

Time to open the assassination files

Oliver Stone's movie "JFK" is of dubious value as history, but it may turn out to be an invaluable political lever for historians, journalists and others interested in prying loose for firsthand examination all the evidence relating to the assassination of the nation's 35th president.

Owing largely to the controversy created by Stone's film, momentum is building in Congress for measures to release immediately virtually all documents and physical evidence connected with two investigations of the assassination—one by a House select committee during the late 1970s and the other by the Warren Commission in the immediate aftermath of the 1963 murder in Dallas.

In the weeks since "JFK" opened, numerous influential members of Congress have come out in favor of making all the assassination materials public. Without question, the most important of those have been Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), the slain president's brother; and Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), who was

chairman of the House committee.

Stokes, who last week announced his support for opening the files, said he did not think they would shed any important, new light on the assassination, but said that keeping them secret—until the year 2009 for most of the congressional materials and 2029 for some of the others—was adding to the sense of suspicion and distrust surrounding the assassination.

With its dramatically presented conspiracy hypothesis, "JFK" has added substantially to that distrust. But like so much else about the movie, the impression that it conveys about the secrecy surrounding the assassination records is misleading.

According to the National Archives, 98 percent of the Warren Commission records already are open and available for research. But 2 percent are not, many for reasons that are now of dubious validity.

Given the passions and anxiety that the assassination still engenders, this is a case where every secret thing ought to be made known.

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