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Ex-Officials Shield Their Files

Weinberger Case Latest to Raise Debate Over Who Owns History

By Gary Lee
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When it comes to retired public officials squirreling documents and records away from public scrutiny, former defense secretary Caspar W. Weinberger is by no means alone.

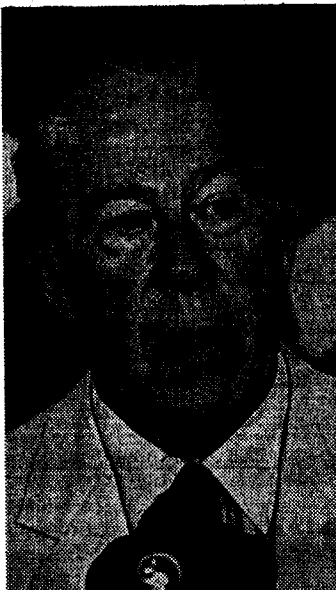
A study released yesterday by the Center For Public Integrity here details the case of Weinberger—who still wields absolute control over public access to 13,000 documents from his Pentagon files at the Library of Congress—and those of other former officials.

Among them: former secretary of state George P. Shultz, who in leaving office in 1989 had 60,000 classified documents transferred to the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, where they are out of reach to independent researchers.

Former Nixon administration secretary of state Henry A. Kissinger turned over his files to the Library of Congress, but keeps ironclad control over them. Although he is cooperating with biographer Walter Isaacson, Kissinger still prevents Isaacson from seeing some of the files, the report said.

Weinberger was indicted Tuesday on charges that he lied repeatedly about his knowledge of the Iran-contra affair and obstructed investigators by concealing the existence of notes he had made during meetings at crucial points in the scandal. Prosecutors discovered those notes in Weinberger's files at the Library of Congress, which they examined with his permission.

The control these and other former officials exercise over once-classified documents was sanctioned by a 1982 executive order, signed by then-President Ronald Reagan. Although legal, the control raises questions about how much the public should be allowed to know about the lives and records of public officials, said Steve Weinberg, an



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author, investigative reporter and editor who wrote the report.

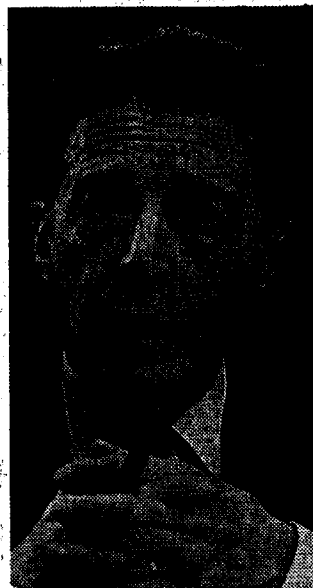
"What these cases tell me," said Weinberg, "is that our view of officials as being public has been turned on its head. The way these men keep their papers away from the public indicates that they don't consider them public at all. They think they own history."

The report also shows how other retired public officials, including former presidents Lyndon B. Johnson and Gerald R. Ford, arranged to keep their files out of the hands of researchers.

Weinberg's asserted that the actions of Shultz, Kissinger and Weinberger are particularly egregious because all three signed lucrative contracts to write memoirs in which they used the material denied to other researchers.

As a result, said Weinberg, the three former administration officials are controlling how history will be recorded. They are preventing others from checking the accuracy of what they write, he said.

When he left the Pentagon,



CASPAR W. WEINBERGER
... controls access to records

Weinberger had his files transferred to the Library of Congress, where an archivist spent 18 months organizing them.

Weinberger, who has final say over access to the files, apparently used them to research his own book, the study said. At one point in "Fighting For Peace," Weinberger paraphrases a dinner conversation he had with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, saying that he had drawn from "a classified memo I wrote for the president after that dinner."

Special investigators in the Iran-contra case were allowed access to the files, however, and they found the documents which became the basis for Tuesday's indictment of Weinberger.

Among others cited in the report as gaining exclusive access to documents for their use are former defense secretary Robert S. McNamara, who served in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, former secretary of state Alexander M. Haig Jr. and former attorney general William French Smith, both of whom served in the Reagan administration.