

# Hoover's Army: John Dillinger and the Modernization of the FBI

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## The New Deal

Given the conservative atmosphere of the 1920's, it would have been folly to predict that the federal government would ever get involved in crime fighting.. With President Roosevelt wielding great popularity and the trust of the people, he was able to soothe the people's interests about the expanding government. John Dillinger's crimes were not shocking enough to create a revolution in government functions.



The Biograph Theater the night of John Dillinger's death.



## Hoover and the Media

Hoover used the media to vilify John Dillinger and glorify the FBI to create an image of an already modernized FBI. He controlled who could get credit and silenced key figures in the investigation. Hoover wanted the people to think the FBI was the already superior crime fighting organization, when it still had a bit of learning to do.



## General Conclusions

The story of the modernization of the FBI is incomplete. There were a multitude of factors other than the crimes of John Dillinger, which were equally important to allowing the FBI to branch out in jurisdiction. The New Deal was causing people to confront their ideas of how the government was supposed to function in society. State and Local Law Enforcement were unable to catch John Dillinger and the new breed of criminals. Finally, Hoover was using the media to glorify his agency, while vilifying Dillinger. A variety of sources were used to come to this conclusion. Newspaper articles, speeches from President Roosevelt, the FBI files themselves, and film clips all give a different picture as to what happened here.

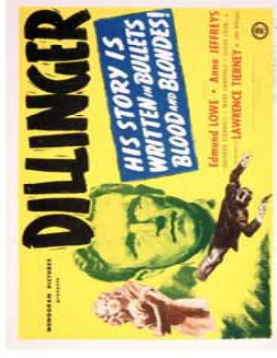


Special Agent in Charge of the Chicago Field Office, Melvin Purvis



## State and Local Law Enforcement

It was becoming apparent that state and local law enforcement was incapable of keeping up with the new breed of criminals. If State and Local Law Enforcement agencies had been able to catch Dillinger, there would have been no need for the FBI to get involved. However, there was another type of crime that was exploiting the cracks in this flawed system while John Dillinger was sitting in a jail cell: kidnapping.



John Dillinger and the Media

On top is a movie poster from the 1945 film titled *Dillinger*. On the bottom is a movie poster from the 2009 film titled *Public Enemies*.