

Q&A

Who owns the Zapruder film?

The film is the property of the Zapruder family. It is now stored at the National Archives under a deposit agreement with the Zapruder family. It is available to researchers with the permission of the Zapruder family. Commercial use of the film must be arranged with the Zapruder family. The Zapruder family requested in 1993 that the film be returned. However, the National Archives has determined that return of the film is a question to be decided by the Review Board.

Doesn't the government now own the film since it has, in effect, taken the film by refusing to return it to the Zapruder family?

That is one of the complicated legal questions. The Review Board's hearing is to resolve those questions.

How much is the film worth?

The film is an irreplaceable historical record of one of the most significant events of the 20th Century. The Review Board views the Zapruder film in this context. However, the Review Board cannot estimate the worth of the film in terms of dollars.

Will the decision of the board lead to litigation and will the government argue that the film is a public document?

That is a possibility. The purpose of this hearing, however, is to resolve the issues of ownership and the future of this important artifact.

How did the government come into possession of the film?

The film was placed in the National Archives under a deposit agreement in 1978. It originally was purchased by Time-Life for \$150,000 shortly after the assassination of President Kennedy. Time-Life sold the film back to the family for \$1.00 in 1975.

Are there copies of the film and where are they now stored?

There are several copies of the film now stored at the National Archives in both 8 mm and 16 mm formats..

Wouldn't the American public benefit if a copy was retained by the government and the original was returned to the family?

The film is a historical artifact. Historians, researchers and the American public would benefit by keeping the original film at the National Archives. The film, however, is owned by the Zapruder family and cannot, under the U.S. Constitution, be taken from them without compensation.

What is the historical value of the film?

The original film is agreed to be the best of the four known motion picture recordings of the assassination. (The others are the Nix film, Muchmore film, and Bronson film.) No future research on the assassination would be complete without examination of the original Zapruder film.

Can I have a copy of the film or photographs made from the film?

The Zapruder family, under their deposit agreement, controls the commercial use of the film.

Why doesn't the family donate the film to the American public?

That is a question they must address.

Can the government legally take the film without reimbursing the Zapruder family for its value?

No. That is a question that has been decided by the Constitution.

What is the condition of the film?

The 8 mm film is very fragile and must be handled with extreme care by the experts at the National Archives. Shrinkage of .5 percent has occurred and most experts agree that it should not be projected to avoid damaging the film. The film is scratched in some places, and does contain two splices {in lieu of six missing frames} where a Life magazine technician damaged the film. The color quality of the film, however, is still quite good.

Has the film been restored, using the latest technology?

No.

If the Review Board decides not to keep film, what happens to it? Would the JFK Collection not retain a copy?

That is a question the Review Board hopes to resolve by conducting this hearing. Copies of the film, which are owned by the U.S. government, would be retained by the National Archives.