

**J. Edgar Hoover Goes to the Movies: The FBI and the Origins of Hollywood's Cold War. By John Sbardellati. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012. Pp. vii, 256. \$27.95.)**

In the early days and years prior to the Cold War, between 1942 and 1958, J. Edgar Hoover's FBI monitored Hollywood with (from the perspective of FBI officials) a genuine fear that the film industry had been infiltrated by Communists who were using the movies coyly to put forward Communist propaganda in an insidious effort to influence the American public. John Sbardellati's book, adapted from his Ph.D. dissertation, is not the first to reveal the FBI's efforts in Hollywood via its COMPIC (Communist Infiltration of the Motion Picture Industry) program. FBI historian Athan Theoharis first uncovered this in *Chasing Spies* [2002], but Sbardellati is the first to delve more deeply into the story and place the FBI's efforts into the broader and deeper cultural and political history of the Cold War's development in Hollywood.

Sbardellati begins with an examination of the early FBI's interest in Hollywood activities dating from the first Red Scare of 1919–1920, which was limited in scope and duration. The time was not yet right for an in-depth investigation. That could only come with the influences of the Second World War, then the Cold War, and the overarching effects those conflicts had on the political culture and national security consciousness of the United States. FBI Director Hoover believed the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union only enabled Communists to inject their propaganda into American entertainment to influence mass audiences. Thus the FBI's systematic investigations into Hollywood actually began long before the Cold War. But after 1945, when a series of labor strikes in Hollywood convinced national security officials that Communists were even more active there, FBI officials increased their investigations and secretly cooperated with the House Un-American Activities Committee and the right-wing Motion Picture Alliance, among others, to expose Communists in Hollywood but without compromising the FBI's good standing among the public. Moreover, as Sbardellati points out, Hoover adopted the extreme ideologue Ayn Rand's *Screen Guide for Americans*, if not her brand of countersubversion, as his guide for detecting Communist propaganda in films. In these efforts, Hoover's FBI was successful inasmuch as its conspiring with other countersubversive groups led filmmakers drastically to reduce the production of social-issue films and, as Hoover happily put it, “trend ... toward pure entertainment” (185).

Sbardellati's book is, indeed, a valuable contribution to the literature of the Cold War, its cultural history, and the history of the FBI. The book reads, however, in places like a dissertation, for example, laying out point by point what the author is going to discuss in the introduction and in individual chapters. The author also tends to attribute repeatedly the policies of FBI officials to the institution of “the FBI,” which somewhat misses the human decisions made there, but both of these criticisms are only quibbles.

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