

Edgar Hoover Was A Corrupt Leader Of The FBI

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J Edgar Hoover and the Formation of the Modern FBI

John Edgar Hoover served as the first director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Appointed in 1924 as the leader of the predecessor of the FBI, the Bureau of Investigation, he played a vital role in the foundation of the modern FBI in 1935. During his lengthy tenure as the director of the FBI, he was responsible for modernizing the FBI and transforming it into a huge and large-scale agency against crime. Among the many modernizations he brought to the FBI, forensic technology and the centralization of the fingerprint database are the most important. During his leadership, he impressed the presidents of the United States as well as the American public. It is true that he was a talented leader who made the FBI the world's most influential crime-fighting agency, yet the strategies he employed for this purpose are considered illegal and wrong. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.)

In his later life, and especially after his death in 1972, he became a controversial figure owing to a large amount of evidence surfacing demonstrating his illegal activities and abuse of power. He did not regard the jurisdictional limitations of the FBI and often exceeded his constitutional authority. He utilized his power as the director of the FBI to harass the politicians and civil leaders deemed to be his opponents and collected and maintained secret files on them, as well as several U.S. presidents. Moreover, he utilized illegal methods for the collection of this evidence. All these activities contributed significantly to the great power possessed by Hoover as he utilized these files and documents to threaten and intimidate the sitting American presidents. (National Archives, n.d.)

Prior to becoming the leader of the old Bureau of Investigation in 1924, he was appointed the head of the Bureau's newly created General Intelligence Division, also known as the Radical Division. It proved to be the beginning of his collection of secret files and wrong allegations. He was a well-known opponent of communism and used this newly gained position to rid America of communists. In this context, Emma Goldman proved to be his first target as he falsely accused her of being the leader of a radical communist group responsible for killing President McKinley. Although his allegations proved to be wrong, he still managed to convict and deport Goldman.

Centralized Power, Political Surveillance, and the

Expansion of Authority

His rise to power continued with him becoming the assistant director in 1921 and subsequently the director in May 1924. Although he was explicitly instructed by Attorney General Harlan Fiske Stone to stop the radical investigations, he continued his illegal activities in secret and, as a result, violated the privacy of others. Although the FBI agents were granted the right to bear arms and arrest someone without a warrant in 1934, he had continued this practice illegally long before that. He further overstepped his authority after the grant of these rights as he got involved in cases and investigations that did not fall under the jurisdictions of the FBI. In short, he used the FBI for his own personal gain and publicity.

A notable example of the above-mentioned fact is that he once sent his agent, Melvin Purvis, after “Pretty Boy” Floyd and John Dillinger, both notorious criminals, and took the credit himself. He was an opportunist and took every opportunity to increase his fame, even if it meant an impeachment of the jurisdictions of the state police. The same was the case of the arrest of Adam Richetti, involved in the Kansas City murders. In addition, he also used his power to deny the publishing of stories against him in the newspapers. He used the same strategies when rumours about his homosexuality began to arise. For example, when a journalist, Ray Tucker, published an article about Hoover’s sexuality, Hoover secretly investigated his private life and gave that information to the media. It instilled fear in the hearts of other journalists. (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.)

Apart from using the FBI against those who tarnished his reputation, he also used it against the individuals he perceived as threats to his job. He started to maintain secret files on the agents that may prove to be a threat to him. A notable example is the case of the assistant director, William C. Sullivan. Sullivan was an excellent agent, and he began to overshadow Hoover. As a result, he was removed from his position while on sick leave in the absence of any prior warning.

Anti-Communism, COINTELPRO, and the Abuse of Federal Investigation

His intense hatred towards communism led to the establishment of the COINTELPRO, targeted towards the Communist Party. He vowed to publicly expose the communists and rid America of them. He held a personal vendetta against any group that opposed him and ruined its image by exposing the data collected through secretive investigations. This led to a rapid loss of support from the American public. Gradually, his COINTELPRO program began to involve civil rights groups due to Hoover’s racism. Martin Luther King Jr. was a prominent target of Hoover, and he used every opportunity to discredit King’s work. He even accused King of having ties with communist leaders like Stanley Levison. His personal hatred towards King was simply due to his contempt towards African Americans. He even sent a letter to King encouraging him to commit suicide.

As his abuses of power grew, so did the questions about his and the FBI's validity. A group, the Citizen's Commission, broke into the FBI files in 1971 and leaked the illegally collected files to the media. With the revelation of the truth about Hoover's corruption and illegal activities, President Nixon called upon him and attempted to persuade him to resign. However, Hoover did not quit his job and remained the FBI's director until his death in 1972. His death proved to be vital in uncovering further details of his corruption, as it was revealed that he used the FBI's funds for his personal activities of eating and vacationing. NBC News used the confidential and official files of Hoover to show how Hoover used misleading facts and false evidence to manipulate several leaders to act according to his desires.

In conclusion, despite modernizing and revolutionizing the FBI, Hoover was, in fact, a detriment to the American constitutional system. His complete disregard for the law, as evident from his illegal investigations and secret files on several leaders and presidents, was brought to the spotlight after his death. Although he had a real chance at greatness due to his highly important position, he used his power for selfish purposes and gains without any concern for the United States and its citizens.

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