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Thurmond, Lennon share history

by Sara Ladenheim
Editor In Chief

J. Strom Thurmond and J. Edgar Hoover have more in common than a first initial in their names.

While ruling the FBI with an iron fist and utter secrecy that could be likened to the Gestapo, Hoover successfully made Hollywood accountable for certain actions that were deemed "anti-American" in the 1950s and 1960s. Film studios, writers, actors and musicians were all subjected to his prying G-men and their questionable tactics. These men were then brought before Thurmond's Judiciary Committee, where their American-ness would be judged.

Thurmond was particularly interested in Hoover's preoccupation with anything Kennedy.

After Kennedy's assassination, though, Thurmond switched political sides and became Republican Barry Goldwater's key supporter and segregation lobbyist.

The resurgence of the Vietnam conflict and the growing unrest of the 1960s brought Thurmond and Hoover together one last time for an incident that would lead to one of the most famous visa-holders in the country being brought before the Senate Judiciary Committee to explain why he should remain in the United States.

Hoover had been preoccupied with the Beatles for most of the last years of his life.

Their initial "invasion" had been a subject of interest to Hoover.

He didn't like their haircuts, according to recently publicized FBI files, and thought they would bring nothing but trouble to the United States with their brand of rock 'n' roll.

Thurmond had been too busy in the latter part of the 1960s to concern himself with rock 'n' roll.

Actively participating in Goldwater's 1964 campaign and later providing an instrumental endorsement of Richard Nixon in 1968, Thurmond's interests were focused more on the Republican Party, as he had recently (1964) become leader of the Southern Caucus.

After he successfully maneuvered the "Southern strategy" to win votes among segregationists and integrationists alike, Thurmond turned his attention to his primary jobs as a senator: Judiciary Committee and Armed Services Committee member.

It was at this point, weeks before Hoover's death and the last true Beatles album, that Thurmond, Lennon and Hoover all came together.

Hoover's report on Lennon fell on the desk of the Judiciary Committee members two weeks before Hoover died.

It remained a mere passing of words for nearly a year and a half after his death.

Thurmond had been the only member of the committee to contact Hoover prior to his passing on the issue of Lennon and his possible conspiracy against the United States.

Lennon had been accused by Hoover of creating anti-American sentiments in his militant anti-war activism.

That activism was compounded by Hoover's insistence that marijuana was a leading reason Lennon's behavior could be so altered.

It was true that Lennon was an anti-war activist and had participated in several rallies, most notably in Toronto, Canada, in 1971, two years after Hoover's death.

His previous anti-Vietnam statements had been released after the 1968

Democratic Convention in Chicago, and merely stated his sympathies for those who were "denied peace."

Thurmond paid attention to Lennon and decided to pursue Lennon's intentions in America.

Launching an investigation into the ex-Beatle's purpose in this country, Thurmond began one of the most interesting twists of 20th-century fate. Lennon was, at first, highly cooperative with the senator and his intentions.

However, he remained committed to an anti-war campaign.

Marching at the 1972 Republican National Convention in Miami, Lennon showed the world he was committed to peace and that he wanted Nixon to realize this as he was seeking re-election.

Thurmond wasn't pleased and found enough evidence to hold a committee hearing on immigration and the status of non-resident aliens. Lennon, who had long been a part-time resident of New York City's Dakota Apartments, was seeking to stabilize his life and apply for citizenship.

His wife, Yoko Ono, was caught in a bitter custody battle that required her permanent status as an American citizen to be finalized.

Lennon, who had proper work permits to record and produce music in the United States, was eager to become a citizen and finalize his love for America, particularly New York.

Thurmond called Lennon to testify, and in a seven-day testimonial, Lennon told of his past use of marijuana, his love of music, peace, life and his wife, and his desire to remain in America.

By the end of the hearings, Thurmond had actually been convinced by



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Sen. Strom Thurmond during the longest filibuster in Senate history, against the 1957 Civil Rights Bill. He spoke for 24 hours and 18 minutes against the bill.

the music hero that his being in the United States was justifiable.

The committee voted to allow Lennon to remain in the United States as a permanent resident alien, with the guarantee that he wouldn't be deported unless he was arrested or found to have delivered fraudulent testimony to the committee.

Lennon remained in New York for the remainder of the 1970s and released two more top-10 albums.

He was working on another album, "Double Fantasy," when he was gunned down Dec. 1, 1980, in the country he had grown to call his home.

Sen. Strom Thurmond sent a wreath of red roses to Lennon's memorial service at Strawberry Fields, as it came to be known, in Manhattan's Central Park.



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