

# 'The Assault on Privacy'

Preview

By Henry Mitchell

Some people fear (Frank Reynolds observes in the ABC News documentary, "The Assault on Privacy") that the Federal Bureau of Investigation is becoming a secret police force.

As part of a look at American privacy, or the increasing lack of it, to be aired tonight at 10 on Channel 7, Reynolds considered two main threats — law enforcement agencies and credit rating companies.

He does not, unfortunately, deal with those hits that get you on the phone and try to interest you in buying a swamp; nor those energetic people who conduct religious censuses and want to know why you aren't saved — those sort of snoopers are more nuisances than threats.

The problem is that snooping is good and useful, especially if it's other people who are being investigated.

The hour-long documentary rightly shows the value of being able to check arrest records quickly. If a man is

arrested, and if it can be learned in two minutes or so that he has a record of four homicides, two bank robberies and three instances of kicking dogs, then surely that is useful to know. His bail might be a little higher than that set for Bess Truman caught jaywalking.

And if you open an account for a woman who proposes to buy \$3,000 worth of shoes, you perhaps are reasonable to want to know if she has ever paid a bill in her life.

And on the surface, if you lead a more or less respectable life, you have nothing to fear from computerized information being stored about you. It is interesting,

however, that Justice Brandeis himself (no hellion he) was the first to make a great issue of the right to be let alone; and Justice Harlan (who neither stole nor set bombs was among the latest to warn that surveillance can take the friskiness and spontaneity out of life, and this is so even if one is not planning to blow up the Capitol.

Each case where a citizen's privacy is invaded (by whatever means) should be judged on its merits.

So says Robert C. Mardian, assistant U.S. attorney general in charge of internal security.

Then what about the stolen FBI papers, asks Réy-

nolds, which seem to indicate cases of outrageous surveillance of citizens for no good reason at all?

On this specific case, Mardian says he cannot comment. Once, Mardian volunteered, there was a hue and cry about a college professor being investigated. People said his academic freedom was being threatened by the FBI. But in reality he was being investigated, Mardian said, for murder and armed robbery.

So there. "I would urge you," Mardian says, offering a general rule of thumb, "to give the FBI the benefit of the doubt."

Goodness, if you can't trust your FBI, who CAN you trust?

Falling out of the chair, one has difficulty remembering an appropriate quotation from the past, but it has fortunately come back:

"I fancy," the Emperor Nero once observed, "I am turning into a god."

ABC has produced a reasonably interesting hour nicely calculated to make your blood boil.

## Correction

The Ossipov Dancers will be replacing Jan Peerce Wednesday, Jan. 12, at the Kennedy Center's Concert Hall. The preview of "Time of Your Life," previously scheduled to take place Wednesday, Jan. 12, at the Center's Eisenhower Thea-

ter has been canceled. "Time of Your Life" will not begin previews until Thursday, Jan. 13, and will have its official opening Saturday night, Jan. 15. The Washington Post carried incorrect listings in yesterday's Calendar.