

A STUDY IN AMERICAN AGITATION:
J. EDGAR HOOVER'S SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF THE
COMMUNIST MENACE

Kevin Gotham
The University of Kansas

Mid-American Review of Sociology, 1992, Vol XVI, No. 2: 57-70

This study is a content analysis of J. Edgar Hoover's Masters of Deceit, a major non-fiction bestseller published in 1958. By using the theoretical insights of the Frankfurt School, Hoover's anti-communist treatise can be thematically analyzed as a specific type of propaganda dissemination: agitation. This study will isolate and explain five agitational themes employed to symbolically construct the Communist Menace: 1. The False Religion; 2. The Apocalyptic End; 3. The Dupes; 4. The Communist Conspiracy; and 5. Trust the FBI. By probing beneath the manifest content of Masters, an effort is made to decipher the latent content and discover the implicit mechanisms used to influence public thought.

In his forty-eight year tenure as the Director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover was lovingly referred to, among other praising epitomes, as "Public Hero Number One," the "greatest," and "most wonderful American," and "America's Rock of Gibraltar."¹ Along with honorary degrees from nineteen of the most prestigious universities and law schools, Hoover received numerous awards, commendations, and certificates for "distinguished service," "integrity and devotion to justice," and "selfless devotion to country and god." In 1946 President Truman presented Hoover with the Medal of Merit and in 1955 President Eisenhower awarded him with the National Security Medal and Distinguished Federal Civilian Service medal in 1958. In 1964 in celebratory tribute to his fortieth year as FBI Director, Hoover received 114 plaques, scrolls, and awards (Donner 1980: 80).

These honors were only the tip of the iceberg of Hoover's enormous popularity. Probably the most popular unelected government official in the history of the United States, Hoover's approving consensus is revealed not only by the hundreds of awards he received over the years, but by his persistent high rankings in public polls. A 1953 Gallup poll showed 78% "favorable" opinion for the Director while only a minuscule 2% had an "unfavorable" opinion (20% had no opinion). A 1965 Gallup poll showed an 84% "highly favorable" rating while a May 1971 poll showed a 71% "excellent" rating for Hoover's governance of the FBI.²

Hoover's enormous popularity derived from his exploitation of the perennial American fear of radical change and symbolic defense of traditional American

values and institutions. For Hoover, Communism was not just a political philosophy or form of government but an eternal attack against America's most sacred values and collective sentiments. Ethnocentric Americanism combined with orthodox Protestantism and individualism were the supreme cultural values for Hoover (Powers 1983: 28).

Hoover's success centered upon the twin utilization of a symbiotic master theme of communist hysteria and communist containment: 1. exaggerating the perils of Communist subversion and deceit, while 2. emphasizing the FBI's investigative powers to contain the communist threat. By disseminating this master theme Hoover acted as both evil seer and good shepherd - by playing upon vague fears, discontents, and insecurities vis-a-vis foreign subversion while at the same time assuring Americans that the FBI was tackling the Communist threat.

This master theme is most tellingly revealed in his magnum opus *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism and How to Fight It*. Published in 1958 it was primarily written by agent Fern Studenbroeker a Bureau researcher on subversive groups working in the FBI's "Crime Records Division" (Ungar 1976, p. 259). The 400 page anti-communist treatise purported to "reveal," according to the introduction, "the everyday facts of communism which will be of maximum help to the people of our country in recognizing and fighting the enemy in our midst" (Hoover 1958, p. viii). According to Hoover, it was a "body of knowledge that the American people *dare not* be without" (emphasis in original) (p. vii). Along with the 29 printings and 250,000 hardback and 2,000,000 paperback copies sold, *Masters* was a major non-fiction best seller for over 30 weeks (3 weeks at number one) in 1958-1959 - a striking testament to Hoover's enormous popularity and gravity of popular concern about Communism during the Cold War (Gentry 1991).

Hoover's popularity derived not from his supposedly expert knowledge of communism but from his successful articulation of specific persuasive themes resonating with the psychological disposition of Americans living during the Cold War. By thematically analyzing *Masters of Deceit* according to the theoretical insights of the Frankfurt School Hoover's symbolic method can be understood as a specific type of propaganda dissemination: agitation. According to the Frankfurt School, the agitator does not "confront his audience from the outside" but "arises from its midst to express its innermost thoughts." The agitator works "from the inside," stirring up what lies dormant there. Between the audience and the agitator there is an "unconscious complicity or collaboration;" neither is entirely passive; and "predominately psychological factors" reflect the "deep consciousness and unconsciousness of both parties" (Lowenthal 1987: 14).

Ambiguity, uncertainty, confusion, and appeals to the irrational and emotional dispositions characterize the agitator's style. While the propagandist attempts to mold the audience's dispositions into a specific and predetermined cast, the agitator functions to ignite the smoldering dispositions of his audience into a proverbial inferno. The agitator, as an "advocate of social change," does

not appeal to objective or rational efforts to ameliorate the social conditions that give rise to the audience's frustration or discontent. The agitator is eager to find a scapegoat who can be held responsible for the perpetuation of these social conditions. Once a suitable scapegoat is found, the agitator proposes to defeat the opponent through the promotion of a movement or organization capable of achieving such an objective.

Unlike the reformer of revolutionary who translates complaints of his audience into objective issues, "the agitator," according to Lowenthal, "makes no effort to trace the social dissatisfaction" of his audience to a "clearly definable cause." The agitator "always suggests that what is necessary is the elimination of people rather than a change in the political structure" (Lowenthal and Guterman 1948: 16). His complaints refer to social reality not in terms of rational concepts and objective verification but through fantasy and extraordinary imagery. The general purpose of agitation is to modify the psychological disposition of the audience so that they will become passively receptive to the personal influence of the agitator.

Drawing upon the scholarly research of Theodore Adorno, Morris Janowitz, and especially, Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman, this study will isolate and analyze certain agitational themes which occur with great frequency and regularity throughout *Masters of Deceit*. Through content analysis of *Masters*, this study will outline some of the distinguishing features of Hoover's ubiquitous portrayal of "communism" as a false religion and eternal conspiracy, among other pejorative connotations, and examine the social and psychological factors which enable such characterizations to flourish in Cold War America. In addition, an effort will be made to probe beneath the manifest content of *Masters of Deceit* to decipher the latent content and discover the implicit mechanisms used to influence public thought.

Theme 1: The False Religion

If there was a theme that could resonate with the dispositions of the American mass public it was to portray Communism not as just another political philosophy but as a false religion posing as the supreme threat to the nation's most cherished values and institutions. Chapter 21, "The False Religion" specifically delineates what Communism supposedly is, according to Hoover:

Communism is more than an economic, political, social, or materialistic doctrine. It is a way of life; a false, materialistic "religion." It would strip man of his belief in God, his heritage of freedom, his trust in love, justice, and mercy. Under communism, all would become...twentieth century slaves (1958, p. vi).

In 1939, Hoover defined democracy as the "dictatorship of the collective conscience of our people" meaning that communism was an attack upon America's collective values and sentiments which had to be countered at all costs

(Powers 1983: 28). For Hoover, the only way to ensure and maintain the "dictatorship of the collective conscience" was to create an image that had an antagonistic affinity with the common values of American culture and then destroy this image. Hoover's success and popularity derived from his portrayal as a 'Michael the Archangel' gallantly protecting America's sacred shores from the Communist false religion.

The basic function of Hoover's symbolic depiction of communism as a false religion is to appeal to the orthodox religious leanings of Americans. *Masters* is loaded with images of atheism and irreligion - intolerable attributes to the average Christian American.³ Atheism and loss of faith in God and religion is the "first step" toward communism indoctrination: "...joining the Communist Party comes from a loss of faith...in our own Judaic-Christian heritage and earnest, though perverted, seeking for a new faith" (Hoover 1958: 107). Just as Marx ("hatred of all Gods was Marx's credo" - p. 323) and Engels were atheists so was Lenin: "At age sixteen, as he later said, Lenin ceased to believe in God. It is reported that he tore the cross from his neck, threw this sacred relic to the ground, and spat on it" (26).

The *Final Goal* of communism is the "utter rejection of all religion...from the heart, mind, soul of man, and the total victory of atheistic communism" (emphasis in original) (329). It is "anti-God and anti-man," possessing the belief that "man can be completely redesigned from a child of God into a soulless social cog...the terror of the twentieth century" (78). "A communist America would celebrate the birth of Karl Marx rather than the birth of Christendom" (172).

One can discern a certain logic behind Hoover's symbolic transformation of communism from a political philosophy into a false religion. According to Adorno, the "lack of objective logic" in the agitator's statements is due to "logical reflections about the psychology of his listeners and the best way to reach them" (Adorno 1975: 39). It could be argued that Hoover well understood George Orwell's dictum that "The average man is not directly interested in politics, and when he reads he wants the current struggles of the world to be transformed into a simple story..." (Powers 1975: 267). Hoover's symbolic method was to transform a complex political ideology born of the sophisticated minds of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin into a simple tale - American good versus Communist evil - which the average citizen could empathize with and understand.

By rhetorically recasting communism as a false religion Hoover succeeded in creating a symbolic threat to, what Robert Bellah would characterize as, the American "civil religion." The American civil religion can be characterized as a set of beliefs and symbols that sacralize American mass culture and place the nation in the context of a transcendental system of meaning (Bellah 1970). According to Hoover, "...the Communist Party is attempting to exploit the rise of materialism, irreligion, and lack of faith in our society..." "They have...tried to "steal" the nobility, the fervor, the enthusiasm of a free government under God" (1958: 116). In an affirmation of American patriotism Hoover exalts:

"...no communist-created utopia can compete with our American way of life" (p. 253). By symbolically portraying communism as a supreme threat to America's most sacred values and institutions - the nation's collective identity - Hoover succeeded in creating a symbol of communism that antagonistically resonated with the religious dispositions of American citizens living during the Cold War.

Hoover's symbolic depiction of communism as a false religion is supplemented by metaphorically transforming communists not only into inhuman creatures but satanic demons. The metaphorical *dehumanization* of the opponent is a favorite agitational theme, according to Lowenthal:

The enemy [as depicted by the agitator] is conceived not as a group that stands in the way of achieving a certain objective but as a superoppressor, a quasi-biological archdevil of absolute evil and destructiveness. He is irreconcilable, an alien body in society... Not even in theory is he amenable to persuasion. He is...evil for the sake of evil (1958, p. 47).

In *Masters*, the Communist Party is depicted as a "freak" and "powerful monster" whose members are "grotesque creatures" (53, 62). Individual communists are referred to as "barbarians in modern dress using both club and blood purge" while Lenin is given the special status of introducing into the world "a new dimension of evil and depravity not surpassed by Genghis Khan or Attila..." "...an immorality that shocked Western Civilization." (35, 101). Stalin is referred to as a "crust of sludge" (50).

Littered throughout *Masters* are sporadic references to the occult and satanism. Communism is "not an angel of mercy but a menacing demon spattered with blood and wielding a sickle of iron" (103). It is an "evil conspiracy" with a "sinister influence" capable of hypnotizing individuals with its "communist *spell*" (emphasis added, pp. 331, 335, 334). Communists are motivated by a "diabolic" logic and disciplined by "terror," "brutality," and "ruthlessness" (51, 160, 173). Not only does Hoover use this agitational theme to symbolically transform communism into something that cannot possibly have any factual basis in reality but mythically portrays communism as an imminent threat of impending doom and cataclysmic ruin.

Theme 2: The Apocalyptic End

One of the foremost themes used by the agitator to seduce his audience is to disseminate the view that radical change or the apocalyptic end is imminent. Both Lowenthal and Adorno extensively discuss the use of this agitational theme: Lowenthal referring to the theme as "the charade of doom" (1987: 42-46), and Adorno referring to it as the "last hour" device (1975: 74-77). The agitational theme embodies, according to Adorno, "the direct or indirect assertion that catastrophe is imminent, that the situation is desperate and has reached a peak of crisis..." (1975: 74).

According to Hoover, Communists work "night after night, week after week," "plotting against America...planning for revolution" (1958: 134). The

Communist Party is a "terrible instrument poised and eager to destroy this country...;" it is a "weapon of attack" continuously mobilized not only for the day of the revolution but for "now" (emphasis in original) (83, 147). Each day is a "day of preparation and dress rehearsal for the day when they come to power. Non-communist ranks must be infiltrated, penetrated, and subverted" (191).

"The United States is a vast battlefield...a gigantic checkerboard. The communist high command is constantly moving, jumping, switching, retreating, to get communist members into positions of influence" (1958: 82). The Communist Party is composed of "thousands" of "fast," and "hard hitting," "offensive shock troops" that can "strike quickly with great fury" (83, 84, 141). In the conclusion to *Masters* the Communist apocalyptic end is portrayed as destroying the "American Way" and "Western Civilization."

Something utterly new has taken root in America during the past generation, a communist mentality representing a systematic, purposive, and conscious attempt to destroy Western Civilization and roll history back to the age of barbaric cruelty and despotism, all in the name of "progress." Evil is depicted as good, terror as justice, hate as love, and obedience to a foreign master as patriotism (1958: 319).

All advocates of social change evoke visions of catastrophe and imminent change but unlike the reformer or revolutionary who summons the audience to work toward an objective end or achievable utopia, the agitator has no rational alternative to the impending disaster. In agitation, according to Lowenthal, "the positive alternative to the threat of disaster is totally lacking or suggested in the vaguest form as a return to the "good old days"" (Lowenthal 1987: 42).

Hoover's pleading for Americans to "wake up" to the impending Communist catastrophe is conceived, like Adorno's characterization of Martin Luther Thomas' agitation device, in terms of "back" rather than "forward" (Adorno 1975: 77). According to Morris Janowitz's content analysis of Gerald L. K. Smith's radio speeches, the agitator consistently "maintains that religion and a return to the ways of Christ are necessary to save America" (Janowitz 1944). A return to "good" and "wholesome" American values and the reading of the Bible is the only thing that can save America from the communism evil according to Hoover:

Suppose every American spent a little time each day, less than the time demanded by the communists, in studying the Bible. The result would be a new America, vigilant, strong, and ever humble in the service of God (334)...If Communists can be so inspired from error, falsehood, and hate, just think what we could do with truth, justice, and love! I thrill to think of even greater wonders America could foster from its rich, glorious, and deep tradition. All we need is faith, *real faith* (emphasis in original) (337).

Only with "God's help" and the "spirit of religion" can the Communist Menace be repelled (p. 338). Hoover's trashy sentimentality stands revealed: "for [o]ut of

the deep roots of religion flows something warm and good, the affirmation of love and justice; here is the source of strength for our land if we wish to remain free. It is ours to defend and nourish" (330).

The threat of imminent catastrophe symbolically illustrates a "hostile world" where personal conversion is the only answer to repelling the communist evil. The latent function of this agitational theme is to instill into the audience a "pervasive sense of fear and insecurity" since impending "catastrophe" implies the spontaneous materialization of change divested of the rational free will of individuals (Lowenthal 1987). The agitator exploits and exacerbates this fear and insecurity by disseminating the view that individuals can be easily duped by the supposedly false claims of communism.

Theme 3: The Dupes

According to Lowenthal, the agitator claims superior knowledge while simultaneously portraying the inferiority of his audience not as an uninformed or "unenlightened" bunch but as "dupes" (1987: 30). According to Hoover, communist "dupes" are individuals who unknowingly do the work of the Communist Party because they are under "communist thought-control" (1958: 93). Hoover defines communist thought control as "controlling, in various degrees, the thinking of many Americans" (81). It "can influence you on any matter, regardless of how minor, making you think favorably toward communism" (93).

For Hoover, the great majority of Americans are "loyal, but deceived citizens" (95). The loyal American is duped into supporting such causes as signing a petition urging "world disarmament" and attending a "Party-manipulated" rally in support of the Bill of Rights, because he/she believes in the aims they possess and does not recognize "the hidden motive" - the advancement of the Communist cause (95). "It is a tragedy, according to Hoover,

...that so many high ranking statesmen, public officials, educators, ministers of the gospel, professional men, have been duped into helping communism...Many well-meaning citizens...not seeing behind the communist intentions have been swept into the communist thought-control net (93).

The Communist Party seeks to infiltrate "labor unions, the government, civic and community groups, religions, professional, economic, and social organizations to turn members (read "dupes") of these legitimate groups into communist thought-control relay stations" to seduce other dupes over to the cause (205, 214).

Since "deceit is one their strongest weapons," and "infiltration can take place before our eyes without knowing it for what it is" Hoover helps out by "translating" communist slogans:

*"Restore the Bill of Rights"...*means eliminating legal opposition to communism, stopping all prosecution of communists, and granting amnesty to

those presently in jail. "Repeal the draft law" and "peace" mean curtailing our national defense effort and allowing Russia to become militarily stronger than the United States. "Increase trade with the Soviet Bloc" means selling materials that would be used by the communist nations for armaments. "Restore academic freedom" means to communists that we should permit the official teachings of communist doctrine in all schools and we should allow communists to infiltrate teaching staffs. If communists had their way, America would be rendered helpless to protect herself (199).

There is a latent function at work in the use of "the dupes" theme: because individuals are so easily duped into supporting communist aims any grassroots mobilizing for social change can be readily discredited as communist infiltrated. To curry favor with labor unions communists employ such tactics as calling for "higher wages, a shorter work week, increased vacations, and an abolition of the high cost of living" (194). In order to find favor with Negroes, communists urge the "abolition of 'Jim Crow Laws,' and the fight for Negro rights" (194). The function of such characterizations is to make individuals believe that the legitimate demands of labor unions and civil rights organizations are communist sponsored.

The "stigmatization of communism as a kind of dupery" is a powerful agitational device, according to Lowenthal, for it "divests it of any ideological significance and extends its meaning to the point where it is completely vague" (Lowenthal 1987: 49). "The agitator blurs the distinction between communism and other ideologies distasteful to him by...suggest[ing] that communism is merely a label to conceal sordid activities, and that consequently anyone whom the agitator considers sordid may be called communist," according to Lowenthal (1987: 48, 49).

Since the agitator's concept of communism is infinitely extendable it can be used to stigmatize legitimate groups as communist manipulated. This smear tactic is a favorite device used in *Masters* to discredit grassroots peace organizations. Legitimate complaints calling for the elimination of the atomic bomb and changes in the U.S. foreign policy are discredited by imparting the claim that communists exploit these issues to further their own cause: "the true meaning of peace and banning the A- and H-bombs is weakening the United States and advancing Russian aggressive aims" (Hoover 1958: 200).

Not only organizations but social events such as demonstrations, rallies, and parades are "ideal" "front" campaigns exploited by communists to further their aims. As Hoover puts it: "...suppose a giant rally for "peace" is held. The platform will glitter with non-communists. But a communist member on hand will control the agenda" (1958: 84). Concomitantly, the Communist Party has established "hundreds of major fronts" organized into a "vast, interfaced" system designed to exploit legitimate social issues for purposes of advancing communist aims.

The latent function of such a characterization is to leave the reader with a confused and disillusioned feeling that all grassroots efforts to ameliorate social

ills are illegitimate since communists may be secretly manipulating and controlling these activities. The individual is led to believe that through their ruthless thought control communists have the capacity to control and subvert political organizations and social movements. Not only are individuals and grassroots mobilization efforts subject to communist thought-control but this thought-control is part of a clever, comprehensive, and planned conspiracy.

Theme 4: The Communist Conspiracy

In agitation, according to Lowenthal, the "dupe is pictured not merely as cheated but as cheated systematically, consistently, and perpetually...for he is victim to a comprehensive and carefully-planned political conspiracy" (1987: 33). If there is one agitational theme that stands out above all others in *Masters* it is the theme of the "Communist Conspiracy." The symbolic transformation of a circumscribed group of individuals - communists - into "mysterious spies" malevolently guided by a "secret international plot," not only functions to blur the specific identity of the group but induces individuals to paranoia since they feel themselves to be objects of secretly manipulated conspiratorial plots. The agitator exacerbates the paranoia of his audience by indefinitely extending the concept of a permanent "conspiracy" to all areas of social life. According to Hoover:

Communists want to control everything: where you live, where you work, what you are paid, what you think, what streetcars you ride (or whether you walk), how your children are educated, what you may not and must read and write...the time your alarm clock goes off...amount of cream in your coffee. They want to make a "communist man," a mechanical puppet, whom they can train as the Party desires. This is the ultimate, and tragic aim, of communism (1958: 9).

Communists are continually at work, night and day, using fraud and deceit to coax Americans over to their "poisonous," "heartless, totalitarian way of life" (243). Communists are not only "literally influencing thousands of Americans" each day but are secretly concealed so that no individual or area of social life is immune from their conspiratorial influence (82).

A physician, a lawyer, an educator, a personnel manager in a business firm, a television script writer - each may be a concealed communist...a professor "guides" a discussion and subtly engenders communist doctrine. A personnel manager hires communist sympathizers, working them into key positions. The Party increases, almost without anyone's knowing it (86).

Never once in *Masters* is one given an objective verification of the effectiveness of the Communist conspiracy. There is never any reference to whether communist subversion is increasing or decreasing, and characteristically, no way of knowing whether the FBI's claims are accurate.

In agitation, according to Lowenthal, "the enemy's strength is not based on actual power or might but on tricks and deception" (1987: 61). It is

characteristic of the agitator to symbolically construct his enemy's might in vague, unverifiable, and unmeasurable terms. The strength of the Communist Part is not measured in numbers but in organized deception. Communism uses tactics of "confusion" and "hypocrisy" to wage its battle against America: "[T]he attack is both legal and illegal, offensive and defensive, open and concealed" (Hoover 1958: 195). A select group of superobedient "hard core" individuals are continuously engaged in undermining American society while, as Adorno puts it, the "good folks are all asleep" (Adorno 1975: 23; see also Hoover 1958: 71). Just how this "hard core" elite actually tries to accomplish this is never objectively delineated or rationally explained.

It is also characteristic for the agitator to not only symbolically construct his enemy in ambiguous terms, but to ambivalently portray this enemy as "both strong and weak," according to Lowenthal (1987: 67). "...I know what communism could do to us," says Hoover, "Not because it is stronger than we are; it is not. Not because it has something better to offer; it has not. But we may not learn until it is too late..." (1958: vii).

Because communists are engaged in organized deceit and clandestine deception, the strength of the Party cannot be empirically measured. "In recent years there has been a tendency to discount the menace of domestic communism solely because of a decline in Party membership," asserts Hoover, "However, ...for every Party member ten others are ready, willing, and able to do the Party's work" (5). Hoover ominously warns his audience that the "Communist Party is stronger now than ever even though numbers are declining" (78). "They are outnumbered; they know that. That is why they must depend on skill, maneuvering and deception" (82).

The mythical representation of communism as a "conspiracy" functions like the agitational themes of the "apocalyptic end" and "the dupes" to incite a paranoid sense of fear and insecurity into the audience since secret enemy machinations supposedly control their lives. Hoover's amalgamation of the various mythical stereotypes of communism and emphasis on the FBI's expert investigative skills functions to encourage the audience that they should trust in the FBI as the means for containing the menacing threat.

Theme 5: Trust the FBI

In chapter 22 of *Masters*, "What Can You Do," Hoover remarks that even though communists "are trained in deceit and trickery and use every form of camouflage and dishonesty to advance their cause" "all loyal Americans" can do "a lot" to combat these "masters of deceit" (emphasis in original - 1958: 310, 309). Hoover stresses that the "responsible person" has a patriotic duty to be alert and learn the "truth" and "facts" about the perils of communist subversion. Since the Communist Party is engaged "deceit" and "trickery" the latent function of Hoover's point is to confuse and seduce the audience in such a way that they will give their complete trust and allegiance to the FBI. According to Hoover, loyal Americans have a duty to report to the FBI any "information about espionage, sabotage, and subversive activities" - an ambiguous term which

could be construed to mean an infinite number of activities. Two sentences later Hoover states that one should not be worried if "the information seems incomplete or trivial" while in the next sentence he asserts that one should "stick to the facts" (311). The latent function of such ambiguous statements is to not only destroy any type of objective or rational definition of what the "facts" are but to confuse the audience in such a way that the "truth" cannot be specifically determined since communists are involved in deceit and trickery.

The "total effect" of the agitator's words, according to Lowenthal, is to make the "audience subservient to his personal leadership" (1987: 8). The agitator does this not only through the intentional blurring of the distinction between objective fact and symbolic imagery, but by demonstrating his supposed special knowledge of the situation. By disseminating a few bits of "secret and highly important information, sources of which he is most careful not to reveal," the agitator implicitly asserts that he has the superior expertise and skill to lead the audience (1987: 143). Americans can rest comfortably since the FBI knows what is going on according to Hoover:

We in the FBI, through confidential sources of information know what goes on in hundreds of [Communist Party] meetings...ruthless thought control.

Communist members learn what to think, how to vote, what to say by a process of "automatic osmosis" - the seeping of predigested thoughts along the Party line into all subordinate minds, disciplined to accept. The members become ideological sleepwalkers, drugged into complete obedience by an unconscious discipline.

...Communist thought control...is a terrifying spectacle, freezing into fixed rigidity the mental process of thousands (145).

According to Lowenthal, the agitator "warns his audience that it needs his guidance in the bewildering situation in which it finds itself." The agitator "claims superior knowledge" which he has "obtained by virtue of his special position" (Lowenthal 1987: 30).

Since the FBI has the "latest scientific knowledge, fingerprints, new investigative techniques, careful training of our special agents," Hoover assures his audience that the FBI is "zealously protecting not only the internal security of the nation but also the rights, life, and property of the individual" (1958: 315). Hoover always discouraged vigilante action and stressed that citizens should leave spy-hunting up to the FBI (Powers 1987). The function of such a characterization is to encourage Americans to give their complete trust and allegiance to the FBI since it is the nation's symbol of security.

Conclusion - The Symbolic Construction of the Communist Menace

The "primary function" of the agitator's words, according to Lowenthal, is to appeal to the psychological dispositions of the audience thereby making them "subservient to his personal leadership." The themes the agitator employs to "seduce" his audience are not "accidental" but "directly reflect the audience's

dispositions" (1987: 18). By thematically analyzing *Masters of Deceit* using the intellectual insights of the Frankfurt School this study has isolated five agitational themes or devices employed by Hoover to symbolically construct the communist menace.

The themes employed by the agitator to incite fear and paranoia into the audience are not fleeting and insubstantial emotions but are basic to modern society. According to Lowenthal and Guterman, "The modern individual's sense of isolation, his so-called spiritual homelessness, his bewilderment in the face of seemingly impersonal forces of which he feels himself a helpless victim" correspond to the "fundamental condition of modern life," *malaise* (Lowenthal and Guterman 1948).

Modern society is exhibited by the prevalence of hyper-rationalized bureaucracies, the decay of traditional roles and patterns of interpersonal relationships, and the rise of mass culture. The resultant insecurity, confusion, and isolation the individual experiences can be understood when considering that the consensus of moral worth in modern society is economic status detached from traditional sources of personality and solidarity such as family, religion, and community.

According to Martin Jay, the "key characteristic" of mass culture as the Frankfurt School understood it was the "substitution of mythic repetition for historical development" (Jay 1973: 181). The erosion of shared values and search for selfhood and social unity in a commodity-dominated world is a requisite for the social creation of a myth system that rationalizes and explains reality. Put another way, the symbolic construction of reality through myth not only provides a meaningful and understandable worldview but simplifies and clarifies the complexity of everyday social life. Mass allegiance and gratification will be bestowed upon the leader who can mythically construct reality in a simple and meaningful way that abolishes the complexity of the labyrinthine modern world (Powers 1975).

Hoover's symbolic construction of the communist menace was an attempt to reduce the impersonal and immovable social forces that control human actions not to an objective structural basis or to a definite rational cause but to a group of individuals who could serve as a scapegoat. Concomitantly, what Hoover was attacking was not these individuals per se, but the unsacred essence they supposedly stood for. The mythical representation of communism as an evil "out-group" functions not only as a means of perpetuating the image of the communist conspiracy without having to document it in fact but also as "a unifying force," according to Adorno, since the audience sees its problems and discontents as reducible to a exogenous group of people (Adorno 1951: 130). In agitation, according to Adorno, "there is a tendency to attack images rather than the reality they represent" (Adorno 1975: 116). Hoover's method was to symbolically construct an image of communism which could antagonistically resonate with the orthodox religious dispositions of Americans and then attack and destroy this image (Powers 1983). It was consistent with Hoover's method never to attack communist doctrines (e.g., dialectical materialism, the possibility

of a classless society, the practical policy of the Communist Party) nor Marxian theory, nor the objective conditions of the masses in Russia under communist rule. Instead, Hoover constructed an imagery of communism as a conspiratorial false religion posing an immediate moral challenge to the nation's collective sentiments and values (Powers 1983: 28).

Hoover's symbolic creation of the communist false religion and defense of traditional American values was accentuated by his portrayal of the FBI as the supreme bulwark of defense against this Menace. Hoover assured the American public that his FBI was containing communist subversion by emphasizing the FBI's scientific techniques and expert investigative powers. By portraying his FBI as a symbol of defense of traditional American values against the communist false religion, his agency acquired a symbolic role as defender of the American civil religion - the source of the nation's collective identity and social solidarity.

Hoover was a figure without parallel in American mass culture. Few government officials have been exalted in the public imagination for as long as he was. His popularity derived from his exploitation of the American fear of radical change accompanied by his symbolic defense of traditional American values and institutions. Hoover's successful articulation of particular agitational themes that resonated with the orthodox religious and psychological dispositions of Cold War Americans is significant in that it is illustrative of how government officials symbolically create the political reality of mass culture (Powers 1975).

ENDNOTES

1. Letters to the Editor, *Life Magazine*, April 30, 1971, p.21. These remarks were in response to a critical cover page article of the FBI which appeared in the magazine on April 9, 1971.
2. Gallup Poll release of Dec. 25, 1953, in "Poll Finds FBI Losing Support" *New York Times* Aug. 9, 1970, p.1.
3. During the Cold War era American "religiosity" as measured by Church-Synagogue membership was at its highest ever - ranging from a high of 76% in 1947 to a low of 73% in 1965. *Gallup Report: Religion in America*. Princeton, NJ: The Gallup Organization 1987 - cited in Roberts 1990, p. 317.

REFERENCES

- Adorno, Theodor W. 1975. "The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses." *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol.IX, Part I. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- _____. 1951. "Freudian Theory and the Patterns of Fascist Propaganda." in Arato, Andrew and Eike Gebhardt, eds., *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. 1978. pp.118-136. New York: Urizen Books.
- Bellah, Robert. 1970. "Civil Religion in America." in *Beyond Belief: Essays in Religion in a Post Industrial World*. pp.168-215. New York: Harper and Row.
- Donner, Frank. 1980. *The Age of Surveillance: The Aims and Methods of America's Political Intelligence Community*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Gentry, Curt. 1991. *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Hoover, J. Edgar. 1958. *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism and How to Fight It*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Janowitz, Morris. 1944. "The Technique of Propaganda for Reaction: Gerald L. K. Smith's Radio Speeches." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. Vol.8, No.1, Spring 1944.
- Jay, Martin. 1973. *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Lowenthal, Leo. 1987. *False Prophets: Studies on Authoritarianism. Communication in Society*, Vol.3. New Brunswick: Transaction Books.
- Lowenthal, Leo and Norbert Guterman. 1948. "Portrait of the American Agitator." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. Vol.12, No.3, Fall 1948.
- Powers, Richard Gid. 1987. *Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover*. New York: Free Press.
- _____. 1983. *G-Men: Hoover's FBI in American Popular Culture*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.
- _____. 1975. "J. Edgar Hoover and the Detective Hero." *Journal of Popular Culture*. Vol.IX, No.2, Fall 1975.
- Roberts, Keith A. 1990. *Religion in Sociological Perspective*. 2nd ed. Blemont, Calif: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Ungar, Sanford. 1976. *FBI*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.