

William Rusher

A Few Words In Defense of J. Edgar Hoover

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THE LEFT-LIBERAL coterie that has spent the past year chewing on the CIA and the FBI is now beginning to zero in on the late J. Edgar Hoover. In recent weeks we have been treated to a spate of loose allegations about past misconduct by the Bureau: information improperly suppressed, or alternatively wrongly leaked, and so forth. And, since the Bureau's long-time Director, J. Edgar Hoover, is dead,



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everyone has felt free to lay these supposed crimes at his door, and blacken his memory.

They had better be careful. Quite by accident I discovered, several years ago, that J. Edgar Hoover is a true hero to most Americans — as, I may add, he deserved to be.

When I was doing the "Advocates" shows on the National Educational Television

network back in 1971-72, we argued one week whether "J. Edgar Hoover should be replaced." My adversary took the affirmative, and his witnesses included a renegade FBI agent who sneered at Hoover and pooh-poohed the record of the Bureau under his long leadership.

For the negative, I had to rely on ex-agents too, since Mr. Hoover would not permit the FBI to lift a finger in its own public defense. Fortunately, there were plenty of men who had worked under him who were glad to speak up admirably in his behalf.

As usual, viewers were then invited to vote on the question. Ordinarily, anywhere from 4000 to 6000 postcards would come in; 7000 was treated as a big response. But this time we were inundated by 25,000 — and 18,000 of them opposed replacing Hoover. (1971-72)

SO, AS the mudgunners of the left go to work on J. Edgar Hoover, let us review the salient facts about this man, and try to understand how he earned his towering reputation. Let us remember, too, that he is dead, and cannot defend himself. His enemies can say whatever they wish, and hint at still more, without the slightest fear of a libel suit, or even of a response. While he lived, they watched their tongues more carefully.

Hoover headed the FBI from its basic reorganization in 1924 until his death in 1972: one of the longest careers on record in a single public office. Eight presidents of the United States, of both political parties, kept him on in the post, because they knew how crucial a job it was and how superbly well he performed it.

In the 1930s he led the drive against the criminal gangs of Dillinger, Karpis, etc. During World War II he kept Nazi efforts at espionage flat on their back. In the late 1940s and early 50s, he efficiently combed the Communists and their fellow-travelers out of government at the height of the Cold War. During the 1960s he fought valiantly against the violations of federal law that stained the civil rights struggle and that became the stock-in-trade of such groups as the Weathermen and the Panthers.

It is largely the battles of those last years that are being re-fought today. Hoover, for example, privately detested the late Martin Luther King Jr., not because of his civil rights stance but because of King's hospitality to card-carrying Communists in his movement. Not only did John and Robert Kennedy both know of the Bureau's surveillance of King in this connection, however, but Bobby actually authorized, as Attorney General, the wiretap of King's phone in the interest of U.S. security.

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UNQUESTIONABLY, HOOVER had — indeed, in his job he had to have — enormous power: mostly power conferred by skilled agents and advanced technology, and the power derived from the information these obtained.

Not one man in a thousand, perhaps even a million, wielding such power over a span of nearly half a century, could have resisted the temptation to use it to aggrandize himself beyond the dreams of avarice. But J. Edgar Hoover remained, to the end, a simple public servant who loved his country, served it superbly, and was a hero to generations of his superiors and subordinates.

And America, I predict, will honor his memory when the mouths of his posthumous detractors are stopped with dust.