

Assassination critic donates FBI records to UWSP Archives

Freedom of Information...if you can afford it

By George Leopold

Recently released Federal Bureau of Investigation records dealing with its investigation of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy have been donated to UWSP by author-critic Harold Weisberg.

An indefatigable opponent of the official investigation and author of six books on the JFK assassination, Weisberg was awarded a free set of FBI documents by U.S. District Court Judge Gerhard Gesell on January 16. The decision stemmed from one of over two dozen Freedom of Information Act suits filed by Weisberg since May, 1966 in an attempt to gain the release of the FBI's records on the President's murder.

In this most recent case, Weisberg successfully sought remission of copying costs on some 40,000 pages of documents arguing that "official stonewalling" in the courts has left him indigent.

Weisberg's gift to the university will include nearly 100,000 pages of assassination documents that have been released by the Justice Department in two large installments. The first occurred on December 7, 1977; the second just over two weeks ago.

When they eventually arrive, the documents will be placed in the university political assassination archives which was established in November, 1976, during a national symposium on the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and President Kennedy which Weisberg addressed.

The establishment of the archives on the Stevens Point campus will allow assassination researchers such as UWSP professor David Wrono to pursue the truth about the murder.

Regarding the Weisberg donation, Wrono stated that "this will serve as a basis for developing an outstanding research archive for the study of important issues in mid-20th century America."

Chancellor Lee Dreyfus commented that the gift would enable the university to "gain a distinction for scholarship on this issue." He added that the unique combination of an assassination archives and Professor Wrono's scholarly abilities would further distinguish the university, and would allow for "serious study" of the JFK assassination in the years to come.

Although he was successful in obtaining the FBI documents, Weisberg has been critical of the way in which the Justice Department has released them to the press. According to the critic, the current releases were staged so that by their mass alone, they become a "new form of suppression."

Because of this volume and the high cost of copying—the FBI charges ten cents a page—access is effectively denied. As a result, the "deadline-beseiged press" is forced to report uncritically on the contents of each release.

Weisberg also noted that despite the recent releases of various documents, most of the relevant FBI records are still suppressed by the Justice Department.

In announcing his decision, Judge Gesell stated that no records would be coming to light now were it not for Weisberg's decade-long court struggle under the Freedom of Information Act. It was this litigation that led to a congressional change in the law that cleared the way for release of the FBI files.



Photo by Ron Thurns

Noted critic Harold Weisberg drives home a point during a national symposium on the King & Kennedy assassinations held here in November, 1976.

Along with this most recent donation, Weisberg also previously deposited in the archives a large amount of material from his personal files on the King and Kennedy

assassinations. At that time he also contributed ten file drawers of records on an American pro-Nazi organization active in the 1930's known as the "Silvershirts".

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Somoza

As a result of this action, which drew considerable popular support, the National Guard stepped up its operations in the guerrillas' highland base. They have been successful to the point where the practical effectiveness of the Sandistas as a strike force has been seriously questioned, even by supporters.

Somoza took the occasion to impose martial law and drop the heavy cloak of censorship over the opposition newspaper, La Prensa. Its editor, Pedro Chamorro, had been a 30 year critic of the Somoza regime and a leader of a coalition of small opposition parties. In his role as editor he had been jailed by the government on ten separate occasions. Even after martial law and the attendant censorship was lifted last September under threat of a cutoff of U.S. military aid, Chamorro was still limited in what he was allowed to print.

Government critics claimed that the only reason his paper was allowed

to continue publishing was that it could be used by Somoza as evidence that certain fundamental rights (freedom of the press) were still very much apparent.

There is evidence that Somoza had come to accommodate himself to Chamorro's attacks, yet when the editor was gunned down by a shotgun blast several weeks ago the logical assumption was that it had been the work of the government.

The government promptly turned up a suspect who confessed to the killing. The suspect told authorities that he had been paid to kill Chamorro by a Cuban doctor exiled in Miami and operating a blood plasma factory in Managua. Chamorro had recently broken a story accusing the doctor of selling the Nicaraguan blood for a tremendous profit in the U.S. Chamorro's widow, among others, thinks the story is too pat, and is hesitant to clear Somoza, citing his involvement in such a large part of community actions, both political and economic.

The factory used by the blood plasma factory was, like many others, owned by the Somozas.

The activity of the National Guard in the mountains has tapered off in recent months, largely in response to

an international outcry for human rights. The government is sensitive to possible repercussions, and is treading a bit lighter.

They have reason to do so. Last year American Capuchin missionaries working in the mountains uncovered evidence of the murder, rape and robbery of peasants by National Guard units attempting to ferret out the Sandista guerrillas. Their reports of atrocities to the authorities and their superiors prompted the Nicaraguan Conference of Bishops to draft a pastoral letter in January of 1977.

In it the bishops condemned the state of terror inflicted upon the mountain peasants by the counterinsurgency units of the National Guard, stating that "inhuman and humiliating methods are used against suspects, from torture and rape to summary executions. Many villages have been abandoned, homes and belongings burned and the inhabitants fleeing in despair and without help. These actions put the very authorities outside the institutional laws of the nation."

The letter went on to condemn other, more economic forms of terrorism. "On the one hand," it said,

"the accumulation of land and wealth in the hands of a few intensifies. On the other hand, humble peasants are stripped of their plots of land with threats, as advantage is taken of the emergency situation.

The subsequent outcry over these crimes on the part of the church, community leaders and international committees has prompted the U.S. to reassess its role in supplying Nicaragua with military aid. To the surprise of more than a few, this week it was announced that due to problems that could no longer be ignored, \$3 million in military aid would be withheld from Somoza's government.

This amount would have broken down into \$25,700 in direct military grants, \$400,000 in grants for training the National Guard and \$2.5 million in military assistance credits, used to finance arms purchases.

Compared to the enormous amounts bequeathed other nations for their military, the \$3 million withheld from Nicaragua seems almost insignificant, yet the budget cut is seen as symbolic by those who believe that this nation should show by its example that neither approves or supports regimes that show contempt for basic human rights.