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Police Science Book Reviews

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POLICE SCIENCE BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by

Ralph F. Turner*

THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION. By *Max Lowenthal*. William Sloane Associates, New York, 1950. Pp. 559. \$5.00.

Probably no more controversial study of a law enforcement agency has ever been published in this country than Max Lowenthal's *The Federal Bureau of Investigation*. Neither Hopkins' *Our Lawless Police* nor Lavine's *The Third Degree* occasioned as many editorial "blasts," political attacks and defenses, analyses by columnists, and acidulous public discussions. Representative George Dondero in a speech in the House called the author "*A Man of Mystery*" and accused him of Communist associations; Walter Winchell characterized the book as a "vicious, one-sided attack on J. Edgar Hoover"; John O'Donnel on the other hand described it as "the best documented indictment on the existence of a federal police . . . that has ever been compiled" but that it is "about as unbiased and objective as a carefully drawn indictment handed down by a smart grand jury guided by a skilled prosecutor"; Senator Bourke Hickenlooper attacked both the book and its author on the floor of the U. S. Senate calling it anti-FBI propaganda; and many newspapers caught in the middle of the controversy followed the lead of the *Washington Post* and published parallel reviews—one pro, one con. The F.B.I. has made no official comment and contemplates no official answer to Mr. Lowenthal's criticisms.

Max Lowenthal is a lawyer—one who once before demonstrated an interest in American police methods when he served as a staff member of the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement (Wickersham Commission) which issued the controversial "Report on Lawlessness in Law Enforcement." He is of the liberal-radical school of politics, a friend of President Truman and other government officials, has served in a variety of government legal, investigative, and administrative posts under both Republican and Democratic regimes, and is an experienced writer who presents his ideas clearly and forcefully.

Mr. Lowenthal proposes to examine six major fields: The extent to which a federal police agency is needed for the curbing of crime; the functions appropriate for such an agency; the investigation by such an agency of non-criminal matters; methods of controlling such an agency; the impact of a federal police agency on American society; and the issues born of the newer responsibilities placed on the F.B.I. such as maintaining security against sabotage and espionage. This reviewer finds little evidence in the book's nearly-600 pages of an intensive or objective examination of any but the last of these important areas.

Mr. Lowenthal with commendable enthusiasm and great expenditure of time and energy but with questionable judgment has amassed an imposing compilation of critical statements, editorials, news stories, and items of testimony before public bodies—many of them of little probative value and nearly all of them outdated in terms of the present-day F.B.I. The sins of the Flynn-Burns days cannot with logic or justice be charged to the wholly-different F.B.I. of 1950. Examination of the exhaustive "Source Notes" (pp. 469-552) indicate an excessive preoccupation with the early non-

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professional period (1908-1924) and with the period of reorganization which necessarily produced some travail after J. Edgar Hoover's accession to the directorship twenty-six years ago. This material has perhaps some interest to the police historian—to the analyst of today's F.B.I. operations it has little value.

Lowenthal's chapters are of unequal merit even when he discusses areas of current interest. "The Bureau Castigates Its Critics" and "Public Relations" contain much carping criticism of the F.B.I.'s admittedly excellent police public relations program which has done so much to raise the public acceptability of policing as a profession; "The Filing System" expresses an unsupported disapproval of a centralization of fingerprint records under F.B.I. control although no instance of misuse of these central files is cited; and the chapters on "Spies and Saboteurs" and the "Investigation of Beliefs" raise but do not answer several interesting questions of civil liberties and constitutional rights.

Lowenthal's principal theses are: That the F.B.I. is a threat to civil liberties; that it uses "secret-police" methods; that it is not so efficient as its publicity indicates; that it invades state and local autonomy in the field of crime control and duplicates the activities of other federal agencies; and, by implication at least, that it exists only for the personal aggrandizement of J. Edgar Hoover. None of these criticisms is new; none is proved by the materials assembled by Lowenthal.

But despite his failure to examine the important areas he projected and his abortive attempt to depict the F.B.I. as an American counterpart of the Geheime-Staats-Polizei, Lowenthal has performed a valuable service. His book is the first non-fictional, non-autobiographical, non-apocryphal study of a national law enforcement agency, a difficult if not impossible task for an outsider, and is refreshing change from the works of Floherty, Rowan, Purvis, Turrou, and the Editors of *Look*. Future studies of the F.B.I., Secret Service, Customs Bureau, Alcohol Tax Unit, and the other law enforcement agencies of the federal government by perhaps somewhat more objective analysts would find welcome among students of government, criminology, police administration, the administration of justice—and indeed among alert and informed members of the general public.

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