

MEMORANDUM

March 25, 1964

TO: Mr. J. Lee Rankin

FROM: Samuel A. Stern

SUBJECT: Obtaining Television Tapes of Assassination Events

Several of us have questions which require an examination of the tapes for television and radio programs broadcast in the days following the assassination. This interest led us to consider the possibility that the Commission might want to obtain, for its permanent records, a complete set of all existing radio and television tapes of events in Dallas and related matters (such as interviews, if there were any, of persons in New Orleans or New York or in the Marine Corps who knew Oswald) but excluding all of the coverage of Washington ceremonies, tributes to President Kennedy and the like. We also thought that it might be of some help to the Kennedy Library to determine the status of these tapes, and that conceivably the Commission might make some arrangement with the Kennedy Library to supply it with any tapes obtained by the Commission or copies thereof.

We asked the Secret Service to ascertain what materials existed, both at local stations in Dallas and at the national networks and wire services. The Secret Service outlined, in their Report #1256, copy of which is attached, the materials available in Dallas, and the estimated cost of reproducing them. Mr. Griffin has undertaken to ask the Secret Service to determine whether the stations involved can describe the subject matter of the tapes, and we are awaiting word in this regard.

Mr. Carswell of Treasury advised that work was already being done by two groups in government to obtain the network materials. The Library of Congress formally requested all tapes from the networks soon after the assassination. Mrs. Elizabeth Hamer, Assistant Librarian of Congress, is handling the matter. A parallel effort is also being made on behalf of the Kennedy Library. I spoke to Mr. Herman Kahn of Archives, who is participating in this effort. Mr. Kahn advised that negotiations have been under way for some time to obtain all network tapes, with two issues unresolved. First, the Library has not yet gotten the agreement of the networks to donate the materials (NEC has estimated that to produce one complete print would cost from \$40,000 to \$75,000); second, there are unresolved questions about the extent of the copyright license that the networks would give the Library. George Stevens of USIA and, until his departure, Pierre Salinger, have been holding informal talks with the networks.

Mr. Kahn also advised that no network has any meaningful inventory of its tapes, and that indexing has started, but it is not expected to be finished for a considerable time. This is confirmed by the lack of success the Secret Service has had in attempting to locate at CBS the tape of an interview of one of the Parkland Hospital doctors which Mr. Specter has requested. Even though the day and approximate time of the interview is known, the tape could not be located at CBS, after five days search.

I have not pursued the matter further with Mr. Stevens of USIA or Mrs. Hamer of the Library of Congress. It seems entirely unlikely that obtaining all the tapes would be of any help to the Commission, even if the networks agreed to supply them. Conceivably the Commission might be able to assist the Library of Congress or the Kennedy Library in obtaining the tapes if the Commission were to join in requesting them.

In any event, I suggest that the Commission and the staff determine as soon as possible those specific televised events which the Commission will require as part of its investigation, and that the Secret Service be asked to obtain these segments from the appropriate sources. Since the tapes are in a completely uncatalogued state, the search for a particular episode is a burden on the network. While the networks will undoubtedly cooperate with one request for specified items, they are likely to object to sporadic requests.

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Willens
Mr. Griffin ✓
Mr. Stern
Files