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Organizational Demonization: The FBI as Sinner

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Abstract. This article describes several descriptive attributions that might "explain" the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) not providing all available information relevant to criminal cases to parties legally authorized to receive such information.

In the last month, the FBI has acknowledged not providing all available information to authorized parties relevant to two criminal cases. One case involved the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. The other case involved the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The most common reactions among journalists and their consumers to these findings have contained attributions suggesting intentional misbehavior to the FBI. However, a closer analysis might suggest that such attributions are unwarranted.

For example, one would need to offer arguments for why the FBI would seek to aid alleged perpetrators in the Alabama bombing and harm alleged perpetrators in the Oklahoma bombing. Such arguments--often complex and bordering on the delusional--can be made, but in such situations, most journalists and their consumers prefer to less complexly view the FBI as out to get innocent people or to help guilty people.

A second perspective constitutes the FBI as engaged in some degree of incompetent behavior. In other words, some FBI individuals, groups, and/or organizational components might not have been capable enough to engage in concerted misbehavior. Intentional and/or unintentional incompetence as at least a partially valid hypothesis seems to characterize many examples of the sub-par performance of organizations.

A third perspective constitutes the FBI as hurt through competent application of its own procedures. This application generates behavior seemingly intentionally malign or intentionally or unintentionally incompetent but arising from phenomenologically validated best practices.

A fourth perspective constitutes the FBI as hurt through "business as usual," cultural practices of the organization, and various life style habits of various organizational components. Much of this may at one level be integral to what it means to be a member of the FBI while concurrently working against its mission.

In psychodynamic terms, the FBI is easily an object of projection, other defense mechanisms, and the phenomena of transference and countertransference. Cyclic reversals of reification, deification, idealization, and demonization are too often the result. A warranted conclusion might be that the FBI is neither as good nor as bad as most people think. (See Bion, W.R. (1974). *Experiences in groups and other papers*. Ballantine; Furnham, A. (1998). *The psychology of managerial incompetence: A sceptic's dictionary of modern organizational Issues*. Whurr Publishers; Hamilton, V.L., & Sanders, J. *The second face of evil: Wrongdoing in and by the corporation*. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3, 222-223; Jehl, D. (May 14, 2001). *Senators criticize F.B.I. on McVeigh papers*. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; McKinlay, A., & Starkey, K. (1988). *Foucault, management, and organization*

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