



The Boss: J. Edgar Hoover and the Great American Inquisition

Athan G. Theoharis, John Stuart Cox

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In 1925 J. Edgar Hoover secretly began to maintain in his own office the "Obscene File" and two other files which were kept separate from the FBI's central records system and which recorded accounts of sexual activities and damaging personal information on dissident activists, prominent leaders and personalities, even Presidents and First Ladies. In addition, Hoover had his aides keep "summary memoranda" on members of Congress reporting on their "subversive activities" and "immoral conduct." He also had aides create office files in which memoranda labeled "Do Not File" itemized illegal break-ins by agents authorized by Hoover; these "files" were also kept apart from the Bureau's central records and were regularly destroyed. Having cracked Hoover's secret filing systems, Athan G. Theoharis and John Stuart Cox present with unprecedented accuracy and comprehensive primary evidence the definitive biography of J. Edgar Hoover, the man who was the FBI for 48 years. The Boss draws on previously unknown and extremely sensitive Bureau files as well as interviews with Hoover family members, agents, politicians, and "targets" of FBI investigations to reveal the man, the administrator, and the power-monger who manipulated American politics for half a century. Although many relevant records were destroyed, the authors obtained access to office files maintained by Hoover and two of his key aides, Clyde Tolson and Louis Nichols, in addition to other sensitive records, such as the break-in file, index for authorized wire-taps and bugs, Hoover's directives to heads of FBI field offices and agents, and files pertaining to prominent personalities including Eleanor Roosevelt, John and Robert Kennedy, Attorneys General Harlan Stone and Homer Cummings. Throughout his tenure in office, Hoover promoted a positive image of G-men as efficient, professional, and apolitical. His own public persona is so well-known as to be a staple of the nation's mythology, it was, however, his personal zealotry against radical dissent (broadly defined) that motivated the Bureau's operations. His files reveal that more than Senator Joseph McCarthy, Hoover was instrumental in creating the anti-Communist paranoia that was called McCarthyism, but, the authors suggest, would have been more accurately named Hooverism. Under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI kept 25 million personal files that is, approximately one for every ten Americans. Author note: Athan G. Theoharis, Professor of History at Marquette University, is the author and editor of many books, including *Beyond the Hiss Case and Spying on Americans* (both published by Temple). John Stuart Cox is a freelance writer.

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