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Opening the Rosenberg Files

By Michael Meeropol
and Robert Meeropol

SPRINGFIELD, Mass.—Contrary to the impression one might get from the press, our Freedom of Information Act request for the files on our parents, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, has brought about the release of less than 30 percent—a conservative estimate—of the Federal Bureau of Investigation material. Every page has been released at the Government's discretion.

In other words, the Government is still determined to control what Americans can and cannot see about the Rosenberg-Morton Sobell case. It is fighting tooth and nail to prevent the release of most of the Rosenberg files.

After months of Government stalling on our initial requests, in 1975 we initiated a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit in Federal District Court in Washington against the F.B.I., Central Intelligence Agency, Department of Justice, United States Attorneys Offices for the Southern District of New York and for New Mexico, and the Energy Research and Development Administration (formerly the Atomic Energy Commission).

Knowing that the New Mexico file on David Greenglass, the chief prosecution witness, had been "pulped" in 1969, Judge June L. Green of the Federal District Court issued an injunction against the defendant agencies that barred any further destruction of documents.

She rejected requests for up to eight months of delays, ordered detailed inventories, and set a timetable for the release of material for which none of the Act's exemptions were claimed. New efforts to stop us came concurrently with the production of the inventories.

The Energy Research and Development Administration asked the court to declare that the Energy Administration had fully complied with the Act, even though it had refused to release some of the most important material. The other agencies asked that their inventories be declared complete and that we be blocked from investigating if this were true.

When the F.B.I. released 29,000 pages with many blanked-out sections, it sought briefly to charge an outrageous $20,000 "search" fee but public and press pressure forced a retreat. However, less well publicized has been its exemption claims on 10,000 complete pages and approximately one-third of the 29,000 pages.

Even more striking are its affidavits that admit that the Rosenberg "main file" holds at least 73,000 pages, over half of which are not covered by the "complete" inventories it claims to have filed!

For example, William Perl, accused as an accomplice of our father and thoroughly investigated, has no F.B.I. file if the inventories are to be believed.

Clearly, the F.B.I. is hiding significant amounts of its Rosenberg files although Justice Department press releases are implying that virtually all the files are being released.

The American people must know that the 29,000 F.B.I. pages represent only 10 percent of all the estmated files in all Government agencies—only 30 percent of what the F.B.I. has admitted to having. Until we all see *what they do not wish to release* (remember Richard M. Nixon's edited transcripts?) the story of the Rosenberg-Sobel case will remain covered up.

Some material that the Government willingly released has been considered by some observers as damaging our claim that our parents were framed.

The F.B.I. says our father told one Jerome Eugene Tartakow of his espionage activities while they were incarcerated together before and during the Rosenberg-Sobell trial. But according to a 1956 Justice Department memorandum, Mr. Tartakow was of "unknown reliability." The Government did not use him against our father at the trial. The memorandum indicated that five years of attempts to substantiate Mr. Tartakow's fantasies had only succeeded in refuting them.

Mr. Tartakow's mention of two alleged members of the "spy ring," William Perl and Ann Sidorovich, further destroyed his story's credibility. Under oath they denied being spies. The Government never contested their denials with espionage or perjury indictments. Mr. Perl was indicted for perjury unrelated to espionage.

We reiterate that our fight for the files has only just begun.

The Government is resisting compliance with the law because, as Judge William B. Jones of the Federal District Court in Washington recently said, "The F.B.I. just doesn't like the Freedom of Information Act."

You can well imagine why, considering what we strongly believe it is hiding in our parents' case.

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