

Possible Essay or Debate Topics for the film *COINTELPRO 101*

Again, you know your situation and students best, and will no doubt come up with questions such for them to write about or discuss. Perhaps some of our suggestions will help spark your own.

What led the FBI and the US government to plan and implement the COINTELPRO program? Were the social movements for independence and civil rights, or the radical leftwing student and antiwar groups really such a threat? In addition to your own research and opinions, use examples from the film in your response.

Suppose that during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s COINTELPRO did not happen—and the FBI and other agencies did not engage in illegal actions directed against the rising social movements. What do you think might have happened? How might this country be different? Explain your reasoning.

Every government tries to suppress efforts to overthrow it, doesn't it? Some of these groups may have advocated for the overthrow of the government, so COINTELPRO was OK. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

COINTELPRO 101 includes a section on “political prisoners” in the United States, many of them imprisoned since the 1960s and 1970s as a result of COINTELPRO activities. Yet the US government routinely denies that there are political prisoners in the US while criticizing other nations. Analyze the cases of several of the prisoners referred to in the film, then provide your reasoned opinion on whether or not there are “political prisoners” in the US.

Do you think Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States? Why or why not?

At one point in the film Muhammad Ahmad (Max Stanford)—Founder of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) and professor at Temple University. comments briefly that “Martin Luther King had changed.” What do you think he meant by that?

In the film, his words are: “COINTELPRO was a governmental conspiracy to liquidate the revolutionary leadership of Black America. Because we were impacting upon the whole country, and the leadership had to be liquidated even up to Dr. King, because Dr. King had changed.”

In the film, Ricardo Romero says: “If it was COINTELPRO then, it is probably COINTELPRO now, maybe a different version, a different name. The same practice is to eliminate, intimidate, incarcerate, and terrorize a people.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

Do you think the “Patriot Act” is constitutional? Why or why not? In framing your answer refer to at least the 1st and 4th amendments to the Constitution and any other amendments or court decisions relevant to the question.