

Editor — J. Edgar Hoover's halo has been knocked askew by the latest wave of revelations about FBI misdeeds under his rule . . . Yet Hoover cultists cling to the notion he was sainted.

I am reminded of this by the recent column of William Rusher in The Sunday Punch "A Few Words in Defense of J. Edgar Hoover." In 1971 when the FBI chief became the object of heated dispute, "The Advocates" program on the National Educational Television network decided to debate "Should J. Edgar Hoover be replaced?" Rusher, at the time chief advocate for the conservative viewpoints, didn't even think it was a fit topic for discussion. But the show went on, and Rusher reminisces that among the dump-Hoover witnesses was "a renegade FBI agent who sneered at Hoover and poo-hooped the record of the Bureau under his long leadership.

I am that ex-agent. After 10 years as a field investigator, I concluded the the FBI's record in the criminal field was as perforated as a machine gun target. Hoover made his mark in the simplistic, shoot-'em-up days of the 1930s.

As I put it on "The Advocates": "Hoover over the years placed a tremendous emphasis on loners and human tumbleweeds — the arbitrarily declared Top Ten Fugitives, most of whom were economically poor, to the total ignominy of the organized crime men, the rich criminals."

It was natural that his politics should belong to the sundial era. When the Cold War set in he waged a holy war against domestic Communists ("Commonists" was his pronunciation), leaking file data to Joe McCarthy and faulting him only for his drinking. In the early 1960s when his domestic intelligence chief William Sullivan proposed that Ku Klux Klan type hate groups posed the gravest threat to national tranquility,

Hoover would have none of it. The New Left was the new bugbear.

For this Hoover was canonized by the theological anti-communists: his bulldog visage adorned the cover of the John Birch Society's magazine and he was showered with kudos by "patriotic" organizations. To them — and to Rusher — he could do no wrong. Rusher contends that "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."

Make that four: Truman, Johnson, Kennedy and even Nixon, for divergent reasons, wanted to get rid of him. But as Senator Estes Kefauver once told me, "Hoover is more powerful than the President." Indeed, I suspect he looked upon Presidents as mere transients.

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