

Again, what validity do these private decisions have? They can be a curse on the individual for the rest of his life, but you may not have any idea whether they are really accurate or not. They may meet no standards of fairness with which we are familiar.

So, in each case of information other than the formal decisions of courts, we do not know what is really meant by the information in the files. As it gets step by step farther away in distance and further away in time from the original source, it becomes less and less accurate until what was the truth can become a lie.

About people in Government, about workers in Government—I do not want to use the word “bureaucrats” because it is a bad word—I would just like to say when anybody who works in a great organization receives information from a computer center and it says “unsatisfactory” in this category, “unreliable” in that category, it takes a lot of courage for a Government employee to say, “I am going to hire him anyway. I am going to disregard this. I think he looks good to me. I have seen him. I don’t care what this professor said in New Haven.”

Most people in Government, because it is so big, because they are part of a great chain of responsibility, are going to say, “I don’t want to take a chance.” That is the common reaction of a man in a big organization. So when they see something bad, they are going to say, “I don’t trust my own judgment. I had better trust what is on paper, because if we hire this young student, whom we like, and he does something wrong, he turns out to be a loser after a while, it will be my fault. I saw this in the record and I failed to stop it. I am going to be blamed. The safe thing is just to say ‘No,’ and hire a man with an unblemished record.”

So, every normal human reaction is going to be to give more weight to these things in the file than I as the maker of the file ever meant. Often I might check something off and I would like to say to the man who is going to hire this fellow, “Disregard this. We didn’t get along, the two of us. I would give him a chance if I were you.” But I never get to say that.

So the reaction of the normal person who reads the file is to say, “I don’t want to take a chance.”

I have examples, also, of the inquiries that come at the other end. They do not happen to be from Government because I have no access to Government inquiries, but these are inquiries from private people to the Yale file. For example, let us imagine that Yale has its own computer center. It does not. It just has a file. Somebody writes in to the dean and says, “The person whose name appears above has applied to us for a position. We would like any information regarding his scholastic standing, character, and personal habits. Your reply will be kept in strictest confidence.” This comes from businesses, and so forth. This is what I imagine would be the inquiry to the computer center.

Notice that they want anything of a pertinent nature about the personal habits, and so forth. When it comes to Yale, what happens? Well, the dean is not going to answer all these letters. They have a student often, maybe a third-year law student or somebody like that, who does part-time work in that bureau. All he does is go and look at the files of the applicant and pull out anything that he thinks these people