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This law is misnamed 'freedom of information'

Call it heresy, if you will, but every month I become more and more convinced that the Freedom of Information Act mocks freedom and is a vehicle of disinformation.

It was founded on the laudable notion that those doing the public's business ought to be compelled to tell the people more about how they go about doing that business. But it was also based on the naive notion that public officials will voluntarily reveal information that makes them look like idiots, crooks, criminals or the sort.

So what we have is an act full of escape hatches and loopholes that permits all manner of nuts to see "their files," which are of no public interest, but requires governmental agencies to reveal only a selective part of the truth about issues of great importance.

The result is that:

- American taxpayers are spending many millions of dollars yearly to finance a game of paper shuffling.

- Tons of documents are being released which raise myriad doubts and questions, but which never tell us any great truths.

- The public — and even part of the press — is being lulled into a false assumption that because of the Freedom of Information Act, government is leveling with the people more than ever in our history.

I am now convinced that this act has legitimized the official hoodwinking of the press and the public, and that it ought to be amended or abandoned.

I came to that conclusion after watching the hullabaloo over the 40,001 pages of documents on the John Kennedy assassination that the FBI released as a result of freedom-of-information lawsuits.

The problem with the Freedom of Information Act is that it lets the FBI and other agencies screen, delete and censor even in cases where the FBI and other agencies are suspect — as in the murder of Kennedy.

The released documents raise questions as to why the Warren Commission failed to probe thoroughly connections with the Mafia of Jack Ruby, the Dallas night club owner who killed Lee Harvey Oswald, who supposedly killed Kennedy.

A reader of the released documents can suspect that it was because the Warren Commission was thrown off the trail by the FBI and the CIA, which was recruiting Mafia gangsters to murder Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.

My point is that the heavily censored documents which have been made public simply add to

American paranoia. We read that President Lyndon Johnson suspected CIA involvement in Kennedy's murder. Some documents implicate the Mafia, Fidel Castro, Texas oil barons, the FBI, ultra-right-wing groups. Millions of Americans must now wonder if some ugly truth, lies in the censored paragraphs, or in the documents that the FBI did not release.

Incredibly, the FBI is spending \$9 million a year on this paper chase, and other departments are spending at least as much. We get little for our money — except a Washington party where we can tell people what the FBI or CIA has in its file about us!

There is no meaningful control of the CIA, the FBI, the Pentagon, in an act that forces them to make public bushels of weeded-out documents they have censored. The only meaningful safeguard is a president who knows what is going on, and a Congress that exercises genuine oversight.

Add to the safeguards a press that constantly digs for the truth rather than languishing in the soft expectation that some law will force bureaucrats to hand over documents showing them to be nincompoops.

So far, the Freedom of Information Act is a bummer.