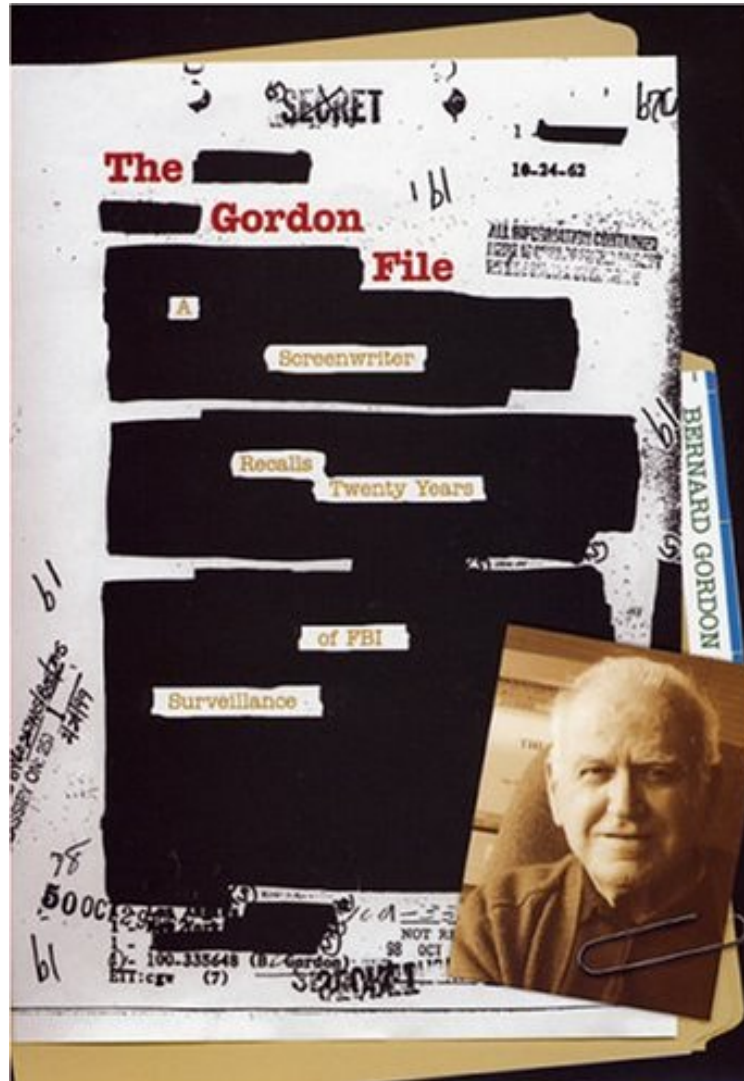


The Gordon File: A Screenwriter Recalls Twenty Years of FBI Surveillance

Bernard Gordon

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Bernard Gordon : The Gordon File: A Screenwriter Recalls Twenty Years of FBI Surveillance before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Gordon File: A Screenwriter Recalls Twenty Years of FBI Surveillance:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The Gordon File: Personal History of an American Tragedy By Customer This is a first person account of an era in American history that must not be forgotten. People were encouraged to spy on friends and colleagues for purely political reasons. Many lost their jobs and were black-listed

and had to leave the country if they were to pursue their professions.³ of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Great Book, Great Writer, Great American

By David L. Robb

True heroes who are also literary heroes come along only once in a generation. A few that come to mind include Henry David Thoreau (Walden), John Reed ("10 Days that Shook the World"), T.E. Lawrence ("The Seven Pillars of Wisdom"), Anne Frank ("The Diary of Anne Frank"), Ernest Hemingway ("For Whom the Bell Tolls") and Jack Kerouac ("On the Road"). Now there is another name to add to this short list of literary and real-life heroes: Bernard Gordon. Gordon, a prolific Hollywood screenwriter ("55 Days at Peking," "The Thin Red Line," "The Day of the Triffids," "Battle of the Bulge") was blacklisted in the 1950s because of his politics. Now he has written a great and important book, "The Gordon File: A Screenwriter Recalls Twenty Five Years of FBI Surveillance," which weaves documents from his voluminous FBI file together with his remarkable life story. Gordon, who is one of the last surviving members of the brotherhood of blacklisted writers, took a courageous stand 50 years ago when he refused to bow to the government's - and the film studios' - pressure to "name names." His brave stand cost him dearly. He had to write under phony names, and then had to leave the country to find work on films in Europe. All this is recalled with great style and remarkable wit, and is masterfully interwoven with more than two decades worth of the FBI's hilariously inaccurate reports that document their surveillance of him. Never before has anyone shown, in such embarrassing detail, how the government wasted so many resources trying to punish dissent while the country was in real danger. As the world teetered on the brink of nuclear war in October of 1962, the FBI was still fanatically pursuing Gordon. And as Lee Harvey Oswald was preparing to shoot President Kennedy, the FBI was pursuing Gordon. "And just what of any value did they find out during these...years of unremitting `investigative efforts?'" Gordon asks. The answer is: nothing. "From all this effort, any intelligence office with the least amount of intelligence should have been able to see that GORDON never knew anything that could be of any value to anyone, much less to any enemy of the United States," he writes. "It is a comment on the timid bureaucracy of the FBI that no one had the honesty, the courage, or even the common sense to say to someone in authority: `We've been following this guy for years, and it is apparent he has no knowledge of anything meaningful, and has had no contact with anyone like an enemy, so why go on? Why not drop this fruitless pursuit?'" But this book is not just a chilling - and often very funny - story about a shameful and distant chapter of American history. It is a wake up call for America today. Gordon reminds us that the same bungling mentality at the FBI that allowed agents to pursue him while the country was in real danger 40 years ago is still prevalent inside the FBI's J. Edgar Hoover Building today - only now they are armed with the First Amendment-crushing powers of The Patriot Act. And unlike the FBI, Gordon asks the right questions. "When will we demand that they spend their billions of dollars and millions of hours pursuing perpetrators of crime and true threats to our safety rather than political dissidents?" he writes. Gordon's book is the best reminder that dissent is not only good, but also that it is patriotic; and that attempts to quash dissent are not only bad, but un-American. Everyone worried about the future of this democracy should read this book. It should be taught in every high school and university in the country.² of 3 people found the following review helpful.

A great story, timely and important

By Daniel Levin

This is a highly readable, smartly written, surprisingly entertaining, but ultimately sobering look at a very disturbing chapter in our history, the era of the blacklist and the hysteria about 'communists' in our midst. What becomes quickly clear, and what Mr. Gordon effectively shows, is that this sad story is almost certainly being repeated right now in 2004 with the FBI's newly expanded mandate from the Patriot Act and the 'War on Terror'. Those of us on the left who have been protesting the war, who subscribe to certain progressive magazines or web sites, or who are active in liberal causes will benefit greatly from reading Mr. Gordon's reflections on his FBI files. These files, obtained through the Freedom of Information act, are fascinating and hugely revealing about how our government works. One cannot help but conclude after reading this fine book that little of substance has changed since the McCarthy era, especially with the current administration in Washington. The book makes it abundantly clear that all activist, progressive citizens remain at risk of being treated suspiciously by their own government, and of having their civil rights and rights to privacy violated. Let's hope that this book is widely read. Mr. Gordon belongs in the company of our best liberal writers, those who are fighting for democracy, justice and human rights (Roy, Zinn, Vidal) and who are not afraid to speak truth to power.

For twenty-six years, the FBI devoted countless hours of staff time and thousands of U.S. taxpayer dollars to the surveillance of an American citizen named Bernard Gordon. Given the lavish use of resources, one might assume this man was a threat to national security or perhaps a kingpin of organized crime not a Hollywood screenwriter whose most subversive act was joining the Communist Party during the 1940s when we were allied with the USSR in a war against Germany. For this honest act of political dissent, Gordon came to be investigated by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1952, blacklisted by the Hollywood film industry, and tailed by the FBI for over two decades. In *The Gordon File*, Bernard Gordon tells the compelling, cautionary story of his life under Bureau surveillance. Drawing on his FBI file of over 300 pages, which he obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, he traces how the Bureau followed him from Hollywood to Mexico, Paris, London, Rome, and even aboard a Dutch freighter as he created an unusually successful, albeit uncredited, career as a screenwriter and producer during the blacklist years. Comparing his actual activities during that time to records in the file, he pointedly and often

humorously underscores how often the FBI got it wrong, from the smallest details of his life to the main fact of his not being a threat to national security. Most important, Gordon links his personal experience to the headlines of today, when the FBI is again assuming broad powers to monitor political dissidents it deems a threat to the nation. "Is it possible," he asks, "that books like this will help to move our investigative agencies from the job of blackmailing those who are critical of our imperfect democracy to arresting those who are truly out to destroy us?"

"Most Americans imagine, I think, that the government agencies charged with national security are at least well intentioned and reasonably competent, but this book will shatter their illusions on both counts. It might also cause them to think twice about some of the programs for collecting 'intelligence' and 'information' that have been proposed for the current 'war against terrorism.' Although The Gordon File tells a story that comes to an end around 1970, the lesson could hardly be more timely than it is today." (Fred Haines, a filmmaker whose credits include Ulysses and Steppenwolf) "Most Americans imagine, I think, that the government agencies charged with national security are at least well intentioned and reasonably competent, but this book will shatter their illusions on both counts. It might also cause them to think twice about some of the programs for collecting 'intelligence' and 'information' that have been proposed for the current 'war against terrorism.' Although The Gordon File tells a story that comes to an end around 1970, the lesson could hardly be more timely than it is today." (Fred Haines, a filmmaker whose credits include Ulysses and Steppenwolf) About the Author Bernard Gordon wrote or produced more than twenty motion pictures, including Battle of the Bulge, 55 Days at Peking, The Thin Red Line, Krakatoa East of Java, Day of the Triffids, Earth vs. the Flying Saucers, and Horror Express. Still active in struggles for democratic values, he helped lead the fight against the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Lifetime Achievement Award to Elia Kazan, who cooperated with the House Committee on Un-American Activities during the blacklist era. Bernard Gordon lives in Los Angeles.