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UCI prof asks CIA for files on Lennon

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Of the Daily Pilot Staff

A UC Irvine professor asked the CIA for all its documents on former Beatle John Lennon Saturday after a previously secret memo revealed the agency monitored the late rock star's anti-Vietnam war activities in 1972.

According to Jon Weiner, the heavily censored memo, among documents he obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, shows the agency asked the FBI to gather information on whether the British superstar would participate in anti-Vietnam war protests at the 1972 Republican National Convention.

The documents were turned over in mid-May to Wiener, who made them public Friday and filed the request the next day.

"The government has consistently claimed that Lennon's activities were somehow relevant to national security considerations," Wiener, 39, said. "We maintain that nothing Lennon did, planned to do or talked about doing, in any way threatened the national security of the United States.

"At most, it threatened the reelection of President Nixon," he said. "But there's no legal reason for the CIA to be involved in protecting Nixon from threats to his reelection.... I don't see why the CIA should have anything to do with political protests in this country."

A political researcher, Weiner is the author of "Come Together: John Lennon in His Time," a Random House book that should be released today. He said the publishing house has agreed to a second edition with inserts about the newly released documents.

CIA spokeswoman Patti Volz declined specific comment on the documents, but noted that in the mid-1970s the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities reported that the CIA had been "involved in some domestic activities at the behest of the President."

"It was inappropriate, and from that came several rules and regulations curtailing the agency's activities," she said Friday.

An accompanying affidavit to the documents, signed by CIA Information Review Officer Louis J. Dube, acknowledged that the agency obtained information appearing in the documents, all of which have been censored.

National security justified maintaining the confidentiality of material that was blacked out, Dube wrote.

"The affidavit is a much more satisfactory explanation of why" only censored documents were released, Weiner said. But because it's unclear whether the CIA is withholding further information, the history professor said he filed a request under the Freedom of Information Act for all CIA documents related to Lennon.

Lennon's song "Give Peace a Chance" gave the anti-war movement its anthem. He "is an important figure to a whole generation and his battle with the Nixon administration is sort of a forgotten chapter," Weiner said.

The professor obtained copies of five documents from FBI files, including one that originated with the CIA. The FBI referred the documents to the CIA for review before releasing them.

Weiner is awaiting word this week on a court ordered explanation from the FBI on why they too censored Lennon documents. The FBI submitted its reasons for withholding two-thirds of a 281-page file in a brief to a federal court last week.

His attorneys hope to schedule a conference with the federal judge and Justice Department attorneys this week, Weiner said.

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