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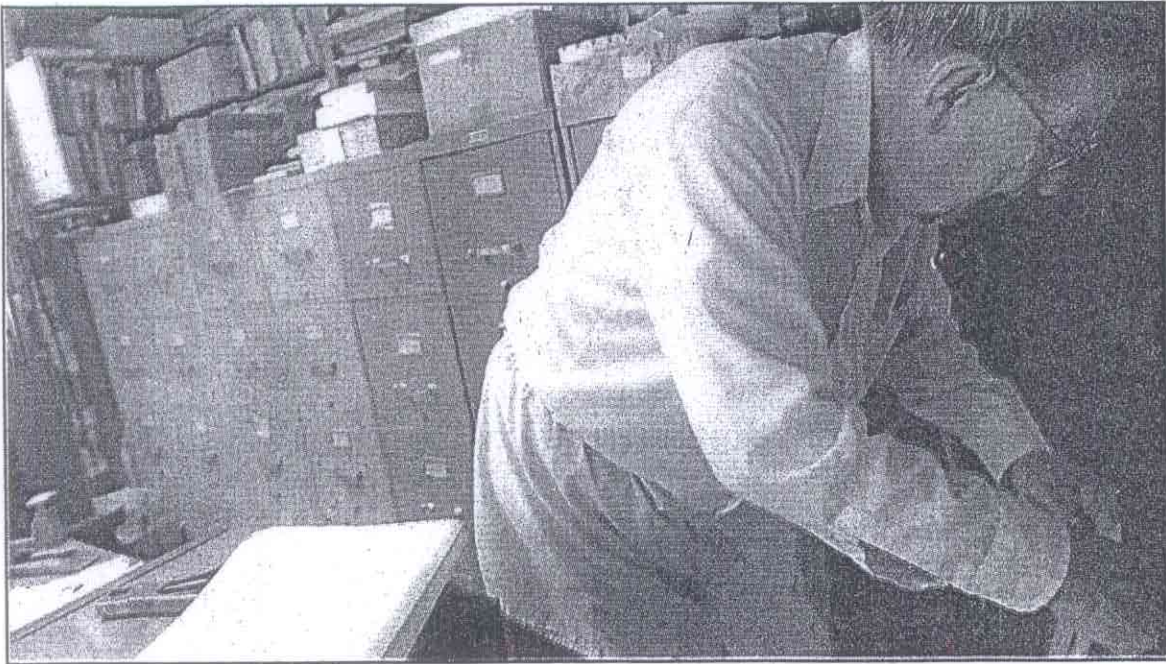
News - Post

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Harold Weisberg spent a large portion of his life trying to investigate what he believed were the darkest moments in U.S. history. During his quest for knowledge, he managed to make a few powerful enemies.





Staff file photo

Local author Harold Weisberg searches through some of the 800,000 documents and information related to the Martin Luther King assassination that he has stockpiled in filing cabinets for research purposes.

One Man vs. One Government

By LIAM FARRELL
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Among Harold Weisberg's voluminous files, the late historian had written a small note, possibly meant only for his eyes.

It is a poem, a brief rumination on the power of confusion. It contains a reference to an excerpt in the Bible, Isaiah 59:9.

"So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us," the Bible passage reads. "We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows."

Such sentiment was indelible to Mr. Weisberg, who spent the bulk of his lifetime searching for answers to what he considered the darkest and most troubling events in American history.

Mr. Weisberg, who died in 2002 at the age of 88 at his Frederick County home, is known for a tumultuous career investigating assassinations and self-publishing controversial books asserting government wrongdoing and cover-ups.

His eight books, notably "Whitewash: The Report on the Warren Report," "Whitewash II: The FBI-Secret Service Cover-up" and "Post-mortem: JFK Assassination Cover-up Smashed!," primarily focused on

(See WEISBERG A-6)

The Struggle for Truth

FREDERICK — Some of Harold Weisberg's efforts to get government information occurred before the passage of the federal Freedom of Information Act in 1966, but his work is a testament to efforts to force government to be open and accountable for its actions and policies.

On Dec. 9, journalist Bill Moyers gave a speech for the 20th anniversary of the National Security Archive, a research institute and library at George Washington University.

Mr. Moyers, who expressed his dismay

(See STRUGGLE A-6)

■ Read parts one and two of the Weisberg story, listen to audio clips, and view more photos and documents at www.fredericknewspost.com.



Photo courtesy of Hood College

President John F. Kennedy visits Hood College in May 1960.

Struggle

(Continued from A-1)

at the government's involvement in the demise of his show on PBS, spoke about a study done by openthegovernment.org, which stated 15.6 million new documents were classified by the federal government in fiscal 2004, an increase of 81 percent compared with the year preceding Sept. 11, 2001.

Also, Mr. Moyers said 64 percent of Federal Advisory Committee meetings were closed to the public.

"Funny, isn't it, how the farther one gets from power, the closer one often gets to the truth?" he said. "It's an old story: the greater the secrecy, the deeper the corruption."

Rebecca Daugherty, the Freedom of Information Act service center director for the Reporter's Committee for Freedom of the Press, said President Bush's administration has taken some positive steps toward embracing FOIA.

For example, a recent executive order by Mr. Bush will require each government department or agency to have a FOIA officer on the assistant secretary level to oversee information requests.

"This is an affirmative endorsement by the president of the Freedom of Information Act," Ms. Daugherty said.

Government openness, however, is something that continually fluctuates based on individual administrations and events. Although the executive order was a positive step, the government has not been entirely cooperative, Ms. Daugherty said, especially in terms of delays.

"You can go very, very wrong as a low-level FBI agent, and the government will protect you," she said. "In that sense we are definitely getting less information than we used to."

Agencies such as the FBI are also deluged by information, providing an easy way out of requests.

"There is increasing secrecy, increasing delays," Ms. Daugherty said. "A delay is in effect a denial. But if you go to court, you're on the court's schedule, too."

Another problem is that government agencies can withhold information by claiming the documents will endanger national security or privacy. Ms. Daugherty said this can be overused, particularly when the government refuses to release information about terrorists because they could be stigmatized if released back into society.

"They reach pretty far for convenient answers that will help them not have to process (the requests)," she said.

In the past few weeks, revelations in the media have certainly given increased credence to the notion the Bush administration has not been as forthcoming as possible.

On Dec. 16, *The New York Times* reported Mr. Bush authorized the National Security Agency to tap domestic correspondence without warrants, reigniting suspicions the government is working against its people behind their back.

For the moment, it remains unclear how deep the shadows we walk in truly are, and each side of the argument, press and government, undoubtedly holds its own interpretation of how dim the light of investigation has truly become.

Perhaps the only inevitable part of truth's journey is in the years that will follow, when future journalists, historians and Mr. Weisberg will set about to see if American government walked openly in sunlight or slipped back into the muddled, darkened depths of secretive night.

"I was born with promises to keep and I did make a strong, persistent, and in many ways costly effort to keep those promises," Mr. Weisberg said in a 1993 interview. "And I hope it is recorded...that to a large degree I succeeded."

(Continued from A-1)

the investigation into the Kennedy assassination, and Mr. Weisberg tried to use the government's own documents against it.

He asserted the FBI and Warren Commission inquiries into the assassination were faulty — ignoring, discarding or obscuring evidence — and were pre-conceived to conclude that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin.

Mr. Weisberg worked extensively in getting the government to release documents on the JFK assassination and others, such as that of Martin Luther King Jr.

In an interview with Joy Derr of Hood College in 1993, Mr. Weisberg estimated he had been involved in 13 separate lawsuits to obtain information, most of which he managed to get released.

In all, he donated the more than 300,000 government documents to Hood College.

"(My work) is selfish. It's selfish," Mr. Weisberg told Ms. Derr. "Here I was, the first member of my family ever born into freedom and when I was old enough to realize it, I felt that I had an obligation to meet.

"What are (poet Robert) Frost's words? 'Promises to keep and miles to go before we sleep'? It gave me an opportunity to repay that obligation. And it means much to me, so much to me that although I have sleep problems, I never have trouble falling asleep."

Mr. Weisberg's FBI file was obtained by *The Frederick News-Post* through the Freedom of Information Act.

The FBI, which had investigated Mr. Weisberg since the late 1930s and escalated its efforts after he was dismissed from the State Department for allegedly being a communist, had not stopped watching him after he left public employment in 1947.

In fact, the legacy of dissidence he created during his government career, from 1936 with the LaFollette Civil Liberties Commission to 1947 when he was fired from the State Department, would haunt him as he worked to investigate the JFK assassination and other historic events.

"I don't want a country in which a president can be gunned down in broad daylight."

Harold Weisberg

Counting chickens

Mr. Weisberg's reappearance in FBI files was not planned. The roughly 16 years between his dismissal from the State Department's Office of Strategic Services for alleged communist sympathies and the assassination of Mr. Kennedy were focused mainly on chicken farming.

In the early 1960s, Mr. Weisberg made headlines in Frederick newspapers because of the work on his Coq d'Or Farm in Hyattstown, where he and his wife, Lillian, raised an assortment of poultry and founded the "Geese for Peace" program, which donated ducklings and geese to St. Lucia and Liberia for the Peace Corps and subsistence farming programs.

Mr. Weisberg was also an award-winning cook, claiming the National Barbecue King title in 1959. His wife was also a star in that field, winning many contests, including being named the 1956 National Chicken Cooking Champion.

According to the interview with Ms. Derr, on Nov. 22, 1963, Mr. Weisberg was in the henhouse gathering eggs when the transistor radio on his waist broadcast the news that the president had been shot.

"I stayed glued to the television as much as I could," he said. "None of the things that happened should have happened."

Lee Harvey Oswald was killed the following day, and about two weeks later, Mr. Weisberg filed a lead and summary for a proposed book to his agent, convinced from the suspicious train of events in Dallas that Oswald could not have been the true assassin.

The reply was not what he expected.

"She said, 'I can't possibly handle this because nobody in New York will consider anything other than what the government is saying,'" Mr. Weisberg told Ms. Derr. "She was so right — you can't imagine how right. I couldn't get another agent."

Fighting the power

Mr. Weisberg's overt conflicts with the government began again in 1961, when Mr. Weisberg and his wife filed a federal torts suit against the government for \$9,950 in damages caused by low-flying helicopters they claimed were ruining their poultry farm. The Weisbergs were awarded \$750, but the most serious damage the FBI did to

Mr. Weisberg had nothing to do with farming.

During the 1950s, the FBI had been building its case that Mr. Weisberg was a communist. A memo from the special agent in charge in the Washington Field Office to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover on Jan. 1, 1955, implicates Mr. Weisberg in the Harry Dexter White espionage case, which was related to the investigation of the Treasury Department spy ring and Nathan Gregory Silvermaster.

The memo concerns a suspect in the White case whose name was blacked out by the FBI. A telephone directory seized from this person's home by Washington Metro Police in 1948 contained Mr. Weisberg's name, according to the FBI file.

No information is provided to explain Mr. Weisberg's connection to either investigation. The events relating to the espionage cases occurred seven years prior to the memo, and no other documents in the FBI file contain this information.

While the telephone directory did not become part of the FBI's official canon of accusations about communism on Mr. Weisberg, other tenuous information did.

The FBI states Mr. Weisberg inquired in September 1959 about how Soviets would react to his chickens competing against Russian poultry. Despite the time frame of this information and some ambiguous references in earlier memos, the alleged communist activities of Mr. Weisberg on his farm are only published in definitive form in memos dating from the mid-1960s and later.

This demonstrates the significant increase in the amount of correspondence detailing Mr. Weisberg's life after the release of his first two books — in 1965 and 1966.

In a summary of Mr. Weisberg's history from Nov. 8, 1966, new information is inserted, stating the farmer held celebrations of the Russian Revolution with an annual picnic "attended by 25 or 30 people." No informant or source of the new information is cited.

"... this book ... is nothing more than a vitriolic and diabolical criticism of the President's Commission and the FBI ..."

Alex Rosen

David Wrone, professor emeritus of history from University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and a friend of Mr. Weisberg's, said the idea of Mr. Weisberg holding celebrations of the Russian Revolution is absurd.

He said Mr. Weisberg would invite a local rabbi and Jewish children to his farm, letting them play with his animals in celebration of the Jewish new year.

"They were observing a Jewish ritual," Mr. Wrone said. "That was

in September. The Russian Revolution was in the last part of October."

Mr. Weisberg got the files the FBI had on him, Mr. Wrone said, and he was extremely troubled by this information.

"It so enraged Harold when he got these documents," he said. "Why would someone do this?"

The farmer knew the FBI was watching him, Mr. Wrone said. Mr. Weisberg could often pick out "men in dark suits" during public appearances to talk about his books and he kept a log of the suspicious phone calls he received in the middle of the night.

"In view of Weisberg's suspected Communist background, ... the FBI could not be of assistance ..."

FBI memo

The first major criticism of Mr. Weisberg's work, and not his alleged political beliefs, occurs after the printing of his first book, "Whitewash: The Report on the Warren Report," which accused both the FBI and Warren Commission of egregious failures of evidentiary investigation to reach a preconceived conclusion that Oswald was the lone assassin.

In a June 6, 1966, memo from FBI assistant director Alex Rosen to Cartha "Deke" DeLoach, an assistant to Mr. Hoover and the No. 3 man in the FBI, Mr. Weisberg is attacked for what the FBI considers his book's failures.

"Due to the inaccuracies, falsehoods and deliberate slanting of facts to fit his own purpose, coupled with Weisberg's subversive background...it is not felt the Bureau should add dignity or credibility to him by acknowledging his communication," Mr. Rosen writes.

Mr. Rosen did not stray from personal attacks in the memo.

"He also said that there are nervous people and neurotics inevitably (sic) there are those who have axes to grind — hatreds or dislikes to be indulged, and political objectives to be attained," Mr. Rosen wrote. "From these comments it would appear Weisberg is adequately describing himself."

This memo also offers a paragraph of background information that is included in virtually all correspondence about Mr. Weisberg's publications and attempts to get government documents.

"Following a review of this book it was determined it is nothing more than a vitriolic and diabolical criticism of the President's Commission and the FBI relating to the assassination of President Kennedy," the memo states.

Credibility and character

Mr. DeLoach, who worked extensively with the media during the JFK investigation, was confident the FBI, the Warren Commission and others involved in the JFK assassination reached the right conclusion.

"He was dictatorial, a control freak. On the other hand, I have to honor him because he was a remarkable man."

Gerald McKnight

"Many authors try to sell a book and get a fast buck," he said in a recent interview with *The Frederick News-Post*. "The fact remains that Lee Harvey Oswald, and Lee Harvey Oswald alone, assassinated John F. Kennedy."

Although he did not remember Mr. Weisberg well, Mr. DeLoach said he read his work on the Martin Luther King assassination, which was of primary concern because he headed the FBI's investigation.

He said Mr. Weisberg's work contained "many fallacies."

"We always looked at criticism to determine whether they were valid or not," Mr. DeLoach said. "We never investigated the authors just to investigate them."

Mr. DeLoach said the FBI worked as efficiently as possible giving out information to the public, but the FBI has responsibilities to its sources and the sensitivity of its files.

"We tried the best we could to give out any information," he said. "I have many good friends in the press. I've always worked with the press and trusted them."

Although the FBI goes to great lengths detailing its disagreements with Mr. Weisberg's findings and his statements during radio and television appearances, the agency also criticized his character and used his background as a reason not to give him information.

Here are some examples:

■ "All in all, the interview with Weisberg was a rehash of the many unfounded allegations which have been made concerning the assassination and merely another effort on the part of a writer to exploit the assassination for his own financial gain." - Milton A. Jones, chief of FBI crime records to Robert E. Wick, Mr. DeLoach's deputy, Sept. 13, 1966.

■ "In view of Weisberg's suspected Communist background, it was recommended...that the FBI could not be of assistance to Weisberg in this matter." - memo from R.H. Jevons, FBI assistant, to Ivan W. Conrad, assistant chief of FBI Bureau Lab, Nov. 8, 1966.

■ "In view of Weisberg's background and his baseless allegations toward Bureau Agents, it is not felt his letter of March 24th or any subsequent correspondence should be acknowledged as it will only encourage further letters from him." — memo from G.E. Malmfeldt, an agent of the FBI, to Thomas E. Bishop, assistant FBI director, April 1, 1969.

And in a letter to Mr. Weisberg:

■ "It is unfortunate that the change in administration has not and apparently will not make you certain that the element of politics played no role in the investi-

gation of the assassination of President Kennedy or the formulation of the guidelines for release to the public of information on the matter in Government files." — letter from Will Wilson, assistant attorney general, criminal division, to Mr. Weisberg, April 8, 1969.

Some of these quotes are contradictory in noting how Mr. Weisberg's communist background precludes agency cooperation while publicly telling him politics are not a factor.

In a memo from Mr. Hoover to an assistant attorney general, dated Oct. 23, 1970, the director sets forth a policy based on Mr. Weisberg's background.

"In view of Weisberg's character, he should not be given the information he requests, and there is legal ground for our position," the memo states.

In denying Mr. Weisberg's requests for information, the FBI offered any one of three reasons: Mr. Weisberg was incorrect, the FBI did not have the information he was looking for, and his requests were not legitimate because he had a history of communist activity.

The timing of the FBI's allegations, and the testimony of friends that its information about Mr. Weisberg is baseless, can easily lead to the question of what the bureau's real motives were.

Mr. Weisberg suspected the FBI was trying to obstruct him, commenting in a *Frederick News-Post* article on July 31, 1980, "The truth is (the FBI is) out to get me ... they're out to stop me."

Years before, when he was working as an investigator for James Earl Ray, accused of killing Martin Luther King., Mr. Weisberg had written a letter to Attorney General John Mitchell on March 12, 1969, accusing the FBI of spreading false information about him.

"I have been informed that teams of FBI agents are going around telling people, some of whom I have never met, that I am a dangerous person, in some unspecified way under 'Communist' influence," the letter states.

In spite of what the FBI file contains, the people who knew Mr. Weisberg are adamant that he was not a communist.

Mr. Wrono said the author spent his life trying to improve America's institutions, not bring them down.

"He thought this was the greatest country that ever lived," he said. "Sometimes people call that patriotism."

Gerald McKnight, professor emeritus at Hood College and a friend of Mr. Weisberg's for 30 years, said the farmer's personality could be overwhelming and confrontational, and although such an attitude harmed their friendship it was necessary to the work he did.

"There was a real authentic loyalty to the United States. He was determined to fight this tooth and nail," Mr. McKnight said. "He had a cathedral-like ego. One had to put up with that because it took someone like that."

Mr. McKnight said Mr. Weisberg's accomplishments, regardless of his personality, deserve

"I was born with promises to keep and I did make a strong, persistent, ... costly effort to keep those promises."

Harold Weisberg

respect.

"He was dictatorial, a control freak," he said. "On the other hand, I have to honor him because he was a remarkable man. Every day of his life he worked on this topic."

Listening to Mr. Weisberg's own statements, he is candid about what he tried to accomplish.

"If you want your country to be what it's supposed to be, no matter how many times you don't succeed, you keep on trying," Mr. Weisberg told Ms. Derr. "If you want to accept what happened and pretend it didn't happen, you have a right to do it. But I don't want a country that lies to the people.

"I don't want a country in which a president can be gunned down in broad daylight on the streets of an American city and consigned to history with the dubious epitaph of a whitewashed investigation.

"I don't want a country in which federal agents can lie with impunity, including under oath, and only be promoted for it, in which the courts don't work the way they're supposed to work, in which the Congress doesn't and the media don't.

"And I don't think it's going to change right away. I have reason to believe it will but I know that if you don't try you can't succeed."

The Deputy Attorney General

October 28, 1970

Director, FBI

- 1 - Mr. K. M. Raupach
- 1 - [redacted]

b7c

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 06-14-2005 BY 60290 AUC BCB/MLT/STW

Reference is made to our letter dated October 9, 1970, and to your letter dated October 2, 1970, which relate to a request from Mr. Harold Weisberg for information concerning the investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy.

Mr. Weisberg's formal request (DJ-118) asks for "all information about and FBI reports of interviews with

b7c

[redacted] Further details in letter of 9/15/70." In the September 15, 1970 letter, after furnishing some information about [redacted] he makes a second request. He writes that the FBI discovered a fingerprint on a leaflet which, he asserts, Lee Harvey Oswald distributed. He asks for information as to whose fingerprint this was and indicates he is aware that the FBI determined that it was not the fingerprint of Oswald.

b7c

Concerning the first request, the files of this Bureau and the files of our Dallas and New Orleans Offices contain no information that [redacted] was interviewed by the FBI concerning the assassination of President Kennedy or concerning Oswald. (Files were also reviewed for the variations of the name, that is, [redacted])

ORIGINAL FILED IN 157-82535-5817

NOTE:

The request received by the Department for information from FBI files is from Harold Weisberg. Weisberg is the man who has written several books critical of the Warren Commission, the FBI, Secret Service, police agencies and other branches of the Government relating to the Assassination investigation. His writings have contained inaccuracies, falsehoods, and deliberate slanting of facts to fit his purpose. He was one of ten employees fired by the State Department during 1947 because of suspicion of being a communist or having communist sympathies. Later, he was allowed to resign without prejudice but he was not restored to his former position. Dallas and New Orleans files have been reviewed on the questions raised by Weisberg and above is result. Bufiles were also reviewed. In view of Weisberg's character, he should not be given the information he requests, and there is legal ground for our position.

The above excerpt is from of a four-page memo from then-FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to a deputy attorney general. In the final sentence on page four, in which Mr. Hoover writes, "In view of Weisberg's character, he should not be given the information he requests, and there is legal ground for our position."