

FBI's Hoover Assailed As a U.S. 'Rasputin'

Washington

Patrick Murphy, former head of four big city police departments, says J. Edgar Hoover was the "publicity-hungry Rasputin of American law enforcement" who did not deserve his reputation as a scourge of criminals.

Criticism of Hoover is nothing new these days, but seldom has it come from within the ranks of law enforcement officials.

In his new book, "Commissioner," Murphy says the late FBI director built up a seemingly impressive record of crime-busting by going after "cheap victories" with lots of publicity value.

"Assiduously avoiding such difficult law enforcement assignments as organized crime, narcotics trafficking, and street crime," Murphy writes, "Hoover put his money on such easy winners as kidnaping, where the criminals were usually dumb and clumsy and the crime was susceptible to solution within a short period of time."

Murphy served as chief or commissioner of police in New York — where, like his father and brother before him, he started as a patrolman — and in Detroit, Washington and Syracuse, N.Y.

He acknowledges that he and his colleagues lived in silence for years knowing of the Hoover abuses.

"Only those of us who have chosen to devote our lives to law enforcement, and who have had to suffer the suffocating presence of the bureau, possess the dubious

distinction of having had to live silently with the truth about this monstrosity," Murphy wrote.

"Our silence was advisable (if not wholly commendable) because of Hoover, who operated behind the scenes as the unquestioned Rasputin of American law enforcement."

Murphy's comments about Hoover and the FBI, although noteworthy considering their source, comprise just one segment of his book.

Most of the volume recounts his experiences as a reformer called to lead four police departments stained by corruption scandals.

The FBI, he says, is the "only completely professional law enforcement agency in the country," and he acknowledges that Hoover made many contributions to police work.

But he also accuses Hoover of a long list of sins, ranging from racism to establishing a relationship with local police based on "menace and mutual mistrust."

"To those of us concerned about the right of the American citizen to the best possible police service at every level, Hoover's transparent program to divide and conquer made him and his bureau the biggest single bureaucratic obstacle in the country to better law enforcement," Murphy says.

"His half century on the Mount Olympus of American law enforcement turned into an American nightmare."

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