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**The JFK Assassination Records Review Board:
Seeking Openness for the American Public**

by

The Honorable John R. Tunheim
Chair, Assassination Records Review Board

The Assassination Records Review Board is an independent federal agency created by federal law to identify, secure and make available to the American public all records related to the assassination of President Kennedy. The Board's efforts to fulfill its mandate have resulted in an unfortunate, unnecessary and avoidable dispute with New Orleans District Attorney Harry Connick over records from the investigation into the Kennedy assassination conducted by former District Attorney Jim Garrison.

In June 1995, the Review Board came to New Orleans to focus attention on records from this area that may belong in the JFK Assassination Records Collection, which is housed at the National Archives. After initial cooperation from District Attorney Connick, the legal confrontation with the District Attorney has prevented important historical records from becoming public, while draining precious resources from both the Review Board and the District Attorney's office.

While testifying before the Review Board on June 28, 1995, District Attorney Connick stated that he would donate records in office from the investigation into the Kennedy assassination conducted by Garrison. At the same time, the Board acquired records from the Garrison family and the family of Edward Wegmann, one of the members of Clay Shaw's defense team.

In July 1995, after the Review Board had conducted its public hearing, the Board received an unsolicited delivery of Grand Jury transcripts from the Garrison investigation. *Contrary to what District Attorney Connick has been quoted as saying, the Review Board was in contact with his office on the very day the records were received. His first assistant was advised that the Board had the records and that the Board position was that these transcripts are defined as "assassination records" under the Board's governing statute, The President John F.*

Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992 (JFK Act). Furthermore, the Board is required to preserve assassination records in its possession for inclusion in the JFK Assassination Records Collection at the National Archives. These records have not been made public by the Board, pending resolution of their legal status.

District Attorney Connick has sought the return of the grand jury records. The Review Board has not returned the records, citing its legal obligation under the JFK Act, but has repeatedly offered to seek a resolution of the matter with the District Attorney. Connick has refused to engage in any discussions with the Board and linked the return of the Grand Jury records with his failure to turn over the investigative files from his office, files which he publicly stated he would donate to the JFK Collection.

The Board's efforts to