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A MOVE TO UNSEAL THE KENNEDY FILES

Panel Chairman Asks Release of Assassination Records

By **CLIFFORD KRAUSS**
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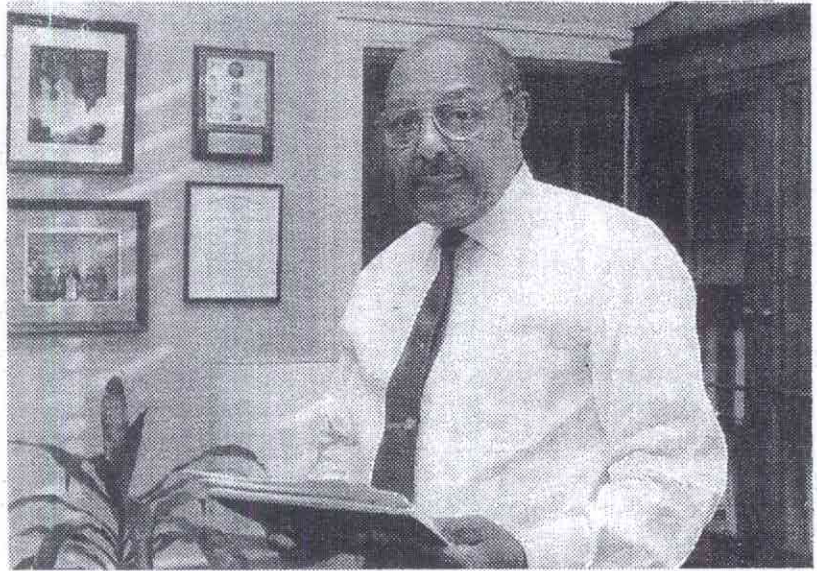
WASHINGTON, Jan. 21 — The chairman of a Congressional committee that investigated the assassination of President John F. Kennedy said today that he would ask Congress to order the release of all Government documents on the slaying. He said such a move would serve to relieve public suspicions that the Government had been involved in a conspiracy to kill the President.

But the chairman, Representative Louis Stokes, an Ohio Democrat, said the release of intelligence agency files and other documents could strengthen evidence that organized crime figures were involved in the assassination.

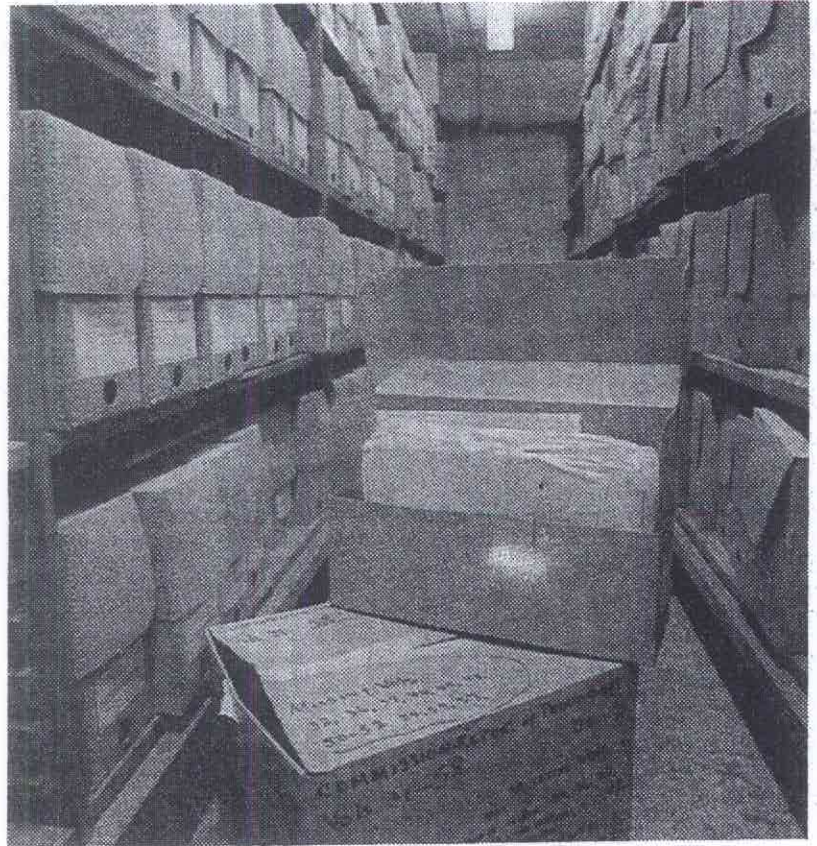
The committee's files could be released if the House votes to do so, and Mr. Stokes's support would be influential in such a vote. But secret material held by other Government agencies can be made public only with the approval of the House, Senate and the President, and prospects for such approval are unclear.

The former House Select Committee on Assassinations sent 848 boxes of unpublished documents it had collected to the National Archives, where they were to be sealed until the year 2029. But the idea of unsealing the files has gained momentum with the recent endorsement of Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts. Mr.

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Jose R. Lopez/The New York Times



Michael Geissinger for The New York Times

Representative Louis Stokes, head of the former House Select Committee on Assassinations, said he would ask Congress to order the release of Government documents on the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Assassination records are shown at the National Archives.

A Move to Unseal the Kennedy Files

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Stokes said recently that he was leaning in favor of releasing the committee's files, although he added that he believed they would add nothing important to public knowledge of the case.

But today he said documents assembled by the Central Intelligence Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation should be released, too. These documents are not part of Mr. Stokes's committee's files, although the panel saw some of them in its inquiry.

These files include transcripts of conversations among prominent members of organized crime that were secretly, and in some cases illegally, taped by law enforcement authorities in the six months before the assassination, said G. Robert Blakey, a University of Notre Dame law professor who served as counsel to the House assassinations committee.

"In the interests of everything being disclosed," Mr. Stokes said in an interview, "let's get everything out that is sealed anywhere."

Today he began to consult with House leaders and staff lawyers to consider what for the legislation to open the files should take.

Concerns on Files' Content

While a House vote could release the committee's files, there are concerns that they, and the intelligence agencies' information, could reveal intelligence sources and methods, as well as rumors that could needlessly harm the reputations of innocent people.

A senior aide to Senator George J. Mitchell of Maine, the Senate Majority leader, said Mr. Mitchell supported the fullest disclosure possible of Government documents related to the assassination. "If Mr. Stokes comes forward with any proposal," the aide said, Mr. Mitchell "would review it."

A White House spokeswoman, Judy Smith, said of Mr. Stokes's comments: "Presently, the White House has no position. We will of course review any request when presented."

Mr. Stokes expressed particular interest in the release of three tapes of secretly recorded conversations between F.B.I. undercover agents and Carlos Marcello, a New Orleans organized-crime figure, in the late 1970's in which Mr. Marcello reportedly said that he was involved in the assassination. The tapes were sealed by Judge Morey Sear of United States District New Orleans in 1981 in order not to prejudice Mr. Marcello's trial for brib-

ing a Louisiana official to receive state insurance contracts.

Mr. Marcello, who is 82 years old, was released from prison two years ago and lives in New Orleans, where Mr. Blakey says he is in poor health. When Mr. Marcello testified before the committee, he denied any involvement in the assassination. But he also expressed intense dislike for former Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, whom Mr. Marcello held responsible for his brief deportation in 1961.

No Word From C.I.A.

In a telephone interview, Judge Sear said he did not remember the contents of the tapes and would not discuss them even if he had. Thomas F. Jones, an F.B.I. spokesman, said he was not aware of the existence of the three tapes.

When asked at a news conference today whether he would support Congressional release of documents relating to the case, the F.B.I.'s director, William S. Sessions, said, "The law, of course, will be followed."

Mark Mansfield, a spokesman for the C.I.A., said, "I don't have any immediate comment on Congressman Stokes's remarks, but the agency has fully cooperated with various bodies that have investigated the assassination of President Kennedy and will continue to do so."

Mr. Stokes's committee, which investigated the assassinations of President Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. between 1976 and 1979, did not obtain

the three tapes. But in its findings, the panel stated that Mr. Marcello "had the motive, means and opportunity to have President John F. Kennedy assassinated, though it was unable to establish direct evidence of Marcello's complicity."

The committee's report also noted links between Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby to Mafia figures, including some with ties to the Marcello organization and to Jimmy Hoffa, the labor leader who was being investigated on orders of Robert Kennedy.

Effect of Movie

Unlike the Warren Commission, which conducted the Government's official review of the assassination and concluded in 1964 that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed Kennedy, the House panel found in its 1979 report that Kennedy "was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy." But the House panel decided that neither the American nor any foreign Government were involved.

Conspiracy theories implicating the Soviet Union, Cuba, the Mafia, right-wing Cuban exiles and even the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency have long been in abundance. But they have been popularized anew by the movie "J.F.K.," which posits that the Government plotted to kill Kennedy to prevent

him from withdrawing American troops from Vietnam.

Interest in Mr. Marcello was fanned earlier this month when Frank Ragano, a lawyer who represented Mr. Hoffa, told The New York Post that Mr. Hoffa had ordered him to tell Mr. Marcello and another mob leader that "They had to kill the President. Hoffa said to me, 'This has to be done.'"

Mr. Stokes said F.B.I. transcripts of conversations of several Mafia leaders before the assassination had been reviewed by his committee but were returned to the F.B.I. and copies were not in the committee's sealed files. "It seems to me," he said, "that anyone doing any further investigation ought to get hold of those wiretaps and analyze them for themselves."

Mr. Blakey said the conversations that were taped by the Government and reviewed by the committee included no conclusive evidence, but they indicated that the Mafia hated the Kennedys and believed the Kennedy Administration was a serious threat to the mob's operations. He said the F.B.I. files "have all the circumstantial evidence that leads to the judgment that the Mafia was involved."

Mr. Stokes said he also thought the C.I.A. files on Mr. Oswald's defection to the Soviet Union in 1959 and his 1963 trip to Mexico City would also be of interest to investigators.