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Author(s): Jared Leighton

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"CHARACTER ASSASSINS"

How the FBI Used the Issue of Homosexuality against the Black Freedom Struggle

Jared Leighton

This article examines Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) inquiries into and counterintelligence actions against gay and lesbian activists in the Black freedom struggle. Drawing on dozens of individual Freedom of Information Act requests and the files of the counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO), this article argues that the FBI's investigation and exposure of gay and lesbian activists in the Black freedom struggle served as a tactic typical of the FBI's attempts to discredit and sow division within and among civil rights and Black Power groups. Prior to creating a formal counterintelligence program against the movement, the bureau focused its efforts on often ineffective attempts at outing individual activists. With the creation in 1967 of a formal COINTELPRO against so-called "Black Nationalist-Hate Groups" and "Black Extremists," however, the bureau drew on this tactic to even greater effect. While other scholars have highlighted extreme tactics employed in COINTELPRO, like fomenting outright violence, this article finds little evidence of that. Instead, a more typical technique of the FBI was the use of poison-pen letters or leaflets that outed gays in the movement to fellow activists or reporters or raised the issue of homosexuality to sow division within the movement and between organizations. In the end, this article draws attention to a rarely discussed issue in Black freedom struggle historiography—the role of gay and lesbian activists and the added burdens they faced from opposition forces—while reexamining COINTELPRO to gain a better understanding of the actions that typified its efforts to discredit and divide the movement.

Civil rights and Black Power activists came under frequent attack from forces seeking to discredit the Black freedom movement. Many African Americans and their allies working to advance racial justice sought to maintain an image of respectability in order to preserve the integrity of their

cause, and accusations of “deviant sexuality” held considerable weight during the long civil rights era. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) remained a persistent opponent of the movement throughout the postwar era, but its use of accusations of homosexuality as a tactic for discrediting activists and dividing the movement only became an effective tool in its counterintelligence repertoire following the urban unrest of 1967 and the emergence of a new FBI counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) labeled “Black Nationalist–Hate Groups” and later “Black Extremists.” While the FBI often opposed the nonviolent civil rights movement, the perceived threat of armed revolution by African Americans during the Black Power era lent a new urgency to stopping Black activism, which resulted in the increasing use of homosexuality as an issue to discredit and divide the movement.

The tactical use of homosexuality and “deviant sexuality” came to epitomize the FBI’s offensives against African American activists and their allies under the new COINTELPRO directive. While there is a great volume of literature on COINTELPRO during this period, much of it describes the bureau’s use of extreme techniques, like fomenting outright violence between Black Power groups. In fact, though, that approach was rarely used, according to available documents. Instead, “softer” techniques, like accusing activists of homosexuality by sending poison-pen letters or supplying public-source information to reporters, such as arrest records for “morals charges,” were far more typical of the counterintelligence program. Through COINTELPRO, the FBI was far more invested in the character assassinations of movement leaders like Huey P. Newton than the real-life assassinations of ones like Fred Hampton.¹

Soft tactics offered more desirable alternatives for the bureau than violent ones did. Agents could create dissension between groups or within organizations without feeling responsible for the loss of life. Furthermore, deploying homosexuality in this manner did not require the bureau to become involved with other agencies or local police forces that might compromise the secret nature of COINTELPRO. It also did not place bureau informants at risk. Unlike other proposals coming from various field offices, the use of homosexuality to sow dissension or discredit civil rights and Black Power organizations almost always received approval from headquarters. Understanding the FBI’s use of accusations of homosexuality against civil rights and Black Power organizations is essential to gaining a fuller understanding of the bureau’s actions against gays and lesbians while highlighting a tactic much more typical of the FBI’s counterintelligence program than outright violence.

Investigations of and Counterintelligence Actions against LGBT Activists in the Civil Rights Era

Prior to a COINTELPRO directed at Black activists, investigations of prominent figures associated with the nonviolent civil rights movement—among others, James Baldwin and Bayard Rustin—show FBI reluctance and care in taking this approach, with a conservative eye toward how the bureau might effectively harness the issue of homosexuality to foster its campaigns against Black activists and their allies. An examination of the available FBI files (or unredacted portions thereof) on LGBT activists for Black civil rights reveals that the bureau was able to uncover little about their sexual orientations, let alone use such information against the movement, prior to the urban uprisings of the late 1960s and the resulting COINTELPRO “Black Nationalist–Hate Groups.”

Scholar James Campbell’s assessment of James Baldwin’s FBI file is representative of many cases. He notes the repeated duplication of mistakes in Baldwin’s file—getting the name of his street wrong, listing him at addresses after he had moved out, and misstating the titles of his books. But perhaps more importantly, the bureau was reluctant to arrive at conclusions about Baldwin’s sexuality. As late as 1966, the FBI still could not determine whether Baldwin was gay. Rather than use just any piece of evidence its operatives could find to smear Baldwin, the bureau showed timidity and reluctance, a kind of restraint not always seen elsewhere in its work.²

One of the gay activists that the FBI most sought to discredit was Bayard Rustin. Its investigation of him initially began as a direct attempt to identify communist infiltration into the civil rights movement. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover requested electronic surveillance on Rustin’s apartment in New York on October 28, 1963. A confidential source informed Hoover that Rustin and Benjamin J. Davis, national secretary of the Communist Party, USA (CPUSA), were working together to increase Black support for communism.³ Every six months, Hoover requested an extension of the surveillance, indicating that the information it uncovered was important to the bureau but not specifying the exact content of this intelligence.⁴ Requests to extend surveillance emphasized Rustin’s prior membership in the Young Communist League, his association with the CPUSA, and his leadership role in the civil rights movement, particularly his counsel to Martin Luther King Jr.⁵ By 1966, the request for extension included an added reason for surveillance: “He is a known sexual pervert.”⁶ Though the bureau had become aware of Rustin’s sexual orientation years before,

it was not until this later date that it explicitly used such information as a justification for monitoring him.

Throughout the 1960s, there is significant evidence in Rustin's FBI file that the bureau sought to use accusations of homosexuality against him. One document makes clear:

It will also be recalled that this source furnished information on 11-15-63 which contained details of Rustin's homosexual proclivities which information was not available from any other source. It was of such value that Mr. Tolson [FBI Special Agent Clyde Tolson] noted, and the Director concurred, "Evans might show enclosure to AG [Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy] when an opportunity presents itself to show up Rustin for what he is."⁷

However, there is also evidence of belated research into material the bureau might have found useful. For example, it does not appear that, before 1969, his FBI file included reference to the New York City police record of Rustin's arrest on October 25, 1946, for violating Section 722 of the New York Penal Code, "offering to commit a lewd or indecent act."⁸ At the same time, it is not clear that such evidence would have been effective. When Hoover and Strom Thurmond entered information about Rustin's "morals arrest" in Pasadena, California, in 1953 into the *Congressional Record* in advance of the March on Washington in 1963, civil rights leaders supported Rustin, reporters did not press the issue, and Tom Kahn concluded that it "seems to have done us more good than harm."⁹

Targeting Gay Activists in the Black Civil Rights Movement through COINTELPRO-CPUSA

Rustin's partner, Tom Kahn, was also a person of interest to the FBI. Beginning sometime in late 1956, the FBI began investigating Kahn because of his involvement in the Young Socialist League (later Young People's Socialist League) and the Eugene V. Debs Society. By 1958, he was added to the Security Index.¹⁰ He aroused further suspicion by using aliases like "Philip Evans," "Donald Newman," "Tom Marcel," and "Jack" when registering at hotels.¹¹ In part through the relationship between Kahn and Rustin, the FBI hoped to discredit the movement. Moreover, the FBI explicitly stated that its investigation into homosexuality was "closely related" to the investigation of communist infiltration of the civil rights movement.¹² However, at least in the pages from the files that have been released, the FBI was unable to uncover much. The New York Field Office checked with the New York Police Department and failed to find any information that Kahn had been

arrested for a morals charge or had been the subject of an investigation.¹³ Hoover also instructed agents to check into Kahn's Selective Service records. He wrote, "Be particularly alert to determine if mental or physical examinations have been afforded him and if any data has been developed regarding his homosexuality."¹⁴ But as with the other inquiries, there is no evidence that they were able to find any information.

In 1964, Kahn became a target in the FBI's counterintelligence program against the Communist Party, USA. It was at this time that the FBI first identified him as a "known homosexual." Because both Kahn and Rustin had worked for various organizations advancing African American civil rights, perhaps most importantly helping to organize the March on Washington, the bureau hoped to discredit them as homosexuals in order to undermine their efforts to advance the civil rights movement, which the bureau continued to believe was under Communist influence. The bureau was also concerned with Rustin's plans to create the A. Philip Randolph Institute, which would focus on both economic and civil rights issues.¹⁵

A passage in one document from COINTELPRO-CPUSA succinctly summarizes the FBI's proposed tactic. Hoover wrote,

Kahn is a known homosexual. New York, Los Angeles, and Washington Field Office should make discreet inquiries to determine if Kahn has ever come to the attention of pertinent police authority in their respective areas for charges involving morals. In the event a record for Kahn is located, determine whether it is of a public source nature or if it can be made public. This investigation is closely related with the investigation of individuals under communist influence who are active in the Negro freedom movement. It is imperative that the utmost discretion be exercised so that the individuals involved do not become aware of the Bureau's interest. No action should be taken that could cause the Bureau any embarrassment and contacts should be made only with established reliable sources. No counterintelligence action should be initiated without specific Bureau authority.¹⁶

A note appended to another document made clear the purpose of investigating Kahn. While he was an important activist in his own right, the bureau had a larger target. The director wrote, "Kahn, the 'boy friend' of Bayard Rustin, is included on the Reserve Index of the New York Office. . . . We are endeavoring to develop evidence of his known homosexuality for possible use in discrediting Rustin, a known homosexual who is active in the Negro movement."¹⁷

While Hoover declared Tom Kahn a "known homosexual," the director needed something in the official record—from the police or military—to

confirm this belief and use it against Kahn. The bureau was unable to locate an arrest record for Kahn on a morals charge or any other violation in New York City. So the director instructed New York to take another look at Kahn's Selective Service records, which it had checked three years earlier. Agents found, however, that "severe restrictions" had been placed on Selective Service files as a result of a recent court case, that two letters requesting access to the file would need to be written, and that those letters would become a part of the subject's Selective Service file. Knowing it would be exposed, the New York Field Office declined to pursue this route but assured the director that it would "remain alert to the possibility of initiating any counterintelligence action against [Kahn] or [Rustin] on the basis of their moral degeneracy or for any other reason."¹⁸

Failed Investigations of LGBT Activists in the Black Civil Rights Movement

Given his prominence as a writer and civil rights activist, James Baldwin also faced intrusion and harassment from the FBI. This grew from both his association with groups the FBI considered communist or communist-front organizations and his criticism of the bureau. To illustrate how quick the bureau was to label groups communist or communist fronts, it followed Baldwin for supporting the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, Civil Rights Defense Committee, the Liberation Committee for Africa, National Lawyers Guild, the Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants, and the magazine *Freedomways*; attending a rally to abolish the House Committee on Un-American Activities; criticizing the war in Vietnam; attempting to travel to Cuba; and more. Beyond that, the attempts to paint Baldwin as a communist continued even though the FBI quoted his public speeches stating that communists offered no solution.¹⁹ FBI agents likely took such comments to be covers for his true subversive intentions. Baldwin also drew attention for criticizing the bureau and Hoover. The bureau considered Baldwin a very important target, or at least it said as much to justify continuing to follow his activities. One document may be taken as representative when it noted, "The unauthorized disclosure of this source could seriously impair the investigation of subversive matters and thereby endanger the national defense interests of the U.S."²⁰

In May of 1963, the FBI discovered intelligence with which to discredit James Baldwin. An unnamed supervisor wrote, "Information has been developed by the Bureau that BALDWIN is a homosexual, and on a recent occasion made derogatory remarks in reference to the Bureau."²¹ In July 1964, Hoover indicated an interest in Baldwin's sex life, asking, "Isn't Baldwin a well

known pervert?" An agent replied, "While it is not possible to state that he is a pervert, he has expressed a sympathetic viewpoint about homosexuality on several occasions, and a very definite hostility toward the revulsion of the American public regarding it."²² But, even by 1966, the FBI still would not say definitively that Baldwin was gay. An agent wrote, "It has been heard that BALDWIN may be a homosexual and he appeared as if he may be one."²³ Their suspicions were raised again in January 1967, when they found out from a source in Istanbul, where Baldwin was living, that he "was evicted by the landlord for having homosexual parties."²⁴ But they were thrown into confusion that December when Baldwin's sister, Paula, told an agent she was his wife.²⁵ The FBI consulted marriage records and found nothing. It took a couple of months until they determined that Paula was his sibling.²⁶ The repeated reluctance to label Baldwin a homosexual despite his "sympathetic viewpoint" contrasts with the quickness with which the bureau labeled him a communist despite his antagonistic viewpoint.

At one point, the bureau attempted to find evidence that James Baldwin and Jack O'Dell (Hunter Pitts O'Dell) were in a relationship. One New York agent, listening to their phone conversation, said, "It is noted that in greeting O'DELL, BALDWIN stated 'Hello, baby, how are you' and in closing the conversation stated that 'It's good to hear from you, baby.'"²⁷ The agent presumed this was evidence of a homosexual relationship and stated its significance. He wrote, "This is being set forth because it is noted that in the obscene log sent to the Bureau relating to BAYARD RUSTIN, RUSTIN was in telephonic conversation with another degenerate named [redacted] (LNU) [Last Name Unknown]."²⁸ A couple of weeks later, an agent, perhaps the same one, wrote, "JACK O'DELL contacted JIMMY BALDWIN and said he had a good time the night before. BALDWIN said he enjoyed it too, and O'DELL said he would contact BALDWIN later."²⁹ These comments are repeated verbatim to show just how slim the evidence was that these two men had a relationship. The agents perhaps realized this, as no other portions of Baldwin's sizeable file attempt to insinuate a relationship between him and O'Dell or any other male activist. As with the attempts to discredit Rustin and Kahn, there is nothing to suggest the FBI was effective.

Other gay, lesbian, and bisexual activists involved in the civil rights movement were surveilled by the FBI, but their files make no mention of sexual orientation. The FBI maintained a significant file on Lorraine Hansberry and included her on its Security Index for a number of years. While the FBI stated its intention to obtain "all available background material on the subject, any derogatory information contained therein," its efforts from

1952 to 1965 turned up nothing on her sexual orientation. At one point, an agent wrote, "Her main occupation, other than housewife, is playwright."³⁰ The file on Barbara Deming is quite limited and also makes no mention of homosexuality, though Deming was more open about her sexual orientation than Hansberry. The only mention of Deming and her female partner appears when her partner became embroiled in a custody battle with her ex-husband. The ex-husband's lawyer contacted the FBI seeking derogatory information about Deming but, according to the file, was not given any. The lawyer mentioned that the man's former wife was living with Deming, but there was no suggestion that the two were romantically connected, and the FBI had no interest in the matter.³¹ Allard Lowenstein's file is lengthier, but there is very little that concerns his extensive civil rights activities. There is also no mention of Lowenstein being gay or bisexual.³² The same holds true for Lillian Smith. Moreover, in his analysis of available documents, scholar Will Brantley concludes, "There is no evidence to suggest that Smith's career was affected by her file."³³

The situation is much the same for Mississippi civil rights activist Aaron Henry. He was part of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's challenge in Atlantic City in 1964, which was closely monitored so the FBI could provide advance warning of the delegation's moves to President Lyndon Johnson. Portions of his file from the 1960s that have been released thus far offer no indication of his sexual orientation, even though he was quite notably convicted on a "morals charge" in March 1962 for making "rude and obscene sexual advances" toward an eighteen-year-old male hitchhiker and had called for, though not formally requested, an FBI investigation into the incident, claiming that local police had framed him. Two files on Henry from the 1960s concern death threats made against him. A third is captioned "Voter Registration Matters in Mississippi."³⁴

Some activists' sexual orientation did not even surface until the FBI did background checks on them prior to their consideration for a federal appointment. Henry's FBI file includes a great deal of information concerning homosexuality, including at least five "morals arrests," but almost none of it surfaced until 1979, when Henry was being considered for an appointment with the Carter administration.³⁵ The only document prior to that is an article from the *Washington Evening Star* about Henry's arrest on a morals charge in Washington, DC, in October 1972, which was added to his file and copied to the Sex Deviates File, the FBI's 330,000-page file on gays and lesbians that would be destroyed later in the decade.³⁶ Pauli Murray's file also begins when she was being considered for a federal appointment, in this case as general

counsel in late 1966. Agents uncovered one arrest of particular interest that occurred twenty-five years prior, in Providence, Rhode Island. They met with the arresting officer, who said “she remembers a female Negro in her late twenties was turned over to her department by RI SP [Rhode Island State Police]. This woman had been found hitchhiking on highway at time she was picked up by RI SP and dressed in man’s clothing. Woman told [redacted] she was a homosexual.”³⁷ The woman, Murray, told the officer she “had been taking some kind of hormone treatments at Bellevue Hospital at New York City . . . to change her sex as she wanted to be a man.” The officer took Murray back to Bellevue.³⁸ The FBI found in Bellevue records that Murray was released two days later, having been diagnosed with schizophrenia.³⁹

Ultimately, whether Murray would be appointed general counsel hinged on four items: “her affiliation with Communist Party organizations, the circumstances of her admission and release from Bellevue Hospital, her unconsummated marriage and lack of annulment, and her two arrests and jail sentence.” The arrests were for picketing in New York City in 1935 and for violating bus segregation laws in Virginia in 1940, so her appointment ultimately hinged on a combination of her civil rights protests, communist affiliations, and sexual orientation. In this case, the FBI’s position is noteworthy. Although the bureau had uncovered evidence it could use to discredit Murray, it gave no recommendation either for or against her appointment.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Murray did not receive the appointment, in part because of the “derogatory” information provided by the bureau.

FBI agents identified Igal Roodenko, one of the freedom riders on the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation, as a gay man as early as 1956. However, his FBI file almost solely concerns his antiwar speeches, which the bureau documented as early as 1950, and his role as chairman of the War Resisters League in the 1970s. At a number of different points, his file notes he is “known as a homosexual,” “is single and has homosexual tendencies,” or lists “Peculiarities: Homosexual.” Even in his role as a peace activist, though, there is no evidence to suggest that homosexuality was used against him or affected his standing in the movement.⁴¹

The FBI had very little on Laplois Ashford, a Black gay man who was the youth secretary of the NAACP in the early 1960s. It would seem that the bureau would have a keen interest in the point person in a national civil rights organization who worked with young people. However, Ashford’s name appears only three times in the FBI file on “Communist Infiltration of the NAACP,” and no other records on him were kept. The FBI was not even able to locate any public-source materials indicating his date or place of birth.⁴²

Summary

All of the LGBT activists in the African American civil rights movement discussed here were targeted by the FBI because of their civil rights activities and their supposed communist affiliations. Yet, even in the cases in which it obtained evidence of homosexuality, the bureau was inclined not to use it. In contrast to the general ease with which it labeled groups communist or communist fronts, the FBI showed uncertainty when it came to labeling someone a homosexual, “sex deviate,” or “pervert.” Moreover, there is no evidence that the bureau was able to effectively use this information against the movement prior to COINTELPRO–Black Nationalist–Hate Groups.

While Hoover had such evidence at his disposal, Athan Theoharis observes that “Hoover recognized the difficulties of confirming intimations of homosexuality and the counter-productivity of a politics of homosexual rumormongering.”⁴³ Hoover may have wanted to avoid homosexual allegations being lobbed back at him, which they often were, though this may only have applied to allegations that he made directly or to which his name would be attached. The director ordered agents to “monitor and vigorously contain such allegations”⁴⁴ against him. Furthermore, instead of operating an organized counterintelligence operation against the civil rights movement, Kenneth O’Reilly argues, “A case-by-case examination of the FBI record does in fact reveal a bewildering collage, with Hoover and his men appearing to stand with the movement on one day and with the resistance the next.” These conclusions are confirmed by examining the files of LGBT activists in the civil rights movement prior to the late-1967 implementation of the new COINTELPRO directives. References would appear suggesting an intent to use homosexuality to smear the movement but without any evidence of follow-through or effectiveness. Investigative effort appears half-hearted and, in some cases, inept. In the case of Pauli Murray, the bureau found evidence of communist affiliations, civil rights activities, and transgender identity but even then expressed no preference, based on its own investigation of the evidence, about whether she was fit to receive a federal appointment. Furthermore, attempts to put information about a person’s sexual orientation to use against the movement often failed. Even when evidence about private sex lives was given to news organizations, they declined to use it.⁴⁵

This changed, however, with the creation of an expanded COINTELPRO in response to the riots of summer 1967, when the FBI made a decisive shift. Theoharis finds, “In the case of radical activists, no holds were barred—in part because the leaking of derogatory personal information about radical activists carried minimal political risk, given their pariah status during the

cold war era.”⁴⁶ With the FBI’s counterintelligence program against “Black Nationalist–Hate Groups” or “Black Extremists,” the sexual activities of radicals were purposely divulged to create a negative image of the movement, create dissension within and among organizations, and hinder the participation of LGBT activists.⁴⁷ While the FBI’s COINTELPRO had been operational since 1956, its targeting of civil rights, Black Power, and New Left groups did not begin until the late 1960s. On August 25, 1967, the FBI launched its counterintelligence program, “Black Nationalist–Hate Groups.”⁴⁸ While the FBI often opposed the nonviolent civil rights movement, the perceived threat of armed revolution by African Americans lent a new urgency to stopping Black activism, which resulted in the increasing use of accusations of homosexuality to discredit and divide the movement.

Attacking LGBT Activists through COINTELPRO–Black Nationalist–Hate Groups

From the beginning of COINTELPRO–Black Nationalist–Hate Groups, agents were ordered to investigate the personal lives of activists. The director wrote, “Many individuals currently active in black nationalist organizations have backgrounds of immorality, subversive activity, and criminal records. Through your investigation of key agitators, you should endeavor to establish their unsavory backgrounds.”⁴⁹ When COINTELPRO–Black Nationalist–Hate Groups was expanded to include forty-one offices in March 1968, the director stated the intentions of the program: to prevent coalitions of Black nationalist groups, halt their growth, stop the “rise of a ‘messiah’” to lead the movement, and foreclose the possibility of violence. Moreover, Hoover said they must “prevent militant black nationalist groups and leaders from gaining *respectability*, by discrediting them to three separate segments of the community”: the “responsible Negro community,” the white community, and “Negro radicals.”⁵⁰ Making accusations of homosexuality against activists in the movement, as well as deepening dissension over the alliance between Black Power and gay liberation groups, could effectively further the FBI’s goals. The issue of homosexuality could divide Black Power groups from each other, be used to discredit leaders, reduce the appeal for those interested in joining the movement, and most certainly undercut the respectability of Black Power organizations, though many consciously were not pursuing a politics of respectability.

To carry out counterintelligence operations, “intimate knowledge” of an individual was necessary, requiring agents to comb through mail, trash, and

other personal items.⁵¹ Moreover, the Charlotte Field Office recommended “physical surveillance of the subject’s motel room for immoral conduct. When such is detected, an anonymous phone call to the local Police Department and newspapers.”⁵² Further, it was of utmost importance that the techniques being used remain “highly confidential.”⁵³

Knowledge of an activist’s sexual orientation was not the only sexual knowledge the bureau sought to collect. However, it felt that much of the sexual information it could find, outside of homosexuality, might not be effective. San Francisco, the office of origin, or division in charge of COINTELPRO–Black Nationalist–Hate Groups (no doubt because of its proximity to the Black Panther Party, founded in Oakland in 1966), informed the director:

In seeking effective counterintelligence it should perhaps be borne [sic] in mind that the two things foremost in the militant Negro’s mind are sex and money. The first is often promiscuous and frequently freely shared. White moral standards do not apply among this type of Negro. You don’t embarrass many Negroes by advertising their sexual activity or loose morals.⁵⁴

The Chicago Field Office concurred, saying, “The counterintelligence approach on a moral basis, with white oriented concepts, irrespective of its inherent values, is not believed to be the most valid or productive basis on which to establish a program.”⁵⁵

Importantly, however, these criteria did not apply to investigations of homosexuality, and there were instances in which various offices across the country used accusations of homosexuality to discredit Black Power activists. In almost all of these cases, the FBI believed it had evidence that a person in the movement was gay, lesbian, or bisexual. In many of them, names are redacted, though the identity of the person under investigation can often be determined by examining the trail of documents or through identifying information included in the documents aside from the person’s name. Nevertheless, these documents should not be presumed to reflect any “truth” about an activist’s sexual orientation. Rather, they are cited because they shed light on an important technique the FBI used to discredit individual activists and create dissension within or among Black Power organizations.

The Chicago Field Office’s Actions against Black Power School Boycotts and the Black Panther Party

In November 1968, the Chicago office became concerned about the growing Black student boycott and one of its leaders, Jim Harvey.⁵⁶ Harvey influenced several groups, including Black Students for Defense and the

Afro-American Student Association/Black Students Association.⁵⁷ Seeking curricular changes, an increase in Black educators, and other reforms, Harvey helped organize a walkout on a Monday in October 1968 that saw thirty-five thousand students empty out of Chicago schools. The following Monday, twenty thousand students and seven hundred teachers protested. In the third week, eight thousand students participated despite increasingly harsh penalties from school administrators.⁵⁸

In hopes of neutralizing Harvey, the Chicago office sent a letter to reporters and a letter to his fellow activists. The special agent in charge in Chicago said of these proposed letters,

The question of homosexuality which is implied in both these communications is not considered one which normally would be of importance in the circles in which [redacted] moves, however, in view of his leadership role, and increasing emphasis upon black pride and masculinity, a question of public identification of a black leader as a homosexual might represent a considerable reflection on this image. It is also believed that the question of the possible informer status of [redacted] as indicated in the second communication, would be of a particular concern to those individuals who would receive this second communication.⁵⁹

In the anonymous letter to reporters, the FBI stated that Harvey had “never been in the [military] service and people close to the boycott problem feel his interest in these young kids is no accident. . . . If the public knew who and what some of these people were, maybe it would help.”⁶⁰ The suggestion that Harvey took an interest in teenage boys was made a bit more explicit in the letter to Black Power activists and also included the insinuation that he served as an informant. The brief letter read, “I know you know [redacted]. I’ve been to his [redacted] and I know why he likes the young Black Brothers down there. We don’t need sissies or freaks for leaders. Some brothers on the west side say he’s with the man cause he don’t work, but he sure gets around. Maybe you can do something. [signed] A Brother.”⁶¹

The following month, the FBI was alerted that a branch of the Black Panther Party (BPP) had opened in Chicago. The BPP was the group of greatest concern to the bureau in its Black Extremists COINTELPRO. As with the student boycott, the office attempted to deploy sexual knowledge to discredit the organization, especially its leaders Fred Hampton, Bobby Lee Rush, and Robert Brown. The FBI’s Chicago office claimed, “Information has been developed that the latter three have used the local BPP headquarters for sex parties.”⁶² Like their attacks on Jim Harvey, the Chicago office suggested sending poison-pen letters in which “it will also be alleged that BROWN and

RUSH are sex perverts, the public knowledge of which could prove embarrassing to the image of the BPP.”⁶³ The letter submitted by the Chicago office, which included numerous errors in order to seem more “natural,” read as follows:

I know those two [redacted] and [redacted] that run the Panthers for a long time and those mothers been with every black outfit going where it looked like they was something in it for them. The only black people they care about is themselves. I heard too they're sweethearts and that [redacted] has worked for the man thats why hes not in Viet Nam. Maybe thats why their just playing like real Panthers. I hear a lot of the brothers are with you and want those mothers out but don't know how. The Panthers need real black men for leaders not freaks.⁶⁴

The Boston Field Office's Actions against the Black Panther Party and Attempts to Sow Division between the BPP and the Republic of New Afrika

The Boston Field Office adopted a similar approach in an attempt to neutralize a Black Power leader. Following the occupation of a building at Brandeis University, Hoover requested information and recommendations for counterintelligence action against Christopher Carambo.⁶⁵ Subsequent investigation determined that Carambo, a member of the Black Panther Party, “has admitted to being a pervert,” and Hoover requested Boston “review pertinent files and if feasible thereafter forward a specific counterintelligence proposal designed toward neutralizing his activities.”⁶⁶

The bureau uncovered evidence of Carambo's sexual orientation through military records. An examination by a doctor from the Medical Corps, U.S. Navy Reserve, reported that Carambo was “an overt homosexual,” and he was reclassified 4F, unfit for military service. Consequently, the Boston division passed information that Carambo was gay onto its informants who had “been encouraged to pass along this information at opportune times to other members of the BPP and black extremists in Boston in order to undermine [redacted] status with the BPP.”⁶⁷

Military files were hardly definitive. The bureau was well aware that Black activists and, of course, many others would claim to be gay to avoid being drafted. One FBI summary of a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee antidraft conference in Chicago reported, “Discussion occurred concerning methods to be used by Negro males to evade military service. They would be encouraged to lie about their physical and mental conditions in pre-military examinations. They would be encouraged to state they had homosexual

tendencies, dress in an effeminate manner and complain of imaginary illnesses.”⁶⁸ Moreover, Carambo ignored his first order for induction in May 1968, making it quite clear that he was trying to avoid conscription.⁶⁹

Still, the bureau hoped to create enmity between the Black Panther Party in Boston and the Republic of New Afrika, and the discovery that Carambo was supposedly gay provided a key counterintelligence opportunity in this regard. The director wrote,

Boston has developed information to the effect that [redacted] is reportedly a homosexual. Boston proposing a letter to be sent to BPP headquarters over the signature of a Boston officer of the Republic of New Africa which will ridicule the BPP for having [redacted]. This has potential for increasing disruption between the BPP and the Republic of New Africa—these organizations are already feuding, as well as exposing [redacted] to BPP headquarters as a homosexual.”⁷⁰

The letter from an anonymous member of the Boston Consulate of the Republic of New Afrika was mailed to Black Panther Party offices in Boston, Berkeley, and New Haven. It read as follows:

I am beginning to believe the Connecticut “Pigs” have done a service for the Black people when they arrested [redacted] of the Boston Black Panther Party, now in New Haven. Anyone who is a *faggot* and *homosexual* does not deserve a position of leadership. We brothers and sisters have too much at stake. If [redacted] moral character should become public knowledge, it would prove embarrassing to all Black movements.⁷¹

Of the ten actions carried out by the Boston office over the course of the counterintelligence program against “black extremists,” two used Carambo’s sexual orientation to discredit him as a leader and create dissension between Black Power groups.

COINTELPRO Actions in Los Angeles and Miami

On the West Coast, the FBI believed it had discovered an instance in which “[redacted] had recently resigned from BPP rather than indulge in Lesbian activities with [redacted] for LA-BPP.”⁷² The Los Angeles division suggested a leaflet “to attack, expose, and ridicule the image of the BPP in the community and to foment mistrust and suspicion amongst the current and past membership through publication and dissemination of information embarrassing to the BPP.”⁷³ The proposed leaflet drew on notions of revolutionary motherhood, nationalism, and the perpetuation of the race while exploiting notions that lesbianism was a mental illness, the result of an inability to

attract men, and the product of bourgeois decadence. The vile leaflet read, in part,

These morbid acts were conjured up in the ailing impotent minds of crotch sucking, perverted paranoid capitalist [redacted], executor of one segment of our chasm of disunity we call the Black Panther Party, and the spineless hanger-on [redacted] to ease the pressure of their carnal cravings. . . . How can we claim to fight the decadence of an oppressive society when the same oppressive decadence spreads its cancerous tentacles within our ranks?⁷⁴

The FBI also uncovered instances of Black Power groups using accusations of homosexuality against each other, which the bureau hoped to exploit. For example, customs agents at the Los Angeles airport searched David Hilliard and took from him a document about Ron Karenga, which included the following: "It is alleged also that Karenga is a hyp [drug addict] and that he is also a homosexual, and it is alleged in connection with this that L.A. Police Department uses these two factors to control Karenga."⁷⁵

In Miami, the only active Black Power group in 1970 was the Black Afro Militant Movement (BAMM). Following an investigation of the group's leader, likely referring to Alfred D. A. Featherston, the special agent in charge wrote, "The Miami Division is considering a counter-intelligence program centered around the reported homosexual tendencies of [redacted] the driving force behind BAMM."⁷⁶ The Miami office hoped to supply this information to Gene Struhl, the news director at WCKT Channel 7 who was planning to produce an exposé of BAMM.⁷⁷ However, the station found it did not have the resources to produce the documentary, and BAMM appeared to be falling apart on its own, so the bureau did not pursue these counterintelligence efforts.⁷⁸

Targeting the Black Panthers in Winston-Salem

While supplying information to existing news outlets, the bureau also created fictional organizations that published their own newsletters. In Winston-Salem, North Carolina, the FBI set up a group called the Committee of Twenty-Five, which existed only in the two newsletters it sent out. To decrease church and community support for the BPP, the bureau used the presumed homosexuality of local chapter leader Larry Little's nephew, James Purcell Little (whom the FBI thought was his brother), to discredit the group. The newsletter charged, "This group has grown so fowl [*sic*] they can not get members from the decent people of the neighborhood and are now taking in punks and sissies like Larry's brother Percell [*sic*]. It is becoming a queer house and no wonder they want our children there for 'breakfast.'"⁷⁹

Still, the Winston-Salem Black Panther Party continued to work with LGBT activists. In January 1971, an informant reported that Panther members attended Mustang Sally's Review, a show put on by a group of "female impersonators," noting, "There were approximately 150 people there. He said the show was very good but almost everyone there besides them and the Panther members were homosexuals." In turn, LGBT activists attended Panther meetings. An informant who joined a Panther class on political power and the Constitution stated that "about six homosexuals were in attendance."⁸⁰ Two months later, the party held an "Intercommunal Day of Solidarity," which included representatives of gay liberation and was meant to be a "stepping stone to Southern Revolutionary Solidarity" the following month.⁸¹

Even after COINTELPRO ended, informants continued to provide salacious, dubious information on the chapter's relationship with LGBT activists. One report said the Winston-Salem Panthers held a fundraising party with Mustang Sally during which

four female impersonators offered a concoction of heroin and Spanish fly to those in attendance and to the participants. After consuming this mixture they stripped and did a "belly dance" followed by a homosexual orgy in which all BPP members were invited to participate. It is noted that BPP membership has been denied to several female applicants because they were lesbians, however, this sexual code obviously does not apply to male members.⁸²

There is no evidence that the bureau took any action on this information to discredit or divide the organization, having since shuttered COINTELPRO.

FBI Accusations of Homosexuality against Huey Newton

Perhaps the most frequent target of accusations of homosexuality was BPP cofounder Huey Newton. Attacks on Newton took on particular urgency in August 1970 when he was released from prison after nearly three years behind bars, during what was at that point almost the entire duration of the Black Extremists COINTELPRO.⁸³ The FBI often mailed caricatures as a method of counterintelligence, and one such cartoon depicted Newton as a homosexual.⁸⁴ The Baltimore, Detroit, and Washington, DC, offices all "submitted general proposals for anonymous communications to exploit situations where former BPP members were unjustly purged, to exploit alleged homosexual background of Newton, and to attempt to furnish questions to friendly mass media sources who may interview Newton."⁸⁵ The San Francisco office notably opposed accusing Newton of being gay, writing that "no specific information has been received concerning any homosexual activity on his part."⁸⁶

The use of homosexuality to divide the Panthers became key later that month when, on KPFA radio, Newton declared solidarity with gay people and then issued his letter "To the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters about the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements," calling for the Panthers, gay liberation, and women's liberation groups to unite "in a revolutionary fashion."⁸⁷ Consequently, the San Francisco office planned to send out anonymous letters to David Hilliard "from supposed members of the Party in the San Francisco area deploring the BPP projected link-up with homosexual organizations, and to direct other offices to do the same." They concluded, "A flood of such critical letters could do much to discredit NEWTON in the eyes of other Panther leaders."⁸⁸

The office of origin sent one letter from an anonymous man to David Hilliard saying, "I seen by last weeks paper that now Panthers are supposed to relate to c s. Huey is wrong. Something must have happened to him in prison. Panthers got enough things to do in 10 point program and fighting for niggers without taking up with m f queers."⁸⁹ Another letter from an anonymous woman to Hilliard read, "How it says we are to join the queers. The Panther sisters have to fight to keep the brothers from white chicks. Now what do you want us to do, watch them to take up with queers. David why does Huey do this sort of thing. Won't you talk to him. [signed] 'A Righteous Sister.'"⁹⁰

Following the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention in Washington, DC, the FBI sent a letter under a pseudonym to the editor of Howard University's *The Hilltop*, blaming the supposed failure of the conference in part on Newton's alliance with white gays. The Washington Field Office's letter said, "Huey Baby and the rest of the Black Panther Party left the planning of the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention in the hands of a bunch of dumb 'niggers' and white queers. Now that it has been exposed as a gigantic failure, Newton has to find a scapegoat to keep from looking like the damn fool he is."⁹¹ The bureau also sent a letter to fifty colleges and universities with Black student organizations from a fictitious Howard University student who attended the convention accusing the Panthers of having sold out African Americans, saying, "How can a Black man relate to anything when he is surrounded by a wild eyed bunch of honkey queers and bearded goats trying to make out with the black sisters?"⁹²

Explicit statements that Huey Newton was gay also continued, portraying Newton as both a "traitor to his race" and a failure in projecting revolutionary masculinity. One letter sent anonymously from the FBI to chapters of the BPP and the National Committee to Combat Fascism said, "Huey Newton

lives miles from another nigger and you'll never find him in National Headquarters. If you're lucky you can see him buying drinks for white freaks in Oakland supper clubs."⁹³ Another letter drafted by the bureau to be sent from South Carolina to Panther headquarters said, "I don't go for joining up with the hunkys and don't nobody here either. Everybody down here is laughing at the brothers for joining up with the hunky queers and everybody says Brother Huey must be one too."⁹⁴ Following an issue of *The Black Panther* that depicted a woman, boy, and elderly man with guns, the Newark office, through the New Left COINTELPRO, suggested sending a letter to the BPP from the Newark Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), saying, "With your leaders fleeing the country and 'Huey the Homo' afraid to raise his voice for fear he'll get busted again, I guess all you got left are the women, kids and old men."⁹⁵

Reassessing the Nature of COINTELPRO

Much has been said about the FBI fomenting violence between Black Power organizations or orchestrating the execution of activists, and for good reason: these conflicts resulted in the loss of life.⁹⁶ However, evidence of bureau culpability in high-profile cases remains to be seen despite continuing assertions in histories of COINTELPRO and Black Power.

Reexamining the FBI's Role in the Hampton–Clark Killings and the US–Panther Conflict

In the case of Fred Hampton, for example, while the FBI provided a floor plan of 2337 W. Monroe, there is no evidence to suggest it played any role in planning or carrying out the killing of Hampton and Mark Clark.⁹⁷ The report by Roy Wilkins and Ramsey Clark, *Search and Destroy*, exonerated the FBI and blamed the Chicago Police Department and the Illinois State's Attorney's Office. A bureau agent told the police that the apartment would be empty at 8 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, when the Panthers attended political orientation class and that the police would be wise to conduct their raid then. The police decided, contrary to the bureau's suggestion, that the raid be conducted before 5 a.m., when the Panthers would be present.⁹⁸ Moreover, the police raid was based on intelligence an informant provided to Sgt. Daniel Groth because the FBI intelligence indicated the weapons the Panthers had were legally purchased.⁹⁹ Sgt. Groth's informant told him, contrary to FBI informants, that there were sawed-off shotguns, stolen police riot shotguns, and other illegal weapons in the apartment.¹⁰⁰ Nor did Groth

notify the occupants that the police had the apartment surrounded in order to prevent a shootout, as the FBI had done when it served a warrant on the Panthers in June.¹⁰¹ The investigating commission concluded that “the raid had been planned and executed by the State’s Attorney’s Office and its Special Prosecutions Unit” and that the raid should have been conducted as the bureau indicated—during the time when no one would have been present.¹⁰²

Moreover, at the later trial, a ballistics examiner with the FBI crime lab, Robert Zimmers, provided his expert testimony for the survivors and families of the Panthers, showing only one shot came from the Panthers while the rest came from police. FBI ballistics also showed that the police had falsely reported that shells came from Panther Brenda Harris’s gun.¹⁰³ In the subsequent petition for certiorari to the Supreme Court, Justice Lewis Powell wrote,

At the close of the plaintiffs’ case in chief, the District Court “reviewed all of the evidence . . . with all reasonable inferences that could be drawn therefrom, in the light most favorable to the plaintiffs.” *Id.* at 186a. The court found the record “devoid of proof of . . . participation [by the federal defendants] in a conspiratorial plan among themselves or with the state defendants. Thus, no liability on their part existed, and their motions for directed verdicts were granted. . . .

No one contends that any of the federal defendants took part in the raid itself. They did supply information to state officers about illegal firearms stored in the apartment. But each federal defendant testified that he did not know of and did not participate in any planning or joint activity regarding the operation at any time. This uncontradicted testimony was fully corroborated by the state defendants. In these circumstances, inferences drawn from a program [COIN-TELPRO] not shown to have been related to the events in question are of dubious value. . . . After 16 months of trial devoted exclusively to the plaintiffs’ evidence, the trial court found the record wholly “devoid of proof of . . . participation” by the federal defendants in the conspiracy alleged.¹⁰⁴

A lack of evidence of FBI involvement also remains in the US Organization–Panther conflict, where often just one document from the Los Angeles office on November 29, 1968, is cited to show the bureau ratcheted up the rivalry.¹⁰⁵ This document says the division was preparing an anonymous letter from a member of US saying that US was aware the BPP had a contract to kill US leader Ron Karenga and that US was planning to ambush leaders of the BPP. Scholars then recount the violent confrontation of January 17, 1969, in which members of US shot and killed BPP members John Huggins and Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter and conclude that the FBI’s escalation of the conflict resulted in the death of two Panthers.¹⁰⁶

However, the memo so often cited from the Los Angeles office to the director on November 29, 1968, was just a suggestion for a letter.¹⁰⁷ In the Los Angeles memo to the director on December 18, the anonymous letter about a planned ambush was still listed among the “Counterintelligence Operations under Consideration.”¹⁰⁸ On January 2, 1969, Los Angeles reported that no operations had been effected since their last letter. Agents found through an informant that the BPP had discontinued its vendetta against US because US had a great deal of support and the BPP felt “that too much ‘heat’ has been brought to bear against them [the BPP].” The BPP did not feel that it was in a strong enough position to continue a feud with US. The memo concluded, “In view of the above, the Los Angeles Office recommends holding in abeyance the proposed anonymous letter concerning the vendetta against ‘US.’”¹⁰⁹

Logically, the Los Angeles office concluded that an anonymous letter about a BPP vendetta against US would not be believed if the BPP no longer had such a vendetta, and therefore, the bureau decided not to send it. Moreover, even if the bureau had sent such a letter, it is unlikely that it would have been believed because any discerning person would wonder why US was warning the BPP that it planned to surprise them by ambush. The Los Angeles office never mentioned the killing of Carter and Huggins as an effective measure of COINTELPRO. Instead, the office continually submitted reports acknowledging, “There has been no reaction to the operations now in effect reported by sources.” For the most part, the L.A. division was monitoring for violations of antiriot and gun control laws, as criminal investigations were more effective than counterintelligence at defeating its political opponents.¹¹⁰ Finally, as David J. Garrow notes, “Unsubstantiated assertions that FBI informants killed Carter and Huggins are unfortunately legion,” and “the only source making such a claim that merits scholars’ consideration is M. Wesley Swearingen,” a former agent whose account “suffers from a profusion of notable factual errors.”¹¹¹ If the L.A. office had a role in escalating the rivalry, such evidence has yet to be unearthed.

Beyond that, documents released from John Huggins’s FBI file show no actions taken by the bureau against him. They concern an investigation of possible violations of the Federal Firearms Act and Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 as he, Alprentice Carter, and Donald Cox were building a cache of weapons. A Freedom of Information Act request for cross-references of John Huggins’s name in the file of COINTELPRO–Black Nationalist–Hate Groups returned just two pages in which Huggins’s name was mentioned, from a fake letter the FBI wrote as an anonymous alumnus

to William F. Buckley Jr. to persuade Buckley to pressure the Yale administration not to allow the Panthers on campus.¹¹²

Moderating Influences in FBI Counterintelligence Activity

The San Francisco Field Office, which led the Black Extremists COINTELPRO, served as an important moderating influence and opposed any suggestion that the US Organization be listed as the sender of a letter accusing Huey Newton of being gay because it did not want to be responsible for “aiding or initiating a murder,” and headquarters concurred.¹¹³ Furthermore, sometime in late 1969, the bureau sharply reduced the use of the tactic of insinuating that movement activists were informants, a practice known as snitch jacketing, having since learned that the Panthers might harm suspected informants.¹¹⁴ Overall, 5 percent of actions carried out under the Black Extremists COINTELPRO included assertions that an activist served as an informant for the police, FBI, or Central Intelligence Agency. Only five acts of snitch jacketing occurred in 1970, and three of them were directed at one person: Huey Newton. Only two were carried out in 1971.

The San Francisco office rejected many of the more extreme suggestions for counterintelligence actions, so much so that it received a reprimand from the director. The San Francisco office argued that there was little likelihood of the Black Panther Party overthrowing the government. Moreover, San Francisco believed that publicizing the “lack of morals” among activists did not produce results. Hoover responded harshly, saying, “Your reasoning is not in line with Bureau objectives as to our responsibilities under the CIP [counterintelligence program]” and that negative publicity generated by COINTELPRO “contributed measurably to the decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States.”¹¹⁵ Hoover concluded his letter of May 1969: “We are calling attention to their derelictions and point out various situations where they should have proposed counterintelligence. We are calling for a reevaluation of the whole thinking behind counterintelligence in the San Francisco Office.”¹¹⁶

The revelation that Richard Aoki served as a longtime FBI informant received considerable attention because it showed that a prominent activist who supplied weapons to the Panthers also served bureau interests. With the release of a lengthier informant file on Aoki, which includes five hundred reports over a ten-year period, journalist Seth Rosenfeld, who broke the story with the publication of *Subversives*, acknowledges that available records still “do not indicate whether the FBI was aware of Aoki’s role in arming the Panthers or whether the bureau was involved in it.”¹¹⁷ Such an action would

have been uncharacteristic of the San Francisco Field Office, though certainly not beyond the realm of possibility.

Moreover, the FBI often opposed letters that threatened the lives of leaders, like Newton. In one instance, a proposed letter would have been sent by a contrived contract killer who derided Newton as “a pigpen graduate and queer.”¹¹⁸ Permission to send the letter was denied. The rationale for opposing death threats was clearly explained in bureau documents: these letters would lead the Panthers to increase their security, and the bodyguards would “undoubtedly [*sic*] become edgy and may shoot first if they expect any harassment of NEWTON,” which could result in the death of an FBI agent or law enforcement officer.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the bureau worried that such letters would violate extortion laws and spark a police investigation, which would lead back to the bureau.¹²⁰ The FBI was risk-averse and interested in using the means that would minimize the exposure of the program. In another instance, the Baltimore office suggested having informants take documents from BPP headquarters, but the director responded harshly: “The Bureau will not condone informants engaging in any illegal activity which could later cause embarrassment to this Bureau. Accordingly, you should discontinue any thoughts of putting this plan into action.”¹²¹

Overall Analysis of COINTELPRO–Black Nationalist–Hate Groups

Instead of using or encouraging violence, an analysis of the files of COINTELPRO–Black Nationalist–Hate Groups, or Black Extremists, shows that accusations of homosexuality against activists were much more typical of the program overall, in both form and function. There were six actions that were carried out by multiple offices: five involved the mailing of articles, and one was the distribution of “season’s greetings” cards mocking the BPP. For the purposes of comparing offices to each other, these actions have been counted for each office that carried them out, which results in 433 total actions. If each is counted only once, the total number of actions carried out under COINTELPRO–Black Nationalist–Hate Groups is 382, still much higher than the frequently cited figure of 295 actions under this counterintelligence operation.¹²²

The ten most active offices in this counterintelligence program were responsible for 255 approved actions (see Table 1). An examination of the actions of these ten offices shows that the overwhelming majority of actions were carried out through anonymous letters and phone calls; fake letters and phone calls, in which an agent would use the name of an actual member; mailing newspaper articles or bureau-designed propaganda; or supplying

Table 1. Number of Counterintelligence Actions Carried Out under COINTELPRO–Black Extremists by the Ten Most Active Offices. Data compiled by author.

	Office	Number of Actions
1	San Francisco	51
2	New York	43
3	San Diego	35
4	Pittsburgh	23
5	Los Angeles	22
6	Detroit	20
7	Chicago	16
8 (tie)	Washington, DC	15
	New Haven	15
	Jackson	15

public-source information to cooperative journalists (see Table 2). These tactics served a key operating principle of the counterintelligence program: they left the FBI least vulnerable to exposure.

Using the issue of homosexuality also served the most important functions of the counterintelligence program: spreading a negative image of Black activists and groups, creating divisions within groups, sowing dissension between groups, and hindering a person’s ability to remain within a group. Publicizing the sexual orientation of gay activists could create a negative image at a time when gay people were demonized as perverts, mentally ill, child predators, and more. It could also cause division between those who supported the involvement of gay and lesbian activists in the movement and those who opposed it. Further, it might divide Black Power groups, as the issue of homosexuality was used to divide the Black Panther Party and the Republic of New Afrika. Finally, it could make a gay, lesbian, or bisexual activist a pariah in the movement. Consequently, in both form and function, using the issue of homosexuality was a typical tactic of the counterintelligence program. Rather than killing activists, the FBI planned to assassinate their characters to neutralize them as political forces.

This was also a favored strategy in other counterintelligence programs, where the bureau used accusations of homosexuality to discredit activists and divide movements. In the New Left COINTELPRO, the most active office—New York—created “The Gigantic ‘Pick the Fag Contest,’” which

Table 2. A Typology of Actions in COINTELPRO–Black Extremists by the Ten Most Active Offices. Data compiled by author. This work draws on the methodology used by David Cunningham to analyze the counterintelligence programs captioned “White Hate Groups” and “New Left.” See David Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Three actions of the top-ten offices are unknown.

Form/Function	Create a negative image	Break down an organization	Create dissension between groups	Restrict access to resources	Restrict ability to protest	Hinder participation	Gather information	Simply to harass	Total
Send an anonymous letter or make an anonymous call	4	31	6	5	5	23			74
Send a fake letter or make a fake call	6	11	5	5	1	2	1		31
Supply information to officials	3	1		19	10	2			35
Plant evidence									0
Utilize informant		3	1	1		2			7
Utilize media source	25	1		2	1	1			30
Disseminate information	16	6	6	17		1			46
Interview target		5					1		6
Spread misinformation	5				1		1		7
Supply resources to opponents									0
Send ridiculing information	8	1	4			1		2	16
Convert informant							1		1
Total	67	59	22	49	18	32	4	2	253

asked recipients to “pick the faggot from the following photos” of Dave Dellinger, Che Guevara, Mark Rudd, and Herbert Marcuse. The contest was meant to discredit Dave Dellinger and create dissension between the National Mobilization Committee, which Dellinger led, and the Coalition for an Anti-Imperialist Movement (CO-AIM), as the return address for the contest was CO-AIM’s P.O. box. The bureau sent contest forms to 225 individuals and organizations.¹²³ This was just one of its actions to exploit Dellinger’s sexual orientation for its own ends and only one of many actions in which the FBI used the issue of homosexuality in an attempt to divide the New Left.¹²⁴

One of the New York office’s most noxious actions under this counterintelligence program was its attempt to divide Black activists from white gay and lesbian and Jewish activists by sending a leaflet that read,

The flood of crappy position papers and senseless pronouncements vomited from the headquarters of NPAC [the National Peace Action Coalition] and the People’s Coalition for Peace and Justice, in recent weeks reveals the usual Queer Cats—like Sweet Dave Dellinger, Fruity Rennie Davis, Old Faggot Stewart Meacham, Nutty Sid Peck and Old Folks Abernathy have once again combined to give the kiss of death to what could have been a meaningful demonstration of the people’s rage against Amerikkka. . . . We note with a high degree of nausea that every white Fag group in the country has been urged to mince their way to the capital. Every Jew landlord in the steaming slum of Harlem and Bed-Sty have [*sic*] been told to take their hands out of BLACK pockets for just one day. Every white, female Lib group, every lesbian collection of cuckoos, every ranting pervert, every liberal maniac . . . will be in D.C. on the 24th. They forgot two small items: *TWENTYFOUR MILLION BLACKS* and thousands of *NORMAL PEOPLE! DEMAND BLACK PARTICIPATION! DEMAND REMOVAL OF THE FAGGOTS!*¹²⁵

Conclusion

While it often opposed more extreme suggestions that might result in violence or place the bureau in danger of embarrassment, the FBI used poison-pen letters or leaflets accusing activists of being homosexual, outed LGBT activists, or criticized Black activists for adopting a favorable attitude toward gay liberation as favored strategies. This move could cause dissension and neutralize activists without bloodshed or making the bureau or its informants vulnerable to exposure. At the same time, the tactic was intended to be used selectively and in targeted ways. As with other tactics, the overuse of a single technique might dilute its impact.¹²⁶ The bureau was careful not to flood an organization with anonymous communications for fear they would cease to be effective. The fact that so many anonymous communications were sent

to Black Power organizations about the issue of homosexuality meant that the bureau was using accusations of homosexuality at the expense of other tactics that would also require anonymous communications.¹²⁷

Furthermore, the FBI consistently used the accusation in cases where it felt the information would be believed or could be proven. The bureau expressed reluctance to make claims that might be discovered, make it the target of a libel or slander case, or place it in violation of ordinances that prohibited the mailing of anonymous communications.¹²⁸ However, there are instances in which offices seem to have casually decided to spread rumors of homosexuality, as the San Diego office did when it wrote, “Consideration is also being given toward spreading the rumor that [redacted] San Diego [redacted], who is unmarried, is a [homosexual],” which it subsequently did.¹²⁹

The effect of these accusations is not always easy to assess. The Chicago office was frequently unable to tell what influence its anonymous letters may have had and eventually concluded, “This technique has appeared ineffective to this point, and Chicago feels should not again be utilized for some time.”¹³⁰ Alternatively, the St. Louis office sent anonymous letters about the marital infidelities of activists because “the Black Liberators will waste a great deal of time trying to discover the writer of the letter. It is possible that their not-too subtle investigation will lose present members and alienate potential ones.”¹³¹ Because the organization it was attempting to disrupt was not particularly strong, St. Louis FBI agents believed their letters “may well be the ‘death-blow,’” though this could be an instance of bureaucratic self-promotion.¹³²

An accurate estimation of the impact of COINTELPRO–Black Nationalist–Hate Groups should acknowledge the added burden that FBI actions placed on civil rights and Black Power groups while recognizing other factors that also contributed to their decline. An effort that began through investigations of individual activists in the early 1960s—the use of accusations of homosexuality against the civil rights and Black Power movements—became more widespread with the creation of a formal counterintelligence program near the end of the decade. Understanding the use of this technique by the FBI is crucial to understanding the nature of COINTELPRO and acknowledging the added constraints that LGBT activists and their allies in the movement faced in their efforts to advance racial and sexual-orientation equality.

NOTES

1. This work is at the intersection of the historiographies of the FBI’s investigations of and counterintelligence actions against the civil rights and Black Power movements and gays and lesbians. It is also at the intersection of the historiographies of African American and LGBT histories more

generally. Works on the FBI and African Americans include David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981); Kenneth O'Reilly, "Racial Matters": *The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960–1972* (New York: Free Press, 1989); Clayborne Carson, *Malcolm X: The FBI File*, with David Gallen (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1991); Michael Friedly, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The FBI File*, with David Gallen (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1993); Kenneth O'Reilly, *Black Americans: The FBI Files*, with David Gallen (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1994); William J. Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015). Works on the FBI and gays and lesbians include Athan Theoharis, *J. Edgar Hoover, Sex, and Crime: An Historical Antidote* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995) and Douglas M. Charles, *Hoover's War on Gays: Exposing the FBI's "Sex Deviates" Program* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2015). Works on COINTELPRO include Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1988/1990); Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars against Dissent in the United States*, 2d ed. (Boston: South End Press, 1990/2002); David Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Seth Rosenfeld, *Subversives: The FBI's War on Student Radicals, and Reagan's Rise to Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012). Previous scholarship on the role of LGBT activists in the African American civil rights movement consists primarily of biographies: Jervis Anderson, Daniel Levine, and John D'Emilio on Bayard Rustin; W. J. Weatherby, James Campbell, David Leeming, and Herb Boyd on James Baldwin; Sara Azaransky and Patricia Bell-Scott on Pauli Murray; Martin Duberman on Barbara Deming and David McReynolds; William H. Chafe and Richard Cummings on Allard Lowenstein; Constance Curry and Minion K. C. Morrison on Aaron Henry, and more. Nonbiographical works in this area include James T. Sears, *Lonely Hunters: An Oral History of Lesbian and Gay Southern Life, 1948–1968* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Michael G. Long, *Martin Luther King Jr., Homosexuality, and the Early Gay Rights Movement: Keeping the Dream Straight?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Stacy Braukman, *Communists and Perverts under the Palms: The Johns Committee in Florida, 1956–1965* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012).

2. James Campbell, "James Baldwin and the FBI," *The Threepenny Review* 77 (1999): 11.

3. LHM [letterhead memorandum], John Edgar Hoover, October 28, 1963, "Memo for the Attorney General Re: COMMUNIST PARTY, USA; NEGRO QUESTION; COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN RACIAL MATTERS, INTERNAL SECURITY-C," FBI 100-HQ-3-116. Where possible, subfile numbers have been noted. However, in many cases, handwritten subfile numbers are too light or unreadable. Also, please note that letters attributed to the director may not always have been written directly by Hoover. All files are HQ [sent from FBI headquarters] unless otherwise specified.

4. LHM, John Edgar Hoover, June 4, 1965, "MEMO FOR THE ATTORNEY GENERAL RE: BAYARD RUSTIN; SECURITY MATTER—COMMUNIST," FBI 100-HQ-442529. The New York office disagreed with Hoover about the value of this information. In its December 1963 report, the New York special agent in charge (SAC) found "there has been no information from this source which would indicate that BAYARD RUSTIN has come under the influence of the Communist Party in connection with his civil rights activities." The following month, the agent concluded, "It is felt that the information which has been received from this source has not been of sufficient value to warrant its being continued." Still, surveillance continued for years after that. See Memo, SAC New York to Director, December 12, 1963, FBI 100-HQ-3-116-630; Memo, SAC New York to Director, January 13, 1964, FBI 100-HQ-3-116-791.

5. LHM, John Edgar Hoover, June 4, 1965, "Memo for the Attorney General Re: Bayard Rustin; Security Matter—Communist," FBI 100-HQ-442529; LHM, John Edgar Hoover, November 26, 1965, "Memo for the Attorney General Re: Bayard Rustin; Security Matter—Communist," FBI 100-HQ-442529.
6. Memo, Fred J. Baumgardner to William C. Sullivan, January 25, 1966, FBI 100-HQ-158790-162.
7. Letter, Director to SAC New York, January 23, 1964, FBI 100-HQ-3-116-791.
8. Memo, Nicholas P. Callahan to John Mohr, November 21, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-158790-188. There is only one document from Rustin's file that indicates it was copied to the Sex Deviates File. It deals with a request by Representative John J. Rooney for information on Rustin's "morals charge," which the FBI agreed to provide him on a confidential basis. See Memo, Nicholas P. Callahan to John Mohr, September 19, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-158790, 105-HQ-34074-34.
9. John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 348–49.
10. Memo, SAC New York to Director, January 7, 1958, FBI 100-HQ-425266-5.
11. Memo, SAC New York to Director, May 8, 1958, FBI 100-HQ-425266-V; Memo, SAC New York to Director, December 9, 1958, FBI 100-HQ-425266-19; Letter, SAC New York to Director, April 28, 1958, FBI 100-HQ-425266-V.
12. Letter, Director to SAC New York, March 26, 1964, FBI 100-HQ-425266.
13. Letter, Director to SAC New York, April 21, 1964, FBI 100-HQ-425266.
14. Ibid.
15. Airtel, SAC New York to Director, March 25, 1964, FBI 100-HQ-3-104-34.
16. Letter, Director to SAC New York, March 26, 1964, FBI 100-HQ-3-104-34-651.
17. Letter, Director to SAC New York, April 21 1964, FBI 100-HQ-3-104-34-675.
18. Memo, SAC New York to Director, April 10 1964, FBI 100-HQ-3-104-34-651; Memo, SAC New York to Director, May 7, 1964, FBI 100-HQ-3-104-34-651.
19. Report, "JAMES ARTHUR BALDWIN," March 26, 1964, FBI 62-HQ-108763.
20. Airtel, SAC New York to Director, October 7, 1963, FBI 100-HQ-146553-42.
21. Memo, [redacted] Supervisor, #12 to SAC New York, May 29, 1963, FBI 100-HQ-146553-18.
22. Memo, Milton A. Jones to Cartha DeLoach, July 20, 1964, FBI 62-HQ-108763-30.
23. Cover Page, Info re JAMES BALDWIN, April 26, 1966, FBI 100-HQ-146553-215.
24. Report, [redacted], "JAMES ARTHUR BALDWIN," May 26, 1967, FBI 62-HQ-108763.
25. Airtel, SAC New York to Director, December 28, 1967, FBI 100-HQ-146553-279.
26. LHM, "James Arthur Baldwin," February 12, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-146553-280.
27. Airtel, SAC New York to Director, January 3, 1964, FBI 100-HQ-146553-84.
28. Ibid.
29. Letter, SA [redacted] to SAC New York, January 22, 1964, FBI 100-HQ-146553-102.
30. LHM, "Lorraine Vivian Hansberry Nemiroff," May 11, 1964, FBI 100-393031. See also William J. Maxwell, "Total Literary Awareness: How the FBI Pre-Read African American Writing," *American Reader* 1, no. 1 (2013): <http://theamericanreader.com/total-literary-awareness-how-the-fbi-pre-read-african-american-writing>; Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes*.
31. Letter, [redacted] to J. Edgar Hoover, August 6, 1969, FBI 105-HQ-133712-7. A request for reprocessing revealed that no further information was kept on Barbara Deming.

32. Allard Lowenstein file, FBI 105-HQ-103168.
33. Will Brantley, "The Surveillance of Georgia Writer and Civil Rights Activist Lillian Smith: Another Story from the Federal Bureau of Investigation," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (2001): 59, 63, 80.
34. "Hitchhiker Makes Charge: State NAACP President to Be Tried in Cleveland," *Clarksdale Press Register*, March 5, 1962, 1; "FBI Investigation Asked: NAACP President Raps 'Plot' by Officers," *Clarksdale Press Register*, March 7, 1962, 12. File 157-HQ-866 is an investigation of threats on Aaron Henry's life made by Theodore Allison Carr; 157-HQ-1081, an investigation into violations of voting rights in Mississippi; and 157-HQ-4956, an investigation of a death threat against Aaron Henry made by KKK member Jack M. Helm. None of the files makes any reference to sexual orientation.
35. Teletype, Director to SACs Washington Field et al., May 22, 1979, FBI 161-HQ-14258-1.
36. "NAACP Executive Arrested in District," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), October 24, 1972, FBI 157-HQ-17138, 105-HQ-34074-54-?.
37. Teletype, SAC Boston to SAC New York, January 3, 1967, FBI 140-HQ-33958-6.
38. Report, Boston Field Office, January 3, 1967, FBI 140-HQ-33958.
39. Memo, Cartha DeLoach to Clyde Tolson, April 4, 1967, FBI 140-HQ-33958-36.
40. Ibid.
41. Report, New York Field Office, "IGAL ROODENKO," February 24, 1972, FBI 100-HQ-369206. This report was copied into the Sex Deviates File 105-HQ-34074-34.
42. Airtel, SAC New York to Director, November 27, 1963, FBI 61-3176-3958; LHM, "Laplois Ashford Youth Secretary National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," November 27, 1963, FBI 61-HQ-3176.
43. Theoharis, *Hoover, Sex, and Crime*, 24.
44. Athan Theoharis, *From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1991), 330–31.
45. O'Reilly, "Racial Matters," 7–8, 148.
46. Theoharis, *Hoover, Sex, and Crime*, 98.
47. Ibid., 99.
48. O'Reilly, *Black Americans*, 48–49.
49. Letter, Director to SAC Albany, August 25, 1967, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1.
50. Airtel, Director to SAC Albany, March 4, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006-19. Underlining in original.
51. Memo, SAC Charlotte to Director, April 4, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006-77.
52. Ibid.
53. Memo, George C. Moore to William C. Sullivan, April 17, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006.
54. Airtel, SAC San Francisco to Director, April 3, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006.
55. Airtel, SAC Chicago to Director, April 22, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006.
56. Jim Harvey's identity is known because a document with a letter to reporters indicating that one of the boycott's leaders is a homosexual was sent to HQ and HQ's response included one line with the name unredacted, saying, "Chicago has suggested four anonymous letters be sent to local newspapermen giving them lead material regarding Harvey's background." This appears to be an oversight that occurred because his name was not written in all caps, as is traditionally done. See Memo, SAC Chicago to Director, November 22, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006-433; and Letter, Director to SAC Chicago, December 10, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006-433.

57. Donald Mosby, "Black Students Plan Big Walkout Today: Fifth Week of School Turmoil Here," *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 14, 1968; Faith C. Christmas, "Boycotters 'Bury' School Bd. in Loop Rite," *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 29, 1968; "Malcolm X Society to Meet Wednesday," *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 19, 1968.

58. "Expect Teachers to Join City-Wide School Boycott," *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 21, 1968; Faith C. Christmas, "700 Teachers Join Second School Boycott: Black Influence Demanded during Peaceful Protest," *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 22, 1968; Christmas, "Boycotters 'Bury' School Bd. in Loop Rite."

59. Memo, SAC Chicago to Director, November 22, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006-433.

60. Ibid. In the letter from the director authorizing the office to send the letters, agents were told to provide more specific information to reporters and give them leads to make a bigger story out of it. See Letter, Director to SAC Chicago, December 10, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006-433.

61. Memo, SAC Chicago to Director, November 22, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006-433.

62. Memo, SAC Chicago to Director, December 30, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006-559.

63. Ibid. It should be noted that the bureau's use of the term "sex pervert" did not always indicate homosexuality and must be examined in context. For example, actor and activist Jean Seberg's FBI file makes frequent mention of her as a "sex pervert" but seems to connote promiscuity or engaging in interracial relationships. For example, "Miss SEBERG is a sex pervert who has been seeing a good deal of SAMMY DAVIS, JR., in recent weeks and reportedly has been romantically linked with LEE MARVIN, a movie co-star, in recent months." Also, "She is reportedly a sex pervert and is presently pregnant by Raymond Hewitt of the Black Panther Party." This information was cross-listed in the FBI's infamous Sex Deviates File (105-HQ-34074), indicating that it contained information beyond homosexuality. See, for example, Memo, SAC Omaha to Director, March 24, 1970, FBI 157-HQ-13876-26, 105-HQ-34074-36; Memo, George C. Moore to William C. Sullivan, April 14, 1970, FBI 157-HQ-13876-28; Memo, Milton A. Jones to Thomas Bishop, May 14, 1970, FBI 157-HQ-13876-30; Memo, George C. Moore to Charles Brennan, August 28, 1970, FBI 157-HQ-13876-32.

64. Memo, SAC Chicago to Director, January 16, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-608. To make the letter readable, each error has not been noted with [sic]. Authority to send the letter was granted in Letter, Director to SAC Chicago, January 30, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-608.

65. Letter, Director to SAC Boston, January 29, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006. This document lists Carambo by name. The chain of documents that follow that refer to the bureau letter to Boston on January 29, 1969, then have his name redacted. This is likely an oversight in the redacting process.

66. Memo, SAC Boston to Director, August 5, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1176; Letter, Director to SAC Boston, September 18, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1278.

67. Memo, SAC Boston to Director, October 8, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1340.

68. Report, Chicago Field Office, December 6, 1967, FBI 100-HQ-439190-9-34X10.

69. Memo, SAC Boston to Director, October 8, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1340.

70. Letter, Director to SAC Boston, November 7, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006.

71. Memo, SAC Boston to Director, November 17, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1429. Authorization to send the anonymous communication appears in Letter, Director to SAC Boston, December 5, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1429. Underlining in original.

72. Memo, SAC San Francisco to Director, December 4, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1496.

73. Memo, SAC Los Angeles to Director, January 28, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006.
74. Ibid.
75. Memo, SAC Los Angeles to Director, September 18, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1287, enclosure. "Hyp" is used to describe someone who is addicted to narcotics, wherein "hyp" refers to a hypodermic syringe. See Jonathon Green, *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang* (London, England: Sterling Publishing, 2005), 758.
76. Memo, SAC Miami to Director, May 28, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1807.
77. Airtel, SAC Miami to Director, August 25, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1256.
78. Memo, SAC Miami to Director, July 28, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006.
79. Airtel, SAC Charlotte to Director, October 26, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2034. This action was authorized in Airtel, Director to SAC Charlotte, November 2, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2034. In 1977, a special review committee tried to make amends for its actions in COINTELPRO and planned to notify 182 targets of the program, one of whom was Purcell Little. Teletype, Director to all SACs, June 24, 1977, FBI 157-HQ-6109-182; Teletype, Director to SAC Charlotte, September 21, 1977, FBI 157-HQ-6109-185.
80. Report, Charlotte Office, January 22, 1971, FBI 105-HQ-165706-8-404.
81. Teletype, SAC Charlotte to Director, SAC San Francisco, and SAC New York, March 3, 1971, FBI 105-HQ-165706-8-450; Airtel, SAC Charlotte to Director, March 10, 1971, FBI 105-HQ-165706-8-468.
82. Airtel, SAC Charlotte to Director, April 5, 1972, FBI 105-HQ-165706-8-633.
83. Teletype, Director to SACs Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Newark, New Haven, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, WFO, August 6, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1906.
84. Memo, SAC San Diego to Director, February 17, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006.
85. Airtel, Director to SACs San Francisco, New Haven, August 20, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1944.
86. Airtel, SAC San Francisco to Director, September 8, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2002.
87. Teletype, SAC San Francisco to Director and SACs Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New Haven, New York, and WFO, August 12, 1970, FBI 105-HQ-165429-73; Teletype, SAC San Francisco to Director and SACs Boston, Los Angeles, New Haven, New York, and WFO, August 21, 1970, FBI 105-HQ-165429-117; Airtel, SAC San Francisco to Director, August 25, 1970, FBI 105-HQ-165429-126; Airtel, SAC San Francisco to Director, August 26, 1970, FBI 105-HQ-165429-116; Huey Newton, *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1995), 152.
88. Airtel, SAC San Francisco to Director, August 26, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1971. Authority to send the letters "deploring BPP link-up with homosexual organizations as unmanly and not 'revolutionary'" was granted in Airtel, Director to SAC San Francisco, September 9, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1971.
89. Airtel, SAC San Francisco to Director, August 31, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1972. The bureau removed any obscene language from its messages and placed the words on an administrative sheet that listed the obscene words along with the page and line on which they appeared.
90. Ibid.
91. Airtel, SAC WFO to Director, December 15, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2136. Authority to send the letter was granted in Airtel, Director to SAC WFO, December 18, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2136.
92. Airtel, SAC WFO to Director, January 11, 1971, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2162. Authority to send the letter was granted in Airtel, Director to SACs Los Angeles, San Francisco, WFO, January 19, 1971, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2162.

93. Airtel, SAC San Francisco to Director, January 4, 1971, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2160.

94. Memo, SAC Columbia to Director, February 25, 1971, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2332. This letter was placed under consideration as the bureau felt there was already considerable dissension within the BPP. See Letter, Director to SAC Columbia, March 8, 1971, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2332.

95. Airtel, SAC Newark to Director, October 16, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-449698-31-33. While the Newark office was told to consider something different because it was similar to another letter it had sent and Newark SDS was no longer active, the office's subsequent report said it had mailed the letter. See Letter, Director to SAC Newark, October 23, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-449698-31-33; Memo, SAC Newark to Director, December 29, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-449698-31-34.

96. Perhaps the most vociferous proponents of the argument are Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall who are critical of those historians, like Athan Theoharis and Kenneth O'Reilly, who offer more modest estimations of the impact of COINTELPRO. See Churchill and Vander Wall, *COINTELPRO Papers*, xxi, xvi.

97. While attorney Jeffrey Haas's book is titled *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010), it contains no footnotes or endnotes to support the claim of FBI involvement, and the 2.5-page bibliography does not list any FBI files, though the author says the work is based on "hundreds of FBI documents" (367). In *Agents of Repression*, Churchill and Vander Wall acknowledge "FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] files and congressional investigations have not revealed any 'smoking guns'" (53), and their section on FBI assassinations has no citations. See Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*.

98. Roy Wilkins and Ramsey Clark, *Search and Destroy: A Report by the Commission of Inquiry into the Black Panthers and the Police* (New York: Metropolitan Applied Research Center, 1973), 31–34; *Iberia Hampton et al. v. Edward V. Hanrahan et al.*, U.S. Court of Appeals, 7th Circuit, 600 F. 2d 600, April 23, 1979, paras. 64, 68. Sgt. Groth admitted this in Edward Lee and Robert Wiedrich, "Hanrahan, Police Tell Panther Story," *Chicago Tribune*, December 11, 1969.

99. *Report of the January 1970 Grand Jury*, United States District Court, Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, 29.

100. Wilkins and Clark, *Search and Destroy*, 31–34.

101. *Report of the January 1970 Grand Jury*, 33.

102. Wilkins and Clark, *Search and Destroy*, 8, 242.

103. *Hampton v. Hanrahan*, paras. 83–84, 103. Part of the file documenting the investigation by the FBI into the Chicago Police Department's raid that resulted in the killing of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark is available in the FBI's online vault. The full file, FBI 44-HQ-4402, is held by the National Archives and numbers over fourteen thousand pages. It consists of communications between various field offices, the Laboratory Division, the Intelligence Division, and the Office of Legal Counsel; and the results are summarized in the *Report of the January 1970 Grand Jury* (National Archives and Records Administration [NARA] to author, January 19, 2016). Beyond that, the COINTELPRO–Black Nationalist–Hate Groups file for the Springfield (IL) Field Office, in whose jurisdiction Mark Clark was based, contains no reference to Mark Clark (NARA to author, January 7, 2016).

104. Justice Lewis Powell, *Hanrahan v. Hampton*, App. to Pet. for Cert. in No. 79-914 (1980), 193a. The case was finally settled in 1982. Churchill and Vander Wall claim, "District Judge John F. Grady determined that there was sufficient evidence of a conspiracy to deprive the Panthers of their civil rights to award the plaintiffs \$1.85 million in damages" (*COINTELPRO Papers*, 140). However, there was no ruling and no admission of guilt, and details of the negotiations were secret. See Tim

Franklin and William B. Crawford Jr., "County OKs Panther Deaths Settlement," *Chicago Tribune*, November 2, 1982.

105. US (pronounced like the opposite of *them*) was the cultural nationalist organization based in Los Angeles and led by Ron Karenga (Ronald McKinley Everett). It provided an ideological contrast with the Panthers and competed with them for adherents.

106. Sources that subscribe to this myth include Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin Jr., *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 6, 211, 218–19. For similar accounts, see Curtis J. Austin, *Up against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 226–30, 234–36, 337–38; Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, 77; Churchill and Vander Wall, *COINTELPRO Papers*, 131–33; Winston A. Grady-Willis, "The Black Panther Party: State Repression and Political Prisoners," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1998), 370; and Huey P. Newton, *War against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America* (New York: Harlem River Press, 1996), 11–12, 78–79.

107. Memo, SAC Los Angeles to Director, November 29, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006-466.

108. Memo, SAC Los Angeles to Director, December 18, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006-541.

109. Memo, SAC Los Angeles to Director, January 2, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-567.

110. Memo, SAC Los Angeles to Director, February 3, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-647; Memo, SAC Los Angeles to Director, February 17, 1969, FBI 100-448006-677; Memo, SAC Los Angeles to Director, February 26, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-709; Memo, SAC Los Angeles to Director, March 3, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006.

111. David J. Garrow, "Picking Up the Books: The New Historiography of the Black Panther Party," *Reviews in American History* 34, no. 4 (2007): 666.

112. Letter, Director to SAC New Haven, August 25, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1190.

113. Airtel, SAC San Francisco to Director, September 8, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2002; Airtel, SAC Los Angeles to Director, September 22, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1994. In another instance, the bureau denied permission to send a letter saying Panther men were having sex with Nation of Islam women because it "could provide impetus required to touch off acts of physical violence." See Letter, Director to SAC New York, January 6, 1971, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2147.

114. See, for example, Letter, Director to SAC New Haven, January 8, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1561; and Airtel, Director to SAC Cincinnati, February 18, 1971, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2221. The bureau also rejected many proposals because they might have resulted in violence. See, for example, Airtel, Director to SACs Baltimore, Detroit, Los Angeles, New Haven, San Francisco, Washington Field, September 16, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2002; Letter, Director to SAC Chicago, November 6, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2042; and Airtel, Director to SAC Los Angeles, February 18, 1971, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2232.

115. Airtel, Director to SAC San Francisco, May 27, 1969, FBI 100-448006-964.

116. Ibid.

117. Seth Rosenfeld, "New FBI Files Show Wide Range of Black Panther Informant's Activities," *Reveal News*, June 9, 2015, <https://www.revealnews.org>, accessed July 10, 2016.

118. Airtel, SAC Los Angeles to Director, September 22, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1994.

119. Airtel, SAC San Francisco to Director, September 29, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-2001.

120. Letter, Director to SAC Los Angeles, September 30, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1994.

121. Airtel, Director to SAC Baltimore, September 17, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1964.

122. The number 295 is drawn from the Church Committee hearings. For works citing this figure, see, for example, O'Reilly, "*Racial Matters*," 291; Austin, *Up against the Wall*, 247; Bloom and Martin, *Black against Empire*, 210. My assessment counts only those actions documented and approved in the COINTELPRO file for "Black Nationalist-Hate Groups" or "Black Extremists." Other counter-intelligence actions against civil rights or Black Power groups at this time that may be documented elsewhere are not included.

123. Memo, SAC New York to Director, February 7, 1969, 100-HQ-449698-34-62; Airtel, Director to SAC New York, February 14, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-449698-34-62; Memo, SAC New York to Director, June 30, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-449698-34.

124. See also Memo, SAC New York to Director, January 21, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-449698-34-54; Memo, SAC New York to Director, March 31, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-449698-34; Memo, SAC New York to Director, May 18, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-449698-34-82; Letter, Director to SAC New York, June 1, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-449698-34-82; Memo, Director to SAC New York, June 30, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-449698-34-83; Memo, SAC New York to Director, July 24, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-449698-34-85; Letter, Director to SAC New York, July 31, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-449698-34-85.

125. Memo, SAC New York to Director, April 2, 1971, FBI 100-HQ-449698-34-91. This was authorized in Letter, Director to SAC New York, April 9, 1971, FBI 100-HQ-449698-34-91.

126. Letter, Director to SAC Los Angeles, October 31, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006-325. This was similarly noted in the White Hate Groups COINTELPRO where the director said, "We are utilizing this technique on a highly selective basis so as not to saturate our targets with anonymous communications and thereby detract from the impact of same when utilized." See Airtel, Director to SAC Birmingham, September 30, 1966, FBI 157-HQ-9-4-70.

127. Letter, Director to SAC Omaha, October 23, 1968, FBI 100-HQ-448006-350.

128. In the instance of a proposed pamphlet called "Storm Warnings," concern was expressed that the bureau might be violating libel laws. The St. Louis office responded, "The statutes further stipulate 'truth is a complete defense' against any libel charges. Since each statement in the pamphlet contains a basis in fact any libel action is, therefore, negated." See Memo, SAC St. Louis to Director, August 29, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006; Letter, Director to SAC St. Louis, September 19, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1237.

129. Memo, SAC San Diego to Director, February 3, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1613. This action was explicitly carried out as the San Diego office later wrote, "The rumor that [redacted] is a homosexual has been instigated." See Memo, SAC San Diego to Director, FBI, March 2, 1970, FBI 100-HQ-448006-1686. Moreover, the initial letter appears to be one of the only instances in which a reference to homosexuality was clearly redacted even though the name was also redacted, giving rise to the possibility that there are other instances of this tactic that do not currently appear in available files.

130. Airtel, SAC Chicago to Director, April 30, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-895.

131. Memo, SAC St. Louis to Director, February 14, 1969, FBI 100-HQ-448006-727.

132. Ibid.