a problem.¹

Seven months later, on May 2, 1972, the President's 'problem' proved to be mortal after all. J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, died in office at the age of seventy-seven. The body was reportedly found by his housekeeper, lying beside the four-poster in the bedroom of his Washington home. It looked like just

another nighttime heart attack, and there would be no autopsy.

Yet someone in Washington - someone powerful - felt threatened by Hoover even in death. The undertakers, arriving at the house to remove the corpse, were met with an extraordinary sight. At the foot of the stairs, in a straight-backed chair, an elderly man sat staring blankly into space. Coming and going around him, moving in and out of the rooms, were a number of younger men - intent on a mysterious task.

Just four hours after the discovery of the body, the men were searching the house from top to bottom. They were rifling through drawers, taking books off the shelves one by one, leafing through the pages, then moving on. The old man in the chair, the dead man's closest male friend - his lover, according to some - seemed oblivious to what they were doing.

The next day, J. Edgar Hoover's body was carried with great ceremony to the U.S. Capitol, where it lay in state on the black bier that once had borne Abraham Lincoln and eight other presidents. Inside, citizens filed past to pay their last respects, at a rate of a thousand an hour. Outside, a few hundred protesters were listening to a 'war liturgy' - a reading of the names of the 48,000 Americans who had been killed in Vietnam.

Mingling with the protesters were ten men from the Nixon White House, on a mission to provoke fights and disrupt the rally. They included several Cuban exiles who had been involved in previous illegal break-ins, and who were soon to be caught red-handed at the Watergate. As they stood waiting that night, just yards from the Capitol where the dead man lay, two of the men talked about Hoover.

What one of them said astonished his comrade. Hoover's home, he confided, had been the target of a recent burglary

inspired by the White House. Then he clammed up. To reveal more, he said, would be 'dangerous.'

The previous day, in the Oval Office, President Nixon is said to have greeted the news of Hoover's death with prolonged silence, then: 'Jesus Christ! That old cocksucker!' Other than that, an aide recalled, he showed no emotion at all.

For public consumption, Nixon treated the death of J. Edgar Hoover as the passing of an American hero. It was he who ordered that Hoover should lie in state at the Capitol - the first civil servant ever to be so honored. He eulogized Hoover as 'one of the giants ... a national symbol of courage, patriotism, and granite-like honesty and integrity.'

To millions of Americans, Hoover was a hero. Long ago, in the twenties, he had virtually created the FBI. He had rebuilt and expanded it, in a brilliant reorganization that left him poised for fame as the 'Number One G-Man,' nemesis of the bandits of the Midwest - Dillinger, Machine Gun Kelly, Alvin 'Creepy' Karpis and Baby Face Nelson.

Later, Hoover became much more than the nation's top lawman. Charged by President Roosevelt with protecting the internal security of the United States, he emerged as the nation's champion against its most insidious foes: first the Nazis, then his enemies of choice, the Communists, and all who dared voice political dissent.

Endless publicity had made Hoover a living icon, showered with honors in his own time. President Truman awarded him the Medal for Merit for 'outstanding service to the United States.' President Eisenhower chose him as the first-ever recipient of the Award for Distinguished Federal Civilian Service, the highest honor a civil servant could receive.

The very name Hoover became synonymous with the safety of the nation, with the core values of American society, and - though few dared say so publicly - with fear.

Like many of the eight presidents Hoover served, Richard Nixon had known that fear. His relationship with the Director had been long and filled with irony. As a gangly young man, he himself had applied to be a Special Agent in Hoover's FBI. As a fledgling congressman, he had ridden to success on the crusade against the Left that Hoover had largely inspired. He had found favor, been given a helping hand, had supped with Hoover at his favorite watering holes. He and the old man shared enemies, secrets and hunger for power. When, finally, the younger man came to the presidency, the pinnacle Hoover himself had once yearned to reach, the two had seemed natural allies.

Yet President Nixon, in his turn, had collided with Hoover. Early on, the elderly Director had become impossible to live with. He cut off liaison with all other intelligence agencies. For reasons of self-preservation rather than principle, he sabotaged the President's battle plan for an intelligence offensive against radical activists. Then he enraged Nixon by soft-pedaling the investigation of Daniel Ellsberg, the government analyst who leaked Vietnam War documents to the press. His erratic public performance made him an embarrassment to the administration. Despite all this, Richard Nixon did not dare fire him.

The President tried to do so, on several occasions. In the fall of 1971, aware that Nixon had summoned Hoover for a showdown meeting, officials sat watching the clock, waiting for news that the Director had finally been forced out of office. The news never came. Though Nixon has never admitted it, the old man fought off disaster with his most trusty weapon: knowledge.

Recently released White House transcripts reveal that the President and his aides were squirming with worry over the damage Hoover could do. On Nixon's orders, aides scurried to retrieve incriminating documents - proving the President had ordered the bugging of newsmen - 'before

Hoover blows the safe.' There were a string of other reasons to be afraid. Hoover, it seems, was aware of some of the White House crimes that preceded Watergate. He even had personal information on Nixon - potential scandal involving a woman.

The Director knew Richard Nixon's sins and secrets, as he knew those of so many others. When he died, there was panic over what information might lie in his office. Nixon's Chief of Staff scrawled a terse note: '... find out what's there, who controls it - where skeletons are.'

In Congress, many senators and congressmen lived in fear of the files Hoover held on them - or that they feared he held. The Freedom of Information Act has made it clear that their fears were justified. The record proves conclusively that FBI agents routinely reported in detail on the sexual activity of politicians - both hetero- and homosexual. Eyewitness testimony reveals how one prominent senator was terrorized into inaction by a reading from his own FBI file.

One of Hoover's closest colleagues, William Sullivan, was to describe him - after he was dead - as 'a master blackmailer.' Yet that is only part of the story. New evidence indicates that this immensely powerful man had a fatal flaw of his own. He was the product of a painful childhood, the son of a mentally ill father and a domineering mother, and his adult life was marred by emotional turmoil and sexual confusion. The Hoover who preached stern moral sermons to America secretly practiced homosexuality - allegedly even transvestism.

As Hoover himself repeatedly warned, homosexuals have always been prime targets for compromise by hostile intelligence agencies - not least that of Edgar's bête noire, the Soviet Union. So tormented was Hoover by his secret vulnerability that he once sought help from a Washington psychiatrist.

The suggestion that the blackmailer was blackmailed, though, comes from a different and startling direction. Why, many have asked, did Hoover long neglect pursuit of the most insidious criminal force of all - the Mafia? Several mob figures now assert that, as they understood it, Hoover posed no threat. He and top organized crime figures had 'an understanding.'

Early in Hoover's career, according to mob interviews, he was trapped by his own homosexuality. Mafia boss Meyer Lansky, who specialized in the use of damaging information to manipulate men in public life, had reportedly obtained compromising evidence - probably photographs. Thereafter, until the Kennedy brothers attacked organized crime, Lansky bragged privately that Hoover had been 'fixed.'

Behind his mask of public rectitude, it is now evident that this American hero was corrupt. He lived 'like an oriental potentate,' as a former Deputy Attorney General put it, milking FBI funds and facilities for his private profit and pleasure. Wealthy friends favored him with lavish hospitality and investment tips, and he apparently protected them from criminal investigation.

In the FBI's oppression of civil rights activists and liberals, Hoover's personal venom comes into focus. His rage over the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Martin Luther King, Jr., was the greater because - for years previously - he had indulged the conceit that he himself deserved the Prize. His fury over criticism by comedian Dick Gregory led him to issue orders designed to trigger a mob attack on the entertainer.

Perhaps an alert public should have realized at the time that Hoover's image was too good to be true. Yet in large measure because the nation's press was so timid, it did not.

'If we didn't have Mr Hoover and the FBI,' a television viewer wrote NBC shortly before the Director's death, 'I

would like to know how you and I would exist.' Many ordinary citizens expressed such sentiments.

Others differed. The poet Theodore Roethke called Hoover 'the head of our thought police - a martinet, a preposterous figure, but not funny.' Hoover's FBI, wrote novelist Norman Mailer, was 'a high church for the mediocre.' 'It was a relief,' said pediatrician Benjamin Spock on hearing of Hoover's death, 'to have this man silenced who had no understanding of the underlying philosophy of our government or of our Bill of Rights, a man who had such enormous power, and used it to harass individuals with whom he disagreed politically and who had done as much as anyone to intimidate millions of Americans out of their right to hear and judge for themselves all political opinions.'

A former Assistant Attorney General under President Johnson, Mitchell Rogovin, thought Hoover's life had been 'a passion play of good and evil. And when there was good, it was hollow.'

What manner of man stirred such different responses? He came to be regarded, the *New York Post* once said, 'with the same awe and reverence accorded the other monuments of Washington. Only he's closed to the public.' That a man with a crippled psyche, capable of great evil, became the trusted symbol of all that was safe and good is a paradox of our time. So too is the fact that, in a tribute after Hoover's death, Chief Justice Warren E. Burger said he had 'epitomized the American dream,' while renowned psychiatrists consider he would have been well suited for high office in Nazi Germany.

In spite of all the damaging information that has emerged about Hoover in recent years, and in spite of congressional motions to remove the words 'J. Edgar Hoover' from the wall of the FBI headquarters, the building still bears that name, in gold lettering, as though nothing had changed.

To explore such contradictions is to make a vital journey through the twentieth century, a time of deception and self-deception about our values, our freedoms and our heroes. Perhaps, because this man's life spanned a period in which the American dream went so badly wrong, understanding him may help us to understand ourselves.

To bring him into mortal perspective, J. Edgar Hoover – the child and the man – will remain 'Edgar' throughout this book. His story began on a freezing New Year's morning, more than a hundred years ago.