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To the Editor,

Because I have spent a considerable amount of time working with FBI files I felt compelled to respond to Mr. Ralph E. Luker's assertion that all of Gerald Posner's citations of the FBI's MURKIN File in his *Killing the Dream* are complete and meaningful. The reality is that all of Posner's 353 endnotes referencing MURKIN, while they may make sense to Posner in some highly personal and arcane fashion, do not meet scholarly standards for citing sources. In short, they are meaningless. They do not inform the interested reader where to go to access his MURKIN sources. Luker could not be more in error than if he insisted that the sun revolved around the earth.

To begin with, as Lesar pointed out in his contribution to this debate, the MURKIN (Murder of King files) are immense. Any one who spends time with FBI files comes to the realization that the Hoover Bureau devised the world's superior filing system. At the time of the King assassination, in addition to FBI headquarters and its legal attaches overseas (legats), the FBI had 62 field offices. All offices reporting on the King assassination used the same classification for all MURKIN files. The classification number assigned was 44 (for "Civil Rights; Civil Rights Election Laws; Voting Rights Acts, 1965). The classification number is always followed by the individual case number in a given FBI office or legat). A third number designates the serial or document number which records the order in which the document was placed in the file.

For example, if there was communication between Miami and FBIHQ about the King case it would read SAC, Miami, to Director, 2/6/1968, Murkin, FBI HQ file, 44[classification]--38861[Main FBI HQ Murkin file]—114[serial or where to find the document in this file]. If the document was located in the FBI's Atlanta office it would read 44-2386—114, or in the Memphis office file the designation would be 44-1574-114. In short, every FBI office would use the same classification of 44 followed by the number identifying the FBI office with the serial number where the document could be found in the file. The best test of Luker's assertion is to check this citation scheme against all 353 references Posner makes to MURKIN and it becomes embarrassing clear that none of his citations provide a single correct FBI file identification.

Under "Acknowledgements," Posner thanks the FBI clerks at FBI headquarters' reading room for making the "otherwise onerous task" of examining 50,000 pages "quite manageable." If you were to visit the reading room or request by mail a MURKIN document cited by Posner, one picked at random, (note 16, p. 399 of his book), FBI document "Re: Previous Employment," Murkin 3334-3335, section 35, p. 114, the eyes of Posner's indispensable reading room clerks would glaze over in utter and hopeless confusion.

The Posner citation system is so erratic and meaningless that it skirts and at times goes beyond the ridiculous. For example, he has a citation (note 10 on p. 357) that reads: Teletype to FBI Director from Buffalo SAC, April 26, 1968, MURKIN, 2151-2321, section 19, pp. 289-90. To begin with he gives no indication at what FBI office this document could be located. Aside from that, the way it is set up one has to assume that 2151-2321 must refer to the serials or document numbers. Whether intended or not, they can have no other meaning in the scheme

Posner provides. That means that this teletype had to be 170 pages long! An FBI teletype is generally understood to be an urgent communication sent over a secure or encrypted communication network. To be sure, some FBI documents are lengthy. Letterhead Memorandums (LHMs) can reach 30 to 50 pages in length. The initial FBI Report on the JFK assassination, designated as Commission Document One, is more than 900 pages. But FBI teletypes are never more than several pages in length. They certainly never reach the ambitious scope of a thesis turned in by a humanities or social science M.A. degree candidate. There are other howlers like this throughout the 353 notes in *Killing the Dream* that Luker would have us believe met the requirements of scholarship.

Perhaps Carl Becker had a point when he noted that everyone was his own historian. However, the humanities and social sciences would become a laughingstock if everyone using government documents devised their own idiosyncratic system of sourcing their work. In fairness, it should be said that Posner is not the only one currently using FBI and other government documents that impairs the validity of his work by mangling the way he chooses to cite his sources. As more and more researchers employ the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act this problem will proliferate, especially in the world of the commercial publishing houses because they seem increasingly reluctant to submit manuscripts to peer review.

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