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Matthew Cecil. *Branding Hoover's FBI: How the Boss's PR Men Sold the Bureau to America.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016. 344 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-2305-1.

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Matthew Cecil, in *Branding Hoover's FBI: How the Boss's PR Men Sold the Bureau to America*, lays out a case that the prestige and public trust enjoyed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) during most of J. Edgar Hoover's tenure resulted not so much from the agency's investigative prowess as from a finely tuned public relations apparatus that began operation only a few years after the term "public relations" was coined. As Cecil puts it: "The bureau practiced, at an early stage in the development of the field, sophisticated public relations techniques on a nationwide scale" (p. 15). Cecil sees the success of this effort as the achievement of specific, talented individuals. He suggests that had they not been on the scene, the agency would have fared much differently in the public estimation from the mid-1930s to the mid-1960s, and that had they not departed, the agency might have avoided its precipitous fall from grace in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In-depth coverage is given to the careers of both Louis Nichols and Cartha "Deke" DeLoach, the two most prominent overseers of the agency's PR efforts, the former from 1935 to 1957 and the latter from 1959 to 1970. Nichols established the template for agency policies, and the book details the manner in which he led efforts to control its image in popular radio shows, fought to head off critical findings from a presidential commission, strategically leaked information on alleged Communist sympathizers to force them from public office, and recruited liberal "moles" to offer intelligence about such organizations as the American Civil Liberties Union. DeLoach followed the template but with a different style. Whereas Nichols was a sometimes subtle manipulator of a vast network of media contacts—both friend and foe—DeLoach focused his attention on "managing upward" and influencing decision makers in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Justice Department, and White House (p. 263).

Nichols and DeLoach are well-known figures, although their methods have never been examined with such care. Perhaps even more valuable, the book provides an equally detailed appraisal of the contributions of agency staff members who are never more than bit players in standard FBI histories. These include Milton Jones, who for almost thirty years was personally responsible for maintaining the content standards for thousands of letters, memos, speeches, articles, and reports the agency produced, and Fern Stukenbroeker, who among other things was the chief ghostwriter for publications that appeared under Hoover's name, ranging from law journal articles to the best-selling book *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It* (1958), which sold more than two million copies. The book includes readable character sketches of these people and many others with whom they interacted, along with analysis of their activities.

Cecil's work has an impressive research base, most notably an extensive review of the FBI's own files of correspondence, memos, and handwritten notes. At its peak, the FBI department responsible for public relations employed almost two hundred people and in a single year responded to about seven thousand letters a month, placed dozens of articles in national magazines, wrote hundreds of speeches and official statements for bureau employees, and performed thousands of "name checks" for the White House. For the network television series *The FBI* (1965-74), it rewrote scripts, vetted cast and crew members (blackballing "subversives"), and had two agents permanently assigned to the set while filming occurred. Censure, probation, demotion, and reassignment were penalties imposed on agency personnel for offenses as small as a typographical error on a letter that went out on the agency's letterhead.

The book also covers the tsunami of criticism that led to a decline in the FBI's reputation at the end of Hoover's tenure. By that time, the health and vigor of Hoover and his top aide, Clyde Tolson, were in decline, and Nichols and DeLoach had moved on. Cecil states: "It seems likely that the Bureau could have weathered the kinds of public relations challenges it faced in the late 1960s and early 1970s had its leadership team been at full strength" (p. 252). I suppose that's possible—certainly he provides examples of inept and inadequate response by the agency during this period. He also notes, however, that by the late 1960s the "FBI represented mainstream 1950s values in a counterculture America" (p. 214), and one wonders if any PR effort could have countered the rising suspicion and scrutiny of public institutions that were fueled by civil rights and Vietnam protests, the culture of scandal and investigative reporting that began to permeate Washington media, and the collapse of the Cold War consensus that had dominated public perception and discourse since World War II.

Branding Hoover's FBI is well done in every respect. The book is well written and organized, its use of both primary and secondary sources is excellent, and overall its argument is convincing. It is a valuable addition to our understanding of the internal workings of the FBI.

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