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Religious scholar to discuss FBI roots in white Christian nationalism

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An understanding of the history of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and its deep roots in white Christian nationalism does not exist without an understanding of J. Edgar Hoover, who ruled the agency for nearly half a century.

To discuss the details — many of which were revealed in newly declassified FBI documents — Lerone A. Martin, a religious studies professor at Stanford University, will visit UC Santa Barbara to present his latest book, [The Gospel of J. Edgar Hoover: How the FBI Aided and Abetted the Rise of White Christian Nationalism](#) (Princeton University Press, 2023).

As director of the federal law enforcement agency from 1924–1972, Hoover shaped the policies of his public office with his own strict Christian upbringing, argues Martin, who also directs Stanford’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute. Not only did Hoover have FBI agents attend worship services and practices as a way to establish “religious identity as being synonymous with American

citizenship,” Martin explains, the agency connected with conservative Christian groups, especially white evangelicals, to promote white Christian nationalism “as the only form that would keep America safe during the Cold War.”

While propping up white Christian nationalism, the FBI policed other forms of religion and politics in America, Martin adds, “most notably by going after Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and attempting to discredit the civil rights movement . . . as a communist subversion.”

Martin will discuss his findings and take questions at a lecture hosted by the Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Ethics, Religion, and Public Life, from 5–6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 20 at the Multicultural Center theater. The event is free and open to the public.

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