

March 23, 1982 BOSTON GLOBE
Inside the FBI's John Lennon file

By Ben Bradlee Jr.
Globe Staff

On Dec. 10, 1971, John Lennon was the headliner at an Ann Arbor, Mich., rally that attracted 16,000 people on behalf of political activist John Sinclair, who had recently been sentenced to 10 years in prison for selling two marijuana cigarettes to an undercover officer.

That night Lennon sang a song he had written for Sinclair: "Won't you care, for John Sinclair? In the stir for breathing air, let him be, let him free. Let him be like you and me. They gave him 10 for two. What more can the judges do? Gotta gotta gotta . . . set him free."

The next day, the Detroit office of the FBI sent a memorandum on the rally and Lennon's

The FBI documents reveal a persistent effort to 'neutralize' Lennon as a political force.

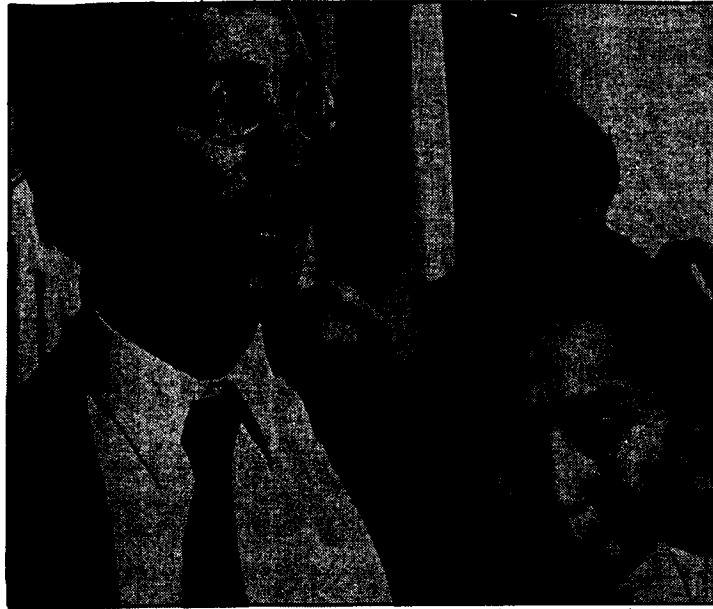
role to J. Edgar Hoover, then FBI director. On Dec. 27, this was followed by another memo to Hoover supplying the lyrics of Lennon's ode to Sinclair.

Newly released documents show that over the next nine months the government — believing Lennon was the keystone of a New Left plot

to engage in anti-Nixon activities, culminating in a political Woodstock at the 1972 Republican National Convention — monitored all the late Beatle's public appearances, kept him under surveillance and urged that he be arrested "if at all possible on possession of narcotics charges" so "he would become more likely to be immediately deportable."

That suggestion from the New York FBI office, and the Detroit memos about Lennon's activities in Ann Arbor, are a silver of the 26 pounds of documents released under the Freedom of Information Act to Jonathan Wiener, an associate professor of history at the University of California, Irvine, for a book on Lennon. Most

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John Lennon and wife, Yoko Ono, at New York immigration court in 1976, learn that Lennon was awarded permanent residency. AP PHOTO

FD-36 (Rev. 5-22-64)

FBI

Date: 7/27/72

Transmit the following in _____
(Type in plaintext or code)

Via AIRTEL _____
(Priority)

TO: ACTING DIRECTOR, FBI (100-469910)

FROM: SAC, NEW YORK (100-175319) (P)

SUBJECT: JOHN WINSTON LENNON
SM - REVACT
(OO: NY)

MIREP

ReNYairtel, dated 5/25/72, and Miami airtel, dated 6/5/72.

Attached are 5 copies for the Bureau, and several copies for Miami, of an LHM dated and captioned as above.

Miami should note that LENNON is reportedly a "heavy user of narcotics" known as "downers". This information should be emphasized to local Law Enforcement Agencies covering MIREP, with regards to subject being arrested if at all possible on possession of narcotics charge.

Local INS has very loose case in NY for deporting subject on narcotics charge involving 1968 arrest in England.

INS has stressed to Bureau that if LENNON were to be arrested in US for possession of narcotics he would become more likely to be immediately deportable.

2 - Bureau (Encls. 5) (RM)
2 - Miami (Encls. 4) (RM)
1 - New York

as, enc. (2), 13

ST-111

100-469910-182

JUL 27 1972

TELEX

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED EXCEPT WHERE SHOWN OTHERWISE

61AUG2 1972

APPROVED: [Signature]

RECORDED COPY FILED IN 11

A 1972 document suggested that a narcotics arrest would make it easier to deport Lennon.

■ LENNON

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of the documents concern the unsuccessful effort of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to deport Lennon on the grounds that he had been convicted in England in 1968 of possessing a small amount of hashish. Lennon was murdered in New York City in 1980.

Wiener said about 100 pages of the material he received consists of heavily censored reports, but the FBI has denied him two-thirds of its Lennon file, claiming, among other reasons, that national security would be endangered. In Los Angeles last week, Wiener filed suit to force the FBI to release the remaining 200 pages. He asked the court to review the documents and determine whether they do compromise national security.

"The Nixon Administration's attempt to deport Lennon in 1972 for his antiwar stand was an outrage," Wiener says, "and it's an outrage today that the Reagan Administration continues to conceal ... the full facts of the government campaign. The suggestion that Lennon's antiwar activities somehow endangered the national defense is absurd. But the Reagan Administration is making the same claim about the peace movement today."

Both the White House and the FBI declined to comment on Wiener's allegations and on any moves undertaken against Lennon.

Two-page memo to Haldeman

The FBI documents obtained by Wiener, some of which he supplied to The Globe, reveal a persistent effort to "neutralize" Lennon as a political force, which seemed of considerable importance to the Nixon Administration. Some of the FBI material also went to the State Department, the Attorney General's office, the CIA and H.R. Haldeman, Nixon's chief of staff.

Most of a two-page memo to Haldeman, dated April 25, 1972, is blacked out, including the name of the author. Only the last paragraph and a short postscript are not. The last paragraph advised that "this information is also being furnished the acting Attorney General. Pertinent information concerning Lennon is being furnished to the Department of State and INS on a regular basis." The postscript called Haldeman's attention to an internal FBI memo from four days before, entitled, "John Winston Lennon, Security Matter - New Left."

That memo was written to Edward S. Miller, then head of the FBI's domestic intelligence division. Miller, now retired, was convicted in 1980 of conspiring to violate the civil rights of citizens by authorizing break-ins in 1972-73 to help find fugitives associated with the Weather Underground. He was pardoned by President Ronald Reagan in 1981. Miller says he has "no recollection" of FBI activity concerning Lennon.

No 'frivolous investigations'

"I don't remember Lennon being a prominent leader," Miller said, "but that's not saying he wasn't a problem. The bureau did not conduct frivolous investigations." He suggested that if a "reasonable man" were allowed to read the censored portions of the Lennon file, as well



John Lennon gives the peace sign as he arrives at Immigration and Naturalization Service offices in New York in 1972 during fight against deportation.

UPI PHOTO

as the withheld material, "he would find some objectivity in all of this ... You're talking about the longevity of our government as we know it. We know, of course, the Soviets want to put us out of business ... This country, in order to function, must have certain reservations. You just can't lay out everything for people to read."

Despite the attention at the Ann Arbor rally, Wiener argues that Lennon first came under close scrutiny in February 1972, when the staff of Sen. Strom Thurmond's internal security subcommittee, citing "confidential sources," wrote two memos about Lennon. The first identified Lennon as the main financier of a "commune group from Washington, D.C.," that intended to disrupt the GOP convention in Miami.

The second memo said the Ann Arbor appearance was the first in a series of concerts Lennon would hold in primary election states to raise money for New Left activities, to encourage the registration of 18-year-olds to vote against Nixon, to press for legislation legalizing marijuana and to recruit persons to disrupt the GOP convention.

On Feb. 4, 1972, Thurmond (R-S.C.) wrote to then-Attorney General John Mitchell, attaching one of the memos. The letter, noted in 1975 press reports, said: "This appears to me to be an important matter, and I think it would be well for it to be considered at the highest level. As I can see, many headaches might be avoided if appropriate action can be taken in time."

Lennon ordered deported

Mitchell referred the matter to his deputy, Richard Kleindienst, who then wrote the INS commissioner. In March, the INS ordered Lennon deported.

An April 10 FBI memorandum spelled out the bureau's conviction that Lennon was in the United States "to assist in organizing disruption of RNC [Republican National Convention]

... New York office covering subject's temporary residence and being instructed to intensify discreet investigation of subject to determine activities vis-a-vis RNC."

In a May 16 memo entitled "John Winston Lennon. Security matter - revolutionary activities," the New York FBI office wrote to the acting director that immigration authorities thought the stated reason for Lennon's wife, Yoko Ono, to remain in the United States - to regain custody of a daughter she said was abducted by her first husband, Anthony Cox - was a ruse.

"INS believes Lennons and Cox may be party to keeping child hidden as tool of delaying deportation hearings," the memo said. "If fact established, INS will go on perjury charges against Lennons." A May 17 memo added the INS believed that Lennon's claim of earning no income here was a "fraud" and that the agency "plans to request mental examination of both Lennons."

Arrest in Miami urged

A July 27 FBI memo from its New York office urges that Miami authorities be alerted to the possibility of arresting Lennon if he went there for the convention. "Miami should note that Lennon is reportedly a 'heavy user of narcotics' known as 'downers,'" the memo says.

"This information should be emphasized to local law enforcement agencies ... with regards to subject being arrested if at all possible on possession of narcotics charge. Local INS has very loose case in NY for deporting subject on narcotics charge involving 1968 arrest in England. INS has stressed to bureau that if Lennon were to be arrested in US for possession of narcotics he would become more likely to be immediately deportable."

In 1975, after a three-year wrangle with migration authorities, Lennon won his fight to stay when the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit ruled that his 1968 British deportation conviction was not enough reason to deport him. Though the extent of official scheming against Lennon was not then known, the Thurmond letter, the memos from his committee and selected other material did move Chief Judge Irving R. Kaufman to warn in his 24-page decision that "the courts will not condone selective deportation based upon secret political grounds."

"The 26 pounds of files suggest the tremendous pressure the government put on John Lennon," said Wiener. "Lennon took a strong stand. He fought the deportation order and eventually won. But he paid a high price. During his three-year fight against the government from 1972-75, his marriage fell apart and his music deteriorated."

"People said Lennon's politics were naive and foolish. But the files show that the Nixon Administration feared John Lennon. They took him absolutely seriously as a political threat."

Wiener called the FBI's contention that Lennon planned to disrupt the GOP convention "absurd ... When Lennon moved to New York in 1971, he thought he was coming to the land of the free, to the home of rock 'n' roll. The Republicans were not on his mind."