

J. Edgar Hoover-- FBI Chief, 1924-72



Jack Anderson

J. EDGAR HOOVER died, as he would have wished, in harness.

When he took over the Federal Bureau of Investigation 48 years ago, it was loaded with hacks, misfits, drunks and courthouse hangers-on. In a remarkably brief time, he transformed it into a close-knit, effective organization with an "esprit de corps" exceeding that of the Marines.

Under Hoover's reign, agents were fired for drunkenness, for insubordination, even a few for homosexual behavior. But not a single FBI man ever tried to fix a case, defraud the taxpayers or sell out his country.

This amazing, scandal-free record was accomplished by hiring the best men available, training them well, convincing them they were the best, paying them top salaries, and then selling the public on the idea that the FBI is ready to protect the nation from internal emergency.

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ABOVE ALL, Hoover insisted upon discipline. FBI men, who were able to face down armed criminals, couldn't escape the gaze of Hoover. Small disciplinary infractions brought heavy punishment — transfers to unpleasant posts, suspension without pay, or outright dismissal.

For his giant accomplishments, the nation should pay homage to the Old Bulldog whose grim visage, gruff manner and steel-trap mind won't soon be forgotten.

But we would be hypocritical if we didn't also make note of the FBI's excesses under Hoover. Before he took over the bureau in 1924, it was used openly for political purposes. He largely halted this abuse.

With characteristic discretion, however, he made information from FBI files available to the right people. And, from time to time, the FBI acted as a political police force.

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FROM THE FBI's confidential files, we have obtained dozens of dossiers that have been kept on prominent Americans. It is clear from these documents that FBI agents have spent an extraordinary amount of their time snooping into the private lives of movie stars, sports heroes, political figures and other public personalities.

It is questionable whether FBI agents, in these days of rising crime, should be spared to investigate public figures.

Nevertheless, J. Edgar Hoover, now beyond the judgments of those of us who sometimes criticized him, is entitled to the final measure of praise now being paid to him.

But it should not be forgotten, amid all the tributes, that the FBI has been guilty of excesses. These abuses of power should occupy President Nixon in his search for Hoover's successor.