



U.S. Agencies Play The Spy Game

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YOU MAY remember the lovely inscriptions carved over the main post office: "Messenger of Sympathy and Love" and "Servant of Parted Friends."

Put them out of your mind.

The U.S. Postal Service, as it is now called, has gone into the spy game, like so many other agencies that we are paying to do something else. Last year, officials admitted to a House Judiciary Subcommittee, the people who were supposed to deliver mail were screening some of it. Four thousand, four hundred citizens were under "mail covers," which is to say that before they got their letters, someone wrote down where they came from and the date they were sent.

Why, you may well ask, is the Post Office doing this? They do it, it seems, because other government agencies asked them to. Including the Fish and Wildlife Service, possibly stalking a salmon poacher, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who couldn't get their man any other way.

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THOSE brought up in the tradition of "Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night" may be sorry to hear that the courier is being stayed in the swift completion of his appointed rounds by the need to snoop. But they are not surprised.

"Someone to watch over me" used to be the name of a yearning old Gershwin tune. Now it is the sub-title of the U.S. government.

Eighteen government agencies spend full time watching over their fellow citizens. And almost every day we hear that some group like the I.R.S., which we are paying to do something else, is keeping tabs on us.

Even the most despondent American can no longer say with confidence, "No one cares if I live or die." Some file clerk will. The F.B.I., for instance, maintains 6.5 million files.

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WHERE we are now is that the land of the free and the home of the brave is being turned into a finks' paradise. The informer is the first-class citizen with full protection of the law. The "subject" — and he represents the largest-growing population in the country — is on file and under suspicion.

Maybe one way to celebrate the bicentennial would be to re-enact the Boston Tea Party with citizens, whose only crime was to dissent from government policy, throwing their files into the harbor. It might cause some pollution, but nothing like what's going on now.