
ACCESS to HSC records:

Enclosed is a letter from Mark Allen and Kevin Walsh, seeking your support for their efforts to unlock the files of the House Select Committee. I encourage you to become a member of ACCESS, and to write to a House member or two. I will keep you informed of any progress resulting from the work of ACCESS, which is already under way.

For those of you who don't already know Mark and Kevin, some background: Kevin was a staff researcher during part of the HSC investigation, mainly while Richard Sprague was chief counsel. He was one of the very few people with prior knowledge of the JFK case to be hired by the HSC, and he gave the Committee an important link to the research community. Mark is a Washington lawyer (in the non-perjorative sense) who has been a buff since he was an undergraduate at Berkeley, where we met. While studying at the University of Virginia, he was involved in the lobbying of Rep. Downing which preceded the formation of the HSC. Mark followed the HSC investigation closely; his analysis of the HSC account of Oswald in Mexico, and his FOIA suit which led to the release of most of CD 347, have been noted in EOC. (See the 8 Sep 79 issue, 2 EOC 3, and #1980.525.)

In May 1981, the Washington Post reported on Mark's suit for FBI records relating to the HSC investigation. (#1981.268) The FBI asserted that the requested records are Congressional material, not subject to the FOIA. The normal withholding period for House records is 50 years, and a resolution of the full House would be required to make an exception for HSC files.

The unavailability of HSC-related records was the subject of a long and informative article by George Lardner, headlined "House Assassinations Committee Attacked for Secrecy on Records." (#1981.267, quoted and discussed in 3 EOC 4, pp. 1-2.) The article includes a critical analysis of the actions and inactions which led to the current situation. An earlier article by Earl Golz, headlined "Public once again in dark," also includes comments by HSC people and critics. (DMN, 22 Nov 79; in TCI, 22 Dec 79; a.k.a. #1980.5.)

The circumstances leading to this withholding, the motivation of the HSC members, and even their awareness of the problem, remain somewhat clouded, but that is of secondary importance. The irony of the situation, however, is clear: the Congressional investigators who broke the JFK case wide open and reversed the official government verdict have left us with more material withheld than ever before. (This applies to the Church Committee as well as the HSC.)

Thousands of pages have been released from the raw files of highly secret intelligence agencies, and almost all of the Warren Commission's internal records are available, but we know very little about what the HSC did (other than in its public hearings) or what it learned (other than what it chose to publish). In the case of several unemphasized but rumor-encrusted leads (such as Jim Braden and Emile Bruneau), we can't even tell whether the information gathered was too strong to disclose or too weak to be worth disclosing.

During the debates on establishing the HSC, some House members were clearly more concerned with satisfying the public that the investigative institutions were working than with finding out who killed Kennedy. Some HSC members came out clearly and eloquently for full disclosure. The report itself said it was "essential" that people "be able to judge this committee's performance." (P. 17)

The HSC was not about to repeat one mistake made by the Warren Commission; it knew that everything it released would be carefully scrutinized. It is understandable that release of its files was hardly the HSC's top priority. As long as there was a chance of a Justice Department investigation of the Mafia angles, it would have made sense to save the hottest leads for official use only. Also, the members could not have been eager to expose every internal HSC decision to scrutiny by the buffs, not all of whom are as reasonable as you and me. (Well, maybe I'm not so sure about you!) According to Blakey, the HSC would have

published more if it had not run out of time and money. At the very least, the publication of more of what Blakey would have published seems hard to oppose.

Whatever the history and justification may be, important substantive information is now unavailable in a number of areas. To pick just two major examples, in addition to organized crime: a classified 300-page staff report on Oswald, the CIA, and Mexico remains totally withheld, and much evidence relating to the autopsy is unpublished. I described some of the unavailable medical evidence in a letter to Rep. Stokes, asking that it be released. (#1981.217, 245) It includes information relevant to David Lifton's hypothesis of pre-autopsy surgery which the HSC was not in a position to evaluate fully before "Best Evidence" came out.

Of course, it is personally frustrating not to know exactly what the HSC did in areas which I had researched, such as the quality of the FBI and WC investigations. The HSC seems to have verified my claim that an FBI report was retyped to delete the reference to SA Hosty in Oswald's notebook, but I have no information beyond the summary in the HSC report. The Committee made some provocative observations about Army Intelligence, and cited a memo I had submitted, but the basic HSC documents were not published - and anyone who wants the cited memo has to get it from the critics! I'm willing to send out copies (and I charge less per page than the Archives), but that is a very silly situation. That is just one reason I fully support ACCESS and its goals.

It is worth emphasizing that ACCESS' immediate goal is passage of a bill which would apply the same standards of accountability to the records of the HSC and the Warren Commission. The WC's files at the Archives are subject to 1965 guidelines which established a policy of maximum possible public disclosure, and to the Freedom of Information Act. Congress, in its considerable wisdom, did not apply the FOIA to itself. The legislative remedy being sought by ACCESS is probably the only practical alternative to 50 years of withholding. Like the FOIA, any bill which passes the House will surely include more than adequate exemptions for material which really ought to be withheld.

Note also that ACCESS is taking no position on who killed JFK, or on the quality of the HSC investigation. I hope that this approach will allow all the readers of EOC to support ACCESS - including former HSC staffers, members of the press, and buffs of all persuasions.

Acoustics:

I have now received the selection from the NAS file which I mentioned in the last EOC. It consists of 120 items, totalling 358 pages. My listing is 3 pages; ask for #99. The file includes about 98 pages of correspondence with (mostly from) critics, 63 pages of published material, and about 121 pages of technical and comparably important items, including correspondence between the Ramsey Committee and the HSC experts. I have not yet had time to digest the technical material.

Prof. Alvarez called me to offer his firm opinion that the arguments about automatic gain control made by Gary Mack (in the first issue of "Coverups!") are invalid. Every radio sold commercially since about 1940 includes some sort of AGC, says Alvarez, and statements to the contrary by the people Gary talked to cannot be relied upon. Alvarez says that the observed AGC action is indeed what one would expect. I know nothing about radio circuitry, so I will defer to the experts and let you know when this question is resolved to my satisfaction.

More on Comer Clarke: (See 4 EOC 3, p. 5.) With this spelling of his last name, Clarke wrote 4 books in England from 1960-3, including one on Russian espionage. (Can anyone find a copy?) Tony Summers has dug up some background on Clarke; he was a more serious and interesting journalist than the HSC account suggested. During the 1960's, Clarke entered a period of personal and professional decline. I now think he did go to Cuba but probably did not get the claimed interview with Castro. (More later.)