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FBI Investigations into the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left

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COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

FBI INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND THE NEW LEFT

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE
HONORS COLLEGE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR HONORS IN THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
COLLEGE OF LETTERS AND SCIENCES

BY

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COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

2019

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FBI INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND THE NEW LEFT

By

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Abstract

This paper examines how the FBI investigated civil rights organizations and social movements from the 1950s through the 1970s. It compares the reasons for the investigations, the investigative methods, and the extent of the investigations. The paper uses FBI files as the basis for the information and to form the argument that the FBI chose its targets based on who posed a significant threat to the status quo. The FBI had a social and political motive to suppress dissent against the government and to suppress the people who challenged laws to advance their rights. The movements examined are the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement. Some attention is devoted to the efforts of the counterintelligence program to deter these organizations from accomplishing their goals.

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Abbreviations

ANP..... American Nazi Party

COINTELPRO..... Counterintelligence Program

CORE..... Congress of Racial Equality

CP/CPUSA..... Communist Party/Communist Party of the United States of America

DNC..... Democratic National Convention

ECLC..... Emergency Civil Liberties Committee

EEOC..... Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

FBI..... Federal Bureau of Investigation

HUAC..... House Committee on Un-American Activities

IDA..... Institute for Defense Analyses

NAACP..... National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

NSRP..... National States Rights Party

SAC..... Special Agent in Charge

SCLC..... Southern Christian Leadership Conference

SDS..... Students for a Democratic Society

SNCC..... Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

UC Berkeley..... University of California Berkeley

WUO..... Weather Underground Organization

Introduction

The FBI has been in existence for over a century. It has made significant changes throughout its history with regard to the targets of its investigations and its methodologies. Through it all, the FBI has kept files on its subjects. Some of the FBI's more well-known targets were not criminals at all; they include people such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Albert Einstein, and many celebrities. The individuals discussed in this paper were activists for social change with whom the leadership at the FBI did not agree because they were perceived as threats. While some of the activists committed crimes, they were under investigation by the FBI before those crimes, or, in other cases, the crimes were not even a factor in the investigation. The FBI targeted many different social movements and activists under suspicion of communism. Through legal and illegal means, the FBI investigated activists and organizations that were trying to enact change and often interfered in their personal lives while doing so. This paper explores the investigations of individuals and organizations associated with the civil rights movement and the New Left. It also provides some guidance for how to use the FBI Vault. This paper is a good starting place for people who want to conduct further research into the activities of the FBI during the mid-twentieth century and gain an understanding of how the FBI operated during that time.

Thanks to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), declassified FBI files are now available on the Bureau's website through the Vault.¹ The Vault was created in 2011 to give the public easier access to FBI files by providing online versions of frequently requested records. New files are added multiple times a month. Searches can be conducted by topic or by person, and a list of popular categories is provided to make common searches easier. Requests can also

¹ "FBI Records: The Vault," Federal Bureau of Investigation, <https://vault.fbi.gov/>.

be made to receive physical copies of files or to get them on compact disc. The availability and quality of online copies and physical copies are the same; the quality of the available documents depends on the condition of the original document. The online files are free to access, but ordering the files on paper or CD costs money. The cost depends on the amount of pages. Requests for physical copies are processed in the order they are received. The time it takes to receive copies also depends on how many pages are in the request.² The files contain a combination of reports, memoranda, newspaper excerpts, and publications by the organization in question, along with other miscellaneous types of documents. As mandated by the FOIA, individual files can only be released if the person is deceased. Consequently, the scope of this paper is limited by this requirement, along with other limitations based on what information has been redacted for security reasons and the amount of pages destroyed or otherwise removed from the file. Additionally, not all paper files that exist have been scanned and published in the Vault.

This paper utilizes FBI files primarily from the 1950s through the 1970s to examine the way the FBI investigated civil rights organizations and their leaders. The files were chosen based on online availability and relevance to the research. This paper is meant to give an overview of the selected topics and is not by any means intended to be all-encompassing. For example, the Black Panthers meet the criteria to belong in this paper and would have provided excellent support for the thesis. However, due to the large amount of material related to the Black Panthers and the time frame during which this paper was researched and written, there was simply too much material to include the Black Panthers and still give the group the attention it deserves.

The FBI routinely practiced discrimination when choosing its targets for investigation, often claiming communist infiltration as a reason for investigating civil rights organizations.

² “FBI Records: The Vault,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed November 28, 2018, <https://vault.fbi.gov/>. “Freedom of Information/Privacy Act,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed November 28, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/services/information-management/foipa>.

While there was a clear racial element to the selection, there was also a clear political motive. Driven by a desire to maintain the status quo and suppress dissent against the government, the FBI closely tracked civil rights organizations and leaders with the intent to discredit them. The FBI's actions created more unrest in the country because it intensified disagreements between and within organizations in an attempt to splinter movements with the hope that the movements would crumble and cease operations. While people had been weary of government surveillance since the early twentieth century, the eventual revelation in the 1970s of the extent of government spying on American citizens caused massive distrust between the public and the FBI. The files demonstrate the secretive nature of the FBI and its ability to obtain and use classified information to steer the country in the direction the leaders thought best by denouncing certain types of economic systems, such as communism, and targeting people who did not stick to the status quo.

This paper is organized into two sections: civil rights and the New Left, with further subsections based on organizations or individuals in order to gain a relatively chronological overview of the time period and to make it easier to compare the FBI's treatment of the organizations and individuals in question.

Historiography

Most of the scholarly research into the FBI's involvement in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s began in the mid-1980s. The research consistently supported the idea that the FBI saw communism as a threat, utilized COINTELPRO to neutralize New Left organizations, and targeted specific people FBI leaders believed posed a threat. Kenneth O'Reilly is perhaps the most prominent scholar in the field, producing several works when the subject was still in its infancy. *Hoover and the Un-Americans: The FBI, HUAC, and the Red Menace* explores how the FBI's actions and investigations in the aftermath of World War II intentionally contributed to a nationwide fear of communism.³ The FBI worked directly with Congress, specifically the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), to provide its members with information and names of informers with the goal of "discredit[ing] its enemies- those groups and individuals who criticized the FBI, its informers, or its congressional friends."⁴ The FBI often acted in secrecy when giving information to journalists and politicians, frequently leaving the informant out of the official file or purposely writing false information. Additionally, pages from files that have been released to the public could have been removed, and there are often large redacted sections, leaving O'Reilly to explain the FBI's secret and unethical motives in regards to investigations of communism.⁵

O'Reilly's 1988 article, "The FBI and the Civil Rights Movement during the Kennedy Years--from Freedom Rides to Albany," explores the government's relationship with the civil

³ Kenneth O'Reilly, *Hoover and the Un-Americans: The FBI, HUAC, and the Red Menace* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

⁴ Ellen Schrecker, review of *Hoover and the Un-Americans: The FBI, HUAC, and the Red Menace*, by Kenneth O'Reilly, *The American Historical Review*, June 1984.

⁵ Schrecker, review.

rights movement during John F. Kennedy's presidency.⁶ President Kennedy and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy were not overtly supportive of the civil rights movement until the summer of 1963, and they did not challenge Hoover's decision to spy on leaders of the movement. In fact, as Attorney General, Robert Kennedy authorized the surveillance of Martin Luther King, Jr. O'Reilly points out that the FBI was supposed to investigate civil rights infringements such as police brutality, but the fear of alienating officers who helped them solve other investigations and losing the support of politicians kept the FBI from doing its job. O'Reilly examines the FBI's role in several events, including the 1961 Freedom Rides, the 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, and the Albany Movement.⁷

Another O'Reilly article, "The FBI and the Politics of Riots, 1964-1968," examines riots that occurred in several major cities after a fifteen-year-old black boy was shot by an off-duty police officer in Harlem two weeks after Congress passed the Civil Rights Act.⁸ The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized a protest rally to demand the officer's firing. The rally quickly turned violent. Riots soon broke out in other states to protest for civil rights and against police brutality.⁹ President Lyndon Johnson, hoping to improve his chances of passing his Great Society platform, ordered an FBI report on the riots. Hoover used the report as a means to conduct further surveillance, and Johnson felt the report legitimized the increase of riot control curriculum for law enforcement agents. O'Reilly found that even though Hoover had toned down his anti-communist rhetoric, he still ultimately attributed the riots to communism. Johnson and Hoover both attempted to use each other for their own political gains. Hoover's attempts were

⁶ Kenneth O'Reilly, "The FBI and the Civil Rights Movement during the Kennedy Years--from Freedom Rides to Albany," *The Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 2 (May 1988).

⁷ O'Reilly, "The FBI and the Civil Rights Movement."

⁸ Kenneth O'Reilly, "The FBI and the Politics of Riots, 1964-1968," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988), 32-35, 51-53.

⁹ Some examples include riots in other areas of New York, and some in New Jersey, Illinois, and Pennsylvania.

more successful, resulting in “the director’s bureaucracy, the FBI, and the director’s mode of operation, federal surveillance, bec[oming] further entrenched in the governing process.”¹⁰

O’Reilly’s 1989 article, “Civil Rights & the FBI,” examines the case of Donald Rochon, a black man sent to Omaha in the early 1980s after becoming an FBI agent.¹¹ He encountered endless harassment from fellow agents while stationed there and, later, in Chicago. Agents harassed Rochon based on racial stereotypes, including spreading rumors about him asking the Bureau to pay for recreational scuba-diving lessons and not being able to swim. As Agent Thomas Dillon stated in court documents, Rochon’s bone density was thicker than that of his white colleagues, which explained why “blacks can’t swim as well as whites.”¹² One incident involved agents defacing a family photograph on Rochon’s desk by pasting a photograph of an ape’s head over Rochon’s son’s face. Shortly after that incident, Rochon requested to be transferred to Los Angeles to be close to his sick father. The Bureau instead transferred him to Chicago.

After making a comment that he might face similar issues obtaining housing in Chicago as he did in Omaha, the Bureau censured him for not reporting the issue as it was a potential violation of federal law. The agents who harassed Rochon in Omaha were informally reprimanded by their superior and no official actions were taken. Thomas Dillon, the main perpetrator of racial harassment against Rochon in Omaha, was also transferred to Chicago.

Agents in Rochon’s unit regularly met and discussed ways to harass Rochon. Agent Gary Miller, who became friends with Dillon, gave several examples of tactics used to harass and intimidate Rochon in Chicago. Miller followed Rochon home from work to find out where he lived. Shortly after that, a letter was placed in Rochon’s office mailbox threatening death against

¹⁰ O’Reilly, “The FBI and the Politics of Riots,” 114.

¹¹ Kenneth O’Reilly and J. Jeffrey Mayhook, “Civil Rights & the FBI,” *Human Rights* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1989).

¹² O’Reilly and Mayhook, “Civil Rights & the FBI,” 33.

Rochon and sexual assault of Rochon's wife in their home. The FBI launched an administrative inquiry into forged death and dismemberment policies put in Rochon's name and placed Miller on a fourteen-day suspension without pay for the forgeries.

The FBI did not take Rochon's complaints of racial harassment seriously and rarely punished offending officers. Before Rochon left Omaha, he filed complaints with the Justice Department and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The complaints took years to be processed and investigated, and the conclusions were not actually handed down until January 1988, long after Rochon had started working at the Philadelphia field office. The Justice Department stated that Rochon's time in Omaha "painted a clear picture of blatant racial harassment," and the EEOC declared that Rochon's transfer to Chicago with Dillon, instead of granting him a transfer to Los Angeles, had been an act of retaliation. Rochon filed a civil suit against nine Chicago agents. The suit had not been settled or decided when O'Reilly published the article, but it did result in the Department of Justice and the Bureau conducting a criminal investigation against Miller. Throughout the investigations and lawsuits, the FBI maintained that the harassment of Rochon was not routine and that Rochon was alone in experiencing racial harassment from within the Bureau.¹³ The article serves to illustrate that racial discrimination had become ingrained in the FBI, and it references other illegal actions, such as COINTELPRO, that had been conducted by the Bureau in regards to the civil rights movement.

"Racial Matters:" The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972, like O'Reilly's older works, explores the FBI's investigations of civil rights leaders.¹⁴ This work more deeply explores the illegal actions the agency engaged in, such as providing information to police that led to the murders of Black Panther leaders, enacting counterintelligence programs that broke

¹³ O'Reilly and Mayhook, "Civil Rights & the FBI," 34-35.

¹⁴ Kenneth O'Reilly, *"Racial Matters:" The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1989).

countless federal laws, and keeping a Security Index with a disproportionately large number of African Americans to make mass arrests easy. The Security Index contained a list of people considered to be national security risks, which facilitated arrests by providing a list of people who could be arrested by executive order in emergencies. O'Reilly once again explored the Bureau's hypocrisy in claiming states' rights when choosing not to seriously investigate civil rights violations while surveilling the people they should have been protecting.¹⁵

While some works provide overviews on multiple subjects, others specifically focus on the FBI's treatment of a single individual. David J. Garrow has published multiple books about Martin Luther King, Jr. *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis* explores how King became a target for the FBI and details the extent of the investigations and harassment that ensued. Garrow rejects the idea that King was targeted because he spoke out against the FBI, asserting instead that King was targeted because his close advisor, Stanley Levison, had previous ties to the Communist Party and had been identified as a communist by a trusted FBI informant.¹⁶

The twenty-first century saw a rise in scholarship concerning the FBI and other social movements of the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. In multiple works, David Cunningham explored the FBI's counterintelligence program's (COINTELPRO) efforts to quell New Left movements and the Ku Klux Klan, examining the tactics used against both the Left and Right.¹⁷ This paper fits into the historiography of the topic by providing a comparison of the FBI's treatment of the

¹⁵ Gerald Horne, review of "*Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972*," by Kenneth O'Reilly, *The American Journal of Legal History*, April 1990.

¹⁶ David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2015).; Kenneth O'Reilly, review of *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis*, by David J. Garrow, *Political Science Quarterly*, Autumn 1982.

¹⁷ David Cunningham, "The Patterning of Repression: FBI Counterintelligence and the New Left," *Social Forces* 82, no. 1 (September 2003).; Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here.*; David Cunningham, "Understanding State Responses to Left-versus Right-Wing Threats: The FBI's Repression of the New Left and the Ku Klux Klan," *Social Science History* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2003).

civil rights movement and the New Left movement and further showing the FBI's bias in selecting its targets of investigation. It provides insight into how the Bureau functioned from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s and what groups it chose to target. Unlike earlier sources on the subject, this paper utilizes the FBI Vault, a source that was unavailable until decades after research on the subject began.

FBI History

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was founded in 1908 for the purpose of having a national law enforcement agency. Prior to the formation of the FBI, law enforcement was not a top concern for the national government. There were local and some state law enforcement agencies, but few resources were devoted to them. Rapid advancements in technology helped spur the growth of cities, which in turn contributed to the rise of crime, leading President Theodore Roosevelt and Attorney General Charles Bonaparte to recruit Secret Service agents and other investigators to work for the Department of Justice. Between its founding and the commencement of World War I, the bulk of the FBI's cases were white-collar and civil rights-related. In the late 1910s, the FBI investigated infamous bombings, such as the "Black Tom" bombing, and Ku Klux Klan-related activity. The 1920s and 1930s saw the FBI focusing on gangsters, many of whom committed armed robbery, murder, and violations of the Eighteenth Amendment, which prohibited the manufacture and sale of alcohol. In 1924, J. Edgar Hoover became the director of the FBI, and served in this capacity until his death in 1972. Following the commencement of World War II in Europe, the FBI began investigating possible spies in the United States, worried that they posed a threat to democracy. After the United States entered the war, the FBI continued to track and prosecute spies, along with enforcing the draft, monitoring the quality of military supplies, performing background checks, gathering intelligence, and breaking foreign communication codes, all in an effort to ensure the country's success in the war. After the war, the FBI focused its attention on detecting Soviet spies and removing them from government positions. An Army Signal Corps project, code-named Venona, resulted in the identification of 350 alleged Soviet spies between 1943 and 1980. In the mid-1950s, when the civil rights movement gained tremendous momentum, the Bureau's focus shifted to civil rights

violations, though it did not have jurisdiction over lynchings and some race-based murders. In the 1960s and 1970s, the FBI focused on criminal and national security cases related to the civil rights movement, opposition to the Vietnam War, and counterculture movements.¹⁸

J. Edgar Hoover

During his nearly fifty-year tenure as director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover exerted tremendous influence over the agency. Hoover instilled his personal and political beliefs into his career and the decisions he made regarding the actions of the FBI. In doing so, the FBI reflected Hoover's values and prejudices. Hoover was known to promote a specific image for his agents and did not hire those who did not fit this image.

For much of the twentieth century, the FBI employed very few black agents. In fact, only half of the black agents hired during the FBI's infancy continued to work there after Hoover became director. There were only a handful of black agents to serve throughout the nation during Hoover's time as director, and no black agents attended the FBI Academy until 1962.¹⁹ For the next several decades, black agents experienced regular and frequent harassment. The FBI not only exhibited discrimination in its hiring practices, but also in the targets it chose to investigate and the discrimination those individuals faced from the Bureau. In addition, the FBI did very little to prevent or investigate civil rights violations that were instituted against African Americans.

According to the FBI's self-published history, three women were known to have served in the FBI in its early years. The FBI employed Alaska P. Davidson from October 1922 to June

¹⁸ United States, *The FBI: A Centennial History, 1908-2008* (Washington: U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008), 2-56.

¹⁹ "A Byte Out of History: Early African-American Agents," Federal Bureau of Investigation, last modified February 15, 2011, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/early-african-american-agents>.

1924, and Jessie B. Duckstein from November 1923 to May 1924. Hoover fired both women during a round of cuts after he became acting director of the FBI in May 1924. Lenore Houston worked for the FBI from January 1924 to November 1928, when she was asked to resign for an unspecified reason. It was not until May 1972 that “women special agents would become a regular and vital part of the FBI.”²⁰ Hoover died in May 1972, and it is his attitude toward women that kept them from becoming special agents. In 1971, the National Organization for Women’s Vice President of Legal Affairs wrote a letter confronting Hoover on the FBI’s refusal to hire women as special agents. Hoover explained that it was “imperative” that only men were hired because they were the only ones who would “be capable of performing all duties of his position, whenever and wherever necessary.” Hoover claimed that agents must be “qualified for the strenuous physical exertion... during any time of day or night,” asserting that FBI field work was too dangerous for women, and the Bureau would “continue to hold firmly that this is inappropriate for women.”²¹

Hoover kept files containing highly sensitive information separate from general files. He kept files on members of Congress, and they included everything from Congress-FBI business relations to personal and potentially damaging information about Congressmen, such as arrest records and rumors. Hoover even had a file on President Richard Nixon, labeled “Obscene Matters.”²² Nixon knew that Hoover had information on him and was afraid to get on Hoover’s bad side because if Hoover’s reputation was ever damaged, he would “pull down the temple with him,” including Nixon.²³

²⁰ United States, *The FBI*, 8.

²¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “National Organization for Women,” Part 1, 26-28.

²² Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 45-46.

²³ Anthony Summers, *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2012), Section 1. The online version of this book that was used for this paper does not contain page numbers.

In 1958, Hoover wrote *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It*.²⁴ In it, Hoover explained that the “first step” toward communism is atheism and the loss of one’s religious beliefs, and the “‘*Final Goal*’ of communism is the ‘utter rejection of all religion... from the heart, mind, soul of man, and the total victory of atheistic communism.’” In an analysis of *Masters of Deceit*, Kevin Gotham wrote, “By symbolically portraying communism as a supreme threat to America’s most sacred values and institutions- the nation’s collective identity- Hoover succeeded in creating a symbol of communism that antagonistically resonated with the religious dispositions of American citizens living during the Cold War.” Hoover expressed views that communism would bring about an imminent apocalyptic end to the “‘American Way’” and “‘Western Civilization’” because “Communists work ‘night after night, week after week,’ ‘plotting against America... planning for revolution,’” by getting “‘communist members into positions of influence.’” Hoover linked arguments from labor unions and civil rights organizations with communism because the communist platform supported such causes. Gotham argued that in making this connection, Hoover tried to “make individuals believe that the legitimate demands of labor unions and civil rights organizations are communist sponsored.”²⁵ This idea that civil rights organizations had such close ties with communism is integral to understanding the FBI’s investigation of civil rights organizations throughout the 1950s and 1960s, since suspected communist infiltration was the reason behind many investigations.

²⁴ J. Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It* (New York: Holt, 1958).

²⁵ Kevin Gotham, “A Study in American Agitation: J. Edgar Hoover’s Symbolic Construction of the Communist Menace,” *Mid-American Review of Sociology* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 60-64. Emphasis is Hoover’s original writing.

Intelligence and Counterintelligence

The Attorney General has authority over the FBI. From the creation of the Bureau until the mid-1970s, the FBI received a minimal amount of instruction from the Attorney General regarding “the compilation of emergency detention lists, guidelines for designating and prosecuting subversive organizations, and orders dealing with domestic violence and civil disorder.”²⁶ Notably, the Attorney General did not give the FBI guidelines for intelligence operations. Electronic surveillance was the sole intelligence technique regulated by the Attorney General because it was the only form of surveillance that interested Congress. The Justice Department was aware of the FBI’s domestic intelligence investigations, though it did not know the extent of the illegal intelligence-gathering tactics. Hoover gave agents permission for “warrantless surreptitious entries and mail openings” until the mid-1960s when the Justice Department and the Attorney General became less permissive of the amount of electronic surveillance. Hoover anticipated that the Justice Department would not support the FBI’s use of such unconstitutional tactics that had the potential to be traced or discovered.²⁷

However, Hoover’s concerns over wiretapping and bugging were minimal compared to a much bigger secret he kept: COINTELPRO. COINTELPRO, or counterintelligence program, was a covert operation run by the FBI to suppress and discredit subversive people, organizations, and movements. The most common tactic involved sending publications to parents of young activists or to distribute materials spreading false information about organizations.²⁸ The FBI anticipated that parents would cut off financial support of their children if they disapproved of their political and social activities, which the FBI hoped would cause the young activists to lose

²⁶ John T. Elliff, *The Reform of FBI Intelligence Operations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 37.

²⁷ Elliff, *Reform*, 37-40.

²⁸ Examples include letters addressed to parents, postcards to students sent to their home address intended to be read by their parents, brochure publications, and more. COINTELPRO also planted evidence and used strategically placed informants to cause tensions within groups.

interest in their causes. Additionally, FBI agents infiltrated organizations in an attempt to cause internal dissent, leading to a breakdown of a group from within. COINTELPRO began in 1956 as a means to suppress suspected members of the Communist Party. The program expanded over time to target civil rights organizations, the New Left, white supremacy groups, economic/labor organizations, and other groups deemed security threats. The FBI continued to conduct COINTELPRO operations until 1971 when a break-in at an FBI office in Pennsylvania revealed that the program was not as secure as the FBI thought.²⁹ The group who committed the break-in called itself the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI. Anti-war activists could spot undercover FBI agents based on their vastly different appearance and demeanor compared to the activists, and the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI wanted to discover the extent to which the FBI interfered in social movements and infringed upon activists' First Amendment rights. Following the break-in, the group strategically mailed copies of certain files to newspapers. The burglars were not caught and had a chance to tell their side of the story in the 2014 documentary *1971* after the statute of limitations had expired.³⁰

Former FBI agent Terry Neist defended COINTELPRO:

There were groups the FBI investigated. There were groups that were intent on tearing down the government and causing disruption in the government. The Weathermen were a violent element. These people robbed banks, they blew up university facilities that dealt with the defense department, so we had informants in there. We also did some of these things against the Black Panther Party which wasn't just doing something for civil rights, but they committed acts of violence. Now it wouldn't be done, but in those days there was really no prohibition against it, so if you're not doing anything wrong you have nothing to worry about. It was simply trying to wreck the groups that were trying to wreck the country.³¹

²⁹ David Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1-6.

³⁰ *1971*, directed by Johanna Hamilton (New York City: First Run Features, 2014).

³¹ *1971*, directed by Johanna Hamilton, 11:25-12:02.

FBI agents routinely underwent training in “sound school,” a three-week course in wiretapping, bugging, and lockpicking.³² They were taught how to plant electronic bugs in walls, which required them to cut open the wall and plaster it without it being noticed. Agents who completed this training course received a lockpicking set from the Bureau, though the sets were not on inventory lists. To complete an “official burglary,” called a “black bag job” by the agents, extreme precautions were taken to ensure the successful completion of the job. According to former FBI agent William W. Turner:

All possible precautions are taken to preclude surprise discovery. It is ascertained that the normal occupants are far from the premises, and a tail is put on them to make sure they don't double back. An FBI agent sits with the police radio dispatcher to ensure that prowler calls from the target neighborhood are ignored. Just in case, the agents going on bag jobs carry no credentials and nothing that will connect them with the FBI. Those of us who carried out these missions often discussed what we would do if, despite everything, we were caught. The consensus was that we would act like a burglar by knocking the man out and fleeing.

Agents who successfully completed bag jobs received a cash payment in addition to their normal salary.³³ Turner's description provides important insight into the illegal actions the FBI conducted in order to plant bugs on its targets. The lengths to which the FBI went to make sure agents did not get caught during black bag jobs demonstrate that the FBI knew these kinds of operations were illegal. The FBI knew it would be detrimental if agents were caught because it would tarnish the public's perception of the FBI, and the FBI would be under too much scrutiny to continue such operations.

³² The source does not specify how common this training was or the percentage of agents that went through it. The author of the source, a former FBI agent, joined the FBI in 1951. He attended “sound school” in 1959, suggesting that it was intended for agents with several years of experience with the FBI. William W. Turner, *Hoover's FBI: The Men and the Myth* (Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, 1970), 317. Wiretapping is a method of listening to telephone conversations by placing a listening device on a telephone wire, typically on a telephone pole box. In terms of the FBI, Attorneys General had the authority to approve wiretaps, making it legal. Bugging is the process of placing a microphone in a concealed location. Bugging, especially the kind that the FBI did during this time, was typically done in private residences and required illegal entry, making the act of bugging illegal because the FBI did not have the ability to grant warrants and did not seek such warrants from those sources authorized to grant them.

³³ Turner, *Hoover's FBI*, 317.

Strikingly different from his later stance, Hoover opposed wiretapping in his early years because he considered it “a lazy man’s tool and an obstacle to the ‘development of ethical, scientific and sound investigative technique.’”³⁴ Wiretapping had been legal until the passage of the Communications Act of 1934. Hoover began to favor wiretapping as a national security measure at the commencement of World War II, and President Franklin Roosevelt gave the Attorney General control over authorizing wiretaps. After the war, Hoover continued to request permission for wiretaps. At any given time, he kept the number around one hundred since he made annual announcements to the public stating the number of wiretaps in place. Keeping the number around one hundred was the Bureau’s way of making the public feel comfortable with the existence of wiretapping. To the public, a low number meant the wiretaps were being placed strategically rather than being used to spy on large amounts of people. In “sound school,” agents were taught that permission for wiretaps must be granted by the Attorney General, but bugs only required permission from the Bureau. Another major difference between wiretaps and bugs is that wiretaps were legal because they were put on telephone pole boxes, and bugs were placed in private residences, which required illegal entry since agents only had Hoover’s permission to enter and lacked official warrants.³⁵

³⁴ Turner, *Hoover’s FBI*, 317.

³⁵ Turner, *Hoover’s FBI*, 317-319.

Civil Rights Movement and Black Power

The civil rights movement has its roots in a long history of slavery, discrimination, and inequality that African Americans had experienced since the colonial period. Despite the Reconstruction Amendments granting equal citizenship and voting rights to African Americans, those rights were not effectively enforced after 1877, leading to widespread discrimination and racial violence throughout the South. “Separate but equal” had been declared constitutional in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 and was not overturned until *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. The Fifteenth Amendment decreed that the right to vote could not be denied on the basis of race, but various efforts succeeded in doing so, such as the grandfather clause, poll taxes, literacy tests, and voter intimidation. To add to all of these challenges to equal rights was the Hoover-promoted theory that civil rights groups in the post-World War II era were sponsored by the Communist Party. This theory led to numerous civil rights organizations being investigated by the FBI for suspicion of communist infiltration, and the investigation of civil rights leaders under accusations of being communist.

NAACP

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1909 to promote equal treatment for blacks. The NAACP was highly influential in getting African Americans registered to vote and challenging existing restrictions that prevented them from exercising that right. The NAACP’s relationship with the Communist Party dates back to 1919, though tensions peaked in the 1930s when the Communist Party continuously feuded with the NAACP over claims that the NAACP leaders were lying to members and did not actually care about advancing civil rights and racial equality. The two were most divided over

the Scottsboro Boys case, a trial that involved nine African American teenage boys accused of raping two white women. The Communist Party hired lawyers to defend the boys, while the NAACP seemed initially hesitant to devote resources because many members believed the case was not directly related to civil rights. Until 1946, the Communist Party advocated for the creation of a new state in the South for African Americans that would be self-governed as a means to achieve self-determination. After abandoning that stance, the Communist Party promoted self-government through voting and office-holding, which closely aligned with the NAACP's mission. Despite a history of public disagreements, the Communist Party attempted to infiltrate local NAACP branches in order to influence its decisions and to be placed into positions of power to make it easier to promote communist ideology. The NAACP was aware of these attempts and, as early as 1947, publicly denounced communist involvement and attempts to take over the organization.³⁶

The first page in the NAACP's online FBI Vault file is dated March 3, 1941, and reveals that the NAACP had been under investigation for "internal security" due to an "indication of increased communist tendencies among some local branches and officers," noting that the NAACP had engaged in "subversive activities." The file then gives a detailed summary of the organization's history, goals, and legislation the NAACP helped pass. The file notes "increasing communist tendencies" as early as 1935. Another report filed in late 1941 concluded that the NAACP was "not considered to be a Communist front organization" on the national level, but there were several local chapters, particularly in the South, that "had been subject to Communist infiltration." Local chapters of the NAACP were investigated throughout that decade for ties to the Communist Party. The FBI kept a list of NAACP officers, both local and national, and their

³⁶ Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909-1969* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 136-144.

status regarding the Communist Party; they updated the lists annually after informants sent election results to the agents involved in the case.³⁷

A report dated July 19, 1954, listed all known NAACP branches and their suspected communist affiliations. The vast majority of the branches were deemed to have “no known Communist Party infiltration.” A couple of branches had current or former members of the Communist Party in attendance, but the informants stated they did not attempt to advocate for communism. Some branches, such as the San Francisco branch, were known to force people out of leadership positions if it was discovered they supported communism. A few were known to have been controlled by communists in the past and had since made efforts to purge communists from leadership roles and ensure that known communists would not serve in any officer positions. In many of the branches, the informant stated the officers were publicly anti-communist and would resist any efforts of communist infiltration or attempts to take over the branch. Some branches, such as Little Rock, Los Angeles, Hartford, and Miami, had their entire sections redacted, so it is not known what the FBI concluded about them. The extensive report concluded with the statement that the Bureau would continue to track the NAACP and compile a report twice a year. The reports that followed were formatted in the same manner and contained a history of the NAACP, a list of officers and branches, the findings regarding each branch, and occasional miscellaneous copies of newsletter articles related to the NAACP.³⁸ Some references were made to members who were arrested for violating the Smith Act, a law that made it illegal to “advocate the violent overthrow of the government or to organize or be a member of any group or society devoted to such advocacy.”³⁹ Despite no evidence of communist leaders and

³⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “NAACP,” Part 1, 2-80.

³⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “NAACP,” Part 1, 81-100, Part 2, 1-101, Part 3, 1-101, Part 4, 1-101, Part 5, 1-101, Part 6, 1-101, Part 7, 1-101, Part 8, 1-26.

³⁹ “Smith Act,” Encyclopædia Britannica, last modified May 9, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Smith-Act>.

few instances of communist members, the FBI has released files dating as late as October 15, 1957. The files continued to refer to the hunt for suspected communists.⁴⁰

A major difference is noticeable in the treatment of the NAACP and other alleged communist organizations and individuals. The FBI was correct about attempted communist infiltration of the NAACP, yet the vast majority of the NAACP's file detailed the organization's history, goals, and membership information. Lists of local branches, officers, and members were updated on set intervals. The major difference is that NAACP officers' private meetings and travel plans and the organization's scheduled events were not documented by the FBI as they were with other suspected individuals and organizations. Based on the available information, the investigation of the NAACP appears to be a legitimate investigation to determine if the organization was infiltrated by Communist Party members; though it cannot be said with absolute certainty that ulterior motives were not a factor in this investigation. The simple collection of rosters and similar materials did not impact the organization's plans to achieve its goals. The investigation did not tarnish the organization's public image as the investigation was not public knowledge. The NAACP was publicly opposed to communism, which likely boosted its public image. The most significant conclusion derived from this investigation is that the FBI demonstrated it was capable of conducting an investigation through legal means with very little interference into the organization's decisions. While this could have served as a basis for how to conduct communist infiltration investigations in the future, the FBI instead turned to illegal and ethically questionable methods of investigation and interference using COINTELPRO.

There is an unexplained ten-year gap in reports from November 1944 to July 1954. It is unknown if there were any reports created during that time or if there were reports created that,

⁴⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "NAACP," Part 8, 20.

for various reasons, were not uploaded to the Vault.⁴¹ The resurgence of reports, if there truly were not any reports created during the ten-year gap, is important given the timing. The NAACP was heavily involved in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision because NAACP lawyers argued in favor of *Brown*. The Supreme Court announced the decision in May 1954, and new reports appeared in the files two months later. It is possible that this is a coincidence and the FBI did create reports on the NAACP during the ten-year gap in question. It is unknown exactly why the files stop in October 1957. Either reports continued to be made and the files were damaged before they could be uploaded to the Vault, or October 1957 is when the FBI decided to stop investigating the NAACP altogether. Alabama declared the NAACP an illegal organization in 1956, which may help explain the timing of the end of the reports. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was established in January 1957, and the FBI began investigating the SCLC in September 1957. A potential reason for the cessation of the NAACP's investigation is that the leaders of the FBI believed that the SCLC posed more of a threat than the NAACP and did not have enough resources to devote to both organizations at the same time. Additionally, the FBI leaders may have believed that the SCLC, as a new organization, had the potential to be easily influenced by communist ideals and infiltrated by Communist Party members. The NAACP, which had existed for nearly five decades at this point, had branches set up throughout the nation and had a sound organizational structure and membership process, and the FBI had been monitoring the NAACP for years, with each report declaring that there was no

⁴¹ Potential reasons include intentional damage to the files in order to destroy their contents, accidental damage, such as water damage, or the loss of the files. In an original draft of this paper, I referenced a memorandum from February 1954. However, I did not cite the specific page number and have not been able to find the memorandum again. That is the only instance I know of that is a page during the November 1944- July 1954 gap. The quote referenced explained that the FBI declared that the continuous investigations have “again established the relentlessness of the CP [Communist Party] in efforts to infiltrate the many nationwide chapters of the NAACP.” However, this was only a memorandum and not a full report that provided detailed membership organization.

known communist infiltration. FBI leaders most likely thought that the SCLC was more likely to produce results about communist infiltration than the NAACP.⁴²

SCLC

The civil rights movement gained tremendous momentum during the 1950s. Many of the people who became leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference were active in the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 and 1956, and most founding members were also NAACP members. The SCLC was established in 1957 to promote nonviolent integration and as a means to conduct civil rights events while bypassing the NAACP ban in Alabama.⁴³ Martin Luther King, Jr. served as the organization's president from its establishment until his death in 1968. In coining the organization's name, Roland Smith believed that the inclusion of "Christian" would make the SCLC "less vulnerable to charges of radicalism and communism" that the NAACP faced.⁴⁴ King was well known at the time, especially among law enforcement, but the FBI was not concerned with King's actions until May 1961 when Hoover requested information on him and other people who were participating in the Congress of Racial Equality's Freedom Rides to desegregate interstate buses and facilities.⁴⁵ Although the New York field office had a file on King, and several other field offices had notes on him and the SCLC, the Bureau not specifically investigate King until 1961.

The FBI's investigation into the SCLC commenced on September 20, 1957, when Hoover issued an order to the Atlanta Special Agent in Charge (SAC), stating that "in the

⁴² This theory may be confirmed or refuted in the future depending on if new evidence surfaces related to the topic.

⁴³ In 1956, Alabama Attorney General John Malcolm Patterson issued a court order to ban NAACP activities in Alabama. Patterson was a staunch segregationist.

⁴⁴ Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 33.

⁴⁵ Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 19-20.

absence of any indication that the Communist Party has attempted, or is attempting, to infiltrate this organization you should conduct no investigation in this matter. However, in view of the stated purpose of the organization you should remain alert for public source information concerning it in connection with the racial situation.” Hoover believed that the SCLC was likely to influence the civil rights movement, so he ordered FBI branches in the South to monitor the organization. A year later, a file indicated “no infiltration known by CP members,” but that the SCLC “appears to be target for infiltration.” It is not specified how the FBI concluded that SCLC appeared to be a target for infiltration, but it may have been because the file noted that Dr. Lonnie Cross, a member of the Socialist Workers Party, had been working with King in Atlanta in September 1957.⁴⁶ There were several SCLC executives with varying degrees of association with the Communist Party that aroused the suspicions of the FBI, giving the FBI reasons to continue investigating the SCLC.

Not all reports in the SCLC’s file were directly related to investigations of the organization. The FBI received reports from several southern states claiming that people were being denied the right to register to vote based on their race, and that the SCLC planned to conduct voter registration drives to register at least 100,000 black voters in time for the 1958 election. The reports stated that the alleged incidents were being investigated as violations of the Voting Election Law.⁴⁷ According to the memorandum, any governmental investigations into the incidents should only be conducted on “complaints which have substantial merit.” The results of this investigation were not published in the SCLC’s file as they would likely have not been

⁴⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Southern Christian Leadership Conference,” Part 1, 4-5.

⁴⁷ The Voting Election Law to which the agent referred was likely the Civil Rights Act of 1957, which created a civil rights section of the Department of Justice and established a Civil Rights Commission that could investigate alleged incidents of voter discrimination. More information can be found at “The Civil Rights Act of 1957,” History, Art & Archives, United States House of Representatives, <https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1951-2000/The-Civil-Rights-Act-of-1957/>. and “Civil Rights Act of 1957,” Eisenhower Foundation, <https://www.dwightdeisenhower.com/383/Civil-Rights-Act-of-1957>.

directly related to the SCLC. Given that widespread voter discrimination based on race occurred until the mid-1960s with the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, the FBI likely did not investigate many claims or did not take them seriously. However, the fact that the SCLC planned a voter registration drive likely caused the FBI to pay more attention to news articles about the SCLC because of the FBI's fear that communists could win seats in government. By monitoring news articles, the FBI would know more about candidates running for public office and know if the voter registration drive was successful.

The FBI paid close attention to the presence of the SCLC in the press, as evidenced by the amount of newspaper clippings present in the SCLC's file. Although there were very few newspaper clippings covering the earlier years of the SCLC in the file, the FBI was still concerned with the SCLC's publicity. The involvement of celebrities in the SCLC had the potential to bring the organization extra publicity, so the FBI carefully monitored an instance of the SCLC partnering with a celebrity. The SCLC invited the musician Harry Belafonte to Atlanta to perform a benefit show on June 6, 1962. The Atlanta Police Department contacted Wyatt Tee Walker, executive director of the SCLC, and told him that Belafonte should use already integrated facilities rather than whites-only facilities or he would be arrested for trespassing if he did not leave when asked. The group, consisting of the SCLC executives and Belafonte, attempted to eat at Kings Inn Restaurant, but left when they were denied service. During Belafonte's visit, the FBI tracked his movements and the people with whom he met.⁴⁸ As Belafonte was in Atlanta for a benefit concert, the FBI could have been attempting to track the source of the organization's income. Belafonte's status as a celebrity could have been worrisome for the FBI, as they may have feared that Belafonte's social status would make it easy for him to influence other people, in this case by supporting the civil rights movement. This careful tracking

⁴⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Southern Christian Leadership Conference," Part 1, 43-60.

of Belafonte and the SCLC's interactions demonstrates the FBI's invasive habits and the FBI leaders' desire to find any faults with civil rights organizations and confirm any suspicions.

The FBI also focused on other lesser-known executives, using them as reasons to continue the investigation of the SCLC. Stanley Levison, listed in reports as associate/assistant director and assistant treasurer of the SCLC, and Hunter Pitts O'Dell, listed in reports as the head of the New York office of the SCLC, were considered secret and former Communist Party members, respectively. Due to their influence in the SCLC and their close relations to King, the FBI believed the SCLC had been influenced by communist ideas, which provided justification for continued monitoring of the SCLC. The New York FBI office requested permission to investigate the New York chapter of the SCLC in August 1962 because of the "dominant CP influence on the executives." The field offices in Atlanta and New York were granted permission to investigate the SCLC "solely to determine the extent of Communist Party infiltration [not to investigate] the legitimate activities of the organization," and other branches were told to determine if an SCLC branch was in their jurisdiction and whether Communist Party members were involved in any capacity. A file dated December 7, 1962, summarized a November 1962 newspaper article concerning the resignation of O'Dell and King's statement that the "SCLC has a policy that no person of Communist affiliation can serve on the staff, its executive board, or its membership at large."⁴⁹

Contrary to the investigation's stated purpose, the investigation clearly went beyond determining communist influence. Agents and informants kept track of the SCLC's plans. In December 1962, King and several other SCLC officers planned to visit several cities in Alabama, and the FBI reported why they were visiting the cities and how they would travel there, including a detailed description of the car, its license plate number, and the anticipated route they would

⁴⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Southern Christian Leadership Conference," Part 1, 154-155.

take. Once in those cities, the FBI tracked where they went and the times they were there. The Bureau conducted similar tracking efforts of the SCLC on many other occasions, tracking flight times, hotel reservations, names of people with whom officers were meeting, and the locations of officers and the time spent in each location.⁵⁰ It was very common for the FBI to monitor the SCLC and King in this manner. The absence of this type of tracking with the NAACP indicates that the FBI did not act this way in all investigations. Rather, it chose targets that it deemed to be the most significant threats.

In February 1962, an informant described King as a “confirmed Marxist,” which gave the FBI more justification to investigate King.⁵¹ The SCLC file includes a provocative 1961 quote from King: “We see the rise of McCarthyism in the South again because all other weapons of the segregationist have failed.”⁵² This quote demonstrates that King believed the civil rights movement was targeted for its alleged communist ties as a way to evoke fear of the civil rights movement instead of acceptance. King was critical of the way the FBI handled civil rights cases, and the FBI was critical of those who voiced their opposition to its methods.⁵³ Based on vast amounts of evidence from the FBI files, King’s quote is accurate, though leaders at the FBI were still determined to harm the civil rights leader's image.

Following the receipt of information that indicated King would be paid indirectly for speaking engagements by donating money to his church, the FBI told field offices to be on alert for any information that would signal instances of tax evasion.⁵⁴ The instruction to “be on alert” constitutes a legitimate order for intelligence, or rather an order to collect information as it is encountered, rather than an order to actively seek such information. Tax evasion is a federal

⁵⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Southern Christian Leadership Conference,” Part 1, 159-165.

⁵¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Southern Christian Leadership Conference,” Part 1, 180.

⁵² Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Southern Christian Leadership Conference,” Part 1, 21.

⁵³ Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 99.

⁵⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Southern Christian Leadership Conference,” Part 3, 61-66.

crime, which means it falls under the FBI's jurisdiction. However, follow-up reports to this alleged crime were not made, and the FBI did not actively search for evidence of tax evasion, choosing instead to focus its efforts on tracking the organization's leaders.

The files describe conflicts between the SCLC leaders, namely between Bayard Rustin and Martin Luther King and between Ralph Abernathy and Hosea Williams. The main issues revolved around money and how to achieve the organization's goals. The SCLC was running out of money in late 1966, and the FBI kept track of what the organization did as a result, such as cancelling certain events, being unable to pay for conference attendees' flights to the SCLC conferences, and fundraising efforts, including Stanley Levison's increased donations.⁵⁵

The SCLC spent a considerable amount of time and resources in Chicago in 1966 and 1967. Projects they focused on were Operation Breadbasket, voter registration, and anti-Vietnam protests.⁵⁶ In August 1966, members of the American Nazi Party (ANP) and the National States Rights Party (NSRP) counter-protested a civil rights demonstration and several were arrested for disorderly conduct. The FBI kept track of the ANP's and NSRP's plans for the demonstration, which shows that the FBI did not completely neglect the safety of civil rights protestors. By this time, King had been openly criticizing Hoover and the FBI for years because of their inaction in protecting civil rights. Events in the civil rights movement had been televised for years, and the FBI likely did not want the public to see a repeat of the Birmingham Campaign when protesters were attacked with police dogs and high-pressure water cannons. A repeat of that event would have garnered tremendous negative perceptions of the FBI. The Civil Rights Act was also in effect at this time, so the FBI could not be as open with its discrimination, meaning they would have to take action if violence erupted between the NSRP, ANP, and civil rights protestors.

⁵⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Southern Christian Leadership Conference," Part 10, 147.

⁵⁶ Operation Breadbasket was an effort to promote black-owned businesses and increase the amount of black workers in white-owned businesses. Jessie Jackson led the effort in Chicago.

The SCLC's file concludes in May 1967 with a report detailing King's visit to Chicago and a speech he gave about upcoming civil rights events in the city that summer. Many pages of the SCLC's file have been pulled under U.S. District Judge John Lewis Smith, Jr. and sent to the National Archives. This decision is connected to two trials: *Bernard S. Lee v. Clarence M. Kelley, et al. (U.S.D.C., D.C.) Civil Action Number 76-1185* and *Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) v. Clarence M. Kelley, et al. (U.S.D.C., D.C.) Civil Action Number 76-1186*. Bernard Lee and the SCLC wanted King's FBI files released, and Judge Smith ordered them sealed for fifty years. They will not be publicly available until 2027. Hence, the SCLC files that relate specifically to King and the FBI's investigation of him have been removed from the SCLC's public file. Lastly, some pages have been pulled for "review at FBIHQ and/or delivery to the House Select Committee on Assassinations."⁵⁷

Even after the resignation of O'Dell and the lack of evidence that other executives had any recent involvement with the Communist Party, the FBI continued to investigate the SCLC under the guise of potential communist infiltration. While it would have made sense for the FBI to stop investigating the SCLC after the major victories of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the FBI leaders could have been worried about what the SCLC planned to do next. After accomplishing their main goals, the FBI perhaps thought that the organization would start to protest for more radical demands. By continuing the investigation into the late 1960s, the FBI made an effort to stay aware of the SCLC's activities, leaving open the possibility that agents could interfere in such activities.

⁵⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Southern Christian Leadership Conference," Part 1, 2.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s rise to prominence as a civil rights leader began in early 1956 when he served as a leader of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. King was in and out of the political spotlight over the next several years, and the SCLC and King had reports about them compiled by several FBI field offices. In the summer of 1956, SCLC leader Bayard Rustin introduced Stanley Levison, a wealthy businessman and the soon-to-be assistant director of the SCLC, to King. Levison knew the FBI had been keeping tabs on him since at least 1954, but the FBI did not know Levison and King were in contact with one another until early January 1962.⁵⁸ The national office did not feel the need to track King, despite his role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, until February 1961, when he published an article in the *Nation* that advocated for greater racial diversity in the FBI and the end of racial discrimination in federal hiring practices.⁵⁹ Despite their discontent over his critical comments, the FBI chose not to investigate King until three months later when the Freedom Rides began. Aiming to desegregate the interstate bus system, the Freedom Rides were supported by King. It is possible that the Montgomery Bus Boycott did not draw the attention of the national FBI office because it focused on a single city, and the local office monitored the activity. The Freedom Rides involved multiple states, which meant that they fell under national rather than local jurisdiction. Hoover requested information on King and the leaders of the Congress of Racial Equality, the group sponsoring the Freedom Rides. Upon learning that the FBI did not have much information on King, Hoover ordered agents to report back with more details.⁶⁰ From then until his death in April 1968, King remained under investigation by the FBI.

⁵⁸ Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 26-31.

⁵⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Equality Now," *Nation* 192 (February 4, 1961): 91-95.

⁶⁰ Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 20-24.

Historian David Garrow argues against the popular belief that the surveillance of King was a result of his criticism of the FBI, explaining that King did not speak out against the FBI from his *Nation* article in February 1961 until he publicly endorsed the complaints in the Southern Regional Council's report on Albany November 1962. Yet King had been under investigation for over a year at the time of his second comment.⁶¹ Despite testimony given to Congressional committees in the 1970s from FBI officials that seemed to confirm the criticism theory, Garrow asserts that the timeline of events and evidence does not support this theory.⁶² Garrow instead proposes that "the origins of the King investigation lay in an honestly held FBI belief that Stanley Levison was a conscious and active agent of the Soviet Union, and that Levison's friendship with King was motivated by something other than a desire to advance the cause of civil rights in America."⁶³ However, it is impossible to know what the FBI's "honestly held beliefs" were, leaving Garrow's statement a theory rather than a fact. Similar to Garrow's claim that the timeline of the criticism theory does not line up, Garrow's theory also does not match his stated timeline. Garrow states that the FBI was not aware of Levison and King's acquaintance until January 1962, yet he also states that investigations had been going on for over a year as of November 1962, meaning they began before the FBI knew that King and Levison were in contact. Given the timing of the beginning of King's investigation by the FBI, it is evident that King's prominence in the Freedom Rides was the catalyst of the investigation. However, both King's criticism of the FBI and his association with Levison likely contributed to the extent of the investigation, though his prominence as a civil rights leader and the early information about civil rights events gained as a result of King's surveillance are the most important factors.

⁶¹ Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 106.

⁶² Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 101-109.

⁶³ Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 109.

Legal wiretaps of the SCLC's New York office were completed on October 30, 1963. On November 8, the FBI completed wiretaps of King's home and the SCLC's Atlanta office.⁶⁴ In a memo regarding a December 1963 strategy meeting on how best to use the information gleaned from the wiretaps, FBI officials declared that one of their goals was "neutralizing King as an effective Negro leader and developing evidence concerning King's continued dependence on communists for guidance and direction."⁶⁵ This is an explicit admission of the FBI's intent to discredit the civil rights leader, harming both King's image and the image of the civil rights movement. Along with increased monitoring of the SCLC, agents were directed to gather more information on King's "personal activities' including his use of liquor as well as involvement with women."⁶⁶ Because of King's status as the figurehead of the civil rights movement, tarnishing his image and destroying his role as a leader would have greatly hindered the progress of the civil rights movement. When the FBI was unable to destroy King based on political reasons, they turned to King's personal life to look for any reasons that would make King appear untrustworthy to the public.

While King stayed in Washington at the beginning of January 1964, his room at the Willard Hotel was monitored via microphone.⁶⁷ Transcriptions of the tapes were given to Hoover shortly after, with Hoover's directive to not tell Attorney General Robert Kennedy about the recording and its contents. Similar recordings were made when King traveled. Some resulted in no material of interest to the Bureau, while other recordings provided material that had the potential to damage King's career if released. On March 10, Attorney General Kennedy received a copy of a hotel recording from late February in which, among other damaging subjects, King

⁶⁴ Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 98.

⁶⁵ Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 131.

⁶⁶ Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 132.

⁶⁷ This was done with permission from FBI officials, though it is illegal because it was done without the knowledge and consent of the Attorney General.

discussed the late President John F. Kennedy's rumored affairs. The timing of the distribution of this tape was important because King was scheduled to participate in a memorial to John Kennedy sponsored by the Kennedy family.⁶⁸ The FBI also allegedly sent recordings to King accompanied by threatening letters in an effort to persuade him to step down from his role as a civil rights leader.⁶⁹ A compilation of reputation-damaging recordings and a letter containing death threats were sent to King at the end of 1964 and were discovered by his wife at the beginning of January 1965. King listened to the tape with his wife and several other close advisors. Upon listening to the tape and reading the letter, they suspected it came from the FBI. The agents in the Atlanta field office who monitored the microphones were not aware that the package had been sent and alerted the Bureau to what they heard. The Bureau wrote a letter to the White House and the Attorney General that described how distraught King had become, though they intentionally did not inform them that the package may have contributed to King's distress.⁷⁰ This emphasizes the Bureau's intent on destroying King's life by any means necessary, rather than investigating any alleged ties he had with members of the Communist Party.

Intense harassment from the Bureau continued until mid-1965 when the focus of the investigation turned from finding damaging evidence about King's personal life to investigating his political activities. The shift was gradual, but became most noticeable after King made public comments in August against the Vietnam War. The FBI garnered little information of interest until February 1967, when King gave a speech opposing the war. King's stance caused him to lose the support of many white liberals and moderates. King continued to give speeches about the conflict, which renewed the Bureau's interest in him. King gave a particularly notable speech

⁶⁸ Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 133-142.

⁶⁹ Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 163-164.

⁷⁰ Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 174-175.

in April 1967, when he called for an end to the Vietnam War. He explained how the Vietnam War is a civil rights issue because of the disproportionate number of black and poor people fighting there, and he called for better programs to assist the poor. He also pointed out the hypocrisy of sending black soldiers to fight for freedom in Vietnam when they did not have freedom in their own country.⁷¹ Additionally, in the fall of 1967, the Bureau learned that King was planning a Poor People's Campaign for the following year in an effort to address income inequality and bring rights to poor people.⁷² President Johnson feared that King would run for president in 1968, and the Bureau aimed to collect as much information as possible about King's political activities.⁷³ King's political activities were investigated so Johnson could be prepared to run against King, should he choose to run for president. The FBI also could have chosen to publicly release damaging information about King if they felt he had a significant amount of support for his campaign. In this manner, the FBI could have influenced the 1968 election if King was on the ballot. In his final political act in the spring of 1968, King traveled to Memphis to assist in a sanitation workers' strike. While King was on the balcony of his room at the Lorraine Motel, James Earl Ray shot and killed him. The assassination and the influence of the FBI into King's life were examined in two federal investigations.

After the Senate Watergate Committee investigation found that "the executive branch had directed national intelligence agencies to carry out constitutionally questionable domestic security operations" and the CIA was accused of spying on anti-war activists, the Senate passed a

⁷¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam" (speech, New York, New York, April 4, 1967), Stanford University King Institute, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam>.

⁷² The Poor People's Campaign was held in Washington, D.C. in May and June 1968. Several thousand poor people set up tents on the National Mall. The area was called Resurrection City. The goal was to persuade the government to provide more resources to assist poor people in living expenses, especially for children, and to dedicate more money to educational programs. Ultimately, the Poor People's Campaign did not achieve its goal of passing an Economic Bill of Rights, but it did result in a slight increase in resources for poor people. For further reading, consult Gordon Keith Mantler, *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

⁷³ Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 272-275.

resolution in January 1975, approving an investigation into federal intelligence operations to determine their extent and if any “illegal, improper, or unethical activities” were conducted during the operations. This resolution established the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, otherwise known as the Church Committee. The majority of the hearings were private, but there were some nationally televised hearings. Some of the hearings focused on the FBI’s efforts to hinder the anti-war and civil rights movements. The Church Committee issued its final report on April 29, 1976.⁷⁴

The FBI conducted a separate investigation of King’s assassination. Although King’s file is sealed and off limits until 2027, there is a file available that focuses on an investigation into his assassination. The file details the creation of the new investigation and details surrounding the assassination. In November 1975, William C. Sullivan, the former Assistant Director of the Domestic Intelligence Division of the FBI, testified to the Church Committee that from late 1963 until King’s death, King was “the target of an intensive campaign by the FBI to neutralize him as an effective civil rights leader,” and that “no holds were barred” in the effort. Due to the media coverage of the Church Committee, there was “widespread speculation” that the FBI “may have had some responsibility in Dr. King’s death and may not have done an impartial and thorough investigation of the assassination.”⁷⁵ Three weeks after Sullivan’s testimony, the Attorney General ordered the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice to review files from the Department of Justice and the FBI to determine if the assassination warranted another investigation and if the FBI’s actions had any impact on the assassination itself. In April 1976, a

⁷⁴ “Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities,” United States Senate, accessed June 27, 2019, <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/investigations/ChurchCommittee.htm>.

⁷⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Martin Luther King, Jr.,” Part 1, 10.

task force was created to review additional files and tapes and to interview witnesses.⁷⁶ The task force found that the FBI should have looked into Ray's sources of income and contact with family after the assassination, though they concluded that the FBI's investigation of King's assassination had been "thoroughly, honestly and successfully conducted."⁷⁷

In regard to the FBI's investigation of King, the task force found that the FBI had "no evidence whatsoever that Dr. King was ever a communist or affiliated with the CPUSA," and that there was "no documentation that the SCLC under Dr. King was anything other than a legitimate organization devoted to the civil rights movement." This led the task force to conclude that the "investigation's continuance was unwarranted."⁷⁸ The task force also found that the ongoing public disagreements between King and Hoover were a "major factor in the Bureau's determination to discredit Dr. King and ultimately destroy his leadership role in the civil rights movement."⁷⁹ Regarding the length of the investigation, the task force asserted that surveillance of King should have ended in 1963 when the FBI knew that Levison separated himself from the Communist Party because it did not do enough for civil rights. The task force declared the COINTELPRO actions against King "unwarranted" and said they were "very probably... felonious."⁸⁰ However, the report stated that the technical surveillance of King did not contribute to his death. The report faulted the lack of racial diversity in the FBI as a factor that led to a lack of understanding of race relations and a disconnect between investigators and black civilians during King's assassination investigation. The five-year statute of limitations had passed, so the task force could not charge anyone with a crime. As for Hoover and his immediate lieutenants, all were dead or retired at the time of the task force investigation, thus no disciplinary action

⁷⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Martin Luther King, Jr.," Part 1, 11-13.

⁷⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Martin Luther King, Jr.," Part 2, 2-3.

⁷⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Martin Luther King, Jr.," Part 2, 20-21.

⁷⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Martin Luther King, Jr.," Part 2, 23.

⁸⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Martin Luther King, Jr.," Part 2, 37.

could be taken against them. The agents who participated in King's surveillance and worked for the FBI at the time of the task force investigation did not receive disciplinary action because it was determined that they only followed orders and did not make decisions about the case.⁸¹ The report concluded with the task force recommending closer supervision of the FBI and other federal law enforcement agencies, banning COINTELPRO and similar activities, and requesting that "unauthorized malicious dissemination of investigative data from FBI files" be made a felony rather than a misdemeanor.⁸² This investigation and report is extremely important because it put rightful blame on the FBI for investigating King for several years after the allegations of associations with communists had been proven false. The report exposed decades of the FBI's illegal surveillance activities and explained how some issues can be resolved in the future. While many people were discouraged that the results of this investigation were unable to produce any punishments on the people who ordered King's extended surveillance and harassment, the investigation did result in permanent policy changes to ensure similar illegal activities would not occur in the future.

Bayard Rustin

Opposite of Martin Luther King, Jr., Bayard Rustin was a behind-the-scenes leader of the civil rights movement. He organized the August 28, 1963, March on Washington, where King gave his rousing "I Have a Dream" speech. Approximately a quarter of a million people attended the event to protest against employment discrimination and the high unemployment rate among African Americans. The organizers also wanted to pressure Congress and President Kennedy to pass the Civil Rights Act. The success and notoriety of this event made Rustin the go-to person

⁸¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Martin Luther King, Jr.," Part 2, 39-44.

⁸² Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Martin Luther King, Jr.," Part 2, 44.

in the civil rights movement for event organizing. His appearance on the cover of *Life* magazine made him known to the nation, but he remained a planner rather than a face of the movement because of his controversial past. He had been a member of the Communist Party in the late 1930s and early 1940s, spent two years in federal prison during World War II as a conscientious objector, and had been arrested twice for sodomy.⁸³ Any of these factors alone would have been reason enough to keep Rustin out of the public eye for fear of damaging the movement and drawing negative attention, but all of them combined meant it was even more imperative for Rustin to remain behind the scenes rather than a figurehead of the movement. Although Rustin was already known to the FBI, public recognition at the conclusion of the March on Washington made him a direct target of investigation.⁸⁴

Rustin was included in the FBI's Reserve Index Section A.⁸⁵ The Reserve Index system listed suspected communists and those at the left of the political extreme. Individuals were then placed into sections based on their occupation. Section A included for teachers, doctors, lawyers, celebrities, and influential people. Section B included people who met the Reserve Index criteria but did not fall into any of the Section A categories. The FBI also had a Security Index of people deemed a risk to national security.

At the end of October 1963, two months after the March on Washington, Hoover wrote to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy requesting permission to place Bayard Rustin's apartment under electronic surveillance "in order to obtain further information concerning the plans of the CPUSA [Communist Party of the United States of America] relating to influence in racial matters." Permission was granted and surveillance began on November 15, 1963. As a close advisor to Martin Luther King and a prominent figure in organizing civil rights demonstrations,

⁸³ Jerald E. Podair, *Bayard Rustin: American Dreamer* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: Lanham, 2008), 1-2.

⁸⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Bayard Rustin," 13-14.

⁸⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Bayard Rustin," Part 2, 14.

the FBI considered Rustin a potentially dangerous influence on the civil rights movement because of his former membership in the CPUSA and ongoing association with CPUSA members. According to numerous FBI reports, Rustin had been a member and organizer for the Young Communist League in 1938 and left the Communist Party in 1941, though he occasionally attended events sponsored by the Communist Party and maintained a close working relationship with Communist Party members Stanley Levison and Benjamin Davis. By the time the Bureau started investigating Rustin, he had been out of the Communist Party for over twenty years, which demonstrates a major flaw in the FBI's reason for the investigation.

The FBI continued to renew authorization for Rustin's surveillance every three to six months "unless instruct[ed] to the contrary" by the Attorney General. According to a 1966 memorandum, Rustin's technical surveillance cost about \$254.83 a month plus an additional fee to use the leased line. Agents meticulously calculated the cost of maintaining technical surveillances based on the number of agents and the number of hours that would be required to monitor the lines. The information gleaned from this surveillance was not strictly related to communism. By listening to the technical surveillance recordings, the FBI was able to gather information on the Selma to Montgomery marches and discovered that King planned to protest against the Vietnam War. Surveillance of Rustin became a "source... of extreme importance in furnishing information concerning Martin Luther King, Jr., his plans and contacts."⁸⁶

As of October 6, 1964, there was "no prosecutive action pending relative to Rustin and... none appears indicated in the foreseeable future," yet the FBI continued to justify the surveillance "because of its large contribution to [their] intelligence in the most important racial movement area of [their] responsibilities."⁸⁷ In other words, the FBI did not expect to charge

⁸⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Bayard Rustin," Part 1, 25.

⁸⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Bayard Rustin," Part 1, 20.

Rustin with any crimes, but placing a technical surveillance on him gave them another way to monitor King and provided them with advanced information of the plans of the civil rights movement. This is a significant example of the FBI investigating for purposes other than the explanation given in the files. The files even indicate that the information was not used for the stated purpose, exposing a clear instance of the FBI overstepping its power.

The FBI received information in June 1967 that the relationship between King and Rustin had declined. Rustin rarely advised King at this point, and a source disclosed that King described Rustin as a “tired ‘radical who wants to be secure and will no longer go out on a limb.’” The New York field office believed that Rustin felt the same way about King and the SCLC. The same report also indicated that the only Communist Party member Rustin contacted was Stanley Levison, and it was solely to discuss King and the SCLC because Rustin and Levison did not “have a fondness for each other.”⁸⁸

Despite their differences, King and Rustin continued to work on the same projects, such as the Poor People’s Campaign. On May 15, 1968, the FBI learned that the Poor People’s Campaign planned to hold a demonstration in Washington, D.C., with an estimated 300,000 people in attendance to protest against income inequality and demand rights for poor people. The SCLC was looking to have Rustin organize the demonstration because they deemed him “the only individual capable of organizing an event of such magnitude.” The expected date was later changed to June 19, 1968, and the Bureau received conflicting information concerning whether or not Rustin would be organizing the demonstration.⁸⁹

Rustin was also considered a “known sexual pervert” by the FBI. Multiple individuals wrote to Hoover and requested information on Rustin’s involvement in “subversive

⁸⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Bayard Rustin,” Part 2, 87.

⁸⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Bayard Rustin,” Part 2, 116.

organizations” and confirmation of his 1946 and 1953 arrests for sodomy.⁹⁰ Rustin’s “homosexual problem” was also discussed in the SCLC’s file.⁹¹ Hoover released Rustin’s arrest record and records of his involvement in communist organizations to some of those individuals. In one case, it resulted in Rustin being removed from the University of Notre Dame Board of Trustees.⁹² FBI agents’ concern with Rustin’s sexuality demonstrates the FBI leaders’ intentions to promote and maintain the type of lifestyle they deemed acceptable . Similar to King’s rumored affairs, Rustin’s homosexuality could have destroyed his reputation if it had become public knowledge.

Rustin wrote to the FBI on November 20, 1975, requesting access to his file under the Freedom of Information Act. This initial request was denied because Rustin did not provide all of the necessary information, such as date and place of birth.⁹³ The file did not contain any information as to whether Rustin submitted another request and if it was approved.

There are roughly 100 pages in Rustin’s file, and each one lists about one dozen different file serial numbers, most of which are marked “destroy.” The pages are results of multiple “supplemental analytical summar[ies]” conducted by Bureau agents throughout the 1960s. The agents tracked occurrences of Rustin’s names in files, documented the serial numbers, and categorized them as “destroy” or “do not destroy.”⁹⁴ It is a given that the contents of the destroyed pages have not been released and therefore the contents cannot be known. However, due to the Bureau’s tendency to destroy documents containing its illegal activities or to simply not document certain evidence and operations, some of the destroyed pages likely contained information of a highly sensitive nature that could have jeopardized the Bureau, such as

⁹⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Bayard Rustin,” Part 1, 6, Part 2, 185.

⁹¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Southern Christian Leadership Conference.”

⁹² Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Bayard Rustin,” Part 2, 189.

⁹³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Bayard Rustin,” Part 2, 214-217.

⁹⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Bayard Rustin.”

information on COINTELPRO operations conducted against Rustin. As COINTELPRO did not become public knowledge until years after these analytical summaries were completed, the Bureau would have been especially careful to keep evidence of COINTELPRO at a minimum.

Stokely Carmichael

While previous sections of this paper have examined organizations run by adults for adults, students also played a vital role in the civil rights movement. College students in the South organized a sit-in campaign in 1960 aimed at challenging segregation. The campaign began after the famous sit-in demonstration at a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, on February 1, 1960. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was founded in the same year to bring young activists together and encourage their ideas. The organization was founded on pacifist principles, modeling itself after other peaceful civil rights groups, which in turn were modeled after Mohandas Gandhi's beliefs. Several members of SNCC in the early 1960s went on to become active in other movements later in the decade, maintaining the peaceful protest strategies they learned from their time in SNCC. SNCC started to become more militant in August 1964 after the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party failed to convince the national Democratic Party that they deserved to be seated at the Democratic National Convention instead of the white members. Leaders questioned whether it would be beneficial to continue operating the organization as an interracial one or to sever ties with the white activists and promote black power; they chose the latter. In May 1966, Stokely Carmichael was elected chairman of SNCC and used his position to increase SNCC's separatist policies.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1-3.

The FBI investigated Stokely Carmichael throughout the 1960s for ties to the Communist Party. His file begins with detailed information about his life and political involvement up to that point. He drew close attention from the authorities, especially during his time as the national chairman of SNCC. Although SNCC's file has not been uploaded to the FBI Vault, much of Carmichael's file focuses on the organization. In June 1966, Carmichael was elected a member of the National Council of the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee (ECLC). In 1961, HUAC published a "Guide to Subversive Organizations and Publications," which described ECLC as "an organization... whose avowed purpose is to abolish the House Committee on Un-American Activities and discredit the FBI." The guide also classified ECLC as a communist organization, stating that the ECLC, "although representing itself as a non-Communist group, actually operates as a front for the Communist Party."⁹⁶ As such, the FBI became increasingly concerned with Carmichael for his involvement in an alleged communist organization. While Carmichael served as the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, he gave a television interview about statements he made during the 1966 March Against Fear, an event coined by activist James Meredith to bring attention to ongoing racism in Mississippi and to encourage voter registration. At this event, Carmichael publicly advocated for black power, stating that violence would be used "if all legal means were exhausted."⁹⁷ The FBI kept track of similar remarks made by Carmichael and classified SNCC as "a militant Negro organization which preaches black supremacy."⁹⁸

The FBI was concerned about Carmichael potentially meeting with Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam, a black militant Muslim group. This could have been concerning to FBI leaders because if SNCC and the Nation of Islam collaborated, they would

⁹⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Stokely Carmichael," Part 1, 9-10.

⁹⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Stokely Carmichael," Part 1, 11-12.

⁹⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Mario Savio," Part 9, 76.

have been able to reach more people and have more of an impact. The FBI leaders may have been worried that SNCC and the Nation of Islam working together would result in more violence and unrest. According to some reports, Carmichael met with Muhammad and several other civil rights leaders on July 28, 1966, and they were monitored by the Chicago Police Department, who relayed to the FBI that the “meeting was peaceful and that no incidents or arrests occurred.” Other reports indicated that Carmichael met with Muhammad for the first time on August 7, 1966, and agreed that they would not work together because Carmichael did not want to become a member of the Nation of Islam, and they could not agree on an approach to attaining civil rights.⁹⁹ This discrepancy may have been caused by the fact that the July 28 meeting included hundreds of people, and the August 7 meeting only involved Muhammad and Carmichael.

Throughout August and September 1966, Carmichael and SNCC led a number of demonstrations, primarily in Atlanta, to protest the Vietnam War and advocate for black power. These protests were closely monitored by the FBI.¹⁰⁰ Carmichael and other SNCC members planned to travel to North Vietnam to gather evidence to present at a tribunal in Paris to indict President Johnson for war crimes. Carmichael was critical of the Vietnam War and felt the United States government was sending “black mercenaries” to fight in the war without guaranteeing their right to vote and other civil rights. He traveled to North Vietnam and Cuba like many other anti-war activists to learn about revolution and the Vietnam War.¹⁰¹

Carmichael’s beliefs caused some people to fear that he had become too radical. Contained in Stokely Carmichael’s file is a letter from a concerned citizen to the FBI asking for information on a number of civil rights leaders and their communist-related activities. The concerned citizen was worried that “so many right thinking people... might be contributing

⁹⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Stokely Carmichael,” Part 1, 27-37.

¹⁰⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Stokely Carmichael,” Part 2, 9-11

¹⁰¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Stokely Carmichael,” Part 1, 45.

unwittingly to the Communist party” when they donated money to Martin Luther King and his organizations. The allegations were: “1) Martin Luther King’s second in command, Bayard Rustin, is a member of the Communist party and has gone to Russia in 1958 (?) to participate in an anti-America rally[;] 2) King himself had been in attendance in a Communist training school in Tennessee, which the FBI subsequently closed as being subversive[;] 3) Sen. Hawkins of the Watts District in California is also a Communist.” The concerned citizen also included a quote from Stokely Carmichael because he or she believed it to be a “statement smacking of anarchy.” The quote in question: “no matter where in the United States, whether in Chicago or Detroit, if a policeman touches a Negro, the whole United States should rise up and riot. I want to see some chaos.”¹⁰² In the return letter, the FBI did not disclose any information that confirmed or denied the concerned citizen’s allegations, but there is a good chance that the allegations caused further investigations into those individuals’ lives and political beliefs. Carmichael’s file contains several other letters accusing him of being a communist. Someone accused Stokely Carmichael of attending the Communist Party’s National Convention in 1966, but the FBI was skeptical of this information because over forty informants had been sent there, and none of them reported seeing Carmichael. Another person became concerned because they discovered Carmichael had been born in Trinidad. They wrote to the FBI that the “West Indies... [are] a stepping stone for the communist to infiltrate into the Western Hemisphere, to promote unrest here in the states.”¹⁰³

Carmichael’s file also contains multiple letters from civilians and Congressmen urging the FBI to take a firmer stance on Carmichael. Some called for his deportation, some expressed outrage that the government allowed his “terrorism” and “anarchy” to continue, and some called

¹⁰² Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Stokely Carmichael,” Part 1, 53.

¹⁰³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Stokely Carmichael,” Part 1, 63.

Carmichael and SNCC members “communists,” “agitators,” and murderers.”¹⁰⁴ These letters demonstrate the way some people felt about anti-war activists, civil rights activists, and communists- whether they actually were communist or were just perceived to be communist. The letters also show that some people agreed with the FBI’s tracking of Carmichael, even if they did not know the full extent of it. The FBI leaders could have seen the letters as a type of mandate to continue their efforts to pursue Carmichael and other activists.

Carmichael was very critical of the FBI, calling it “most derelict in the field of civil rights.” He also publicly criticized Hoover. Comments of this nature made Carmichael more of a target for investigations. Additionally, President Johnson grew concerned about Carmichael’s and SNCC’s potential links to the Communist Party and asked “to be reassured that the FBI has good coverage on Carmichael,” along with receiving memoranda several times a week relating to the matter.¹⁰⁵ President Johnson, who was already dealing with a multitude of major issues both domestically and internationally, wanted to be proactive in preventing such issues from escalating. Thus, he turned to the FBI to track potential culprits. Johnson’s request encouraged the FBI to vigorously monitor Carmichael, though Johnson would not have known about the illegal actions taken by COINTELPRO. Johnson’s concern about Carmichael’s potential communist affiliation was also likely associated with the Vietnam War and the other domestic issues, such as the anti-war movement.

¹⁰⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Stokely Carmichael,” Part 1, 53, Part 5, 16.

¹⁰⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Stokely Carmichael,” Part 1, 21, 55.

Anti-War Movement and Student Protests

Although there were student protests and student involvement in advancing civil rights, anti-war and free speech protests took a hold in the later part of the 1960s. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was formed at the University of Michigan in 1960, establishing chapters throughout the United States over the next decade. Throughout the 1960s, SDS, like many student organizations, addressed a variety of issues, including civil rights, voting rights, the draft, and the Vietnam War. Student protests aimed to make major changes in higher education, and they later had a large influence on the anti-war movement. Student movements attracted attention from the FBI for the amount of unrest they caused on campuses and the potential they had to influence young adults as they came of legal voting age. In such a tumultuous time, student activists had the ability to invoke major changes in their universities and in social policy. The FBI targeted student activists with COINTELPRO, often getting university administrators and the students' parents aware of the activists' involvement in the movement with the goal of punishing the students to the point that they would curtail their political involvement.¹⁰⁶

Mario Savio

The Free Speech Movement at the University of California Berkeley (UC Berkeley) began in the fall of 1964 to protest a thirty-year-old rule that banned political activity and expression on campus.¹⁰⁷ Mario Savio emerged as the leader and primary spokesperson of the Free Speech Movement, a vocal opponent of the Vietnam War, and a civil rights advocate. His

¹⁰⁶ Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Random House Paperbacks, 2005), 81-88.

¹⁰⁷ Bud Schultz and Ruth Schultz, *The Price of Dissent: Testimonies to Political Repression in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 289.

first encounter with the FBI came in the summer of 1964 when Savio and another activist were assaulted by two men while working the Freedom Summer project in Mississippi.¹⁰⁸ Savio was interviewed as a victim, and Paul Sistrunk was later convicted of the crime.¹⁰⁹ At the time, the FBI compiled some background information on Savio, but the files read as if the FBI did not consider Savio suspicious or have any misgivings about his participation in the civil rights movement.

The FBI began examining Savio's background in October 1964 after protests began at UC Berkeley. Savio drew nationwide attention, and the FBI could have been worried that similar protests would begin at other universities. The FBI also knew that Savio had been involved in the civil rights movement. At UC Berkeley, the Bancroft strip, a small piece of city-owned land by the university's southern entrance, was the closest students could get to political activism on campus, such as distributing literature. In September 1964, the university wanted to ban political activity in this space as well, effectively banning the last remnant of free speech on Berkeley's campus. The students met with the administration to try to convince them to reopen the Bancroft strip, launching mass protests after their efforts failed. Savio gave a speech at a rally supporting free speech, which was the beginning of his role as the face of the free speech movement. Shortly after, Berkeley students began hosting sit-ins and defying the university's attempts to punish select protestors by uniting and signing a paper saying they were all complicit in breaking the rules. On October 1, the administration instructed the police to get non-students out of the sit-in demonstration first. The police arrested Jack Weinberg, a former student and leader of Campus CORE, in front of a large number of demonstrators. Weinberg went limp, and he was dragged into a police car. The protestors surrounded the police car so it could not go anywhere,

¹⁰⁸ The Freedom Summer project was an initiative to register African American voters in Mississippi.

¹⁰⁹ Sistrunk is mentioned by name only one time in the file in Part 4, 232, presumably on accident. In the many occasions where the incident is discussed, the attacker is named, but the name is redacted.

and Savio climbed on top of the car to give a speech. Many others did the same over the next thirty-two hours. Negotiations over the next two months between the students and the administration failed. About six thousand students showed up at a rally on December 2, and one thousand of them took control of Sproul Hall, which contained the dean's office. In the early hours of December 3, police began the process of arresting eight hundred people.¹¹⁰

All FBI field offices were "instructed to intensify their coverage of the activities of Savio" in December 1964 following a "lawless demonstration" at UC Berkeley, which resulted in 800 student arrests. The FBI documented Savio's high school and college academic achievements, arrest record, and his involvement in the civil rights movement. The FBI had not found any proof of Savio being involved with the Communist Party, though they noted in the report that one of his close acquaintances was a leader in San Francisco's Communist Party and used it as a reason to increase their observation of him while he embarked on a college speaking tour. They also used it as justification to investigate the other demonstrators who were arrested.¹¹¹

In February 1965, Savio spoke at a rally at UC Berkeley hosted by CORE and SNCC to protest racial discrimination. Savio announced a sit-in at US Attorney Cecil F. Poole's office in the Federal Office Building in San Francisco, where they had three main requests: "(1) Insure Federal protection for demonstrators at the Jack London Square Friday night (Oakland). (2) Request the FBI to investigate the arrest of five CORE members in last Friday's demonstration in Oakland. (3) To protest the Government's failure to aid voter registration in Selma, Alabama." Savio said Hoover "refuses to protect constitutional rights" of citizens in Selma, Alabama, who

¹¹⁰ Robert Cohen, *Freedom's Orator: Mario Savio and the Radical Legacy of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 75-99, 178-198.

¹¹¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Mario Savio," Part 1, 137-138.

were attempting to register to vote.¹¹² Hoover was highly sensitive toward comments such as these that insulted him or the Bureau.

Savio and his wife Suzanne Goldberg were placed on the FBI's Reserve Index Section B in early 1965 due to "publicity given to Savios and possible activity which may be of interest to the Bureau."¹¹³ They were both given the designation SM-C, meaning security matter-communist, even though they never espoused communist beliefs. This label was an easy way to launch and continue an investigation despite a lack of evidence, which enabled the FBI to monitor Savio for years. Two years later, the San Francisco field office recommended for Savio to be placed in Section A. Instead of granting the field office's request, the Bureau placed him on the Security Index as Priority II because of his role as a protest leader and because of his association with Bettina Aptheker, a member of the Communist Party. Savio continued to participate in and lead student protests at UC Berkeley after the university suspended him and he dropped out. Savio was labeled by the FBI as a key activist in the New Left movement on January 30, 1968, but was removed several months later when the FBI determined he "may be moving toward a more politically stable posture." The file noted that there was "no information... that he continues to be closely associated with Bettina Aptheker or other CP members" and that he has not traveled internationally since he took a vacation in Mexico in May 1967. Savio ran for the California State Senate under the Peace and Freedom Party, "a legally constituted political party," in 1968, and "gave no indication of an affiliation with any basic revolutionary group[s]... [other than] his apparent sanction of the Black Panther Party." After Savio was removed from the key activist list, the San Francisco SAC was instructed to "remain particularly alert for any indication of renewal of leadership on his part in the New Left

¹¹² Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Mario Savio," Part 4, 232-233.

¹¹³ Despite Savio and his wife having different last names, the file referred to them collectively as "Savios."

movement.”¹¹⁴ Although Savio was no longer considered as large of a threat, this instruction enabled the FBI to continue closely monitoring Savio. As a major figurehead of the New Left, Savio had the potential to influence other activist, something that the FBI wanted to prevent.

In April 1969, the San Francisco FBI field office was instructed to make a report on all speeches and public statements Savio had made on college campuses since April 11, 1968. Despite the FBI’s belief that Savio had been “moving toward a more politically stable posture,” they still wanted to convict Savio of a legal offense.¹¹⁵ In doing so, the FBI agents showed their fear of Savio returning to political beliefs and actions they deemed unacceptable. The office was ordered to look for statements advocating violence and prepare to investigate anything that could convict Savio of violating antiriot laws. It was determined that Savio did not violate antiriot laws during that time frame.

Throughout Savio’s file are records of his academic status, employment status, marital status, and location of residence. Savio’s travels were tracked, as was his application for a passport. Savio’s location in general was monitored, as were the names and residences of his family members. His file includes reports from an investigation during the summer of 1964 when he was attacked while helping with Freedom Summer in Mississippi. All of this demonstrates how the FBI meticulously collected any type of evidence that would assist in locating and arresting Savio should the need arise. They were also able to analyze any patterns that appeared in his life, and could potentially use that information to predict what Savio would do next.

The file also contains records of death threats, assault threats, and anti-Semitic remarks he received throughout the 1960s, even though he was not Jewish. When Savio was interviewed by the FBI about the extortion threats he received, he asked that his lawyer remain throughout

¹¹⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Mario Savio,” Part 1, 176.

¹¹⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Mario Savio,” Part 9, 21.

the questioning. The FBI did not allow this, stating they “could not vouch for the confidential matter of information if a third party is present.”¹¹⁶ The most recent pages in Savio’s file are from January 1975. The contents are redacted, so it cannot be determined what information was relayed.

Some files contain direct or indirect references to COINTELPRO and the need to suppress the activities of the New Left. In May 1968, Hoover sent a memorandum to the SAC of the San Francisco field office stating it was “imperative that the Bureau... redouble its efforts in penetrating those groups which have spearheaded these attacks on our established institutions and are currently calling for open revolution.” The call for an open revolution falls under the protestors’ First Amendment rights, as long as they did not encourage violence. Thus, Hoover instructed agents to violate the Constitution in order to maintain the condition of “established institutions.” The SAC was instructed to evaluate Savio for the Agitator Index, to monitor and report Savio’s travel, and to “closely follow [Savio’s] speeches and writings during this campaign with a view toward resolving” the question of whether Savio should continue to be considered a key activist in the New Left movement.¹¹⁷ Hoover insisted that “one of the prime objectives should be to neutralize him in the new left movement. The Bureau will entertain recommendations of a counterintelligence nature to accomplish this end.” The memorandum closed with the instruction to “pursue this investigation aggressively and with imagination.”¹¹⁸

Another such excerpt reads:

The Bureau has been very closely following the activities of the New Left and the Key Activists and is highly concerned that the anarchistic activities of a few can paralyze institutions of learning, induction centers, cripple traffic, and tie the arms of law enforcement officials all to the detriment of our society. The organizations and activists who spout

¹¹⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Mario Savio,” Part 8, 52.

¹¹⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Mario Savio,” Part 9, 21.

¹¹⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Mario Savio,” Part 9, 23.

revolution and unlawfully challenge society to obtain their demands must not only be contained, but must be neutralized. Law and order is mandatory for any civilized society to survive. Therefore, you must approach this new endeavor with a forward look, enthusiasm, and interest in order to accomplish our responsibilities. The importance of this new endeavor cannot and will not be overlooked.¹¹⁹

The phrase “must be neutralized” seemed to suggest that the SAC should implement counterintelligence measures against Savio and New Left members. References such as these are not very common in the files. It is likely that many similar instructions were redacted on the original files or that pages were destroyed altogether in an attempt to prevent the information from being leaked. Such an overt call for neutralization makes evident the FBI leaders’ desire to prevent any changes from occurring in the government’s operation and the way American society functioned, from gender roles to discrimination based on race and the treatment that accompanied it.

[Columbia University and Students for a Democratic Society](#)

As a result of earlier Free Speech Movement protests, combined with the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement, people continued to advocate for more freedom throughout the United States and the world. In the spring of 1968, Columbia University was the site of widespread student-led protests, with a significant number of faculty members participating as well. Located next to Harlem, Columbia students did not agree with the university's plans to build a gymnasium in the neighborhood because it required the seizure of low-income housing that Harlem residents occupied in order to make space for the gym. Additionally, Columbia students protested against the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), a military strategy research organization, and against military recruitment on campus. The students wanted to know if

¹¹⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Mario Savio,” Part 9, 33.

Columbia was associated with IDA but did not receive a response from the university. As punishment for demonstrations that continued despite the prohibition of indoor demonstrations at Columbia, six of the protestors received disciplinary action, including Mark Rudd, the leader of the protests.¹²⁰

Students at Columbia and other universities protested the Vietnam War by boycotting classes, occupying buildings, and putting on other types of protests to demonstrate their anger against the draft and the war in general. These types of protests were especially prominent throughout the country in the latter half of the decade as more militant options were explored in the civil rights movement. SDS members were heavily involved in the protests. Mark Rudd garnered national attention as a result. He became more radical and soon joined the Weather Underground Organization. Rudd's name appears in COINTELPRO files and Weather Underground files. He is described as a "fugitive leader of America's violent left" and "the first of the really violent white student radicals," which are strong indicators that he has his own file.¹²¹ However, he is still living, so his file has not been released. SDS is also featured heavily in files from the 1960s and was a target of COINTELPRO, but a file about SDS has not been released.

In a May 28, 1968, memorandum, the FBI stated that "it is anticipated that Mark Rudd... will be designated as a Key Activist in the near future." The FBI continued to monitor students at Columbia months after the protests had ended. SDS was the main New Left organization targeted by COINTELPRO. The FBI sent anonymous letters to SDS members' parents "outlining their child's specific political and personal misdoings" with the hope that the parents

¹²⁰ Kurlansky, *1968*, 81, 195-197.

¹²¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Weather Underground," Part 2, 1-2.

would stop supporting their children financially.¹²² The New York office prepared a leaflet with photographs of the protestors, “which pictorially describes those elements that would take over our colleges... [and could] be useful in hardening the line taken by the administrative officers in our universities and may serve to formalize opinion against the New Left.” The FBI produced similar leaflets about SDS, hoping to put them in “the harsh light of ridicule.” The New York office suggested sending postcards to parents of children involved in the New Left that would “advertise a fictitious party at SDS headquarters and would indicate that marijuana would be smoked at the party,” but the Bureau declined the request for fear it could bring embarrassment to the Bureau. The New York office also provided other unspecified ideas for “potential counterintelligence actions including material for anonymously mailings [sic] against the New Left, advertisements for fictitious events and the exploitation of the ‘cuckoo angle’ inherent in the NL.”¹²³

In October 1968, the FBI became aware of a documentary made about the Columbia protests titled *Columbia Revolt*.¹²⁴ A company called The Newsreel produced the fifty minute black-and-white film. Only two copies of the film existed, one in the possession of the Columbia SDS chapter, and the other in the possession of the production company that screened it for SDS chapters across the country. Hoover instructed the SAC of the New York office to “take necessary steps to obtain a copy of this film... [because it] could be of value to [the FBI] for counterintelligence purposes as well as In-service training.”¹²⁵ The files do not say if the Bureau ever obtained a copy, but it would have been useful because they would have seen the event from the students’ eyes. As a pro-SDS film, the Bureau could have a better idea on how to adjust their

¹²² Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here*, 2.

¹²³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “COINTELPRO\New Left- New York,” Part 1, 78-79, 91, 99, 229, Part 2, 5.

¹²⁴ *Columbia Revolt* (New York City: Newsreel, 1968). The film is now available in the public domain.

¹²⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “COINTELPRO\New Left- New York,” Part 1, 26, 41.

counterintelligence program to address subjects in the documentary. It also could have potentially alerted them to other prominent SDS members they may not have known about.

One example of COINTELPRO interfering with the anti-war movement is the FBI's anonymous letter in the fall of 1968 claiming to be the mother of a teenage girl who was involved in "the fight for Negro civil rights." The FBI sent the letter to a woman whose 17-year-old daughter had been arrested at a protest on October 3, 1968, while wearing a hat with an obscene message about the draft. The letter claimed that the sender's daughter was arrested for disorderly conduct, just like the recipient's daughter. The letter writer stated there was "something drastic" wrong with the anti-war movement because of its use of profanity. The sender told the recipient that if she let her daughter "continue her pathetic association with her 'Yippie' friends, she will surely end up where [the sender's] poor daughter is now- under psychiatric care." Permission to send the letter was granted on December 27 with the explicit instruction to "assure that all steps necessary are taken to protect the identity of the Bureau as its source."¹²⁶ Hoover approved the transition from personalized letters to generalized postcards congratulating students on their SDS membership in July 1969. This allowed for a much faster production of literature to reach more parents compared to the time it takes to create individualized letters.¹²⁷

The FBI has released COINTELPRO New Left files from field offices in several major cities. The vast majority of the COINTELPRO New Left files are related to attempts to suppress SDS. However, some other organizations do appear in the files, like the Socialist Worker's Party and the Worker Student Alliance.

¹²⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "COINTELPRO\New Left- New York," Part 1, 15-17.

¹²⁷ Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here*, 2.

Weather Underground Organization

The Weather Underground Organization (WUO), also referred to as Weatherman, the Weathermen, and Weather Underground, formed in the summer of 1969 after a contentious meeting. Consequently, SDS collapsed as members split over how to achieve their goals. The Weather Underground served as the more militant and radical faction within SDS, while the Progressive Labor Party believed the best path to revolution was through the industrial working class. At SDS's national convention in June 1969, members elected multiple Weathermen supporters, including Mark Rudd, Bernardine Dohrn, Bill Ayers, and Jeff Jones, to national offices. Members split over their support for the Weathermen versus the Progressive Labor Party, and many members did not support either faction, which effectively ended SDS. As an organization, the Weathermen's platform was based on a Marxist-Leninist anti-imperialist ideology with the goal of creating a classless world, thus taking a stance against the immense wealth of the United States. The Weathermen believed the revolution against American capitalism had already begun and that there was no reason to delay violence because it would inspire other people to join the revolution.¹²⁸

There were approximately 500 members of Weatherman when it formed. The group formed collectives in several cities, including Chicago, Detroit, Boston, and New York. Members lived communally and had to share their possessions or give them up. The members who had jobs gave their income to the group, and other members solicited money from family members. Members often stole food because they used their money to buy guns.¹²⁹

Rather than containing copies of files that were made during the investigation of Weather Underground, the collection consists of a lengthy report detailing the organization's ideology and

¹²⁸ Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 17, 45-54.

¹²⁹ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 54.

activities. The Chicago field office compiled a report in 1976 about Weather Underground's activities from 1969-1976. Prior to the detailed report is a summary of the organization's philosophy and key events regarding the organization's membership, such as travels to Cuba and Vietnam. It also listed some arrests and trials of WUO members.¹³⁰ The summary heavily emphasized foreign influence on Weather Underground: "From the initial meeting between the Vietnamese and leading anti-war activists held in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, in November, 1967, to the July, 1969, meeting with leading Weatherpeople held in Havana, Cuba, the influence of Vietnamese representatives on the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) leadership became sharply pronounced. At the same time, the example of the Cuban revolution became the guide for the emerging American student revolutionary. With an increasing number of trips to Havana where the youthful revolutionary could learn at first hand how to create revolution, the influence of Cuba on the developing WUO was enormous."¹³¹

Weatherman operated openly in its first few months, notably hosting the Days of Rage in Chicago in October 1969. Also called the National Action, Weatherman intended for the event to be "the first gathering of the revolutionary youth of the United States to join [Weatherman] for three days of violence to match the violence of the United States in Vietnam."¹³² The Days of Rage did not have the turnout Weatherman anticipated. Several hundred people showed up, and most of them belonged to Weatherman. Much to Weatherman's chagrin, Days of Rage did not attract large amounts of people in the New Left outside of Weatherman nor did it attract large numbers of young working-class people. The event caused other New Left organizations, such as

¹³⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Weatherman Underground," Part 1, 26-32.

¹³¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Weatherman Underground," Part 1, 26.

¹³² Mark Rudd, *Underground: My Life with SDS and the Weathermen* (New York: Harper, 2010), 154.

the Black Panthers, to publicly disapprove of Weatherman because of the amount of overt violence.¹³³

During the Days of Rage, Weathermen and other young revolutionaries broke windows and clashed with police officers. The FBI described it as “a wild, window-smashing rampage.”¹³⁴ Chicago Police arrested two hundred eighty-seven people for offenses, including mob action, resisting arrest, disorderly conduct, and aggravated battery. Mayor Richard Daley called in the National Guard to assist the Chicago Police. Two months later, a grand jury indicted sixty-four Weathermen for charges relating to the Days of Rage, including aggravated battery, resisting arrest, mob action, and aiding an escape.¹³⁵ In his memoir, Weatherman National Secretary Mark Rudd explained that the Days of Rage were planned to occur during the Chicago Eight trial and begin on the two-year anniversary of Che Guevara’s execution.¹³⁶ In the Chicago Eight (later the Chicago Seven) case, eight leaders of the 1968 Democratic National Convention protests were charged with conspiracy to riot.¹³⁷ Protests engulfed the convention, violence erupted, and several people were put on trial. The demonstrators protested the Vietnam War and Vice President Hubert Humphrey’s nomination. Consequently, Weatherman, as an anti-war organization, protested the trial of the Chicago Eight. Also central to the date was Che Guevara’s execution as Guevara served as an inspiration for revolutionaries, especially Weatherman members, due to his role in the Cuban revolution.¹³⁸

At the end of December 1969, the Weathermen held the Flint War Council and decided to go underground, operating in secrecy to avoid law enforcement. The organization officially went

¹³³ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 68-69.

¹³⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Weatherman Underground,” Part 2, 1.

¹³⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Weatherman Underground,” Part 3, 7-8.

¹³⁶ Rudd, *Underground*, 154.

¹³⁷ David R. Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), xiii.

Janice E. Schuetz and Kathryn Holmes Snedaker, *Communication and Litigation: Case Studies of Famous Trials* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1988), 219.

¹³⁸ Rudd, *Underground*, 154.

underground in February and March 1970 after a townhouse in Greenwich Village exploded while several members made bombs. Other members went underground in the intervening months after the Days of Rage in order to avoid trials and prison sentences for their conduct in October.¹³⁹ A major factor in the organization's decision to go underground was the killing of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton on December 4, 1969, by Chicago police.¹⁴⁰ This likely caused members of the Weathermen to go underground for their own safety and to prevent any of their members from being killed by law enforcement. While underground, the Weathermen conducted bombings and issued communiqués regarding their political stance and their reasons for the bombings.¹⁴¹

On May 21, 1970, Bernardine Dohrn published Weather Underground's *Declaration of a State of War* in which she explained that people "will never live peaceably under this system... [of] war and racism" and announced that Weatherman "will attack a symbol or institution of Amerikan injustice... within the next fourteen days."¹⁴² Based on the FBI's list of bombings conducted by Weather Underground, Dohrn was most likely referring to the attempted bombing of the San Francisco Hall of Justice. In a letter, Weather Underground claimed credit for a bombing at that location, but an explosion did not occur. Several months later, an unexploded bomb was found at the site. Dohrn also could have been referring to two bombings that occurred in New York City on June 9, one at the New York City Police Department headquarters, and the other at a Bank of America building.¹⁴³ Police stations and police cars were among the most

¹³⁹ The Greenwich Village townhouse explosion occurred on March 6, 1970 and killed three members of Weatherman. Most members were underground before the explosion, and the remaining prominent members went underground after the explosion. The FBI file on Weatherman incorrectly lists the date of the explosion as March 2, 1970.

¹⁴⁰ Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 124, 165. The Weathermen were strong supporters of the Black Panthers, though the Black Panthers did not support the Weathermen because of their overt violence.

¹⁴¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Weatherman Underground," Part 3, 41.

¹⁴² Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Weatherman Underground," Part 3, 47-48.

¹⁴³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Weatherman Underground," Part 3, 64.

common targets of Weather Underground bombings, including those in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Detroit. Weather Underground also bombed the United States Capitol, the Pentagon, National Guard facilities, and other buildings association with the Vietnam War or the penal system.¹⁴⁴ In all, Weatherman conducted thirty-eight known bombings, none of which the FBI solved.¹⁴⁵ Although there were occasional injuries as a result of the bombings, the Weathermen never killed anyone. They were known to give alerts to allow time for evacuations before the explosions occurred to prevent fatalities.¹⁴⁶ The only fatalities that occurred were those from the Greenwich Village townhouse explosion.

Following the section on bombings was information on the past and present members of Weather Underground. When the Chicago office wrote the report in 1976, they estimated that Weather Underground had approximately thirty members still underground. The report contained information such as date and place of birth, foreign travel, and activities with SDS and Weather Underground.¹⁴⁷

Near the end of the report is a list of individuals known to have attended the Flint War Council. At the bottom of the list a line is redacted. Beneath it are the words “(Special Agents of the FBI from photographs taken by the Michigan State Police of the meeting),” which indicates the FBI had at least two agents at the meeting. This notation is the closest the file gets to mentioning FBI intervention into Weatherman’s activities.¹⁴⁸

The FBI not only sought to destroy Weatherman from within but also aimed to splinter relations between Weatherman and other New Left groups such as the Black Panthers.

¹⁴⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Weatherman Underground,” Part 3, 62-71.

¹⁴⁵ Tim Weiner, *Enemies: A History of the FBI* (New York: Random House, 2012), 285.

¹⁴⁶ Weiner, *Enemies*, 285.

¹⁴⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Weatherman Underground,” Part 4, 3-70, Part 5, 1-71, Part 6 1-42.

¹⁴⁸ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Weatherman Underground,” Part 6, 48. Larry Grathwohl is a known infiltrator of Weathermen. He served as an informant for about a year when the organization first formed. He is not named in the FBI’s Weatherman Underground file.

Weatherman member David Gilbert recounted learning of an instance when agents posed as employees of the SDS national office and called the Black Panthers to say they could no longer print materials for the Panthers because they had too much work to do. He also stated that the two people who attempted to escalate the disagreement into turning violent were later revealed to be police officers.¹⁴⁹

In June 1972, the Supreme Court banned wiretapping of American citizens unless a warrant had been issued. Since 1939, the FBI had been conducting warrantless wiretapping with the approval of presidents, attorneys general, Hoover, and other FBI leaders. At the time of the decision, Weatherman Underground and the Black Panthers had six known warrantless wiretaps between them.¹⁵⁰ The wiretaps had to cease immediately, so the Bureau started doing black bag jobs again. In October 1972, the FBI began conducting black bag jobs against friends and family members of twenty-six Weatherman members. Agents did not find any evidence, but the jobs, combined with other black bag jobs committed during this time, resulted in federal grand jury investigations of FBI leaders. The Justice Department had to drop indictments against Weatherman leaders because the evidence was based on illegal surveillance.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ David Gilbert, *Love and Struggle: My Life in SDS, the Weather Underground, and Beyond* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 82.

¹⁵⁰ The source does not specify the exact number each group has, but presents it as a total between the two organizations.

¹⁵¹ Weiner, *Enemies*, 312-314, 334.

Summary of Findings

The FBI often investigated civil rights organizations and their leaders under the guise of determining if there was communist infiltration of the organizations. Organizations that promoted African American rights were the most common targets, as were anti-war movement organizations. While there are a vast number of targets available to examine, this paper skimmed the surface by examining the NAACP, the SCLC, Martin Luther King, Jr., Bayard Rustin, Stokely Carmichael, Mario Savio, the Columbia University protests, Students for a Democratic Society, and the Weather Underground Organization. These targets all provide examples of how the FBI sought to maintain the status quo and suppress dissent against the United States government and its political decisions. The FBI went beyond its scope of power and used communist infiltration as an excuse to track civil rights organizations' plans and monitor their protests.

Legal wiretaps enabled the FBI to have advanced notice of the civil rights movement's events, such as the Selma to Montgomery March, giving the FBI time to determine if they wanted to enact counterintelligence to thwart the movement. Illegal methods of intelligence gathering were also used to spy on targets. The FBI conducted illegal operations called black bag jobs to install microphones in targets' residences to eavesdrop on them and collect information. FBI agents infiltrated organizations they considered subversive in order to spy on them. This enabled them to know the organization's plans, and it also helped them determine if there was communist infiltration or influence. Due to the FBI infiltration, agents could influence organizations, whether that meant guiding them to the FBI's acceptable decisions, causing further unrest within organizations, starting arguments between organizations, or even inciting violence that would later get blamed on the organization itself. The FBI meddled in movements'

affairs, sometimes using counterintelligence to further divide the movement. Counterintelligence was also used to intentionally spread misinformation and to have parents discover and disapprove of their children's activities. Overall, the FBI went beyond normal intelligence-gathering and investigation and instead meticulously tracked the activities of organizations and individuals who wanted to effect change in their country.

During the time that the FBI investigated the civil rights movement and the New Left, the FBI certainly incited fear in people who were unsure about the movements and served to reinforce the beliefs of people who already thought those organizations were subversive. The FBI successfully caused divisions between organizations and increased unrest, thus damaging the operations and reputations of various organizations. Despite the FBI's efforts to undermine the civil rights movement, tremendous accomplishments were still made, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The FBI went to extreme lengths to ensure that their investigations and illegal operations were kept secret. Once the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI released information about COINTELPRO, the FBI became a less reliable source. In the years since the exposure, it can now be said that the FBI did more harm than good during this time because they attempted to damage movements that are now seen as massive historical achievements, resulting in a permanent stain on the FBI's history.

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