

## History Declassified: Using U.S. Government Intelligence Documents to Write Left History

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**Robert Justin Goldstein, *American Blacklist: The Attorney General's List of Subversive Organizations* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008)**

**Ivan Greenberg, *The Dangers of Dissent: The FBI and Civil Liberties Since 1965* (New York: Lexington Books, 2010)**

**Tim Wiener, *Enemies: A History of the FBI* (New York: Random House, 2012)**

### I

Interdisciplinary social science fields such as Law and Society, American Political Development, and historical sociology have paid comparatively little attention to the question of how the repression of movements for social democracy may have shaped the expansion of U.S. government power over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Questions of how the U.S. state has been “shaped by war and trade,” or how social history and political history can converge by “bringing the state back in,” do not tend to treat military and law enforcement agencies as shaping the “opportunity structure” of social movements.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, studies of social movements in the U.S. may touch upon issues of government repression, but the issue remains largely under-theorized, especially across different social movements. It is commonplace to note the “exceptionally hostile terrain” for labor unions and third parties in U.S. history.<sup>2</sup> And the history of anti-communism in the U.S. is fairly extensive. But the nature and historic effects of government repression of nearly all movements for social democracy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S., especially since the 1950s, remains a topic that has so far interested activists more than academics.

Part of the problem is archival rather than theoretical. More than four decades after the passage of open government laws, most of the archives produced by U.S. government intelligence operations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have either been destroyed, secretly transferred to private hands, or kept classified.

The U.S. government’s systematic destruction and withholding of documents related to its intelligence programs has produced a massive historical and cultural erasure in both academic and popular U.S. history. Without the records of government agencies that defined as one of their missions the repression of communism during the short 20<sup>th</sup> century (1914-1991), it is impossible to fully analyze the role of government repression in shaping U.S. political culture during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

The inability to know the full extent of U.S. government surveillance decades after the fact has done more than produce a culture of impunity within

U.S. government. It also contributes to a political culture that has accommodated an explosion of domestic surveillance practices by governments and corporations over the past decade. As Frank Donner wrote thirty years ago in *The Age of Surveillance*, surveillance has always been a “mode of governance.”<sup>4</sup> But since September 11, 2001, it has also become the dominant mode of law enforcement in the United States, with a breadth and depth that would have been unimaginable before the digital revolution.

We can only speculate about what effects this massive surveillance system has had or will have on the political culture of the U.S. But one important way to understand its significance is to chip away at the myopia that sustains it: to unearth the long history of the U.S. government intelligence programs that have always targeted movements for social democracy in the name of national security. To do that, however, we first need access to the archives.

## II

The walls erected by the U.S. government to historical reckoning are not total. They do require a great deal of effort to surmount, however—effort that most historians are not inclined to make, and are generally not trained to do in graduate school.

And so it comes as welcome news that three works on U.S. government repression, all of them drawn heavily from Department of Justice and FBI records obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and litigation, have been published in the last three years. Each of these books charts important new ground, but in different ways.

Robert Justin Goldstein’s *American Blacklist* provides the first sustained scholarly attention to the creation and enforcement of the Attorney General’s List of Subversive Organizations (AGLOSO) in nearly 45 years. Ivan Greenberg’s *The Dangers of Dissent* provides one of the only historical surveys of FBI political spying after the death of its longtime Director, J. Edgar Hoover, in 1972. And Tim Wiener’s *Enemies* details the inner workings of the FBI’s leadership—particularly since the 1960s—perhaps better than any other work to date.

Reviewing these books together provides an opportunity to assess not just the history of government repression of movements for social democracy, but the challenges of doing historical research by “liberating information” from classified government archives, as Greenberg calls it.

## III

In *American Blacklist*, Robert Goldstein describes the role that the U.S. Department of Justice played in using the ideology of national security to undermine the politics of social democracy during the early years of the Cold War.

From 1947 to 1955, the Attorney General's List of Subversive Organizations (AGLOSO) popularized the notion that many left-wing organizations were "communist fronts" regardless of the actual influence that the Communist Party had in them.

*American Blacklist* expertly traces AGLOSO's origins to a "secretly created 1940-1941 government listing of organizations in which membership alone would raise doubts about suitability for federal employment" (17). It then explains how, following the massive strike wave of 1946, and the election of a conservative, anti-labor Congress, President Truman succumbed to political pressure by issuing Executive Order 9835. EO 9835 prohibited communists from employment in federal government or, crucially, from being recipients of federal government funds. It directed the Attorney General to create a list of "subversive organizations" to enforce the order—which it did by reviving the list it produced during World War II.

Truman lost control over the enforcement of his own Order, however, when Congress pressured him to place the FBI in charge of its enforcement. According to Goldstein, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover interpreted his new mandate broadly, and it served "for the next thirty years as a key basis for [the FBI's] increasingly virtually unbounded investigation of individuals and groups throughout American society, including the widespread use of a variety of illegal burglaries, wiretaps, and other intrusive means" (52).

According to Goldstein, "although it is impossible to disentangle the impact of AGLOSO from that of other repressive governmental measures during the Red Scare," he still argues that AGLOSO was the "single most important domestic factor that fostered and facilitated the [second] Red Scare" (xi). This is a bit of hyperbole. Greenberg ignores the effect of such other legal instruments at the FBI's disposal such as the Smith Act, the Taft-Hartley Act, and later the McCarran Act in criminalizing membership in the communist party and "communist fronts" over the course of the 1940s and early 1950s in the United States.

Yet still Greenberg makes a strong case that AGLOSO's importance has heretofore been understated, and he connects its omission from most histories of the Cold War by describing the erasure of its archive from the public domain. "The heart of this book," he explains, "is based on research in archival materials or materials obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) that have rarely, if ever, been accessed by researchers" (349). Only through recently released FBI and Department of Justice files was he able to chart AGLOSO's effects. "The vast majority of the approximately 280 AGLOSO-designated organizations were extremely obscure and have left barely a trace of their existence anywhere, except perhaps in the FBI files. However, substantial secondary studies exist for about 30 of the most prominent of these

groups” (350). As a result, government documents provide a basis to not just study government repression, but to recover part of the history of those movements that government agencies sought to suppress.

Rather than offering a history of AGLOSO from the perspective of those who participated in the organizations listed as “subversive,” however, *American Blacklist* uses FBI files mainly to track the political history of AGLOSO, with an emphasis on administrative rule-making and subsequent court challenges. By tracing AGLOSO’s evolution, *American Blacklist* shows how the listing of “communist fronts” for the purpose of denying people employment was a political project constantly in crisis because it criminalized what was later determined to be constitutionally protected rights to “free speech.” Those organizations that survived being listed on AGLOSO were thus able to mount legal challenges that subjected AGLOSO to legal scrutiny, through which the list was ultimately ruled unconstitutional.

Though the Attorney General ceased adding organizations to AGLOSO in the mid-1950s once the Supreme Court constrained some of the excesses of the second Red Scare, the damage had already been done. Within a little over fifteen years, only 20 of the 274 organizations originally listed survived (66). AGLOSO’s public listing of nearly 300 “subversive” organizations (many of them created during the late 1930s when liberals, socialists, and communists worked in coalition with each other in a “popular front” against fascism) did more than merely blur the boundaries between Communist Party members and those whom they may have worked with. It provided a legal basis for the FBI to investigate hundreds of thousands of individuals for supposed communist sympathies, for thousands of people to be denied careers in their chosen professions, and for the disassembling or purging of most left-wing institutions.

*American Blacklist* is the definitive work to date on AGLOSO, and an essential reference work on Cold War government repression. But it offers a dense political and legal history in a narrative populated more with federal agency acronyms than individuals. It ends by tracing AGLOSO’S afterlife in a little-known attempt by President Nixon’s administration to unsuccessfully revive the blacklist, providing a fascinating but in some ways anti-climactic ending that avoids tracing the cultural afterlife of public policy.

Because it bred suspicion that any number of reform activities might be “fronts” for “subversives,” Greenberg argues that AGLOSO “played a central role in molding an entire cohort of Americans (known as ‘the silent generation’ on college campuses) who feared to join organizations, sign petitions, or otherwise express their views” (xiv). This is likely true, but such a claim needs closer attention to the culture of the Cold War to substantiate. What *American Blacklist* could develop more fully is the concept of the blacklist as a cultural process for

disenfranchising people in the name of democracy rather than just a mere list controlled by the Department of Justice. After all, the list modeled a process for determining eligibility for employment copied by local and state governments and private employers. This marked the blacklist as a form of governmentality, and not just a legal mechanism. As the term blacklist became a verb and not just a noun, its adoption normalized firing people for their political beliefs. It is that process of normalization—which raises all sorts of questions about the relationship between citizenship and employment—that *American Blacklist* takes for granted, by describing them as the mere effect of a list maintained by the Department of Justice.

#### IV

Ivan Greenberg's *The Dangers of Dissent* promises a different approach to using government documents to narrate the history of surveillance programs. He describes his research on post-1965 (and especially post-1972) FBI domestic intelligence programs as “bottom up” history: “rather than focus on top leaders, I hope to shift the ground to subjects” (8).

This is an admirable intention, but it does not accurately describe the book. The main sources for the book are government documents about left-wing social movements, not documents produced or assembled by activists themselves. To the degree that the subjects of surveillance appear at all, it is mainly as litigants seeking to uncover the spying that targeted them rather than as activists with a broader agenda. As a result, *The Dangers of Dissent* ends up being largely a history of FBI surveillance, not a history of those under surveillance.

According to Greenberg, “declassified FBI spy files form the primary research of this book.” He assembled these files through “ninety five FOIA requests with the FBI and obtained approximately forty-five declassified files constituting about thirty-five thousand pages,” with a few thousand of those pages requiring a lawsuit to release. Greenberg calls this method of research “liberating information” through “FOIA activism” (9).

But as Greenberg himself confesses, despite his activist language, his method produced less information about social movements than about the FBI. Or, as he states in his introduction, “I did not find many ‘smoking guns’—that is, FBI memos that reveal big, unknown state secrets. Rather, the declassified material revealed patterns of government behavior” (13). And so *The Dangers of Dissent* ends up being more a history of how the FBI has been able to sustain its domestic intelligence operations in both legal and illegal ways, and less about the nature of government surveillance programs or their effects on U.S. political culture.

*The Dangers of Dissent* begins by going over largely well-known illegal activities by the FBI in the late 1960s and early 1970s under its counterintelligence programs (COINTELPRO) against black nationalists and New Left activists: illegal break-ins; illegal wiretaps; encouraging activists to fight and even kill each other; planting false stories in the news media; writing fake letters to politicians, media, and to activists, etc. From this perspective, Greenberg introduces the problem of what he calls “state crimes” committed by the FBI with impunity.

*The Dangers of Dissent* is most valuable when it leaves the well-worn track of COINTELPRO history and provides a narrative of succeeding FBI intelligence programs under different presidents— from the attempted reforms of Presidents Ford and Carter, to the reactivation of widespread domestic intelligence programs by President Reagan two decades before the War on Terror. This is largely uncharted historical territory. It is made possible by Greenberg’s acquisition of files on FBI directors during the 1970s, and by his tracking a variety of lawsuits from the 1980s to the present.

The gist of the arc that Greenberg traces is a “dramatic withdrawal” of politically-motivated investigations of social movement activists during the late 1970s, followed by a speedy restoration and even expansion of domestic spying initiated by President Reagan and continuing unabated ever since (115). Greenberg thus tracks a shift in Cold War era domestic intelligence practices from the politics of anti-subversion to the politics of anti-terrorism.

The 1970s were the heyday of Congressional investigations into, and wide-ranging litigation against, illegal FBI activities. According to Greenberg, during this time the FBI’s intelligence apparatus went through an intense reprioritization of its work: “Compared to 21,414 active investigations in 1973, the FBI conducted only 4,868 investigations in 1976, a decline of more than 400 percent.... By 1978, the FBI claimed only 102 investigations were conducted nationwide” (115-16). Reflecting this shift, the number of FBI special agents declined 10 percent during the late 1970s (107). This was an extraordinary transformation.

But Greenberg notes that during the 1970s, the FBI also re-legitimized its domestic spying in ways that paved the way for the Reagan restoration by shifting its work from policing “subversion” to policing “terrorism.” FBI domestic intelligence did not end, even if the figure of the terrorist seemed to suggest a more criminal and thus more legitimate object of scrutiny than the more amorphous Cold War figure of the “agitator,” “rabble rouser,” or “subversive.” Instead, the FBI’s domestic intelligence became more focused on self-proclaimed revolutionary organizations like the Weather Underground and various factions of the new communist movement, and on organization leaders rather than rank-

and-file members. Even though the FBI ceased its surveillance of the white nationalist National Alliance during this time, it maintained its surveillance of the Communist Party and even the Socialist Workers Party (116).

Greenberg provides a speculative explanation for the decline of FBI investigations of activists over the course of the 1970s: a shift in targets from activists to politicians. One of the FBI's primary activities in the 1970s involved its campaign to prosecute politicians for corruption by using federal agents to snare them in elaborate bribery schemes that bordered on entrapment. "By the end of 1978," Greenberg claims, "the FBI conducted about one thousand public corruption cases focused on crimes by congressmen, governors, state legislators, and police chiefs" (105).

In ABSCAM, the FBI's most famous program for investigating political corruption, undercover agents posed as representatives of the fictitious "Abdul Enterprises" and offered bribes to unsuspecting elected officials. The FBI's use of the specter of the dangerous Arab corrupting American democracy dovetailed with the FBI's reinvention of itself as an agency to fight terrorism. At a time when the exposure of FBI misdeeds under Hoover embarrassed the organization, Goldberg argues, "the FBI wanted to punish Congress for exposing [the FBI's] past corruption." In this way, Greenberg claims that ABSCAM served as a form of political "payback" (106). Greenberg also mentions in passing that as the FBI's investigations into political corruption evolved, they disproportionately targeted and ensnared black politicians elected after the passage of the Voting Rights Act and the growth of the black mayors' movement (133-34).

But in both the case of ABSCAM and the FBI's targeting of black politicians, I am not aware of any evidence that proves that the FBI's investigations were motivated by political payback for Congressional investigations into FBI misdeeds. As proof of a political vendetta, Greenberg cites only a single quote, in which FBI Director William Webster (later CIA Director and now Chairman of the Homeland Security Advisory Council) told an American Bar Association meeting that "in the FBI we've been under attack for past incidents and circumstances," and also described Congressional backlash to ABSCAM as "similar to the emotions in the Bureau when they had their times" (106). But this quote seems more suggestive, and not enough to rest such a serious accusation of malfeasance. The agency's malicious intent is plausible, but much more scholarly investigation seems necessary before such claims can have credibility.

Even if the FBI shifted its attention from activists to politicians, however, it did not do so for long. During the 1980s, Greenberg documents, "Reagan ushered in a new era of surveillance by broadly linking domestic dissent to terrorism, falsely associating violence with peaceful and lawful protest" (143). After reaching an historic low in the late 1970s, the FBI conducted as many as 20,000

investigations into international terrorism between 1982 and 1988 (138). As part of this expansion, the FBI in the 1980s systematically targeted anti-nuclear activists and environmentalists who used direct-action, and, importantly, immigrant groups and Arab-American organizations critical of Israel (120).

As the Iran-Contra scandal broke in the late 1980s, so did the story that the FBI had engaged in a widespread, systematic program of infiltration and disruption of the Committee In Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CIS-PES), and likely also was engaged in a series of break-ins in liberal churches that provided sanctuary to refugees from the wars in Central America.<sup>5</sup> The FBI transferred what it claims to be the entirety of those files to the National Archives as part of litigation brought against it, but it is my understanding that the vast majority of that archive remains classified over two decades later.

With the end of the Cold War came the opportunity to challenge the legitimacy of the FBI's domestic intelligence programs, but that opportunity was short lived. As an outgrowth of probes of FBI spying on opponents of the Reagan administration's Central America policies, Congress forbade the FBI from conducting investigations of American citizens based on their speech in 1992. But this law, known as the Edwards Amendment, was short-lived. It was repealed in 1996 in the wake of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, Republican Party electoral victories during the 1994 mid-term elections, and 1995 Oklahoma City bombing (162).

Following these events, the chance for post-Cold War elimination or reform of domestic intelligence practices was lost. As Greenberg notes, "President Clinton presided over one of the largest expansions of the FBI in U.S. history.... A 1990 budget of about \$1.7 billion reached \$3.1 billion in 1999" (163). By the late 1990s, half of that budget went to investigative activities, and one third of the FBI's entire workforce was located in its National Security Division. The FBI was unlikely to be sued for these investigations— not just because information about them is scarce, but because anti-terrorism laws passed in the 1980s and 1990s made such investigations legal and secret (275). In this way, the War on Terror began before September 11, 2001. It just hadn't been consolidated into new information-sharing networks and digital surveillance practices yet.

The concluding chapters of *The Dangers of Dissent* document the history of obscure and largely failed attempts to use public records law to provide a check on illegal government spying. The passage of a law in 1986 providing exemptions for "foreign intelligence, counterintelligence, or international terrorism" from the Freedom of Information Act has provided wide latitude to federal agencies to withhold or redact most intelligence domestic documents produced since the 1970s (216). Indeed, federal agencies frequently "blackball" or

refuse to even acknowledge the existence of files that they unilaterally consider outside the realm of open government laws.<sup>6</sup>

That the national security state has developed wide exemptions for itself in public disclosure law, and developed a series of professional practices for interpreting those exemptions to its benefit, is perhaps no surprise. But that this transformation took place as part of the development of an anti-terrorist framework for domestic law enforcement is still noteworthy. *The Dangers of Dissent* tracks this administrative transformation in state capacity well, but does not analyze it very thoroughly. And because barriers to public disclosure are now so high, the book's description of the FBI's domestic political intelligence operations is mainly useful for bringing together different stories, rather than adding new information about domestic spying practices. Whether and to what degree FBI surveillance activities had a substantial effect on the social movements they sought to neutralize, or the political culture of the last few decades, remains a topic still in need of greater exploration.

## V

Whereas Robert Goldstein and Ivan Greenberg put years of effort into acquiring the government documents that they wrote about in their books, Tim Weiner more or less had the never-before-seen files that he used for his book *Enemies* dropped in his lap. Such are the rewards of being a prominent reporter for the *New York Times* on national security issues.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) acquired tens of thousands of pages of files via FOIA on the FBI's domestic intelligence activities, and then turned them over to Weiner after the publication of his book *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*. Weiner also benefited from the FBI's publication of previously released files on its web site, along with a substantial collection of oral histories collected and published online by the Society of Former Agents of the FBI. And finally, the release in 2011 of FBI files on "Operation SOLO"—the infiltration of the leadership of the Communist Party by Morris and Jack Childs—timed perfectly with Weiner's own writing of his book. Based on this research largely done by others, Weiner produced a well-written account of the how the FBI's extensive apparatus for monitoring the activities of U.S. citizens has failed time and again to apprehend spies and terrorists within the U.S. government and society.

This is a story that—while not based in the specific archives that Weiner had access to—has been told before, most notably by Athan Theoharis in his book *Chasing Spies: How the FBI Failed in Counterintelligence but Promoted the Politics of McCarthyism in the Cold War Years*.<sup>7</sup> So it is to Weiner's discredit that he does not cite any of the work Theoharis has produced in his long and distin-

guished career. Indeed, Weiner does not cite any sources at all for the information he provides in *Enemies*— he only provides citations for quotes. And when he cites FBI files, he merely notes “FBI/ FOIA,” and does not cite the file name, number, or serial of the documents he used. This not only makes it difficult for other historians to verify his sources, it suggests that Weiner might not be familiar with the FBI’s file system—something that is more or less required of those who use FOIA to recover archives from the FBI.

These differences in citation methods between journalists and historians are more than mere trifles, because where *Enemies* is weakest is in its failure to engage with the voluminous literature on the FBI’s domestic intelligence programs during the Hoover era. Weiner’s account of Cold War era surveillance under Hoover is a top-down, inside story. As such, it spends most of its attention on recounting how the FBI was able to infiltrate the Communist Party at the very top, and produce a ream of invaluable intelligence in the process. Weiner thus mainly documents whether and to what degree the FBI apprehended communist spies in the 1940s and 1950s. Lost in this history is the fact that, as Robert Goldstein helps document, the FBI played a key role in systematically disassembling the institutions of the left in the U.S. under the auspices of anti-communism.

Just as troubling is Weiner’s use of FBI spy files to rationalize the FBI’s intelligence and counter-intelligence programs against the black freedom movement during the Cold War. Weiner claims that files from the FBI agent Morris Childs “help explain several mysteries of the Cold War, including Hoover’s ferocious opposition to Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights movement...” (208).

Weiner’s analysis shows an extraordinary lack of engagement with the substantial literature on the FBI’s history of targeting African Americans with intelligence and counterintelligence programs. He does not take into account or explain FBI targeting of black radicals during and after World War I—so well documented by Theodore Kornweibel, Jr.<sup>8</sup> He does not mention the role of the FBI in the deportation of Marcus Garvey. He does not seem to be familiar with Robert Hill’s book, *RACON: Racial Conditions in the United States During World War II* which published thousands of pages of FBI intelligence on black nationalists and activists in the early years of the modern civil rights movement.<sup>9</sup> Nor does he make any reference to the FBI’s file on “Foreign Inspired Agitation Among American Negroes”— through which the FBI collected over 140,000 pages of files on the black freedom movement between 1941 and 1957, and repressed the black labor-left, years before it opened a file on Martin Luther King, Jr.

Instead of citing this historical record, Weiner cites a few exchanges between Morris Childs and Soviet leaders in the late 1950s to deduce that

Hoover's fierce hatred for Martin Luther King, Jr. was based on understandable national security concerns about communist infiltration of the civil rights movement. It is true that the FBI had evidence that Stanley Levison, a close adviser to King, had deep ties to the Communist Party—ties that he never revealed to King or the general public.<sup>10</sup> But Weiner presents this information as if the FBI might not have otherwise monitored King at all, as if it didn't already have the entire black freedom movement under investigation for "communist infiltration." Weiner thus concluded to National Public Radio personality Terry Gross that Hoover "had a reason, beyond racism" for investigating Martin Luther King, Jr., "that he wasn't a monster. What he did was understandable in the context of the times."<sup>11</sup> Congressional investigations in the 1970s would suggest that is an historical assessment even people at the time would have likely disagreed with.

Because Tim Weiner's books receive greater publicity than almost all other scholarly monographs put together, his omissions in *Enemies* have significant cultural effects. His writing on the FBI before the 1970s has in some ways displaced and undermined decades of important and less-well-known scholarship—scholarship that is less exclusively based on FBI files, and is much more critical of Hoover and the FBI.

Yet *Enemies* is still valuable. It contains, I believe, the single best history of the war between the Nixon White House and the FBI over control of domestic intelligence operations in the U.S. during the early 1970s—a war that brought down both institutions in the Watergate scandal and its immediate aftermath. No other book that I am aware of documents so effectively how President Nixon's attempt to remove control of domestic intelligence operations from J. Edgar Hoover, and internal struggles within the FBI's leadership over how to respond to Nixon, produced a series of fights that escalated into a kind of mutually assured destruction for both the White House and the FBI.

When the Nixon White House developed its own domestic intelligence operation, it also usurped the traditional prerogatives of the FBI, despite the objection of Hoover and his loyalists. Weiner pays particular attention to the key but often overlooked role of Hoover's Director of Domestic Intelligence, William Sullivan, in supporting the White House against Hoover and precipitating some of the conflict between the two. Hoover loyalists in the FBI, including but not limited to Mark Felt, then leaked information about the White House operation to the *Washington Post*. But exposing corruption in the White House raised the broader issue of U.S. government corruption. In the wake of the Watergate scandal, the U.S. Senate conducted a series of hearings and produced multi-volume reports on FBI misdeeds that have left the agency's reputation tarnished ever since.

The wave of releases of scandalous information about both the FBI and the Nixon White House revealed more about the U.S. national security state during the Cold War than had ever been previously revealed, and permanently damaged the legitimacy and public trust of government in U.S. political culture. The FBI's attempts to personally destroy Dr. King, and to use counter-intelligence programs (COINTELPRO) to "neutralize" black radicals in order to prevent "the rise of a black messiah," made "COINTELPRO" a household word for illegal and immoral government operations against its own citizens.

After documenting the immediate aftermath of the Watergate scandal, *Enemies* provides a look at the troubled inside of the FBI as an organization during the 1980s and 1990s. Weiner describes the FBI's repeated failures to prevent terrorist attacks, its unproductive turf-battles with the CIA, its leadership struggles, its infiltration by Soviet agents, and the uneven record of its various Directors. No mention is made of the FBI's extraordinary deployment of resources against non-violent environmental activists, so-called "eco-terrorists," as documented in William Potter's *Green is the New Red*.<sup>12</sup> But on the other hand, the repeated stories of intelligence failures provide a picture of a troubled institution—one that Weiner uses to implicitly question whether the FBI should be trusted with the vast powers that it has been given by Congress under the War on Terror.

## VI

If police, FBI, military, CIA, and National Security Agency records were properly preserved and open to the public, historians would be expected as a matter of course to explore the archives as part of their research on just about any topic related to 20<sup>th</sup> century United States political and cultural history. Learning how to navigate government intelligence program records would be part of many PhD students' training, and part of the broader experience of doing research in National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) collections. Those records could be read against the grain to provide histories of all sorts of organizations, individuals, and social formations whose archival traces have otherwise been lost. And the extraordinary volume and elaborate methods of government intelligence practices would have to be taken into account in just about any history of the growth of the state over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Lacking public access to already-declassified archives, historians must become more aggressive in learning how to request that files be declassified and released to the public. Here are some places to start.

Substantial portions of police department domestic intelligence "red squad" files from New York City and Portland are open to the public but remain underutilized. A substantial quantity of Chicago red squad files have only just

been opened to the public this year, and deserve historians' attention.

FBI files are now more accessible than ever before. The National Archives recently acquired a vast array of files on social movements from the 1940s through the 1960s, many of which are listed in its Archival Research Catalog (ARC) online. Researchers still have to file FOIA requests to get the files declassified, however.

The FBI also has a substantial number of historically significant files, which are now more easily accessible because they can be released as pdf files on CD-ROM and because the Obama administration requires that all FOIA requests be processed with a "presumption in favor of disclosure." Perhaps some of the most historically significant files still in the FBI's possession relate to what it calls "foreign counterintelligence." These are "105" series files that cover both nationalistic tendencies in U.S. social movements (Black, Latino/a, Asian, and Native American), as well as U.S. government tracking of revolutionaries (especially communist ones) from other countries when they travel to the U.S. or develop ties to activists in the U.S. This vast collection includes files on everything from the Nation of Islam to Cuban communists and Puerto Rican Independence activists, few of which have ever been released to the public.

For historians to take seriously the question of government repression in their cultural and political histories, they are going to have to learn how to gain access to these kinds of collections. Otherwise they will accommodate the government's desire to shape the course of history without leaving a trace.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ira Katznelson and Martin Shefter, eds., *Shaped by War and Trade: International Influences on American Political Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002); Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); for an example of American Political Development studies of the U.S. that study changes in state capacity without studying the national security state, see Meg Jacobs, William J. Novak, Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: A History of the World 1914-91* (New York: Vintage Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Frank J. Donner, *The Age of Surveillance: The Aims and Methods of America's Political Intelligence System* (New York: Knopf, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> For Congressional hearings on the FBI's infiltration and harassment of CISPES, see <http://intelligence.senate.gov/pdfs101st/10146.pdf>. See also Ross Gelbspan, *Break-Ins, Death Threats and the FBI: The Covert War Against the Central America Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Jason Leopold, "Revealed: The FBI's Secretive Practice of "Blackballing" Files," Truthout.org, January 17, 2012. <http://www.truth-out.org/revealed-fbis-secretive-practice-blackballing-files/1326811421>

<sup>7</sup> Athan Theoharis, *Chasing Spies: How the FBI Failed in Counterintelligence but Promoted the Politics of McCarthyism in the Cold War Years* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Theodore Kornweibel, Jr., *"Investigate everything": Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty During World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); and *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Robert A. Hill, *The FBI's RACON: Racial Conditions in the United States During World War II* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> David J. Garrow, "The FBI and Martin Luther King," *Atlantic Monthly*, July/August 2002.

<sup>11</sup> "The History Of The FBI's Secret 'Enemies' List," Fresh Air with Terry Gross, February 14, 2012.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=146862081>

<sup>12</sup> William Potter, *Green is the New Red: An Insider's Account of a Social Movement Under Siege* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2011).