

Guide to  
the Microfilm Edition  
of the  
**FBI FILE ON THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES**

Edited by  
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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This material, drawn from the files of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, has been prepared for publication by Kenneth O'Reilly, assistant professor of history, University of Alaska, Anchorage.

## INTRODUCTION

Spanning thirty-seven years, from the later New Deal period to the immediate post-Watergate years, the recently declassified FBI headquarters file on the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) represents a richly detailed source for the study of the relationship between one of the most powerful executive branch bureaucracies and one of the most controversial congressional investigating committees of the twentieth century. The file contains hundreds of substantive documents on such major historical issues and developments as the legislative-executive conflict of the Franklin Roosevelt and early Cold War eras; the Hollywood Ten hearings and the entertainment industry blacklists of the McCarthy era; and the civil rights, antiwar, and black nationalist movements of the 1960s.

Established by the House of Representatives in May 1938 as the Special Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities, HUAC was made the permanent, standing Committee on Un-American Activities seven years later. HUAC received a new name (Committee on Internal Security) and mandate in 1969 and was abolished in January 1975 as both houses of Congress were preparing to investigate the intelligence community in the wake of Watergate. The committee's most famous alumnus, Richard Nixon, rode its best-known investigation, the Alger Hiss-Whittaker Chambers case, into national prominence and eventually the Oval Office. Hundreds of other prominent Americans testified before the committee as "friendly" or "unfriendly" witnesses, including the current president of the United States, Ronald Reagan, who appeared in 1947 after he had been recommended to HUAC by the FBI.

Many of the documents in the first part of the file (1938-45) concern the political warfare waged by HUAC's first chairman, the conservative Texas Democrat Martin Dies, against the reform state. If partisan and more than a bit

irresponsible, the Dies Committee's explicit charge—that the Roosevelt administration was somehow furthering an international Communist conspiracy—commanded front-page newspaper headlines and, on occasion, the indirect support of the FBI and its conservative director. At the same time, J. Edgar Hoover considered the Dies Committee a direct threat to the bureau's autonomy and bureaucratic domain. As a result, the first portion of the file not only illuminates the roles played by the FBI and the Dies Committee in raising the specter of the Democratic party's complicity, unwitting or otherwise, in the international Communist conspiracy, but it also illustrates how the conservative and politically motivated FBI pursued the twin goals of autonomy and bureaucratic empire building. To further document the rivalry between the FBI and the Dies Committee, despite the general agreement on the need to purge the federal civil service, J. Edgar Hoover's official and confidential file on Martin Dies has been included.

The second and largest part of the HUAC file, covering the years 1945-69, is also characterized by this same type of love-hate relationship. On the one hand, FBI ministrations were often direct and pervasive. In 1947, as HUAC and its new chairman, J. Parnell Thomas, were preparing for the Hollywood Ten hearings, Hoover ordered the special agent in charge of the bureau's Los Angeles office "to extend every assistance to this Committee." In 1959, two years after Senator Joseph McCarthy died and nearly five years after grade-school and high-school civics texts began to report the death of the McCarthy era, the FBI leaked dossiers on seventy-one public-school teachers employed in the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas to the committee's staff director. The FBI hoped "the exposure of these subjects . . . and the attendant publicity could result in their removal from the school system in California." On the other hand, the file reveals the continuing bickering and feuding between Hoover's FBI and the Un-American Activities Committee over such issues as the use of FBI informants as friendly witnesses or the hiring of former agents as investigators. This ambivalent relationship continued into the 1960s during the investigations of student and other groups calling for HUAC's abolition, the Ku Klux Klan, the race riots of 1965 and 1967, and the Vietnam peace movement. FBI executives

worked closely with the committee during certain investigations (the Klan probe in the mid-1960s and the Students for a Democratic Society probe in the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example) but refused requests for aid in other cases.

The third and last part of the file, spanning the years 1969-75, records the emergence of the terrorist as the new *bête noire*. This period encompasses the apex of the FBI's domestic intelligence empire and the beginnings of the first substantive challenge to the surveillance consensus. Most of the final serials in the file concern the committee's attempts to protect the FBI from other (unfriendly) congressional investigating committees and provide bureau officials with a forum to explain and defend their agency's record of spying on law-abiding American citizens.

The FBI headquarters file on HUAC will be of interest to political historians and political scientists concerned with the New Deal, the domestic Cold War, the protest movements of the 1960s, and the events and legacies of the Watergate period. The file provides a unique glimpse into the world of HUAC, the most resilient of the Red-hunting congressional investigating committees, and the world of the FBI, a disciplined, resourceful, and highly motivated political elite in constant pursuit of ideological and bureaucratic objectives. During the Hoover years, the FBI retained a remarkable degree of autonomy and compiled an equally remarkable record of influencing national politics and shaping public opinion on the alleged threat posed by un-American activities to the nation's security. The HUAC file contributes to our understanding of the FBI's impact on the American polity and suggests that the bureau belongs in the mainstream of recent political history, and not on the periphery. Social historians and sociologists will find the file valuable for the information it provides on the strategies and aspirations of a broad range of dissident Americans, from Communist party functionaries and the Ku Klux Klan grand dragons to grass-roots activists from the dozens of obscure groups that coalesced around the HUAC abolition movement and helped give birth to the New Left.

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