

J. Edgar Hoover and the Anti-interventionists: FBI Political Surveillance and the Rise of the Domestic Security State, 1939–1945. By Douglas M. Charles. (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2007. Pp. ix, 197. \$39.95.)

In February 1941, amid the “great debate” about possible U.S. intervention in the Second World War, President Franklin Roosevelt learned of an anti-interventionist pamphlet that accused him of subverting American democracy. The document, published by the anti-interventionist America First Committee, charged that the Lend-Lease bill before Congress was actually a “war-dictatorship bill” that would give the president “absolute power.” Roosevelt passed a copy of the circular to his press secretary, Steve Early, along with a request, “[F]ind out from someone—perhaps FBI—who is paying for this” (68).

As Douglas M. Charles shows in this timely book, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was more than willing to oblige his boss. Charles documents the FBI’s surveillance of anti-interventionists from the start of the war in Europe in 1939 to the early years of American involvement. He argues convincingly that the “obsequious” director pursued these investigations not because of genuine concerns about national security, but because he wished to curry favor with the president by serving his political and policy interests. Often, the FBI had little interest in gathering evidence for possible prosecutions; instead, it sought to discover damaging personal information about Roosevelt’s critics in order to discredit them.

In pursuit of these alleged subversives, Hoover’s agents examined their mail, interviewed their neighbors, listened to their phone calls, broke into their homes, and leaked damning stories about them to the media and public opinion leaders. The targets included the aviators Charles Lindbergh and Laura Ingalls, historian Harry Elmer Barnes, Senators David Walsh and Burton Wheeler, and Representative Hamilton Fish, among others. Although some of these isolationists admired the Nazis, the agents seldom found that the German government was funding their anti-interventionist propaganda. Usually, the answer to Roosevelt’s query about funding was unsurprising: right-wing press barons were paying for the groups. But the lack of foreign links did not stop the FBI from spying on the dissidents.

Charles argues that the Bureau’s role as an “institution of the national security state” actually dates to the era of the Great Debate (174). It was in this period, he says, that the FBI “extensively and systematically monitored administration critics while seeking to undermine them” (176). He concludes that the history of this surveillance is particularly relevant in twenty-first-century America, as the Bush administration increases governmental secrecy and expands domestic snooping.

The author could develop more of the story of the later years of the war. Despite the impression created by the subtitle, the book has little coverage of events past 1943. Nonetheless, Charles recovers the history of a significant period

in the development of the national security state. Like Katherine Sibley's *Red Spies in America*, this book prompts historians of U.S. intelligence to locate the seeds of Cold War-era programs and mindsets in the burgeoning security state of the Second World War.

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