

# 'Major gap in record' of RFK assassination

**NORTH DARTMOUTH** — The head of the Robert F. Kennedy Assassination Archives said yesterday that key material supporting the theory of a conspiracy in the shooting appears to be missing from recently opened files of the Los Angeles Police Department investigation of the murder.

Professor Philip H. Melanson said there were gaping discrepancies between earlier accounts of how much testimony was taped and the amount of audio tape made available for public perusal last month after officials opened secret records on the assassination.

"Our survey of the files has discovered a major gap in the case record," Melanson said, reading from a prepared statement. "There is a large shortfall of tape recordings of interviews. . . . The best circumstantial evidence indicates that more data did exist but disappeared."

Melanson said the records contain no taped interviews of 51 key witnesses, including 29 whose testimony would have been expected to shed light on whether Kennedy had been a victim of a conspiracy.

"The fact that they do have to do with conspiracy is dis-

turbing because it means that the original investigation was either quite incompetent . . . (or) if it wasn't incompetence and it was some kind of purging of a record, it's the most disturbing of all," he said, answering a reporter's question.

In Los Angeles, the chief police spokesman, Commander William Booth, said the department would "not deal with what somebody else calls a discrepancy."

"Everything that we had in file with regards to that case had been turned over to the (state) archives," he said via telephone. "In terms of individuals coming up with their own theories . . . and being critical as to whether they find what they're looking for or not . . . the records have to speak for themselves."

Los Angeles Police concluded in 1969 that Sirhan Sirhan, a Jordanian immigrant serving a life sentence for the crime, was solely responsible for the assassination.

Robert Houghton, who as chief of detectives headed the police investigation into the June 5, 1968, assassination, said it was difficult to argue the finer points of a 20-year-old crime, but rejected suggestions of a coverup.

"I don't know anything about destroying any tapes at all," the 74-year-old Houghton said via telephone from his home in North Ridge, Calif. "Certain things I understand have been blocked out, but that was to protect a lot of people who were interviewed. I don't know what was taken out, if anything."

The 43-year-old Melanson began compiling a collection on Kennedy's killing in 1984, when the library at Southeastern Massachusetts University accepted material gathered by the Robert F. Kennedy Truth Committee, a group that believes more than one person was involved in the shooting.

Conspiracy theorists suggested that a second gunman fired at Kennedy from behind, while Sirhan stood in front of him.

Melanson, who teaches political science, said that of the 3,470 interviews conducted by Los Angeles Police during investigations, only 301 interviews were available on tape in the recently released record.

"This contrasts sharply with the quality and quantity of tapes stated or implied over the years in the most knowledgeable descriptions of the files," he said.

—AP