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J. Edgar Hoover and the “Red Summer” of 1919

MARK ELLIS

J. Edgar Hoover directed the Bureau of Investigation (BI), later renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation, from 1924 until his death in 1972. His autocratic style of management, self-mythologising habits, reactionary political opinions and accumulation of secret files on real, imagined and potential opponents have been widely documented. The views and methods he advocated have been variously attributed to values he absorbed as he grew up and to certain peculiarities of his personality. Most biographers trace his rapid rise to prominence in the BI to his aptitude for investigating alien enemies during World War I, and radicals during the subsequent Red Scare. He was centrally involved in the government's response to the alleged threat of Bolshevism in America, and, although he later denied it, he co-ordinated the notorious Palmer raids of January 1920, in which thousands of aliens were rounded up and several hundred were deported.¹

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¹ Richard Gid Powers, *Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (London: Hutchinson, 1987) stresses environmental influences on J. Edgar Hoover. Athan G. Theoharis and John Stuart Cox, *The Boss: J. Edgar Hoover and the Great American Inquisition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) employ psychological insights from Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950). See Michael Wreszin, “‘Gee But I’d Like to be a G-Man,’” *Reviews in American History*, 20 (June 1992), 258–63. For critical accounts of Hoover’s work in the Red Scare, see Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, 57–127; Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 51–70; Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: Norton, 1991), 75–105; Michael R. Belknap, “The Mechanics of Repression: J. Edgar Hoover, the Bureau of Investigation and the Radicals, 1917–1925,” *Crime and Social Justice*, 7 (Summer 1977), 49–58. For a sympathetic account, see Ralph de Toledano, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man in His Time* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1973), 47–65. On Hoover’s denial of involvement in the Palmer raids, see Hank Messick, *John Edgar Hoover* (New York: David McKay, 1972), 14–18; Albert E. Kahn, *High Treason: The Plot Against the People* (Croton-on-the-Hudson, N.Y.: The Hour Publishers, 1950), 14–19.

An inadequately studied aspect of Hoover's early antiradicalism is the surveillance he ordered of black American political organisations and leaders, largely in response to race riots which broke out across the United States between May and September 1919. James Weldon Johnson of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) recalled it as the "Red Summer."² Hoover saw the riots as part of a general revolutionary upheaval and he made repeated attempts to establish a link between racial violence and left-wing agitation. Often disregarding the findings of his own agents in the field, he concluded that one of the main causes of such unrest was the dissemination of subversive propaganda among blacks and the outspokenness of their leaders. From the end of 1919 onwards, 'Negro Activities' constituted a permanent category in the weekly intelligence summaries which he compiled for circulation in Washington and American embassies abroad, and race featured prominently in radicalism surveys he prepared for the Justice Department and for Congress.³

Although considerable attention has been devoted to Hoover's response to the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, when he tried to undermine Martin Luther King, Jr., and others, his behaviour then cannot be understood without examining his response to the wave of black protest which followed World War I. This made such a deep and lasting impression on Hoover that he retained throughout his long working life the views he formed about black activists at the age of 24, during the Red Summer.

II

Hoover lived in Washington all his life. He grew up in Seward Square, a few minutes walk from the Capitol and described by one biographer as "a microcosm of white, Protestant, middle-class America."⁴ In his youth, racial segregation in the city became rigid; blacks lived in distant corners of the district, or in alleys behind white blocks. During World War I, he joined the Justice Department, where he reviewed alien enemy internment and deportation cases. In 1919, when the few civil libertarians in the department were replaced by reactionaries, Hoover was retained. By now, Bolshevism had supplanted German intrigue as the most feared foreign

² James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way* (New York: Viking, 1933), 168.

³ General Intelligence Bulletins of Radical Activities, in Files OG 374217, OG 208369, OG 202600-1628, OG 202600-1778x, Bureau of Investigation Records, Record Group (RG) 65, National Archives (NA), Washington, DC; *U.S. Senate, Investigation Activities of the Department of Justice*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 15 Nov. 1919, 13, 161-87.

⁴ Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, 9.

subversion and it was blamed for widespread industrial unrest in 1919 and a spate of bombings. On June 4th, two days after the bombing of the home of the new Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer, the Justice Department announced the formation of a special Red-hunting team. A month later, J. Edgar Hoover was put in charge of arrests and deportations and on August 1st he was made head of the new Radical Division, as a special assistant to the attorney general. His job was to study the ideologies and activities of the Left and show how they could be counteracted. With his own budget, he selected the government's targets, appeared in deportation hearings and built up a small army of clerks, experts and translators. The 580 agents of the BI were also at his disposal.⁵

Investigation of blacks had begun in 1917, amid rumours that German spies were trying to foment a race war in the South. Military intelligence and the BI monitored the black press and leadership closely, in the belief that increasing rejection of the gradualist philosophy of the late Booker T. Washington was itself evidence of external subversion and potential black disloyalty. Encountering racial radicalism for the first time, investigators assumed that blacks had been duped by enemy propagandists. After the war, white officials like Hoover, to whom racial inequality seemed natural and immutable, concluded that Bolsheviki and the Industrial Workers of the World were behind continuing black protest. Several black leaders were kept under surveillance in the eight months after the Armistice, including W. E. B. Du Bois, editor of the integrationist middle-class NAACP journal, the *Crisis*, A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, editors of the socialist monthly, the *Messenger*, and Marcus Garvey, editor of the Pan-Africanist newspaper, the *Negro World*.⁶

Racial violence escalated during this period: in 1917, 38 blacks had been lynched and another 38 died in a race riot at East St. Louis, Illinois; in 1918, 58 blacks were lynched; in 1919, more than 70 blacks were lynched, at least ten of them veterans in uniform. Touring the South in May 1919, Herbert Seligmann, a white journalist, later the NAACP's first Director of Publicity, found blacks arming themselves for self-defence and whites expressing intense loathing of equal rights campaigners.⁷ By mid-July

⁵ Ibid., 10–68; Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 19–56; Don Whitehead, *The FBI Story: A Report to the People* (New York: Random House, 1956), 41–53.

⁶ Mark Ellis, "Federal Surveillance of Black Americans During the First World War," *Immigrants and Minorities*, 12 (March 1993), 1–20.

⁷ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1917* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), 218; Elliott M. Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 2, 1917* (New York: Atheneum, 1972). Secretary's Report for June 1919, Board of Directors File, Papers of

1919, there had been three serious race riots, at Charleston, South Carolina, involving white naval personnel, at Bisbee, Arizona, involving black troops, and at Longview, Texas. These riots were investigated with varying degrees of thoroughness by the Navy Department, the War Department and the Justice Department and were seen as little more than temporary swellings of normal Southern racial tensions.⁸ The federal government took more notice, however, when blacks demonstrated a new determination to fight back in riots in Washington, DC, and Chicago. These riots and subsequent disorders increased suspicions that subversive propaganda was making the black population disloyal and lawless.

As at Charleston, white servicemen were heavily involved in the Washington riot. Hundreds of demobilised soldiers, sailors and marines were living in the capital and thousands more awaited discharge in nearby camps. Amid claims of a black crime wave, white newspapers carried sensational stories in June and July about assaults by black men on white women. After an alleged assault on the wife of a Naval Aviation Bureau employee, white servicemen attacked black districts for four nights, from July 18 to 21. The rioting left four whites and three blacks dead and 93 people needing hospital treatment, half of them white. James Weldon Johnson, in a special report for the *Crisis*, concluded that, by resisting, blacks had prevented “another and worse East St. Louis.”⁹

The Justice Department followed the riot closely. J. Edgar Hoover’s assistant and close friend, George F. Ruch, and six BI special agents sought what the DC police chief called a “sinister movement” behind the rioting. The agents accompanied police patrols and assisted them in stopping all vehicles with black occupants, beating them up if they were armed. All the BI agents reported large numbers of arrests of blacks and no arrests of whites. In compiling their reports, they were plainly under orders to show what part had been played by subversive propaganda among blacks. They concentrated on the mood of black Washingtonians,

the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Herbert J. Seligmann, “Protecting Southern Womanhood,” *Nation*, 108 (14 June 1919), 938.

⁸ Josephus Daniels to Arthur Capper, 26 June 1919, Letterbook 103, Papers of Josephus Daniels, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Reports and correspondence in Files 26283–2588, 26395/746, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Navy, General Correspondence 1916–20, RG 80, NA; Reports and correspondence in Files 10218–348, 10218–376, Records of the Military Intelligence Division, RG 165, NA.

⁹ Lloyd M. Abernethy, “The Washington Race War of July, 1919,” *Maryland Historical Quarterly*, 58 (Dec. 1963), 309–24; *Crisis*, 18 (Sept. 1919), 243.

rather than the aggression of whites, presenting the resolve of blacks as extraordinary and significant – as if for whites to band together to harm blacks was natural, and for blacks to retaliate was not. However, the agents discovered “no evidence of radical or class leadership” among blacks, or evidence that the riot had been “in any way connected with radical or Bolshevik propaganda.” They concluded that blacks were on the streets for self-protection and that they distrusted the police. The BI agent-in-charge implied that this was understandable, given that policemen in one station had battered a black prisoner unconscious in front of a delegation from the local NAACP branch.¹⁰

III

Despite the absence of evidence linking the rioting and Bolshevism, a refinement of the Red Scare took place a few days later that marked the start of a pattern and bears the fingerprints of J. Edgar Hoover. The white press, particularly the *New York Times*, began to carry comments by an unnamed federal official on the revolutionary mood of black Americans. This official was either Hoover himself or Robert Adger Bowen, one of the newspaper monitors Hoover cultivated in the Translation Bureau of the New York City Post Office. Bowen had shown a special interest in the black press and was chosen by Assistant Attorney General Francis P. Garvan in June 1919 to provide a survey of black radicalism. Bowen had claimed that the black press “increasingly employed the tone of menace and the threat of violent resistance” and that “racial antagonism” was “permeating even the negro masses.”¹¹ If the federal official quoted by the *New York Times* at the end of July 1919 was Bowen, he would not have spoken to the press without the approval of the Radical Division. It is more likely, however, that the official was Hoover. The *Times* revealed that government files showed:

¹⁰ Reports of W. W. Wright, N. A. Joyce, H. P. Alden, E. O. Irish, F. C. Baggaly, P. M. Kemon, M. E. Tucker, 22 July–9 Aug. 1919, File OG 369936, RG 65, NA.

¹¹ Robert A. Bowen, “Radicalism and Sedition Among the Negroes as Reflected in Their Publications,” 2 July 1919, File OG 359561, RG 65, NA. See also Bowen’s reports and correspondence in Files 47732, B-236, B-240 RG 28 (Entry 40), NA. Bowen claimed that blacks showed “increasing defiance and organized alignment with the most destructive forces of our political life today.” He found the black man “rapidly being made strongly race conscious and class conscious,” so that “his way of salvation is felt to lie not in the conformity to the law but in defiance and antagonism of it, while of popular opinion he is encouraged to become increasingly more insolently scornful. It is not in my opinion an attitude that the government can safely ignore.” Bowen’s later reports were passed by the Post Office to the Justice Department, where Hoover came to rely on them.

that the negroes of this country are the object of a vicious and apparently well financed propaganda which is directed against the white people and which seeks, by newspapers, pamphlets and in other ways, to stir up discontent among the negroes, particularly the uneducated class in the Southern States. Documents in the possession of the authorities show that among the radical organizations active in this propaganda are the I.W.W., certain factions of the radical Socialist elements and Bolsheviki.¹²

In the short term, this kind of briefing enhanced the Justice Department's reputation, but in the long run it raised unwarranted expectations that Palmer was ready to act decisively against racial subversion. In fact, no real evidence of such a plot emerged and Palmer was primarily concerned with alien radicals. The fascination with racial aspects of the Red Scare was Hoover's.

The same edition of the *Times* described a rally at Harlem's Palace Casino. The audience was urged to "follow the constructive work of the blacks in Washington.... Don't demand your rights – take them... Use all methods to obtain your rights, even force... Make radicalism the very essence of your propaganda.... Make the white man stop treading on your toes."¹³

As those words were being spoken, another riot was erupting, in Chicago. Since 1910, migration from the South had caused the city's black population to rise from 46,000 to 125,000, leading to intense competition for housing and employment. Blacks also became a factor in the calculations of politicians. In April 1919, local Democrats charged that the re-election of the Republican mayor, William H. Thompson, had been by the margin of the black vote. On July 27, a black boy drowned in Lake Michigan after being pelted with stones by a white man when he swam in front of the white area of an unofficially segregated South Side beach. Black bathers, angered by a white policeman's refusal to arrest the stone thrower, clashed with police reinforcements. When a black man wounded a white policeman, he was shot dead by a black policeman, after which the crowds dispersed, uttering threats. The following afternoon, black

¹² *New York Times*, 28 July 1919. The federal official spoke of "an agitation which involves the I.W.W., Bolshevism and the worst features of other extreme radical movements. It appeals to the ignorant and seeks openly to create a feeling of resentment among certain negro elements that may lead to results that all good citizens will deplore unless it is stopped. That the movement is making headway there is no doubt. Reports from all parts of the country show this to be the case." The last sentence suggests that an official central to government intelligence was speaking.

¹³ *New York Times*, 28 July 1919.

workers were waylaid as they left the stockyards and in a matter of minutes two were killed and several injured. That evening, blacks attacked whites at random. The violence became uncontrollable when whites gathered on the edges of black districts, or drove through them, firing at houses. Rioting continued until Mayor Thompson asked Governor Frank O. Lowden to send in militiamen. In all, 23 blacks and 15 whites were killed and 537 people were injured. Just as in Washington, blacks in Chicago retaliated fiercely.¹⁴

Once again, on Hoover's specific instructions, the BI had agents on the streets. Hoover wired the division superintendent, E. J. Brennan, "Make thorough investigation to determine whether race riots your city due to propaganda among negro element by radicals."¹⁵ He was uninterested in the possibility that subversive agitation had induced whites to riot.

Brennan sent out four men, two of whom toured the city's "Black Belt" during the next two days and nights, watching the fighting and visiting police stations. They found no evidence that "any members of the IWW or any other radical organization were taking part in the disturbances." Brennan reported this to Hoover. The other agents interviewed people with definite views on the riot. A real estate dealer, who objected to black residence in white areas, blamed the meatpackers for importing too much black labour. The vice-president of Armour's meatpacking firm blamed the IWW, but the president, J. Ogden Armour, conceded the shortage of housing had been a problem. His white employees agreed. Connections between the riot and the IWW or Bolshevism were also discounted by the mayor's office and the Chicago Federation of Labor. Chief of Police John J. Garrity blamed the black press, especially the "decidedly rabid" *Chicago Defender*. The agent who interviewed him agreed that many black papers were "viciously edited with a view of creating racial hatred.... The editorials are calculated to bring on riots and race wars." His colleague bought up copies of black newspapers and magazines and found the *Favorite* magazine especially distasteful, not least for its description of the Chicago police force as Irish brutes. Five blacks were interviewed: a Republican politician, a lawyer, an equal rights activist and two ministers. All rejected any suggestion of

¹⁴ William M. Tuttle, Jr., "Labor Conflict and Racial Violence: The Black Worker in Chicago, 1894-1919," *Labor History*, 10 (Summer 1969), 408-32; Tuttle, "Contested Neighborhoods and Racial Violence: Prelude to the Chicago Race Riot of 1919," *Journal of Negro History*, 55 (1970), 266-89; Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1978), 3-64; Harold F. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 36-62.

¹⁵ F. Burke to E. J. Brennan, 19 July 1919, File OG 369914, RG 65, NA.

radical incitement. The lawyer, Ferdinand Barnett, blamed housing and workplace tensions. The latter, he said, stemmed from the exclusion of blacks from unions, turning them into strikebreakers. His wife, the antilynching campaigner, Ida B. Wells – “a notorious race agitator,” according to one agent, and “considered by the black population of Chicago to be some kind of super-woman,” gave him “the old, old story about the maltreatment of colored people in the South.” The agents seemed to conclude that most blame lay with the meatpackers. Indeed, when the industrial relations director of Illinois Steel, a former BI division superintendent, insisted there was no Bolshevism or other radicalism among local blacks, the investigation was closed.¹⁶

The southern white press greeted the riots with satisfaction. Now the North might appreciate southern arguments against allowing blacks even a semblance of equality. In contrast, much of the northern white press concluded that blacks were the willing audience of revolutionary propagandists and that plans were afoot to cause a race war. The *New York Tribune* condemned “the excessive disturbances caused by the negroes” and blamed “the insidious IWW and Left Wing Socialist propaganda being disseminated among the negroes.” The *Boston Herald* traced “the unprecedented boldness and aggression” of blacks in Washington and Chicago to the “sinister influence of the I.W.W. and of Bolshevism” and to “young colored men who, by tongue and pen, boldly repudiate the methods of the former period and call for reprisals in kind upon all white men who resort to violence against them.” The *New York Times* declared that “Bolshevist agitation” was “bearing its natural and inevitable fruit.” It recalled “pro-German and pacifist propaganda among the negroes, which may well have turned into Bolshevist or at least Socialist propaganda since.” These riots were more than “casual flamings-out of race hatred in cities the least likely to harbor such feelings. In other words, the situation presupposes intelligent direction and management.” It was “time for the authorities to stop wool-gathering and begin to find out the facts.”¹⁷

After the East St. Louis riot, Attorney General Thomas Watt Gregory had refused to initiate federal prosecutions; in 1919 A. Mitchell Palmer was just as strongly opposed, for states’ rights reasons. He declared, even before the reports of the BI’s Chicago office were received, that both of

¹⁶ Reports of E. J. Brennan, J. Spolansky, A. H. Loula, J. P. Folsom, M. Kitchin, 29 July–7 Aug. 1919, *ibid.*

¹⁷ “What the South Thinks of Northern Race Riots,” *Literary Digest*, 62 (16 Aug. 1919), 17–18; *New York Tribune*, 29 July 1919; *Boston Herald*, 30 July 1919; *New York Times*, 29 July 1919.

the major riots were "due solely to local conditions and were not inspired by Bolshevik and other radical propaganda."¹⁸ J. Edgar Hoover thought otherwise. At this stage, he was less interested in prosecuting radicals than in educating himself about the aims and methods of socialism and communism. The reports he demanded of BI offices might eventually lead to prosecutions, but in the short term they represented "general intelligence." On August 12, he ordered BI agents to send him all information on "anarchistic and similar causes, Bolshevism, and kindred agitations advocating change in the present form of government by force or violence, the promotion of sedition and revolution, bomb throwing, and similar activities." If those involved were aliens who could be later deported, so much the better.¹⁹ However, black protest was to be treated as a distinct and urgent subject of investigation. In a separate instruction on August 13, Hoover told the agents-in-charge of the Washington, DC, and Chicago field offices that he was especially interested in any evidence of radical propaganda among blacks. He asked the Washington police to trace the distributor of a pamphlet entitled *Lest We Forget*, which urged blacks to fight back with renewed ferocity should rioting recur. He was, he explained, "particularly desirous of becoming fully in touch with the situation among Negroes not only in the city of Washington but in other centers of the country."²⁰ He ordered the Chicago office to conduct "an immediate and vigorous investigation" into the finances of black newspapers: "I am particularly anxious to determine whether or not the IWW organization or other radical elements are lending funds to the encouragement of Negro agitation."²¹

Learning that blacks were buying guns and ammunition in St Louis, he urged special vigilance: "Careful attention should be given toward the Negro agitation which seems to be prevalent throughout the industrial centers of the country and every effort should be made to ascertain whether or not this agitation is due to the influence of the radical elements such as the I.W.W. or the Bolshevik."²² The Washington, Chicago and St Louis field offices produced no evidence of subversive agitation among blacks, but Hoover was undaunted. He planned a three-pronged assault on black radicalism: deportation of Marcus Garvey, infiltration of black radical groups and prosecution of the *Messenger*.

¹⁸ Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis*, 137, 262; A. Mitchell Palmer to Joseph P. Tumulty, 26 Dec. 1919, Case File 152, Papers of Woodrow Wilson, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; *New York Times*, 31 July 1919.

¹⁹ Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, 66–68, 74–77, 96–100.

²⁰ F. Burke to Maj. Raymond Pullman, 15 Aug. 1919, File OG 372102, RG 65, NA.

²¹ F. Burke to E. J. Brennan, 13 Aug. 1919, File OG 369914, RG 65, NA.

²² F. Burke to J. J. McLaughlin, 9 Aug. 1919, File OG 161973, *ibid*.

IV

Early in the summer, the New York BI office conducted a review of potentially deportable radicals. Listed along with left-wing socialist aliens was Garvey, a British West Indian subject, who had been in the United States since 1916 and had begun to make an impact on black New Yorkers in 1918.²³ The BI classed him as “a violent speaker and writer of extreme revolutionary tendencies.” At the same time, a black Methodist bishop wrote to Palmer, denouncing Garvey as “in every respect a ‘Red,’ ... an adventurer and a grafter, bent on exploiting his people to the utmost limit.” Since his methods were “calculated to breed racial and international strife,” Garvey should be “either required to discontinue his present vicious propaganda and fake practices or be deported as an undesirable.” Hoover noted this letter and called for all existing reports on Garvey – primarily surveillance records from November and December 1918, when Garvey had tried to send a delegation to Versailles.²⁴

Hoover asked Anthony Caminetti, the Commissioner of the Bureau of Immigration, to consider deporting Garvey, forwarding an anonymous letter from New York about Garvey’s alleged crookedness. Meanwhile, George Ruch placed Garvey at the top of a new central list of deportable radicals. On August 15th, Hoover ordered a new investigation of Garvey’s “aggressive activities” and the preparation of a deportation case. To strengthen it, he drew on British government complaints about the influence of the *Negro World* in the Caribbean.²⁵ In other words, Hoover devoted special attention to the deportation of a struggling black publicist, at the height of a supposed Bolshevik onslaught on America. New information on Garvey was gained from black informants, the New York Police Department Bomb Squad, the Post Office and British intelligence. From this mixture of fact, rumour and opinion it was deduced that he was “the most dangerous figure in Negro circles,” but immigration officials could find nothing he had said or done for which he could be deported. The BI watched him for the next two months in the hope that he would slip up. “Unfortunately, however,” Hoover wrote in October 1919, “[Garvey] has not yet violated any federal law whereby he could be proceeded against on the grounds of being an undesirable alien,

²³ Report of M. J. Davis, 24 June 1919, File OG 341761, *ibid.*

²⁴ C. S. Smith to Attorney General, 25 June 1919, File OG 185161, *ibid.*; Reports of M. J. Davis, 12 July 1919, W. M. Offley, 14 July 1919, File BS 198940, *ibid.*; J. T. Suter to W. M. Offley, 12 July 1919, File OG 5523, *ibid.*

²⁵ J. E. Hoover to A. Caminetti, 13 Aug. 1919, File OG 185161, *ibid.*

from the point of view of deportation." He consoled himself with the thought that one day he might prosecute Garvey for fraud.²⁶ In June 1920, he asked Ruch if they could get him on immorality charges under the Mann Act for travelling around with his secretary. Eventually, in 1923, when Hoover was Assistant Director and Chief of the BI, he nailed Garvey for mail fraud. He was imprisoned in February 1925 and deported to Jamaica in November 1927.²⁷

Hoover's second line of attack on black radicalism was infiltration, typified by the work of Arthur U. Craig, a black high school teacher in Washington, DC. He was hired for undercover work on "various movements among the Negro population." Hoover told him to spy on the NAACP, Garvey, the IWW, and the *Messenger*. Craig ingratiated himself with officials of various equal rights groups in New York, before landing a job with Garvey's Black Star steamship line. He reported on its precarious financial state and the air of gloom at its fleet of one over-priced tramp steamer, but Hoover found his evidence disappointing. He wanted specific sayings of Garvey, on which to base a deportation, but Craig's reports were "rather general." In September, he was recalled to Washington, where he covered the annual convention of the National Equal Rights League, posing as a delegate. After BI agents in New York and Baltimore complained about his work, he was interviewed by Hoover and sacked the next day by Ruch.²⁸

Hoover's attempt to prosecute the *Messenger* was prompted by Rep. James F. Byrnes of South Carolina, a political ally of Palmer. On August 25, Byrnes commandeered a congressional debate on education to denounce IWW subversion among blacks. He said it was "manifest that

²⁶ Louis F. Post to Attorney General, 16 Aug. 1919, DJ Central File 198940, RG 60, NA; J. E. Hoover to H. S. Ridgeley, 11 Oct. 1919, *ibid.*; Hoover to G. F. Ruch, 23 Aug. 1919, File OG 341761, RG 65, NA; F. Burke to J. A. Baker, 15 Aug. 1919, File OG 185161, *ibid.*; W. H. Lamar to F. Burke, 1 Aug. 1919, and F. Burke to Baker, 18 Aug. 1919, File OG 359561, *ibid.*; Report of F. B. Faulhaber, 19 Aug. 1919, File OG 208369, *ibid.*; Report of M. J. Davis, 28 Aug. 1919, File OG 185161, *ibid.*; Reports of agents Wolff and Peyronnin, Sept.–Oct. 1919, File BS 198940, *ibid.*; J. E. Hoover to G. F. Ruch, 25 Aug. 1919, File OG 341761, *ibid.*

²⁷ J. E. Hoover to G. F. Ruch, 8 June 1920, File BS 198940, *ibid.* Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 191–200; Robert A. Hill, "'The Foremost Radical Among his Race:' Marcus Garvey and the Black Scare, 1918–1921," *Prologue*, 16 (Winter 1984), 214–31.

²⁸ F. Burke to J. A. Baker, 11 Aug. 1919, and J. E. Hoover to A. U. Craig, 12 Aug. 1919, File OG 258421, RG 65, NA; Reports of Agent C-C (Craig), 3 Sept.–30 Sept. 1919, in Files OG 185161, OG 208369, OG 369936, *ibid.*; J. E. Hoover, memorandum, 3 Oct. 1919, File OG 374217, *ibid.*

when sanguinary conflicts take place in cities so widely separated and within so short a time the cause is general and not local.” He blamed “the incendiary utterances of the would-be leaders of the race now being circulated through negro newspapers and magazines.” Old-style black leadership was “being challenged by a crowd of radicals who are appealing to the passions of the negroes and inciting them to deeds of violence...in order to secure privileges they believe themselves entitled to, and the recent riots indicate that many are accepting this bad advice.” Byrnes cited the *New York Times* reports. The southern black man, he said, was “happy and contented and will remain so if the propagandist of the I.W.W., the Bolsheviki of Russia, and the misguided theorist of other sections of this country will let him alone.” Suspecting that the *Messenger* was financed by the IWW, since it was “pro-German and anti-American,” he demanded its prosecution under the 1918 Sedition Act.²⁹ His speech was widely reported, prompting another press briefing by an unnamed Justice Department official, who claimed that Byrnes’s allegations “seemed to be well-founded.” The *New York Times* reported that new publications for blacks were “springing up all over the country to spread the propaganda...[of] Russian Soviet interests.... Agents of the Department of Justice are investigating. Facts thus far developed lead officials to believe that the I.W.W. and the Soviet influence were at the bottom of the recent riots in Washington and Chicago.”³⁰ This was not only fiction; it flatly contradicted the Attorney General’s earlier statement. Whatever Palmer thought, his Red-hunters found it inconceivable that race riots and Bolshevism were unconnected.

Although Byrnes was advised that prosecution of the *Messenger* was likely, the Justice Department was afraid of losing peacetime cases brought under the war powers. Another option lay in Section 6 of the US Criminal Code, forbidding seditious conspiracy, if the *Messenger*’s “true intent” was that blacks should “band themselves together for the purpose of aiding revolution to be started by the I.W.W.s.” The district attorney thought the magazine’s remarks about lynching and inequality produced “an intense hostility towards the forces of law and order.... In other words, [the black] mind is inflamed, followed by a preparation for concerted action.” He suspected Randolph and Owen were “engaged in a conspiracy to overthrow by force the Government of the United States.” However, he needed evidence outside the magazine, itself. Hoover went

²⁹ *Congressional Record*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 25 Aug. 1919, 4302–5. James F. Byrnes to A. Mitchell Palmer, 25 Aug. 1919, DJ Central File 9-12-725, RG 60, NA.

³⁰ *New York Times*, 26, 27 Aug. 1919.

to New York, urging his agents to get some evidence, even if it meant prosecution in the state courts.³¹ They could find none and, at this point, the allegations planted in the press about black Bolshevism and the riots seemed groundless.

The Red Summer was not over, however. Further major racial violence in 1919 gave Hoover new opportunities to link black protest and public disorder. A race riot at Omaha, Nebraska, on September 28 – essentially an extended lynching – led him to call for a “full and detailed report..., giving particular attention to radical activity.” None could be found.³² Hoover did not follow up this riot, firstly because Omaha’s blacks were passive during the riot, conforming to expected behaviour, and secondly because his attention was diverted three days later by a much more violent and, apparently, conspiracy-based riot in the South.

On the night of September 30, in Phillips County, Arkansas, a sheriff’s deputy and a railroad special agent exchanged shots with members of a black sharecroppers’ union, gathered at a roadside church. The tenants were planning to sue their landlords for fair returns on the cotton crop. One of the lawmen died; the other raised the alarm. White posses formed in response to rumours of 1,500 armed blacks surrounding the towns of Elaine and Helena, and after minor skirmishing federal troops were sent into the county. They joined the posses in a massacre, possibly killing between 100 and 200 blacks. Five whites died in the fighting and six were wounded.³³

Governor Charles Brough of Arkansas, believing the sharecroppers had been plotting to kill their landlords, accused the *Chicago Defender* and

³¹ R. P. Stewart to J. F. Byrnes, 12 Sept. 1919, DJ Central File 9-12-725, RG 60, NA; F. P. Caffey to Attorney General, 3 Nov. 1919, 10 Dec. 1919, *ibid.*; Stewart to Byrnes, 14 Nov. 1919, *ibid.*; Hoover to B. A. Matthews, 3 Dec. 1919, *ibid.*; Bureau Chief to Lamb, 4 Oct. 1919, File OG 258421, RG 65, NA; J. E. Hoover, memoranda on Radical Division work, 10, 18 Oct. 1919, File OG 374217, *ibid.*

³² F. Burke to J. H. Daly, 29 Sept. 1919, File OG 292778, RG 65, NA; Reports of J. H. Daly, 4, 18, 25 Oct. 1919, *ibid.*; Reports of S. W. Dillingham, 7, 9 Oct. 1919, *ibid.*; *Omaha World-Herald*, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 Sept. 1919; Michael L. Lawson, “Omaha, A City in Ferment: Summer of 1919,” *Nebraska History*, 58 (Fall 1977), 395–417.

³³ *Crisis*, 19 (Dec. 1919), 56–62; Walter F. White, “‘Massacring Whites’ in Arkansas,” *Nation*, 109 (6 Dec. 1919), 715–16; B. Boren McCool, *Union, Reaction, and Riot: Biography of a Rural Race Riot* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1970). The highest official estimate of the number of blacks killed near Elaine was twenty-six. The true figure may have been four or five times greater. The Works Projects Administration’s *Arkansas: A Guide to the State* (New York: Hastings House, 1941), 341, states “probably more than 100 Negroes lost their lives.” A white Arkansan gave the number killed as 856. See L. Sharpe Dunaway, *What a Preacher Saw Through a Key-Hole in Arkansas* (Little Rock: Parke-Harper, 1925), 101–17.

the *Crisis* of agitation. The chairman of the white citizens' investigating committee preferred to blame the IWW for "feeding their stuff to all the negroes of the South for the past year." Military intelligence agreed that the riot was "part of the organized campaign of terrorism of the I.W.W and joint radical organizations" and Hoover appears to have made similar assumptions.³⁴ He ordered the BI field office in Memphis to investigate, aided by agents from Little Rock and Pine Bluff. They communicated with Hoover in an imaginative code: "Race riots" were "energized exuberancy," "Negro Insurrection Phillips County Arkansas" became "check purple deluge thornbill romantic," and "Seventy participants convicted by State Court" came through as "Seventy crunched tensile by gimlet thratch." Finding no IWW involvement, the agents concluded that there was no conspiracy by the union and that the black population was not well armed, allowing Palmer later to advise the White House to resist calls for federal intervention.³⁵

Despite his own agents' repeated findings – that the riots of 1919 were not attributable to subversive agitation – Hoover stuck to his original suspicions. Reviewing the Radical Division's work, he insisted that while the "direct causes" were "purely local," it was "no doubt true that a secondary cause of the trouble was due to propoganda of a radical nature." The *Messenger* was a prime example.³⁶

The white press saw racial violence in the same light. The *Nashville Banner* wrote of "a plain endeavor being made throughout the world to create disorders and riot..., with the evident ultimate view of making possible revolution." The *New York Times* declared that "natural conclusions" lent "a high degree of plausibility" to charges that the IWW had fomented the Arkansas riot. It claimed the IWW had armed the blacks and persuaded northern papers "to exaggerate real grievances and to create unreal ones, and by clear implication to convey the thought that for such a situation only one remedy – the most desperate – exists." The *Times* also predicted black uprisings in the North, due to the unrealistic

³⁴ Charles H. Brough to A. S. Bureson, 17 Oct. 1919, File OG 20770, RG 65, NA; E. M. Allen to David Y. Thomas, 4 Jan. 1920, Papers of David Yancey Thomas, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Library; Capt. J. B. Campbell to Intelligence Officer, Camp Pike, Ark., 2 Oct. 1919, File 10218-372, RG 165, NA.

³⁵ F. Burke to McElveen, 2, 4, 6, 7 Oct. 1919, File OG 373159, RG 65, NA; Reports of McElveen, 7, 10, 11 Oct. 1919, *ibid.*; McElveen to Burke, 9 Oct., 30 Dec. 1919, *ibid.*; Reports of C. M. Walser 10, 12 Oct. 1919, *ibid.*; Walser to Burke, 4 Nov. 1919, *ibid.*; Report of C. R. Maxey, 10 Oct. 1919, *ibid.* See also material in DJ Central File 158260, RG 60, NA. A. Mitchell Palmer to Joseph P. Tumulty, 26 Dec. 1919, Case File 152, Papers of Woodrow Wilson, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

³⁶ J. E. Hoover, memorandum, 18 Oct. 1919, File OG 374217, RG 65, NA.

aspirations of black veterans. This fantasy was conjured out of the provocative statements of federal officials, prevailing antiradical anxieties and the new determination of black leaders.³⁷

The Radical Division review was prompted by a sudden heightening of the Red Scare. The Boston police strike of September 1919 was followed by a violent steel strike and the announcement of a coal strike to start on November 1. When Woodrow Wilson collapsed on October 2, pressure on the government to combat the Reds focused more narrowly than ever on the Justice Department. In mid-October, in a stiffly-worded resolution, the Senate demanded that Palmer show just what his department was doing to arrest, punish and, if possible, deport, those trying to overthrow the government and impede commerce. Two days later, the *New York Times* carried yet another briefing by a federal official, claiming knowledge of "the efforts of the I.W.W., Bolshevik, and radical Socialist groups to stir up discontent among the negroes."³⁸

A month after Wilson collapsed, Palmer, too, fell ill, leaving J. Edgar Hoover to produce a reply to the Senate. He included a special 26-page section on the black press, authorship of which has been attributed by historians to Palmer or Hoover himself.³⁹ In fact, it was by Robert Bowen of the Post Office and Hoover's sole contribution was the removal of Bowen's name and some unseemly quotations, such as the *Chicago Whip's* allegation that several senators and congressmen were concealing their black ancestry. The black press report stated, for the record, that "Practically all of the radical organizations in this country have looked upon the Negroes as particularly fertile ground for the spreading of their doctrines... and in many respects have been successful.... The Negro is 'seeing red.'" Lengthy excerpts were given from the black press on socialism, Bolshevism, unions, the army, lynchings, riots and what Bowen

³⁷ Nashville Banner, 4 Oct. 1919; *New York Times*, 5 Oct. 1919.

³⁸ Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 124-56, 166-77, 195-96; *Senate Resolution 213*, 17 Oct. 1919, 66th Cong., 1st sess.; *New York Times*, 19 Oct. 1919.

³⁹ Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 58; Robert A. Bowen, "Radicalism and Seditious Among the Negroes as Reflected in Their Publications," 28 Oct. 1919, File OG 3056, RG 65, NA. See *Investigation Activities of the Department of Justice*, 167-81. Authorship is attributed to Hoover or Palmer by Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, 68-69, 128; Theodore Kornweibel, Jr., *No Crystal Stair: Black Life and the Messenger, 1917-1928* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), 76-79; William Cohen, "Riots, Racism, and Hysteria: The Response of Federal Investigative Officials to the Race Riots of 1919," *Massachusetts Review*, 13 (Summer 1972), 382-83; Arthur I. Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-In, 1919 and the 1960s* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1975), 189-92; de Toledano, *J. Edgar Hoover*, 56; Max Lowenthal, *The Federal Bureau of Investigation* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950), 120-29.

called “sex equality.” Hoover allowed Bowen’s gratuitous comments about black “clumsiness of expression, ... insolently race-centered condemnation of the white race, ... insolent bravado, ... emotional abandon, ... [and] dangerous spirit of defiance and vengeance.”⁴⁰

There could, Bowen insisted,

no longer be any question of a well-concerted movement among a certain class of Negro leaders of thought and action to constitute themselves a determined and persistent source of radical opposition to the Government, and to the established rule of law and order.

Among the more salient points to be noted in the present attitude of the Negro leaders are, first, the ill-governed reaction toward race rioting; second, the threat of retaliatory measures in connection with lynching; third, the more openly expressed demand for social equality, in which demand the sex problem is not infrequently included; fourth, the identification of the negro with such radical organizations as the I.W.W. and an outspoken advocacy of the Bolsheviki or Soviet doctrines; fifth, the political stand assumed toward the present Federal administration, the South in general, and incidentally, toward the peace treaty and the league of nations. Underlying these more salient viewpoints is the increasingly emphasized feelings of race consciousness, in many of these publications always antagonistic to the white race and openly, defiantly assertive of its own equality and even superiority.⁴¹

Here is a model Red Scare analysis of the race problem, with its presumption that retaliating against violence, demanding equality and disagreeing with Wilson were not simply deplorable, but *proof* that blacks were embracing Bolshevism. Hoover summed this up in the main body of Palmer’s reply as meaning that communism was “the cause of much of the racial trouble in the United States at the present time.”⁴²

The report was nonsense. As one of the few whites who regularly read black journals, Bowen made no effort to understand the sense of betrayal blacks felt after the War for Democracy and failed to recognize the wide range of black viewpoints. To Bowen, demands for the elimination of segregation and discrimination assumed a monstrous significance, for three reasons. First, his own racial sensibilities were offended; second, he adhered to the Red Scare orthodoxy that held that the real origins of protest were to be found in subversive intrigue; and third, he knew what the Justice Department and Congress wanted to hear. J. Edgar Hoover had no difficulty with white supremacist antiradicalism. Indeed, he encouraged people to think that *he* had written the section on the black press, telling another official that he was working on “a complete report on the negro situation in the United States.” When others assumed he was

⁴⁰ *Investigation Activities*, 13, 162, 172.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 328.

the author, he did not tell them otherwise. He controlled distribution of offprints to interested parties, such as military intelligence and, true to form, before it was sent to Congress, he leaked a copy to the press through the pro-Wilson journalist David Lawrence.⁴³

The report produced a predictable reaction in Congress. Two days after it was submitted, Rep. Thaddeus H. Carraway of Arkansas linked the Elaine riot to the NAACP, saying that the latter should be renamed, "An association for the promotion of revolution and inciting to riots." A month later, James F. Byrnes repeated his earlier charges, when introducing a bill to outlaw material "the intended or probable result of which is to cause disturbance, rioting or the resort to any unlawful methods to effect changes based upon racial or class differences." In January 1920, the Graham-Sterling Bill, a blend of various sedition bills, sought to outlaw material "whereby an appeal is made to racial prejudice of which the intended or probable result is to cause rioting." The bill died in committee, mainly because of growing opposition to A. Mitchell Palmer, who called for its passage.⁴⁴

V

Even though the fear of Black Bolshevism diminished as racial violence declined in the early 1920s (with the exception of the Tulsa riot of 1921), it had become part of the mythology of the Red Scare – one that opponents of black civil rights were keen to perpetuate. It was produced by a common deduction: black leaders are abusing American democracy and institutions, and are encouraging their hitherto placid followers to demand things that white Americans will not grant them; such disloyalty and insistence on the impossible are producing a revolutionary mood within black America – hence, the riots; radicals, such as the IWW or Bolsheviks, must be behind this phenomenon, since they alone stand to gain from a wave of protest. Without any evidence, Hoover had succeeded in connecting the genuine dissatisfaction and growing

⁴³ J. E. Hoover to R. P. Stewart, 7 Nov. 1919, DJ Central File 158260-1, RG 60, NA; Col. A. B. Coxe to J. E. Hoover, 13 Dec. 1919, DJ Central File 202600, *ibid.*; Brig. Gen. M. Churchill to Hoover, 16 Dec. 1919, *ibid.*; T. J. Spellacy to E. K. Jones, 2 Jan. 1920, *ibid.*; Spellacy to H. C. Lyman, 8 Jan. 1920, *ibid.*; *Chicago Daily News*, 5 Nov. 1919. Hoover often passed off others' writing as his own. See Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, 81.

⁴⁴ *Congressional Record*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 19 Nov. 1919, 8818-21. *Sedition, Syndicalism, Sabotage, and Anarchy*, Hearings before Committee on Judiciary, House of Representatives, on Resolutions 10210, 10235, 10379, 10614, 10616, 10650, 11089, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 11, 16 Dec. 1919, 6-13.

impatience of black Americans to an international conspiracy to destroy capitalism.

By the time Hoover became director of the BI in 1924, the Radical Division had been dissolved. He continued to maintain secret files, but during the following decade he concentrated on developing his reputation as a relentless crime-buster. By 1933, his position was secure and in 1939 Franklin D. Roosevelt formally restored the renamed FBI's domestic intelligence mandate.⁴⁵ By the end of World War II, Hoover was probably the most powerful unelected man in Washington. Surveillance of black Americans continued during the 1930s and World War II. The black press was monitored by the FBI after 1941 and both the March on Washington movement and the NAACP were bugged in 1943. However, Attornies General Frank Murphy and Francis Biddle placed unusual importance on the protection of civil rights, so that after 1939 Hoover was obliged to investigate white supremacist crime. This burden was eased under Herbert Brownell in the 1950s, but it was re-imposed under Robert F. Kennedy and Nicholas Katzenbach in the 1960s.⁴⁶ William Keller argues that Hoover and the FBI became adept at "the politics of equivocation" – the Ku Klux Klan was infiltrated and disrupted *because* of government policy, while the same was done to black activists *despite* government policy.⁴⁷

Hoover launched investigations on the basis of his own instincts and prejudices, still powerfully influenced by his racially segregated upbringing. As nationally organised black political action gathered pace, he gradually resurrected the spectre of Black Bolshevism. Although in public he denied that the Communist party was making headway among blacks, he privately warned Eisenhower's cabinet in 1956 that protests like the Montgomery bus boycott would "rock the boat" and that the civil rights movement was vulnerable to infiltration. By 1964, he was making such charges openly. In January, he told the House Appropriations Committee

⁴⁵ Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 84–85, 92–94, 106–7, 111–199; John T. Elliff, *The Reform of FBI Intelligence Operations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 15–19; Richard Gid Powers, *G-Men: Hoover's FBI in American Popular Culture* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), passim; Frank Donner, "How J. Edgar Hoover Created His Intelligence Powers," *Civil Liberties Review*, 3 (Feb.–March 1977), 34–51.

⁴⁶ Kenneth O'Reilly, "Racial Matters": *The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960–72* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 16–29, 31–47; Patrick S. Washburn, *A Question of Sedition: The Federal Government's Investigation of the Black Press During World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁴⁷ William W. Keller, *The Liberals and J. Edgar Hoover: Rise and Fall of a Domestic Intelligence State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 73–78.

that "Communist influence does exist in the Negro movement;" in December, he denounced "dangerous opportunists and morally corrupt charlatans" within the movement, "who would form an allegiance with any organization, regardless of its nature, to advance their own power and prestige."⁴⁸ Officials and journalists to whom he showed slanted FBI reports would have recognised these statements as allusions to Martin Luther King, Jr., and his SCLC associates, Stanley Levison and Jack O'Dell.

Athan Theoharis and John Stuart Cox suggest Hoover developed an "obsession" with discrediting King, Sanford Ungar calls it "almost pathological," and David Garrow has shown how the racism and conservatism of Hoover's FBI fostered this antipathy.⁴⁹ As the civil rights movement began to attract various radical supporters, the FBI's opposition became more general. After the 1964 Democratic national convention, FBI field offices were instructed to interpret the term "Communist... in its broadest sense.... There are clear and unmistakable signs that we are in the midst of a social revolution with the racial movement as its core." It was in this context that Hoover approved illegal efforts to destroy black nationalism.⁵⁰

In 1957, Hoover recalled the "anarchy and lawlessness and immorality" that he had detected as a young man in Communist party doctrines and wrote, "my conclusions of 1919 remain the same."⁵¹ Equally, the views he held about black protest during the Cold War were the views he formed in 1919. The international and domestic circumstances had changed and Hoover had become a much more sophisticated and

⁴⁸ Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, 329–31, 417; J. Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit* (New York: Henry Holt, 1958), 243; Hoover, "Red Fascism in the United States Today," *American Magazine* (Feb. 1947), 24–25, 87–90. Remarks before Pennsylvania Society and Society of Pennsylvania Women, New York, 12 Dec. 1965, in Hoover, *J. Edgar Hoover on Communism* (New York: Random House, 1969), 130–31. The FBI produced reports for Eisenhower entitled "The Communist Party and the Negro" in 1953 and 1956 and "The Nation of Islam" in 1960.

⁴⁹ Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 354–60; Sanford Ungar, *FBI* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975), 419; David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From 'Solo' to Memphis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 151–58. See also Keller, *The Liberals and J. Edgar Hoover*, 103–10; Frank M. Sorrentino, *Ideological Warfare: The FBI's Path Toward Power* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Associated Faculty Press, 1985), 107–34. In 1962, King's name was added to the Bureau's Emergency Detention list of people to be arrested in the event of war. See Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, 371.

⁵⁰ Garrow, *FBI and Martin Luther King*, 119–20; Nelson Blackstock, *COINTELPRO: The FBI's Secret War on Political Freedom* (New York: Vintage, 1976); Kenneth O'Reilly, *Hoover and the Un-Americans: The FBI, HUAC, and the Red Menace* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 370.

⁵¹ Hoover, *Masters of Deceit*, foreword.

powerful bureaucrat, but the FBI's antipathy towards black leaders in the 1960s was rooted firmly in Hoover's experiences during the Red Summer. The tone and basic assumptions underlying Hoover's comments about black leaders were unchanged; so were his favoured methods. He had used several black informants during the Red Scare; he relied on them still in the Cold War, although Supreme Court decisions in 1956 and 1957 limited the use of informant testimony and granted defendants greater pretrial access to witness statements. In the 1920s, he had enjoyed sowing doubts among black leaders by encouraging Cyril Briggs and Marcus Garvey to inform on each other; in 1964, he tried to exploit new divisions by asking Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and James Farmer of CORE for their views on Martin Luther King, Jr. In 1919, he had used the press to influence perceptions of black protest by white Americans; in the 1960s, he was still doing it and one of his confidants was none other than David Lawrence, by now publisher of *U.S. News and World Report*. Hoover's fascination with the sex lives of black leaders had begun with Garvey's affair with his secretary in 1920; it reached a frenzy with the tape-recording of King in 1964. Finally, in 1919, Hoover had learned to cultivate good relations with southern congressmen, welcoming their complaints and bolstering their prejudices; in the 1960s, in public hearings and private briefings, he secured the gratitude of conservatives like Sen. James O. Eastland of Mississippi, chairman of both the Senate Judiciary Committee and the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, and Sen. John L. McClellan of Arkansas, chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.⁵²

Hoover used the nationwide riots of the 1960s to heighten fears of a black rebellion, widen the FBI's domestic intelligence role and justify his own service beyond the mandatory retirement age. Treading carefully with Lyndon B. Johnson, he endorsed an administration report in 1964 that found disturbances in nine cities were not started by either communists or civil rights groups, but FBI agents were nevertheless ordered to look for subversive elements behind the rioting. They were told to use "informants...to determine the underlying cause" and "whether there is an organized pattern emanating from subversive or radical groups of other outside sources." The language and logic were

⁵² Reports and correspondence in Files BS 202600-33 and BS 61-44, RG 65, NA; O'Reilly, *Hoover and the Un-Americans*, 95-96, 197-98, 210; O'Reilly, "Racial Matters," 69-70, 73, 134-35, 144-47, 155, 168, 255, 326-27; Garrow, *FBI and Martin Luther King*, 53, 61-62, 66, 130-31; Ungar, *FBI*, 104-10, 115-18, 134-39, 148-50, 159-72, 284-85; Theoharis and Cox, *The Boss*, 357-60.

almost identical to Hoover's orders to field offices in 1919.⁵³ Indeed, parts of his testimony at the age of 73 to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence in September 1968, could have been given word-for-word by the 24 year-old head of the Radical Division half a century earlier: "Communists labor ceaselessly to exploit the racial situation and to incite racial strife and violence in this country. They have been active in exploiting propagandawise the riots of recent years. One main communist goal is to alienate Negroes from established authority."⁵⁴

Opposed to the basic aims of the civil rights movement, Hoover consciously hampered its progress by questioning its loyalty. As in 1919, no evidence was unearthed in the 1960s to show that left-wing conspiracy had created either black protest or riots, but his prejudices were too deeply ingrained to be erased. As a result, the sympathies of the official charged with the detection and prevention of crimes under federal statutes lay with white supremacists, many of whom were prepared to break the law in the South. In Hoover's mind, radical black organisation for constitutional rights still endangered the American social order, and carried with it the threat of external subversion.

⁵³ Kenneth O'Reilly, "The FBI and the Politics of the Riots, 1964-1968," *Journal of American History*, 75 (June 1988), 91-114.

⁵⁴ Statement before National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, 18 Sept. 1968, in Hoover, *Hoover on Communism*, 132. See also Hoover's 1968 FBI appropriation testimony, *ibid.*, 131-32.