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## 6. Presidential Library Materials

Under the legislation of the JFK Records Collection Act, both the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson presidential libraries have been obliged to grant the Review Board access to donor restricted material and records stored under a deposit agreement to determine whether the material contains assassination information. Initially, both presidential libraries were reluctant even to attempt to release some of their most closely guarded records involving Jacqueline Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and William Manchester. In the case of both Libraries, privacy concerns as well as political motivations, delayed the decision-making process. Ultimately, the Review Board prevailed and was the impetus that forced the libraries to take action on some of the more controversial matters. The Review Board made progress on the following fronts: secured the LBJ Library's agreement to release the Jacqueline B. Kennedy tapes and transcripts<sup>1</sup>; convinced the JFK Library to obtain William Manchester's permission to allow a member of the Review Board staff review his papers on *The Death of a President*; and secured the cooperation of the JFK Library in approaching the Kennedy family regarding the release of the sealed tapes and transcripts of Manchester's interviews with Jacqueline Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy.

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<sup>1</sup>Scheduled to be released on September 18, 1998.

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***a. William Manchester interviews.***

There has been considerable public interest in the William Manchester papers relating to his work on *The Death of a President*, a great deal of which is stored at the John F. Kennedy Library under a 1967 Deposit Agreement. Of particular historical value are the extensive personal interviews he conducted in the early aftermath of the President's death. In contrast to many of the other records in the Collection that provide insight into the investigations of the assassination and show glimpses of what was going on in the government behind-the-scenes, the Manchester interviews chronicle the human side of the story. At its inception, *The Death of a President* had been envisioned to provide "one complete, accurate account about the assassination, . . . that would be based on material gathered while the memories were still fresh."<sup>2</sup> In a way, the interviews captured and recorded the early recollections and reactions of people closest to President Kennedy and provide a lens through which the tragedy of the event can be seen and understood in the context of the times.

Beginning in early 1995, The Review Board made repeated attempts to gain access to Manchester's papers at the Kennedy Library for examination purposes. Finally in June, 1998 Manchester agreed to let a Review Board staff member review

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<sup>2</sup>See William Manchester, Forward to *The Death of a President*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, p. ix-x.[CHECK]

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his material on the premises of the Kennedy Library. This review determined that, while much of the information obtained from the interviews is incorporated into the book, the raw notes are a more pure form of record, unadulterated by editing, analysis or selection, which would be of great value and interest to researchers.

Although Manchester recorded some of his interviews on tape, the recordings were not available at the Library. Only the written notes and/or transcripts of his interviews were held in this collection. Furthermore, not all of the interviews that Manchester referenced in *The Death of a President* could be accounted for in the notebooks and transcripts he deposited in the custody of the JFK Library. Because of their unique historical value, The Review Board regards these interviews to be relevant to the assassination. To date, however, the matter of opening the Manchester papers is unresolved, pending further negotiations between The Review Board and William Manchester.

***b. Jacqueline B. Kennedy tapes at the JFK and LBJ Libraries.*** There are six recorded telephone conversations between Jacqueline B. Kennedy and President Johnson within the collection of presidential recordings at the LBJ Library. The Review Board has worked consistently with the LBJ Library to

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secure their release. The LBJ Library was concerned about donor restrictions associated with the release of these tapes as Lady Bird Johnson was highly protective of Mrs. Jacqueline Onassis's privacy. Finally, in March 1998 a decision was made by the LBJ Library to open these conversations with the condition that they be opened along with the next scheduled release of President Johnson's recordings, rather than on their own. In this way, the conversations can be examined chronologically and in their original context. The Review Board understands that these tapes will be released on September 18, 1998, along with the release of the August to November 1963 recordings.

**Jacqueline B. Kennedy tapes and transcripts of the Manchester interviews.** The tapes and transcripts of William Manchester's interviews of Robert F. Kennedy and Jacqueline B. Kennedy are subject to a 1967 agreement which states that they were not to be made public for 100 years "except. . . on the express written consent of plaintiff [Jacqueline B. Kennedy]." With Mrs. Onassis's passing, her daughter Caroline Kennedy became her representative and is the only person with the authority to give consent to open this material. The Review Board, which recognizes that these interviews have extraordinary historical value and may be the most important records not yet released, has pursued this matter with the JFK Library and William Manchester. After reviewing the

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existing documentation to determine whether there was any recourse to lift the court order, the Review Board decided to approach Caroline Kennedy to discuss the possibility of having the tapes and transcripts opened at the Kennedy Library.

c. **Robert F. Kennedy tapes from the JFK Library.** The Review Board is pursuing this matter in conjunction with its effort to seek permission from Caroline Kennedy to release the Manchester tapes and transcripts.

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