

How to Obtain Your File

To request a file for an individual or organization, an application may be requested by mail or phone from the Red Squad Notification and Distribution Compliance Program. When the application is properly completed and submitted, an effort will be made to locate and retrieve all relevant information contained in the files. When the material is collected, the applicant will be advised to pick up a copy of the file or, under special circumstances, it will be sent to the person who is authorized to receive it. All requests are completely confidential.

This process may require several weeks. Because the court has ordered the notification and distribution program to be completed within sixteen months, applicants are advised to act promptly. The expiration date of the program is September 10, 1991.

Clip and Mail:

Please send me an application form so that I may seek any information gathered by the Detroit Police Red Squad.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Individual Organization

MAIL TO: Red Squad Notification and
Distribution Compliance Program
800 Palms Building
Detroit, MI 48201
Or call 313-961-7010,
8:30 am to 4:30 pm E.D.T.

*Inquiries must be made before
August 10, 1991.*

Your Right to Privacy

The lawsuit which exposed and brought to an end the practice in Michigan of a secret police surveillance program serves to highlight and reinforce the right of every citizen's constitutional right to privacy. The freedom to attend public meetings, to speak out on all political issues, to petition, to pray — all are part of our system of justice and our democratic tradition. If the people allow government, at any level, to intrude on our privacy, and to undermine and subvert these freedoms, we run the risk of surrendering our basic rights.

By making the Red Squad files available to all who were objects of illegal political surveillance, the public is once again reminded that a free society cannot tolerate harassment and interference with those who wish to express themselves publicly and legally about existing conditions or needed changes.

For Deceased Individuals or Defunct Organizations

The file of a deceased individual or an organization that is no longer active may be obtained by any person who can establish a rightful claim to the information. For those who are beneficiaries, the claimant may be so named, a spouse, for example, or a near relative, may be eligible. A person may apply for the file by submitting proper documentation. Similarly, past officers or other officials of an organization which is defunct, must present proof of affiliation with their application for the file.

RED SQUAD Notification and Distribution Compliance Program

800 Palms Building • 2111 Woodward Ave.
Detroit, Michigan 48201
(313) 961-7010

They were spying on us



Why the Detroit Police RED SQUAD?

For many years, the Detroit Police Department had been gathering information on various political, social and cultural activities of citizens and visitors to the city. This surveillance program, organized under a specially created police unit known as the "Red Squad," was never publicly acknowledged.

The files contain facts, photos, newspaper articles and other information about individuals and organizations which were kept secret and under police guard.

Despite an untold number of police hours and dollars spent in this effort, no legislation and no criminal prosecutions ever resulted from the work of the Red Squad.

Those who were surveilled

Estimates indicate the files include the names of 1.5 million individuals and organizations. The Red Squad accumulated its data by attending, and frequently taking photographs of all sorts of gatherings — union meetings, political rallies, demonstrations, art shows, consumer protection efforts, rock festivals, theater parties, anti-Vietnam war seminars and other activities. Spies and informers, all unidentified of course, were employed to help the police at these functions. Much of the Red Squad's surveillance was coordinated with federal agencies, other state and local agencies and private organizations.

The Results of 17 Years of Litigation

In 1973, several citizens brought suit against the State of Michigan and City of Detroit. Their suspicions were aroused by the presence of unidentified video cameras at Anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, the taking of auto license numbers and other overt signs of surveillance. The lawsuit resulted in bringing to light the massive extent of police spying that took place since about 1945. It was also revealed that a Detroit Police Red Squad had been operating as early as the 1930's, but most of these files no longer exist. Shortly after the lawsuit was filed, the police ceased their political surveillance of citizens.

However, negotiations for the release of the files took many years. In 1980, the Michigan State Police began its program of notification of individuals by mailing letters to about 38,000 people. This program marked the first mass notification and distribution of official police intelligence abuses ever ordered by an American court.

The agreement to release the Detroit Police files was not finalized until May, 1990. Because these records are not organized in a manner that would lend itself to the same notification process utilized by the Michigan State Police, individuals and organizations must apply to the Red Squad Notification and Distribution Compliance Program for their files.

The agreement establishes a three person Board of Trustees to oversee and supervise the program. At the end of its 16 month court authorized term, the program may turn the files over to an archival repository for later educational, historical or research purposes.

Other Consequences

In addition to the direct and indirect interference with the First Amendment rights of individuals, the police at times provided information concerning employment relationships and engaged in smear campaigns against leaders and members of various organizations. The full extent of such damages to the reputation, employment and other facets of the lives of the individuals and organizations surveilled will probably never be known.

The individuals monitored by the police were targeted because they were considered to be potential political threats; they were not necessarily engaged in violence or illegal activities. Indeed, many names in the files are of non-participating bystanders, including those who may have loaned a car or attended a function out of pure curiosity (the taking of car license numbers outside an event was a favorite police tactic to establish who was in attendance).

An example of the consequences of Red Squad activity can be gleaned from this excerpt of a Michigan State Police Report, 1950-51: "Information obtained through investigation is analyzed and applied in the most appropriate manner to discourage the employment of subversive individuals who attempt to infiltrate the educational field, government agencies and defense agencies."



organization, except in connection with such law enforcement activities as it has under the charter and ordinances of the City of Detroit and the constitution and laws of the State of Michigan.

The surveillance or investigation of persons, groups or organizations which is not reasonably and directly related to such law enforcement activities is prohibited.

William L. Hart,
Chief of Police, Detroit

Jan. 7, 1982

SPECIAL ORDER BY THE DETROIT CHIEF OF POLICE

The freedom to speak, to dissent, to write and publish, and to associate privately and publicly for any lawful purpose, without governmental interference or impairment, is of paramount importance to the citizens of the City of Detroit. The purpose of this order is to insure that lawful expressions, associations, opinions and beliefs are not impaired or interfered with by intelligence or surveillance activities which may be performed by the police department. It is intended that

surveillance shall be undertaken only in connection with the police department's law enforcement activities and its disciplinary and residency investigations. Accordingly, the following order is hereby adopted:

The police department shall not engage in the collection, indexing, retention or dissemination of information or beliefs, opinions, associations or expressions of any individual or group or