



J. Edgar Hoover, Sex, and Crime: An Historical Antidote

Athan Theoharis

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Was J. Edgar Hoover a homosexual? And did organized-crime leaders, knowing this, blackmail the FBI director into leaving them alone? These charges won almost instant popular acceptance when they were aired in a sensational biography of Hoover in 1993. But Athan Theoharis, the foremost authority on Hoover and the FBI, here shows that the accusations are spurious—and not nearly as intriguing as Hoover's real attitudes toward sex and organized crime. Theoharis takes apart the argument for Hoover's homosexuality, then goes on to paint a chilling portrait of a moralistic bureaucrat who would not hesitate to use sex-related information against his political enemies—when it could not be traced to FBI investigations. Theoharis explains why the FBI's ineffectiveness in pursuing organized-crime leaders stemmed from the same political priorities that gave Hoover broad authority during the cold war years to use illegal investigative techniques and to focus on political activities. Punctuating his narrative with case materials from the FBI's secret files—on presidential candidates, senators, congressmen, artists and writers, college presidents, and others—Theoharis unravels the brilliantly devious means that Hoover used to accomplish his political ends. And he shows how they contributed to a culture of lawlessness within the FBI itself.

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