



## Public Enemies: America's Greatest Crime Wave and the Birth of the FBI, 1933-34

By Bryan Burrough

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In **Public Enemies**, bestselling author Bryan Burrough strips away the thick layer of myths put out by J. Edgar Hoover's FBI to tell the full story—for the first time—of the most spectacular crime wave in American history, the two-year battle between the young Hoover and the assortment of criminals who became national icons: John Dillinger, Machine Gun Kelly, Bonnie and Clyde, Baby Face Nelson, Pretty Boy Floyd, and the Barkers. In an epic feat of storytelling and drawing on a remarkable amount of newly available material on all the major figures involved, Burrough reveals a web of interconnections within the vast American underworld and demonstrates how Hoover's G-men overcame their early fumbles to secure the FBI's rise to power.

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*By Bryan Burrough*

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**Public Enemies: America's Greatest Crime Wave and the Birth of the FBI, 1933-34** By Bryan Burrough **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Burrough, an award-winning financial journalist and *Vanity Fair* special correspondent, best known for *Barbarians at the Gate: The Fall of RJR Nabisco*, switches gears to produce the definitive account of the 1930s crime wave that brought notorious criminals like John Dillinger and Bonnie and Clyde to America's front pages. Burrough's fascination with his subject matter stems from a family connection—his paternal grandfather manned a roadblock in Arkansas during the hunt for Bonnie and Clyde—and he successfully translates years of dogged research, which included thorough review of recently disclosed FBI files, into a graceful narrative. This true crime history appropriately balances violent shootouts and schemes for daring prison breaks with a detailed account of how the slew of robberies and headlines helped an ambitious federal bureaucrat named J. Edgar Hoover transform a small agency into the FBI we know today. While some of the details (e.g., that Dillinger got a traffic ticket) are trivial, this book compellingly brings back to life people and times distorted in the popular imagination by hagiographic bureau memoirs and Hollywood. Burrough's recent *New York Times* op-ed piece drawing parallels between the bureau's "reinvention" in the 1930s and today's reform efforts to combat the war on terror will help attract readers looking for lessons from history.

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From [Booklist](#)

The literature on Depression-era desperadoes such as John Dillinger is exhaustive but hardly exhausted, as Stanley Hamilton's *Machine Gun Kelly's Last Stand* (2003) and Burroughs' offering indicate. Burroughs imparts his personal fascination with such charismatic criminals to his readers as he strips the mopes of folkloric myth to restore them to their rightful places as bank robbers, kidnappers, carjackers, and cop killers. Burroughs' work also benefits from recently released FBI records. His narrative seamlessly incorporates that information with extant knowledge, a boon to readers ready for a chronicle of the cases that elevated the Bureau of Investigation to the *Federal Bureau of Investigation*. In 1933 the BI was not yet the country's premier police agency; it became so via its pursuit of gangsters who murdered BI agents in an infamous Kansas City attack. Burroughs' grip on J. Edgar Hoover's subsequent investigations is solid as he slyly dramatizes what kind of people Bonnie and Clyde, "Baby Face" Nelson, "Pretty Boy" Floyd, the Karpis-Barker gang, and their confederates really were. A 10-strike for the true-crime fan. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

"Brims with vivid portraiture ... Excellent true crime." —**The New York Times Book Review**

"An amazingly detailed true-life thriller..." —**Entertainment Weekly**

"It is hard to imagine a more careful, complete and entrancing book on the subject, and on this era." —**The Washington Post**

"[A] riveting true-crime tale... Fascinating... The real story, it turns out, is much better than the Hollywood version." —**The Wall Street Journal**

"Spellbinding... A model of narrative journalism and [a] gripping read." —**BusinessWeek**

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