

Chapter 3--Public Activities of the Assassination Records Review Board

Introduction

Contrary to previous governmental bodies that dealt with the assassination of President Kennedy, the Review Board conducted a fair amount of its activities in the open. Although the very nature of the Review Board's work, declassification of records, necessitated closed meetings for the review of classified records, the Review Board promoted openness and conducted public meetings so that members of the public could see the Board members at work.

In the past there have been problems with secrecy. The records of previous investigative bodies such as the Warren Commission and the HSCA were sealed. Yet members of these commissions reached conclusions based on these sealed investigative records. The public lost faith when it could not see the very documents whose contents lead to these conclusions. Therefore, when the JFK Act was drafted, Congress included provisions for interaction with the public, and openness with the public.

The Review Board did not reach conclusions about the records, but made them available to the public so that private citizens could decide for themselves what happened, and at the very least determine the significance of a particular record. The Review Board conducted experts conferences, open meetings, public hearings, and had extensive, ongoing contact with members of the public who followed the Review Board's work.

Early on, in preparation for the review of records, the Review Board conducted an experts conference. The Review Board sought and received guidance on the existence and location of records. The Review Board also conducted public hearings wherein it would hear testimony from members of the public. Another important component of the Review Board's public outreach program was its open meetings. The Review Board weighed important issues such as the establishment of the definition of an "assassination record," the transfer of the "Zapruder film" from the Zapruder family to the JFK Collection, and recommendations for the final report. All of these issues were discussed and resolved with the input of private citizens.