

velopment of the post-Warren Commission review of the assassination. On July 4, 1967, Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act (FOIA). It was revolutionary legislation that allowed private citizens to apply for the release of federal government files, even including those maintained by the FBI, CIA, and other sensitive organizations. The government agencies could only refuse to release the documents if they fell under privacy or security exemptions that were set forth in the law. Since its inception, and a subsequent amendment in 1974, over a million pages of documents have been released about the Kennedy assassination. However, the federal agencies were initially very reluctant to comply with FOIA, and researchers were often forced to resort to lawsuits to win the release of even the simplest documents.

"I think the FBI's attitude was that they hated the Freedom of Information Act from the very beginning," says James Lesar, whose pro bono lawsuits for documents relating to the Kennedy case, many on behalf of Harold Weisberg, have been responsible for prying more sensitive material out of the government than those of anyone else. "The FBI was originally so against the idea of FOIA that it classified early FOIA requestors as a '100 file,' a domestic subversive. They also tried to make the process unpleasant. One of the little things they did at first was to provide you with atrocious copies. They would wait for the copy machine to run low or something, and provide terrible copies. But they eventually wearied of that."

The FBI was repeatedly unmasked for lying to those who filed FOIA requests. "For instance," Lesar recalls, "one ploy was that they said they had to search all their files page by page, because they had no index. And all the while they had a 48,000-card index in the Dallas field office. Technically, FBI headquarters [in Washington] didn't have the index.*"

"In other instances, they would say there wasn't anything in the field offices that wasn't also kept in headquarters, that the

*Researchers did not discover the existence of the card index until Weisberg sued for the Dallas field office files in 1978, and the index was disclosed in 1980 (Interview with James Lesar, December 1, 1992).