

J. Edgar Hoover's War on Black America

By Lee A. Daniels
NNPA Columnist

By the early 1970s, Black Americans could reasonably say they had emerged victorious from their long struggle with America's internal evil empire: the regime of legalized segregation in the South.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had given Blacks in both the South and the North the tools – the power of the federal government at their backs and the ballot in their hands – to, at long last, make America a democracy in fact, not just rhetoric.

It was then they got proof that America's racist power structure had long had a secret ally at the very top of the national government. It was J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the man who for nearly half a century had in some ways been, except for the president, the single most powerful government official in the country.

That's one of the many



Book by Betty Medsger

ting murder. Hoover would let no law stand in his way of trying to establish a state police-like structure beneath America's ostensibly democratic form of government.

(The Central Intelligence Agency, whom the power-mad Hoover always distrusted, also had its own secret domestic-spying program. Beginning in the early 1970s, that, too, would be exposed.)

That was especially true regarding Black

all) of them.

Another ironic facet of the story of the Media Burglary is that the FBI, which boasted of being the greatest law-enforcement agency in the world, never did identify, much less arrest these otherwise, law-abiding citizens, even though most of them for years continued to live in the Greater Philadelphia area.

Betty Medsger's *The Burglary* offers many powerful lessons worth studying any time of

the year but especially for Black History Month. For one thing, it rebukes those who contend Black Americans' history no longer needs any special attention because we already know everything about it—as well as those who disparage Black Studies as nothing but the study of “victimization.”

On the one hand, *The Burglary* tells us that we have yet to learn the full story of the multiple layers of national as well as state and local governmental power that were arrayed against Black Americans in their quest for full citizenship

even after the civil rights acts of the 1960s were enacted.

But we also shouldn't ignore one of the things that fact underscores: Despite the most far-reaching and vicious efforts of the hydra-headed White racist power structure, Black Americans and their allies among other Americans nonetheless broke the regime of legalized and de facto apartheid J. Edgar Hoover through his “secret FBI” helped maintain.

In other words, they were, as preceding generations had been, true to the spirit of

the words penned by the 20th century writer and poet Sterling Brown:

“The strong men ... coming on/ The strong men gittin' stronger./Strong men .../Stronger ...”

Lee A. Daniels is a long-time journalist based in New York City. His latest book is Last Chance: The Political Threat to Black America.

Hoover would let no law stand in his way of trying to establish a state police-like structure beneath America's ostensibly democratic form of government

powerful truths underscored by Betty Medsger's new book, *The Burglary: The Discovery of J. Edgar Hoover's Secret FBI*. The book explores how the burglary in early 1971 of the agency's field office in Media, Pa., near Philadelphia, by eight antiwar activists led to the unraveling of the Hoover's decades-long “secret war” against American democracy.

Hoover died in mid-1972, when news reports about the few files that had become public had already begun to destroy his reputation as an honorable public servant. But it wasn't until Congressional hearings in the mid-1970s that the public would learn Hoover's monstrous behavior included wholesale spying on hundreds of thousands of citizens by both FBI agents and their army of, literally, thousands and thousands of informants; the planting of rumors and false information to destroy the reputations of individuals and organizations; and deliberate criminal acts, from burglaries, to trying to provoke violent clashes between Black militant groups, to aiding and abet-

Americans. The details here of Hoover's COINTELPRO campaign against the established civil rights groups, Black militant organizations, Black students on college campuses, and ordinary citizens living in Black ghettos are stunning even to this writer, who's long known of the program's existence.

Those details show that the FBI, driven by Hoover's “savage” racism – and especially his hatred of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – surrounded Black Americans (and all Americans), whether “militant” or not, with a secret-police-like structure that rivaled those of the states of the Soviet Union.

Several authors have powerfully explored this terrain over the years. But Medsger's gripping narrative provides new and shocking details in part because in 1971 she was one of the very small group of journalists the “Media Burglars” anonymously began distributing the stolen FBI files to. They had remained anonymous all these years until she, with their permission, in this book reveals the identities of most (but not

Help Shape Your Future! Turner School of Construction Management

For over 40 years Turner has offered this program nationally at no cost to minority-owned, women-owned, disadvantaged and emerging small businesses in the construction industry. Individuals enrolled in the program gain insights and meaningful tools that help them target their business for quality and growth while developing new strategic business relationships.

Now Accepting Applications for the Spring 2015 Session!

If you would like to receive an application, please contact Marilyn Morrison, mmorrison@tcco.com, (503) 226-9825



Registration Deadline is January 30, 2015

Classes will be held Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4pm-6pm at Portland Community College in the Continuous Learning for Individuals, Management, and Business (CLIMB) Center beginning Tuesday, February 3.