

Les Whitten
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Dear Les,

Jack's column in today's Wx Post, FBI wants \$237 for Coretta King to See Her Files, something I'm glad to see published, misses what I'm certain is a very big con job on Mrs. King. This sum represents a mere 2,370 pages. This is far short of all the records the FBI has on her. It probably is limited to what the FBI is not going to try to withhold from her from FBIHQ files only. It also is probably limited to a "main" file on her which, if my recollection is correct, classifies her as subversive, a 100-classification file.

It took some time, effort and litigating to get it, but I did, finally, get the inventory of FBI field office holdings on the Kings, their closest associates and the SCLC. Understand, I'm referring to only an inventory. It is 400 pages long! It has never been used and so far as I know I alone obtained it. It will tell exactly how many pages each and every one of the 59 field offices has in each file, including the file in her.

Please excuse my not checking but those files are in the basement, I can at best handle stairs only a couple of times a day, and I'm tired after a long, hard day. But I'm confident of what I say and I also think that when the FBI is being so stingy (as a matter of policy and in violation of law and regulation) and wasting more than \$237 to do so, an examination of a small reflection of the great amount of taxpayer money it wasted in its, to use the word cover favored and savored so, nefarious operations against the Kings. This incomplete and unpublished inventory provides a glimmer of the fortune spent, which represents money and time not spent on the FBI's vital law enforcement responsibilities, like, say, the mafia.

They are right now trying to give me a hard time because I'm refusing absolutely to let them rewrite and negate FOIA through me again. I don't recall if I wrote you, among a few, when they had arranged to charge me with contempt for refusing to do their work for them. If I did, their lawyer thereafter made a pretext call to mine and actually threatened to have me "thrown in jail." This is in the case record and is undisputed. Well, I've been giving them a chance and I'll continue to give them a chance and I don't think they have the backbone -or stupidity. But they went out of their way to create the situations which, literally, have me in contempt, before Judge John Lewis Smith.

I don't think they'll be as deterred by my age and poor health as they will by their fear of an airing before the appeals court. Smith is their ever-failing, never-failing rubber stamp.

I don't have Mrs. King address and I can't afford to call her, but if you are in touch with the reporter ~~ME~~ or associate who is in touch with her, she and they are welcome to access and to copying what I refer to.

Please excuse the typos. I want to make the morning mail and avoid the weekend's delay at this end and get to bed.

Best wishes,

Harold Weisberg

P.S. I finally got those records in the lawsuit for which you provided an affidavit and in which they initially refused me a fee waiver. I had to litigate to get it.

JACK ANDERSON

FBI Wants \$237 For Coretta King To See Her Files

Adding insult to injury, the FBI is insisting that Coretta Scott King pay to see the files the G-men compiled on her during more than two years of secret surveillance. The widow of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. refuses to knuckle under to the bureau's petty demand.

The amount is trivial: \$237. But she stands on principle: the Freedom of Information Act allows government files to be released free of charge in cases "primarily benefitting the public." By paying the \$237, she would be put in the position of acknowledging that she is just idly curious about the FBI's files on her.

In fact, she intends to store her surveillance files in Atlanta with her husband's papers at the Martin Luther King Center for Nonviolent Social Change. They would be historically valuable evidence of the almost paranoid suspicion with which the Kings were regarded by the FBI under its late director, J. Edgar Hoover.

Paying the fee also would be an admission that her work in the civil rights movement—and by inference that of her husband—is of little pub-

lic interest. The FBI's picayune insistence on payment seems to be one more attempt by the bureau to belittle the man its late director hated and feared with such passion.

King's widow appealed the FBI's decision. The Justice Department has been sitting on her appeal for more than a year.

Ten months ago, she raised the subject personally with Attorney General William French Smith, whom she was visiting on another matter. The meeting was cordial but produced no action on her appeal to waive the fee. Like many private citizens, journalists and historians in the past two years, she has been stonewalled by the Reagan administration's policy of making government documents difficult if not impossible to obtain.

Louise Cook, archivist at the King Center, told my associate John Dillon that several historians have written in support of Mrs. King's view that release of her records would be of significant public benefit.

Edith P. Mayo, an associate curator of the Smithsonian Institution, wrote that the FBI files would provide "invaluable perspective" on the civil rights movement because of her "unique position as the wife and co-worker of Martin Luther King Jr."

Denial of the fee waiver is "a tragic mistake in judgment on the part of bureau officials," wrote Marvin Y. Whiting, archivist and curator of the

Birmingham Public Library. The FBI, he wrote, should help historians "gather as definitive a body of documents as possible on a person of such historic significance as Martin Luther King Jr."

Actually, the FBI file reveals less about King's widow than it does about the bureau and its disgraceful gossip gathering. I know, because several years ago I obtained from an FBI source the bureau's dossiers on various civil rights leaders, including hers.

In a transparent attempt to make the trivial seem important, the FBI labeled the surveillance reports "secret" or "confidential," and gave them such ominous headings as "racial" or "extremist matters."

But there's little meat in them—certainly nothing to justify the vast amount of money and effort that went into the surveillance.

For example, the G-men examined her passport, apparently to make sure she hadn't sneaked off somewhere that the press hadn't reported. Her colleagues were routinely referred to as "agitators," but those who tattled to the FBI on her whereabouts were dignified as "confidential informants."

Footnote: Laura Einstein, the Justice Department lawyer assigned to the case, said the FBI will give her copies of the King files, which she will examine to determine if they are eligible for a fee waiver.