

# \$126-Million F.B.I. Building, Named for Hoover,

Building Viewed  
as Dullest of  
a Dull Lot

By PAUL GOLDBERGER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 30—

There is one small bit of color in the new J. Edgar Hoover Building on Pennsylvania Avenue here—in the rug and desk implements from

the office of J. Edgar Hoover, part of which has been re-created for the amusement (or

inspiration) of the tourists who are expected to flow through the new structure at the rate of 500,000 a year. Everything else in the building is so neutral that it can fairly be said that the color scheme runs the gamut from white to beige.

There are white vinyl floor tiles, white ceilings and white walls. The concrete facade is beige, and the paving block in the huge central court is a sort of murky grayish beige.

The absence of color would not in itself be so important were it not an indication of the utter banality that pervades every aspect of this design. The new headquarters of the Federal Bureau of Investigation is one of the dullest buildings in a city of dull buildings—an arrogant, overbearing concrete form that dares the visitor to come near.

## An 11-Story Structure

The building, designed by C. F. Murphy Associates of Chicago, is an 11-story structure of precast and cast-in-place concrete, lowered to seven stories along Pennsylvania Avenue to conform to height limitations suggested by the Pennsylvania Avenue Commission.

The lower wing is arranged around a trapezoidal courtyard; from afar, the massing suggests that the upper section was set down on four heavy piers atop the rear part of the courtyard.

It is awkward imagery, to say the least. In a certain sense, it derives from le Corbusier's great monastery at La Tourette, France, in 1955, one of the seminal buildings of the rough concrete school that has come to be called "brutalist." But le Corbusier's heavy sections atop piers were a knowing exploitation for a dramatic hillside site; here, the whole thing becomes pointless.

The visitor enters in the center of the Pennsylvania Avenue wing, passing under the structure into the central court, which the F.B.I. admits was designed more as a "staging area" for controlling tour than as anything else.

A vast concrete stair mounts to a terrace overlooking the courtyard; from there, two identical arcades, 20 feet high and lined with concrete columns, cut their useless and pretentious way through to the building.

## Dedicated in Washington

10-1-75  
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### White Walls and Emptiness

The halls offer endless vistas of white walls and empty space—it is obvious that none of the things that have been learned in the last few years about the role of warm materials and varied shapes, not to mention color, in the making of a good work penetrated the F.B.I.

How does a fiasco like this occur? The process of creating Federal architecture is so complicated that it is hard to describe at less than book length—but that is itself a large part of the problem. The F.B.I. building took 12 years to design and build, and most of those years were spent in pushing and pulling between several huge bureaucracies—the F.B.I., the General Services Administration, which acts as the official "client" for Federal buildings, and the architect's office itself. This situation was complicated by the F.B.I.'s interest in security as a priority, and the Pennsylvania Avenue Commission's role as yet another layer of bureaucracy, albeit one advocating better design.

Doubtless there will be some observers who will say that this is not so bad because it is, after all, an appropriate symbol of the F.B.I. True enough.

As the dedication program says, the building is a "fitting tribute to its namesake, Mr. Hoover. (Indeed, it is understood that the F.B.I. Director argued for an even more massive, closed structure than what was built.)

But, tempting as it is to pass off the F.B.I. building as an amusing reflection of government's banality, such a view remains unconvincing and cynical at bottom.

For a building exists to do more than symbolize the uses within; it must play an active role in the cityscape without. This building turns its back on the city and substitutes for responsible architecture a pompous, empty monumentality that is, in the end, not so much a symbol as a symptom—a symptom of something wrong in Government and just as wrong in architecture.



The New York Times/George Zook

Above: President Ford chatting with Clarence M. Kelley, F.B.I. director, as a color guard passed during ceremonies dedicating the J. Edgar Hoover Building, right, new headquarters for the bureau.

