

to be handled in strictest secrecy, he warned his agents.

As the "sensitive operation" went into effect, Hoover sent his characteristically long-winded memos to a succession of attorneys general. They seemed to describe the FBI's southern operation in numbingly complete detail. They did not. The illegal COINTELPRO-White Hate activities were mentioned rarely, briefly, and vaguely. As one of the recipients of these reports, Nicholas Katzenbach, would say, Hoover "used terms of art, or euphemisms, without informing the Attorney General that they were terms of art."⁶²

In the field, agents resented the restrictions of the FBI Manual and lobbied for greater freedom to act—or they simply disregarded the Bureau's few weak prohibitions about reporting on the lawful political activities of U.S. citizens. The unlawful or improper acts of the secret anti-Klan program continued to 1971, averaging about forty "actions" annually.* Seventeen KKK groups and nine others, such as the American Nazi and National States Rights parties, were targeted.

Hoover's stamp was evident on it all. For the purpose of "discrediting and embarrassing"⁶³ leaders of the Klan, the FBI used illegal means to procure personal tax returns and related materials. Without informing the IRS Disclosure Branch, as required by law, agents had surreptitiously gained the documents from employees of the IRS Intelligence Division. "Notional" organizations were set up by FBI informants in order to splinter the United Klans of America. One such counterfeit group attained a peak membership of 250 deluded adherents.

But the spirit of J. Edgar Hoover shone most brightly in the anonymous letters crafted to split up marriages or sunder old friendships, all in the name of "disruption" of a hate group. In at least one sense, the FBI director assumed that, beneath their sheets, Klan members were the same as American Communists: they couldn't concentrate totally on party work with an enraged wife in the house.

And so the grand dragons and their mates were bedeviled with such crude inventions as this anonymous letter: "Yes, Mrs. A, he has been committing adultery. My menfolk say they don't believe this but I think they do. I feel like crying. I saw her with my own eyes. They call her Ruby. . . . I know this. I saw her strut around at a rally with her lustfilled eyes and smart aleck figure."† The

*During the same period, by contrast, the average number of "actions" initiated against the moribund Communist party each year was one hundred.

†Such letters generally reveal the influence of Sullivan's notions of human frailty, if not the work of his own hand. The director might think sex was always the lever, but a married man knew that lies about money could be more "disruptive." In this note, the "God-fearing Klanswoman" took care to report, "They [her "menfolk."] never believed the "stories that he stole money from the klans in [deleted] or that he is now making over \$25,000 a year. They never believed the stories that your house in [deleted] has a new refrigerator, washer, dryer and yet one year ago, was threadbare. They refuse to believe that your husband now owns three cars and a truck, including the new white car. But I believe all these things and I can forgive them for a man wants to do for his family in the best way he can." This invidious touch suggests that the recipient had never seen the house, appliances,