

Ms. Meg Greenfield
Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

7/22/86

Dear Ms. Greenfield,

The question you ask (7/22/86) has troubled me for many years and I've concluded that "Why Nothing Is 'Wrong' Anymore" is because "the very notion has become politically and personally embarrassing" to so very many of those who control what the people may know, understand and believe, like the Post and many of its employees including - really, nothing personal - you.

When, as Cardoza said, for good or ill, the government is the teacher of us all; and when, without even pro forma denial that government commits felonies before the courts; and based on, undeniably, nothing but perjury, fraud and misrepresentation, and that is not newsworthy to the Post (close to a dozen there) or worthy of any editorial comment, you and Mr. Rosenfeld, you have one answer to your question and, I think, you have the answer in your subhead; because it is politically and personally embarrassing. And that because beliefs and prejudices dominate what the readers get from you all.

Without any exception of which I am aware all the major media have abandoned our traditional and I believe truly great concepts of journalism. While the reasons for this may be complex and I am not suggesting any deliberate dishonesty by anyone and while my own reporting experience is of the very distant past, I've had that experience, I've had experience inside the government, I've worked where news was made and to a degree I've made news. My experiences include working for the Senate as an investigator and editor and for World War II intelligence (OSS) and in the State Department. I believe I am in a position to offer this (intendedly constructive) criticism and believe it is not unfair.

The pertinent question of the headline has troubled me for years, more in recent years when seriously impaired health slowed me down and gave me more time to think. It troubled me when I was able to get around and addressed many collegiate audiences. It troubled me because that of which I spoke was very wrong for government and because I did not want to be negative to formative minds from whom opinion-formers and leaders might come. I finally evolved a balance, saying that governments are made up of men, men are not perfect and thus governments also are not. Then I'd say that there is no other land in which I could safely do what I was doing, that England^{and} the commonwealth countries have official secrets acts and I'd be in jail, that in the USSR I'd be in an insane assylum, and that no matter how slight the odds,^{here} a determined person has the possibility of making the kicking-and-screaming system work. It has been possible for me and I told these young people that because I persisted in a freedom of information

lawsuit against great odds, losing all the way to the Supreme Court, Congress did heed one persistent man and amended FOIA's investigatory files ^{exemption} because of him. That permitted rectification of terrible abuses by government, at least in that form and for a while. What I did not tell them is that even when one man of no influence did make the system work as we'd been taught in school, not a single paper in the country considered it to be newsworthy. Perhaps in not saying this I was less honest than I could have been, but I thought and think it is terrible to turn our young people off, as I feared then.

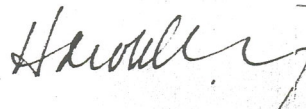
The only reporting of that of which I know was incidental to something else and then would not have been news if I'd not created an unusual situation in which a crusader for freedom of information appeared to be intent upon enjoining it. (George Gardner's enclosed story is essentially accurate but I didn't seek an injunction, only a temporary restraining order, and Gesell, who had held against me in other FOIA litigation, actually said that if it were not for me the country would not have the FOIA it then had.) By the concepts of my youth, making the system work as I then did would not only have been news, it would have been glorified in. By the prejudices in news judgement of my seniority it was not news.

I sent copies of all pleadings in the matter on which I am again pro se before the appeals court and in which, I assure you, I am not serving personal interest but act against it to try to prevent serious and evil precedent (already a little successful), to at least 30 reporters and by this I mean I sent that many everything. To a few others, on occasion, I sent individual pleadings. I heard from two only, one on the Post who phoned to say he saw no news value and one on the Times who wrote that.

The bar was only a little less negative when its members are irrefutably and undeniably involved in felonies, ground for lifting licenses. It sent what I sent to a lawyer who may or may not in the end defend me against the criminal charges I dare in persisting in trying to frustrate these awful and very wrong precedents. Which are almost totally unreported. The exception was in the rag of the self-styled Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. It spoke to the government lawyer only and rehashed those falsehoods and defamations. (It and the ACLU and the Nader law group also refused to file amicus briefs in the case I took to the Supreme Court, where I made the system work in spite of them.)

I used to think that there is reaction in our money-oriented society to efforts to defraud but I've decided it is selective. It does not mean anything when a great and powerful government seeks to steal three months of his Social Security checks from a man with no other income because it does not like him and what he has done.

I very much wish that the major media would give more thought to the ultimate consequences of support of government policies and acts that by traditional concepts are wrong and not pretend that "nothing is wrong" in those matters. Sincerely,



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Critic to Get Free FBI Set Of JFK Files

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

U.S. District Court Judge Gerhard Gesell refused yesterday to delay the FBI's impending release of thousands of additional documents bearing on the assassination of President Kennedy, but agreed that author-critic Harold Weisberg should get a free set "with all reasonable dispatch."

The FBI plans to make public on Wednesday some 40,000 pages of headquarters documents on the 1963 assassination at a cost of 10 cents a page for those who want their own copies. The bureau released an initial 40,000 pages last month on a similar basis.

An outspoken critic of the Warren Commission and author of six books on the JFK murder, Weisberg noted that he has had freedom-of-information requests for such documents pending for years and that he had asked for a waiver of fees in mid-November. He filed for a federal court injunction in late December, arguing that he was entitled to a free set at least by the time the final batch was made public.

Charging that such voluminous FBI releases amounted to "media events" that effectively camouflage unjustifiable deletions and paper over "a very careful job of sifting and concealing," Weisberg said the Justice Department and the FBI had completely ignored his request for a waiver of the fees, which he said he could not afford.

Announcing his decision from the bench after an hour-long hearing, Gesell was sharply critical of the government's delay in responding to Weisberg's request for more than 50 days. The Justice Department offered him a reduced rate of 6 cents a page last week, but Gesell said "it is apparent no consideration whatever" was given to Weisberg's claims of poor health and indigency.

"The equities are very substantially and overwhelmingly in plaintiff's favor," Gesell said. He said that the records would not be coming to light now were it not for earlier freedom-of-information litigation by Weisberg. This led to a congressional change in the law, opening the door to FBI investigatory records.

The judge, however, declined to hold up the Wednesday release, on grounds that the disclosure of the documents was the "pre-eminent consideration." Weisberg's lawyer, James H. Lesar, said later that he understood the FBI would mail Weisberg copies of the forthcoming 40,000 pages the same day.