



J. Edgar Takes a Close Look at J. Edgar Hoover's Career

The film's intent is clear when one reads its synopsis: "As the face of law enforcement in America for almost 50 years, J. Edgar Hoover was feared and admired, reviled and revered. But behind closed doors, he held secrets that would have destroyed his image, his career and his life."

The movie examines the public and private life of Hoover, played by the talented Leonardo DiCaprio. Hoover is portrayed as a man who has allowed absolute power to corrupt him. Shifting back and forth between past and present, *J. Edgar* examines the news behind the news stories.

The film begins with the 77-year-old Hoover regaling his biography writers of his "side of the story" (which began in 1919) with the Palmer raids against anarchists and other radicals. The scene underscores the notion that too much power in the hands of ruthless or corrupt individuals can lead to unchecked violations of liberty, and seemingly presents Hoover as one of those ruthless individuals. In Hoover's version of the story, he justifies his crackdown of the radicals, asserting, "Sometimes you need to bend the rules a little to keep our country safe."

J. Edgar seems to indicate that Hoover was greatly affected by the Palmer raids, but the film does not ignore another great influence in Hoover's life — his overbearing mother.

Fortunately, Eastwood avoided taking the film down a more scandalous road, such as claims that Hoover engaged in cross-dressing, or participated in homosexual relationships, and even more salacious backroom deals, as was claimed by Anthony Summers in his 1993 book, *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover*. Even many of Hoover's most virulent critics on the Left, though, have acknowledged that Summers' source for the sensational claims — Susan Rosenstiel — was completely lacking in credibility and was motivated principally by monetary motives. However, Eastwood does permit certain implications in his film without taking a direct approach, such as can be seen in the implied sexual relationship between Hoover and his FBI colleague Clyde Tolson. This is another charge that has been thrown about by Hoover's detractors, but without a shred of substantiating evidence to show anything other than a close friendship between two men.

The movie follows the course of Hoover's career, and purports to chronicle how he often manipulated his pursuits to advance the image of the FBI.

Hoover has been the target of the Left for years, and it's a shame to see Eastwood fall into the same paradigm as his Leftist counterparts, although Eastwood's presentation of the man is significantly fairer. For example, Hoover is presented as a champion of scientific crime analysis, such as fingerprints, in order to assure that the right people are brought to justice.

However, Eastwood portrays in a negative light Hoover's pursuit of evidence on people generally lionized by the media, such as John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., whom Hoover believed to be dangerous. But there was a definite rationale to Hoover's motivations behind these endeavors, as noted by The John Birch Society.

The Left's treatment of Hoover has less to do with the man himself and more to do with what seems to be a tolerance for communism and totalitarianism, and a reflexive intolerance for anti-communism. For those who are more familiar with the communist movement, however, Hoover was a hero. John Birch Society founder Robert Welch wrote to Hoover on more than one occasion to articulate his belief that the FBI head was one of the few reliable sources of information on communism.

That is not to say that Hoover was the expert on the communist's insidious agenda, or that he and



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Welch always saw eye to eye. On a number of occasions, Hoover rejected Welch's conclusions about people and organizations, and came to hold very different ideas about the internal security of our nation from what The John Birch Society determined.

Still, Hoover did engage in a dogged pursuit of corruption, and he deserves credit for that — which for the most part, Eastwood gives him. Eastwood also aptly presents Hoover as the patriot he was who truly loved his country and held a passion for the rule of law, most of the time.

It is because of Eastwood's slightly more balanced approach to the life of J. Edgar Hoover that critics such as Peter Paras from E!Online have given the film bad reviews, asserting that the "story plays things too straight," and that it is "without any real examination of the politics." In other words, Hoover's image has not been entirely distorted by Eastwood the way Joseph McCarthy has unfortunately been misrepresented by the Hollywood elite and the mainstream media, as a maniacal investigator hell-bent on labeling everyone a communist.

The history examined in the film makes it compelling, particularly as it regales the story of Hoover's pursuit of the kidnapper who took Charles Lindburgh's baby, and the transformation of the treatment of crime scenes after Hoover discovered the value of fingerprinting.

And the performances in the film are predictably captivating. Leonardo DiCaprio delivers once again, effectively capturing all the passions and frustrations that Eastwood had hoped to depict. His performance is complemented by a talented supporting cast, including Naomi Watts as Hoover's employee Helen Candy and Armie Hammer as Hoover's longtime friend Clyde Tolson.

In all, *J. Edgar* is a well-made film and likely the fairest presentation of Hoover that will ever come out of Hollywood. Whether viewers will be perturbed by some of the director's choices will vary with the individual, but for those who recognize the insidious nature of communism, the movie seems to vilify an endless pursuit of subversive communism. By the same token, however, it draws an interesting parallel to reveal how laws such as the PATRIOT Act can actually prove to be attacks on liberty.



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