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College of Arts and Sciences
Political Science Department

July 17, 1984

Honorable Stephen Yslas, President
Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners
150 North Los Angeles St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Mr. Yslas:

The library at my university has established an archive for materials relating to the Robert F. Kennedy assassination. As a professor of political science, one of my primary areas of teaching and research is the study of political assassinations in America, and I also sit on the board of directors of the Assassinations Archives and Research Center, Inc. of Washington, D.C. Because of these involvements, my university library has appointed me to administer to the acquisition of RFK assassination materials. I am in the process of obtaining such materials from a variety of governmental agencies and was recently sent to the Los Angeles area to inspect and retrieve several privately held collections.

Clearly, the most historically critical records and materials are those held by the Los Angeles Police Department. Most of this material has yet to be released or accessed by scholars, journalists or the general public. As part of the archival collection efforts described above, I wrote to the Police Commission in May of this year (see attached), requesting answers to crucial questions originally posed by CBS News in 1975. I made my request under the Commission's procedure, instituted in 1975, for obtaining information on the RFK case. I have as yet received no acknowledgement of, or response to, my request. During a follow-up visit to the Police Commission on July 10, 1984, I was surprised to discover that Commission Secretary William G. Cowdin was apparently unaware of the 1975 procedure.

I respectfully urge the Commission to expedite the existing process in order that historically vital materials can be accessed and disseminated within a reasonable framework of time and cost, not only for my university but for the many researchers (historians, political scientists, journalists) who will be making future requests.

In accord with the shared goal of maximum possible availability of data, I look forward to a response to my previous request and to the continuing and expeditious release of data under the Commission's 1975 procedure, relative to which I will also submit further and more generic requests (regarding categories of witness statements, physical and photographic evidence, etc.). Such requests will more effectively serve the Commission's previously expressed commitment to public disclosure than would a series of minutely cast questions.

As this process of dissemination unfolds, the bureaucratic and public policy effectiveness of the Commission's existing procedure will become clearer, both to the Commission and to the public it serves. Whatever problems may arise or whatever improvements in effectiveness may be deemed necessary, the goal of carefully preserving and maximally disclosing RFK assassination materials to a level commensurate with that which now exists for the other major political assassination cases of the 1960's - President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. - is one which is embraced by scholars, interested segments of the public, and, surely, by the Commission.

Although the Robert F. Kennedy assassination is, as we are all aware, a watershed political event, it is both striking and disturbing that in comparison to the assassinations of President Kennedy and Dr. King, the RFK case remains historically shrouded by a dearth of released material, even though there remain important, unresolved questions which command serious analytical attention. The contrast in the availability of materials is indeed a sharp one. The Warren Commission has released all 26 volumes of its investigation and they have been published; the 10 volumes of the Los Angeles Police Department's investigation have not been released. Dallas Police Department files, relating to advance protective investigations for President Kennedy's visit and to that Department's assassination investigation, now repose in the National Archives. Nearly 100,000 pages of documents generated by the primary investigating agencies in the King assassination (the Memphis Police Department and the FBI) have been released. Although the protection of national security weighed heavily upon the release of documents dealing with President Kennedy's assassination, approximately 600,000 pages have been released. In both the King and John F. Kennedy cases, the balance between the protection of individual privacy and the public's right to know has resulted in the release of hundreds of thousands of pages of documents and dozens of volumes of investigative reports.

If there is any additional information which I can provide to the Commission regarding my request or regarding the more general points described above, please do not hesitate to contact me. I

look forward to a response to the 14 questions which I submitted on 31 May 1984 and to a productive and continuing interaction with the Commission as this historically crucial process moves forward.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Dr. Philip H. Melanson

Dr. Philip H. Melanson,
Professor and Chairperson

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CC: Members of the Los Angeles Board of
Police Commissioners