

Activity: Stealing J. Edgar Hoover's Secrets

Background: Explore the discovery of the Cointelpro program and its impact on public discourse and policy shifts surrounding the delicate balance between the government's ability to maintain national security measures while respecting individual privacy and civil liberties.

Objective: Evaluate how government actions affect individual privacy and civil liberties, analyze the historical and political effects of these actions, and explore the ethical considerations surrounding government surveillance.

Reflect and Predict: In the columns below, reflect on your takeaways from the Four-Corners activity by responding to the reflection question.

Reflect: After participating in the Four-Corners activity, were your own views on the balance between national security and individual privacy challenges?

Do you feel more certain or unsure about your stance, and why?

Watch the Retro Report film [Stealing J. Edgar Hoover's Secrets](#) and listen for key moments to better understand the impact of the discovery of the Cointelpro program.

What were the motivations behind the break-in at the F.B.I. office in Media, Pa.?

How did the break-in expose the Cointelpro program and activities?

Why did the publication of the Cointelpro program and activities cause outrage?

What changed about the F.B.I. following the publication and exposure of Cointelpro?

What are some of the negative perceptions about government surveillance that came to light after the break-in and subsequent news stories?

Further Investigation: Read more about the Cointelpro program, and examine some of the now public files

compiled by the FBI. Read the article “[“Discredit, disrupt, and destroy”: FBI records acquired by the Library reveal violent surveillance of Black leaders civil rights organizations](#)” | Berkeley Library

What were the stated objectives of Cointelpro concerning the civil rights movement?

What impact did the F.B.I.'s Cointelpro activities have on the civil rights movement and its leaders?

How might the F.B.I.'s labeling of civil rights groups as "subversive" or "extremist" have influenced public perception of the civil rights movement during the 1960s?

Examine some of the Cointelpro documents that have been released by the FBI.
[Cointelpro – F.B.I. Records: The Vault](#)

Choose a set of records to view. State which group you chose, why you chose it, and paste the link in the box to the right.

After a brief analysis of the documents, describe one thing you learned and pose one question you have after viewing some of the documents.

Think-Pair-Share: Consider the following questions. Discuss your responses with a partner before sharing what you discussed with the class. Record your answers below.

How is the break-in comparable to other leaks, like the Pentagon papers or the information about N.S.A. surveillance that was leaked by Edward Snowden?

Why might some Americans agree that Cointelpro tactics and programs are necessary to ensure national security?

Why might some Americans argue that Cointelpro tactics and government surveillance of its citizens is never justifiable?

How important is government transparency and accountability to you? Why or why not?