

Assassination Records Review Board

600 E Street NW ■ 2nd Floor ■ Washington, DC 20530

THE ASSASSINATION RECORDS REVIEW BOARD

"All Government records concerning the assassination of President John F. Kennedy should carry a presumption of immediate disclosure."

*The President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992
Public Law 102-526, October 26, 1992*

Introduction to the Assassination Records Review Board

The Assassination Records Review Board is an independent federal agency created to oversee the identification and release of records related to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The Review Board was established by The President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992 (PL 102-526), and was signed into law by President George Bush. The five members of the Board were appointed by President Clinton, confirmed by the United States Senate, and sworn in on April 11, 1994.

The law gives the Assassination Records Review Board the mandate and the authority to identify, secure, and make available all records related to the assassination of President Kennedy.

The Board has until October 1, 1996 to fulfill its mandate, plus an additional year at the Board's discretion to complete its responsibilities.

The Review Board Members

The Review Board consists of the following members:

1. John R. Tunheim, Chair; Minnesota Chief Deputy Attorney General.
2. Dr. Henry F. Graff; Professor Emeritus of History at Columbia University.
3. Dr. Kermit L. Hall; Dean, College of Humanities, and Professor of History and Law at The Ohio State University.
4. Dr. William L. Joyce; Associate University Librarian for Rare Books and Special Collections at Princeton University.
5. Dr. Anna K. Nelson; Adjunct Professor of History at The American University.

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The Law

The President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act was enacted by the Congress and signed into law by President George Bush on October 26, 1992. The law states "All Government records concerning the assassination of President John F. Kennedy should carry a presumption of immediate disclosure."

The law mandates that all assassination-related materials be housed in a single collection in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

The Act defines five categories of information for which disclosure may be postponed, including national security, intelligence gathering, and privacy -- provided there is "clear and convincing evidence" of some harm which outweighs public disclosure.

The law requires all federal agencies to make an initial assessment of whether they possess records relating to the assassination. The agencies themselves will conduct an initial review to determine whether their records may be disclosed immediately or whether disclosure should be postponed. The agencies must then give all records that are not disclosed to the Review Board. The Review Board will then evaluate all agency decisions to postpone the release of records. Once the Board completes its review of an agency's recommendation for postponement, all records, including those that have a postponed release date, will be transferred to NARA. The Act requires that all assassination records must be opened by 2017, with the exception of records certified for continued postponement by the President.

Authority of the Assassination Records Review Board

The Senate report of The President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992 stated that " the underlying principles guiding the legislation are independence, public confidence, efficiency and cost effectiveness." In order to achieve these objectives, the Act gave the Board the specific powers to:

- * direct government offices to provide identification aids and organize assassination records;
- * direct government offices to transmit assassination records to the National Archives;
- * obtain assassination records that have been identified and organized by a Government office;
- * direct government offices to investigate the facts, additional information, records, or testimony from individuals which the Board has reason to believe is required;
- * request the Attorney General to subpoena private persons to compel testimony, records, and other relevant information;
- * require any Government office to account in writing for the destruction of any records relating to the assassination of President Kennedy;

- * receive information from the public regarding the identification and public disclosure of assassination records; and
- * hold hearings, administer oaths, and subpoena witnesses and documents.

Background and Need for the Law

On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated while traveling in a motorcade in Dallas, Texas. His tragic death, and the subsequent murder of Lee Harvey Oswald, the President's alleged assassin, led to the creation of The Warren Commission, seven days after the assassination.

Amid continuing public doubts that all of the facts surrounding the assassination had not come to light, the House of Representatives established the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1976 to reopen the investigation.

In addition to these two major federal investigations devoted to the investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy, three other federal investigatory bodies have dealt with the assassination to some degree. President Ford created The Rockefeller Commission in 1975 to investigate Central Intelligence Agency activities within the United States. Part of the Commission's efforts related to the Kennedy assassination. Also in 1975, Congress created the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (the Church Committee) and the House Select Committee on Intelligence (the Pike Committee). Some of the work of these committees was related to the assassination.

Despite these official investigations and with private researchers continuing their efforts, the public was not satisfied that all of their questions about the assassination of President Kennedy had been answered. The result was the passage of The President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992, which included the creation of the Assassination Records Review Board.

Contacting the Assassination Records Review Board

The President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992 provides that the Review Board has the authority to "receive information from the public regarding the identification and public disclosure of assassination records."

If you have relevant information regarding records relating to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, or would like to learn more about the Board, please contact us at:

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