

JFK Researcher Leaves Work to College Hood to Get Government Documents That Frederick Man Collected

By Deb Riechmann
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FREDERICK, Md.—Harold Weisberg moves slowly these days down the wooden stairs of his cellar, where more than 50 file cabinets are stuffed with government documents on President Kennedy's assassination.

Like a proud father, Weisberg, 79, shuffles around the rows of tan, black and Army green file cabinets labeled with names from the past: Lee Harvey Oswald, Jack Ruby and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

In the files, Weisberg has neatly catalogued more than 300,000 pages of information on the assassinations of Kennedy and King that he managed to wrest from the FBI, the Department of Justice, the Warren Commission, the CIA and other government bodies.

Weisberg used the documents to write seven books—six on the 1963 assassination of Kennedy and the other on the 1968 slaying of King. But with health problems and advancing age, Weisberg recently decided to will his life's work to Hood College here, where his papers are to be transcribed on computer discs and made accessible to future generations.

"This is one subject that is never going to die," Weisberg said, sitting

in a living room chair with his legs, weakened by phlebitis, propped up on an ottoman. "People have collections of the nutty stuff—the conspiracy theories—but not the facts."

Unlike other researchers, Weisberg did not focus on who killed Kennedy. He concentrated on the facts and evidence from the slaying and what the government did and did not do to investigate the murder. Four of his books are titled "Whitewash" and have a series of subtitles to distinguish them.

Obtaining documentation on the government's investigation into the Kennedy assassination did not come easily. Weisberg took the government to court about a dozen times from 1970 to 1980, using the Freedom of Information Act to amass the documents. A 1975 lawsuit lasted about 10 years.

The paper trail he retrieved includes hundreds of pages of verbatim transcripts from executive sessions of the Warren Commission, which concluded that Oswald acted alone in killing the president from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository building in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

"I think Esquire magazine had it right when they said Weisberg was the 'dean of assassination researchers,'" said Jerry Ginocchio, an associate professor of sociology at Wofford College in Spartanburg, S.C., who has delved into the Kennedy assassination for 10 years.

Weisberg was born in Philadelphia and reared in Wilmington, Del. After attending the University of Delaware, he worked for the Wilmington Morning News and later wrote fea-

ture stories for the Sunday supplement of the Philadelphia Ledger.

Weisberg, who also worked as a Senate committee investigator, served in the Army during World War II, first in the military police and later as an analyst for the Office of Strategic Services, a forerunner to the CIA.

He became involved in the Kennedy assassination investigation soon after the president's death and later was an investigator for James Earl Ray, who pleaded guilty to killing King.

He still gets calls from reporters around the world and receives as many as a dozen letters a day. He personally answers the letters that pose serious questions, but has given up responding to those asking about conspiracy theories.

Although he doesn't propose to know who killed Kennedy and shuns discussion of conspiracies, Weisberg said: "I'm certain he [Oswald] didn't do it alone, and the evidence is not all that persuasive that Oswald killed anybody."

Meanwhile, some of Weisberg's Warren Commission documents and other files have been moved to the Hood library. The rest of the Weisberg collection will follow when he dies.

Charles Kuhn, library director, said the plan is to store the documents on compact computer discs that could be easily accessed by the public. The library plans to store the original documents for safekeeping.

"It's his life's work. It's a large amount of data that doesn't exist in this form anywhere else," Kuhn said. "It's an entire life of going after FBI files—against the odds."