

The 1971 FBI Burglary: Taking a Stand Against Illegal Government Surveillance

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I started my topic search by reviewing the History Day topic suggestions where ‘NSA spying’ was listed. I soon narrowed this down to the 1971 FBI burglary that exposed illegal government surveillance, which I chose because of the topic’s government inner workings aspect, and also its strong and oppositional stand in history. These citizens stood up for what they believed in, even though it meant risking their futures.

First, I sought information that overviewed my topic in books, websites, videos, and other sources. To find specific information, I conducted an interview with two of the burglars, which gave me first-hand information I couldn’t obtain from other sources. Another excellent primary source I discovered was a book in which were photocopies of several documents stolen. For the next three steps in the History Day process, Regionals, State and Nationals, I researched to assure that all of my information was factual and correct.

After my research was complete, I wrote my voice over script, which was revised several times by teachers, family, and peers, and then was made more powerful, meaningful and clear for Regionals, State and Nationals. I started to find images for my documentary, which I later uploaded to the program iMovie. I recorded my script, adjusted my pictures, and made my recordings smoother. For Regionals, I added music to each section to make it dynamic and switched out secondary photos with meaningful primary sources. When moving onto the State competition, I added words said by Keith Forsyth, made suggested changes, and uploaded it to Youtube.com, a flash drive and a DVD. For Nationals, I made sure that all photos were purposeful and essential to the visual appeal of my documentary and made my concluding paragraph more substantial to summarize my topic and leave an impression.

In March of 1971, the Citizens’ Commission to Investigate the FBI, consisting of 8 strong non-violent protesters, took a stand against illegal government surveillance by burglarizing an FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania. Consequently, documents depicting illegal actions taken by the government were published in newspapers, along with exposing the FBI’s Counterintelligence Program. When it was released, the public was bewildered to learn that the country’s protector, the FBI, was the source of illegal citizen surveillance. Due to this exposure and heroic act, investigations were performed on the government and its operations and, over time, others have been inspired to perform confrontational acts against the government, for example, Edward Snowden and the rally Stop-Watching Us.

If I were to do History Day over again, I would start researching earlier and find all photos before constructing the documentary. Although History Day is hard work, it is worth the benefits and knowledge that is gained in the end. Takeaways that I gathered from the project would include improved writing and revising skills after severely critiquing my script and time management skills. The main takeaway would be realizing that just a few strong-willed, bold, and passionate people can change the world.