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Stonewalled

Frederick author battles

U.S. for assassination files

By **RICHARD F. BELISLE**

FREDERICK, Md. — When Hitler's Germany fell to the Allies in 1945, the end came so quickly that the Nazis never had time to destroy the mountains of records they had accumulated since the early 1930s.

The information was invaluable to historians like William L. Shirer, who credited the availability of records as one of his greatest assets in compiling "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich."

Author Harold Weisberg of Frederick did not have the same breaks.

He, too, is involved in a gargantuan task of compiling data on two important chapters of history the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.

But Weisberg has had to spend much of his time fighting the federal government to force it to release documents on the slayings. He's been in court "so many times I couldn't even count" in the last 12 years, trying to obtain data for the six books he has written on both incidents.

He's become so absorbed with the government's secrecy that he says "it's no longer most important who killed Kennedy. What is important is that the

government has been stonewalling me ever since they learned that I was becoming an expert on the case and was starting to dig into things they wanted kept quiet."

The 65-year-old author says facts surrounding JFK's death may never be known, including whether Lee Harvey Oswald was acting alone on that Friday in November 1963.

"I'm not chasing an whodunnit," he says. "What I am trying to do is to bring out how the government acted in a coverup of the facts and to stop it from happening again."

Many of his court cases have centered around his charges that the FBI, CIA and other government agencies have been guilty of censoring and manipulating the facts in the case.

Weisberg won some vindication last month when U.S. District Court Judge Gerhard Gesell ordered the release of a second set of government documents on the Kennedy assassination. Gesell also ordered that Weisberg be given copies of the second release free of charge. Others will have to pay \$6,000 or more for the copies.

The documents were mailed to

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Photo by Richard Bellie

Harold Weisberg and one of his books

On JFK, King assassinations

Frederick author

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Weisberg last week — all 58,000 pages in 16 cartons. He already has them filed in neat rows in filing cabinets in the basement of his home on Old Receiver Road.

He's still trying to get the first batch at no cost.

The first installment of the 200-volume FBI assassination files on the Kennedy slaying was released in early December. It contained more than 40,000 pages, but government experts have claimed that they contained no new revelations concerning Kennedy's murder.

They mostly dealt with the efforts of hundreds of FBI agents in tracking down leads, trips and rumors on the killing.

The latest release covers the continuing investigation, from September, 1964 where the first installments left off, to recent times. According to Weisberg, who has had several days to peruse the documents, they contain little new or astounding information.

Weisberg says the documents were released to him on the basis of 50 Freedom of Information Act requests against the government. "Twenty-five of those requests were mine," he says.

The information act became law July 4, 1967 after it had been signed by then President Lyndon Johnson. By that time,

Weisberg had written and published three of his first six books on the Kennedy assassination — "Whitewash", based mostly on information supplied by the Warren Commission Report on the assassination; and "Whitewash II", which explains his interpretation of how the FBI and Secret Service covered up details surrounding the Kennedy case, and a third book on suppressed photos of the killing.

He has since published three more books, the latest in 1975.

Only one, the first, was sold through a commercial publishing house.

Weisberg says he was not a great admirer of Kennedy during his early years in office and only voted for him in opposition to Richard M. Nixon, Kennedy's challenger in 1960. "It wasn't until the Cuban Missile Crisis that I began to see some value in him as a president."

He became inspired to write on the assassination because of his own background, he says. His parents moved to the United States from Russia following what he terms "the great persecution of Jews in Russia — the beginning of modern anti-semitism. I'm a first generation American and I was taught to believe that the theory of American Society is the freest form man has yet devised."

He says he sees his responsibility as that "of a debt owed. I inherited it by be-

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ing the first member of my family to be born in America."

Weisberg says he lined up a literary agent in New York late in 1964, "gave him a lead and summary on my first book on Kennedy's death, and saw the hysteria that resulted."

A publisher told him "nobody would touch anything on a book about Kennedy that contained anything other than what the government was saying," he says.

"She turned out to be right. I lost my agent over it."

He then decided to publish and distribute his own books. He had 23,000 copies of the first book printed and most of those sold. "This is where I got the money to buy this house," he explains. Subsequent books didn't fare nearly as well. "The first book is always the best seller. Sequels never do as well."

He also complains of problems with distributors failing to pay him and distribution problems. Most of the books he now distributes are sold by mail through his house: He has boxes of unsold copies of all six books lining the walls of his basement.

Adding to Weisberg's woes is a circulation problem in his legs that keeps him from being as mobile as he used to be. He can no longer drive for great distances and is tied to an exercise machine

for several hours each day trying to improve his circulation.

In addition, he is compiling information against the FBI for federal use against the agency in court cases.

"I'm a recognized expert on FBI subversion, especially in my own case."

He said in a recent press conference in Washington that "If anyone else had done what they did to me, the FBI would have gone all out to seek criminal charges."

The author says the FBI has harassed him and used tactics designed to label him as a "conspiracy theorist and a kook."

"You know, I'm running out of time. I have this circulatory problem, I'm getting along in years, I don't have much income and the Justice Department keeps me busy compiling data for them. But I still have a lot to do. I want to make sure that these records are available to anyone who wants to see them."

Weisberg says as far as he knows no one has done so much in guaranteeing that the information on the Kennedy and King slayings is made available. He is building a file of documents for the University of Wisconsin "so that anyone who wants to can have access to them and doesn't have to go through what I did. This thing has really drained me over the years."