

Executive Summary

Through October 1996, despite lengthy delays by some Federal agencies, the Review Board acted to transfer 8,972 documents to the National Archives and Records Administration for inclusion in the JFK Collection. At the end of 1996, the collection totaled 1,290 cubic feet, equivalent to 3.3 million pages of documents. Among the records that were previously classified or unavailable that have now been reviewed and released by the Review Board are thousands of CIA documents on Lee Harvey Oswald and the assassination of President Kennedy that make up the CIA's Oswald File, the controversial House Select Committee on Assassinations Staff Report on Oswald and Mexico City, the original Marine Corps personnel file on Oswald, copies of the official records of District Attorney Jim Garrison's investigation of the assassination, as well as thousands of records from the FBI's core and related files on the assassination.

The Review Board will not be able to complete its work within the original three-year timetable set by Congress for a number of understandable reasons. First, the original estimate that the enormous task assigned to the Review Board could be accomplished in three years was simply wrong. Second, there were a number of necessary, but unforeseen, delays in the early phase of the Review Board's life that prevented it from effectively reviewing records until the second half of its first year. Third, the eighteen-month delay in appointing the Board required Federal agencies to define for themselves the universe of records that should be processed under the Act and to speculate about the kind of evidence that would be needed to sustain the redaction of assassination-related information. Once the Board was in place, agencies needed to revise a considerable amount of work. In fact, many agencies have yet to complete their review and the Board is still seeking their compliance. And fourth,

These include the lengthy delay in the appointment of the Review Board, a necessarily protracted start-up period, and unfortunate inefficiencies related caused by the agencies operating without the guidance of the Review Board. In addition, the more than 25 Federal agencies initially encountered problems in identifying and locating assassination records, and later, determining the proper standards for the postponement of the release of information.

All of these complexities, which were unforeseen when Congress initially passed the JFK Act, prevented the timely review of assassination records until June 1995.

The overall record of agency compliance and performance has been mixed. In no case has an agency completed its responsibilities within the time frame set up under the JFK Act. However, in almost every case, the Review Board attributes such delays not to any intended disregard or disrespect for the law, but rather to the enormous volume and complexity of the work.

The work that remains to be done includes:

- reviewing the extensive FBI and CIA files collected in response to requests from the House

Select Committee on Assassinations

- searching for additional records, including those now in private hands and in the custody of foreign governments.

Because the Review Board believes that in order for it to be faithful to its historical responsibility and commitment to release to the public all known assassination records, it must recommend that the JFK Act be extended for one additional year.