FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION/PRIVACY ACTS SECTION

COVER SHEET

SUBJECT: LOU COSTELLO

STANDARD FORM NO. 64

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Mr. Nichols

DATE: 1-10-48

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FROM : [redacted]

SUBJECT: LOU COSTELLO; LOU COSTELLO, JR. FOUNDATION
Information Concerning

Mr. Tolson
Mr. E. A. Tamm
Mr. Clegg
Mr. Glavin
Mr. Ladd
Mr. Nichols
Mr. Rosen
Mr. Tracy
Mr. Carson
Mr. Egan
Mr. Gurnea
Mr. Harbo
Mr. Mohr
Mr. Pennington
Mr. Quinn Tamm
Tele. Room
Mr. Nease
Miss Holmes
Miss Gandy

In accordance with your request there is set forth a summary of available information on Lou Costello, the movie comedian.

I. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Lou Costello was born March 6, 1908, and was christened Louis Francis Cristello. His place of birth is not given. While in his teens, he quit high school and began to work in a haberdashery, which job he soon quit to become an actor. His first attempts were unsuccessful and he then decided to become a prize fighter. Fourteen fights later he ended up on the West Coast where he became a Hollywood stunt man.

He met Bud Abbott in 1929 at the Empire Theatre in Brooklyn, when his regular straight man was taken ill. Bud agreed to substitute and they have been together ever since. They played most of the burlesque and many of the vaudeville circuits together. Their first break came in 1938 when they were given a 10-minute spot on Kate Smith's program. Their real success came when they began making movies in Hollywood. Since then they have made numerous pictures and their success is well-known. (Current Biography, October, 1941)

II. COSTELLO AN ADMIRER OF CHARLIE CHAPLIN

In June of 1943 the Bureau received information that Harry Crocker of the Los Angeles Examiner and a close contact of Charlie Chaplin's, intended to launch a publicity program for the purpose of bettering Chaplin's public reputation. Chaplin's reputation, of course, has suffered due to his numerous escapades. Crocker said that Costello, who was a fond admirer of Chaplin, was going to help in regard to this program. (31-68496-x1)

III. COSTELLO REPORTED HAVING LARGE LIBRARY OF OBSCENE FILM

In October of 1944 during the course of an investigation of a purported ring of obscene motion picture operators in Hollywood, information was received that the best known customers for obscene film in Hollywood were Red Skelton, Lou Costello, George Raft and others. One informant, who, it has been shown, tends to exaggerate the facts, said that Lou Costello had the largest library of obscene film in Hollywood. The informant remarked that Costello "had it running out of his ears." (71-1843-5)

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IV. COSTELLO TIE-IN WITH UNDERWORLD

On October 22, 1946, the Los Angeles Office advised that Lou Costello has requested assistance from one [redacted] of New Jersey to "take care of"

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one [redacted] who was making a play for Mrs. Costello. [redacted] in turn called [redacted] a hoodlum in Los Angeles, and told him to handle the matter and to assure Costello that [redacted] would cause no further trouble. [redacted] later advised Costello that he had had a meeting with [redacted] and that [redacted] "wasn't touched," but that Costello would have no further trouble with him. [redacted] told Costello to call him in the event that he had any further complaints against [redacted] and that he would "hurt him." [redacted] also told Costello that in the event of any additional trouble he would not have to call back East because he, [redacted] could take care of the situation in Los Angeles. Costello later called [redacted] and told him that [redacted] had handled the matter satisfactorily. To this the Director penned the note, "What a tie-up to the underworld." (62-81093-3-75)

V. COSTELLO INTERVIEWED IN CONNECTION WITH COPYRIGHT MATTER

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In October of 1946, Costello was interviewed by Agents of the Los Angeles Office concerning the Embro Film Company and one [redacted], who were reported to have violated the copyright laws by showing certain films at a profit. It appeared that Costello was securing these films from the Universal Studios to show at military hospitals for shut-ins. [redacted] was later convicted and fined $1,000 after a plea of nolo contendere. (52-34892)

VI. COSTELLO ATTENDS LEWD PERFORMANCE

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In December of 1946 during the course of the investigation of a White Slave Traffic Act case in the Portland Division, information was secured reflecting that two prostitutes put on a lewd performance for Lou Costello, the movie actor, while he was in Portland in connection with the premiere of a motion picture. The show was arranged by a man known as [redacted] and the girls were paid $50 apiece for their part in the show. (61-73358-1)

VII. COSTELLO TAKES PART IN ITALIAN ACTIVITIES

A report from Los Angeles reflected that on April 17, 1947, Lou Costello was a member of a local Italian-American Citizens Committee which planned a banquet for Ferruccio Parri, the non-Communist former Premier of Italy, and one Carlo Levi, who were touring the country under the sponsorship of the American Society for Cultural Relationships with Italy. This information came from the People's World, a Communist newspaper. It should be noted that the Society is under investigation at the present time as a Communist front. (105-9929-12)

VIII. CONTACTS WITH THE BUREAU

On February 28, 1946, the Director wrote a letter to Abbott and Costello in Beverly Hills, stating that he had the pleasure of listening to their radio program the preceding night and enjoyed their play on words on the meaning of the FBI. Costello answered this letter on March 8, 1946, and invited the Director to be his guest at lunch should he come to California. (100-190833-3)

IX. THE LOU COSTELLO, JR. YOUTH FOUNDATION

The Chicago Herald-American for August 19, 1946, reflects that Lou

Costello went on a tour of the country in an effort to combat juvenile delinquency. According to this article, the two comedians were working on the theory that adults had failed in the fight against delinquency and they believed kids should have a chance to express their own opinions.

The same article points out that the Lou Costello, Jr. Youth Foundation was conceived by them after the death of Lou, Jr. in a swimming pool in 1943. Bud and Lou contributed $150,000 and were touring the country in the hope of raising another $200,000. (62-26225-A)

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ADDENDUM: LBN:MP 2-9-48 - [redacted] had originally talked to me about getting Abbott and Costello on our program "This Is Your FBI" and giving a plug to the Costello Foundation. I subsequently called [redacted] back and told him this was inadvisable. [redacted] stated he had been doing some checking himself and had learned that Abbott had withdrawn on the advice of the District Attorney, for which reason he had abandoned any idea of having Abbott and Costello on the program.

ECK:eb

STANDARD FORM NO. 64

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Director, FBI

DATE: November 3, 1948

FROM : SAC, Los Angeles

SUBJECT: Motion Picture, "10,000 Kids and a Cop"; Lou Costello, Jr., Youth Foundation; Research

The film captioned as above has been prepared at the Nassour Studios as a youth project, the proceeds of which are to go to the Los Costello, Jr., Youth Foundation. Theatres will be charged $10 for a showing of this film. However, law enforcement and social agencies may use it free of charge.

It deals with the above-named youth center in East Los Angeles, which was built in the memory of the infant son of Lou Costello, who died several years ago. The part of a police officer is played by William Bendix and the facilities of the Youth Foundation are depicted. At the picture's conclusion, the officer gives a short talk on the desire of the police officer to be friends with the youths of the community.

I have not seen the picture personally but have been informed that it is well worth while.

This is submitted to the Bureau as a matter of information at this time.

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Tolson
Belmont
DeLoach
McGuire
Mohr
Parsons
Rosen
Tamm
Trotter
W.C. Sullivan
Tele. Room
Holloman
Gandy

Lou Costello Dies at 51; TV, Film Comedy Star

By United Press International

HOLLYWOOD, Mar. 3.—Veteran film comedian Lou Costello, fifty-one, died today at Doctor's Hospital of a heart attack complicated by a blood clot.

He suffered the attack a week ago and had been believed to be recovering.

His manager, Edward Sherman, said Mr. Costello's wife, Ann, had been visiting him and left just before he died.

He said the attack a week ago had been followed by a blood clot.

Lou Costello

One of the first to be informed was his longtime partner in comedy and close friend, Bud Abbott.

When told of Mr. Costello's death, he sobbed and in a barely understandable voice said—"I can't talk now, call me back later, please."

Mr. Costello teamed with Bud Abbott in 1930, after breaking into the entertainment business by the vaudeville route.

The two comedians broke up their team last year.

Mr. Costello, born in Paterson, N. J., was famed for his sad-faced declaration "I'm a bad boy" in many of the skits he and Abbott developed.

The "Who's on First" baseball routine the two developed was one of the most famous in modern movie comedy and was played in person, too, before several Presidents of the United States.

Costello was the roly-poly comic, while Abbott played the straight man. Costello was working in a Brooklyn burlesque house when he ~~and Ab~~bott got together.

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