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NARA KJ DATE 06/25/11

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Memorandum

Rankin Papers

TO : J. Lee Rankin

DATE: December 28, 1963

HPW:mar

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Box 34

FROM How Howard P. Willens

SUBJECT: Assignments and Work Product of Commission Staff

Once we have agreed upon a tentative outline of the Commission's work, the most important administrative problem besides hiring a staff is to decide how the members of the staff should handle their assignment. As we have discussed previously, I believe that the Commission staff should consist of approximately five teams of two lawyers, each team assigned to a single substantive area of work. This memorandum suggests a set of procedures and projects which may enable the staff to do the most effective job. Many of these matters were discussed yesterday with Messrs. Adams, Redlich and Shaffer.

At the beginning, we should obtain from each team of lawyers a comprehensive memorandum summarizing all relevant investigative materials, isolating issues to be resolved, and recommending any additional investigation by investigative agencies or the Commission. After review and approval by you, additional investigation will be requested. As the results are received and incorporated into the basic memorandum, the process is repeated until the fact-gathering function is completed to the extent it can be through the work of the investigative agencies. At this point, we should begin to decide what testimony before the Commission, if any, is required, and prepare for any such hearings. Mr. Adams properly stresses the need to get sworn testimony from some witnesses in the near future. I agree, certainly in the case of Mrs. Oswald, and think that preparation for this should be completed as soon as possible.

There was agreement by all of us discussing the matter that one product of our efforts should be a chronological chart setting forth by date and time all the relevant facts disclosed in our investigation. In the first place, this is very often the best way to relate facts in which time is significant. Some aspects

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of this investigation lend themselves particularly to this analysis, for example, the actions of Oswald on the day of November 22 until his apprehension or the movements of Ruby on November 24. The second reason for this effort would be that a chronological chart can be a useful investigative tool, facilitating the making of relevant connections, suggesting leads for further investigation, etc. This is an extraordinarily tedious job. For example, in a major criminal prosecution now pending, two agents have been occupied for close to five months doing nothing else but preparing such a chronological chart.

In view of the dimensions of the job, two questions immediately are presented: (1) should the chart be attempted in complete form, and (2) who should do it. Taking the second question first, I am inclined to believe that the chart should not be prepared by our professional staff or by secretaries. I think it should be done by experienced agents loaned for the necessary time by one of the major Federal investigative agencies. Professor Redlich has some good reasons for believing this should be done by a few young lawyers on the staff. If you decide on agents, I do not recommend that they come from the FBI or the Secret Service. Other agencies, such as IRS or Department of Labor, could be explored informally on this, if you or the Commission think this should be pursued. If we go ahead, I would try to reserve decision on the first question posed above until we get into the project and could draw on some experience and the expertise of the agents assigned.

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There was also agreement to the effect that a complete name index might be useful in our work. This index would have cards (or contain folders) for each person (agent, witness, etc.) whose name appears in our basic investigative materials. On each card the source of the name should be noted (e.g. the particular FBI report and page number) plus the most abbreviated identification (e.g. John Doe - employee at Depository). Every different source where the name is mentioned should be noted on the card. This is one way to keep track of who has been interviewed by whom, to obtain easy reference to the statements of particular witnesses, and to serve other occasional purposes. It may not be used very much by the staff. The difficulty is - if you don't start out with one, it is unlikely that you will begin one in the midst of your work. It is also difficult to estimate now whether information so collected would aid the writing of the final report or the review of our work some years in the future. It might - so perhaps the pertinent question is why not keep such an index? If it decided to keep such an index, then I believe each team should be held responsible for supplying the names and related information from its area to our central files.

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Another method of organizing facts which might be useful in our work (which has not been discussed) can be designated the "notebook" method. The aim of this method is to keep a loose-leaf notebook whose sheets contain facts gleaned from the reports with identification of the source for each fact. To the extent possible, each sheet should contain only a single fact or, at the most, related facts that will necessarily be handled as a unit, e.g. the facts surrounding the purchase of the assassination weapon. The sheets containing the facts will be organized along the lines of the outline prepared for the particular substantive area. As new facts are developed, they are abstracted from the reports on to the sheets and placed into the proper place in the notebook. Summary memoranda are written on any given point based on the facts collected in the notebook. If desired, a complete set of notebooks can be maintained in your office, so that you have ready access to something which (ideally at least) should be current and easy to handle.

This "notebook" approach supplements the other ways of organizing the mass of material. Although memoranda are still written, the notebooks, rather than the memoranda, become the secondary materials for future reference. The source of facts can be kept track of and handled more conveniently through use of a notebook as compared with a narrative memorandum. This method reduces the possibility that the process of selection involved in the writing of an initial memorandum will subordinate certain facts whose significance becomes more apparent during later stages of the investigation.

On the other hand, it is clear that the assignment of preparing these notebooks and keeping them current is an arduous one. Even granting agreement on the utility of these notebooks, we have to weigh the disadvantages of these against other approaches. In view of the experience and stature of our senior staff members, I would suggest that this matter be discussed with each of them prior to any final decision. Each of these lawyers probably has a favorite way of assembling facts which would serve our purposes. I don't believe that uniformity here is necessary, although aesthetically preferable. Also, certain areas may lend themselves to slightly different treatment. If we decide on (1) a chronological chart, (2) a name card index, and (3) summary memoranda at periodic intervals, I think we can afford room for more variation in any additional techniques used by the staff.

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In view of the division of responsibility among the staff, I think it is important that each member of the staff be kept generally advised of the over-all progress of the work. To this end I would suggest that each member (or team) receive Xerox copies of the synopsis and table of contents sheets of all investigative reports received. Sufficient copies of these are now being prepared. In addition, each should receive the subject index to the files when completed. After any initial summary memoranda are written by the various teams, I think that copies of all should be distributed to each team for review. Other ways of keeping the "specialists" informed will develop as time progresses, I am sure, such as the general distribution of outgoing investigative requests or reports to the Commission from you.