

Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Federal Bureau of Investigation identified its primary files on the Kennedy assassination in the 1970s in response to public interest in disclosure of records related to the assassination under the Freedom of Information Act. These records, referred to by the FBI as the “core and related” files, consist of headquarters and field office files on the following subjects: Lee Harvey Oswald, Jack Ruby, the JFK Assassination Investigation, the FBI administrative file on the Warren Commission, Marina Oswald, Ruth Paine, George de Mohrenschildt, Clay Shaw, David Ferrie, the FBI administrative file on the Church Committee, and the FBI administrative file on the House Select Committee on Assassinations. The FBI established its JFK Task Force (which consisted of five document reviewers)ⁱ in 1992 as Congress debated legislation to accelerate disclosure of all records related to the assassination of President Kennedy. The FBI conducted records searches of the core and related subjects in its Central Records System and its automated electronic surveillance index (ELSUR Index) to determine that they had gathered all core and related files in FBI headquarters and field offices.

The FBI identified a second major category of records to be processed under the JFK Act which the FBI refers to as the “HSCA Subjects”. In its investigation of the Kennedy assassination, the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) requested access to records responsive to FBI searches on approximately 700 different subjects. The HSCA cast a wide net in its investigation, and the HSCA subjects range from individuals who had direct contact with Lee Harvey Oswald to major figures in organized crime and anti-Castro Cuban political activity. The HSCA secured an agreement from the FBI in 1978 that the Bureau would retain the HSCA subjects as a “sequestered collection” which would be filed as a set of records apart from the FBI’s central records system.

All of these records (the core and related files and the HSCA subjects) were identified, and the FBI had begun its JFK Act processing prior to the appointment of the Assassination Records Review Board. The FBI delivered its first shipment of assassination records to the JFK Collection in December 1993. As of September 30, 1998, the FBI has made 22 shipments of assassination records to the JFK Collection.

As described in Chapters 4 and 5 of this report, the Review Board streamlined its review processes in 1997 to ensure that all assassination records would be reviewed by the close of the Assassination Records Review Board. In the spring and summer of 1997, the FBI assured the Review Board that it would finish its processing of assassination records as a result of the streamlined processes. Despite their assurances, in March 1998, the FBI wrote a letter to the Review Board stating that it did not expect to finish its assassination records processing until February of 2000. After a series of meetings between the Review Board and the FBI, the FBI again committed to finishing its JFK processing before the end of September 1998.

The Review Board formally submitted to the FBI more than 50 requests for additional records. In response to the Board’s requests, the FBI made its original files available. In a limited number of instances, the Bureau provided documentation on those files that were destroyed according to the FBI’s records retention schedule. The Review Board designated thousands of documents for assassination records processing as a result of these requests.

In January 1997 and again in April 1998, the staff of the Review Board met with the FBI to address any outstanding matters with respect to the Bureau's compliance with the JFK Act. The compliance program with the FBI focused primarily on the scope of the FBI's searches under the JFK Act. The Review Board staff raised additional records issues, including the identification of any working files of top FBI officials with responsibility for overseeing the investigation of the Kennedy assassination and accounting for all relevant electronic surveillance that related to the assassination. Acting on the Review Board's concerns, the FBI requested all FBIHQ Divisions to conduct searches for any materials not retrievable through the FBI central records system and for records that may have been maintained by top FBI officials. While the FBI has discovered some new assassination records as a result of this search, they have not found any working files maintained top FBI officials from the early 1960s.

On the issue of electronic surveillance, the FBI requested all 56 of its field offices to identify any electronic surveillance in which assassination-related figures were either speaking, or referred to, in conversations monitored by the FBI. The FBI searched its ELSUR indices under the core file subjects. The FBI certified that it identified only one instance where a core subject was a target of FBI electronic surveillance, and that was the electronic surveillance of Marina Oswald in Dallas following the assassination. All other responsive electronic surveillance identified by the FBI consisted of so-called "overhears," where a person is mentioned in a conversation. Nonetheless, the FBI certified that these would be reviewed and processed under the JFK Act.

The FBI has a well-indexed, centralized filing system, and the FBI's official main files on the Kennedy assassination were readily identified and processed under the JFK Act. The bulk of FBI records relating to the assassination have been placed in the JFK Collection. However, at the time of this Report, the FBI was still processing some additional materials for inclusion in the JFK Collection.

The FBI submitted its Final Declaration of Compliance on August 20, 1998.

i. At its peak in 1994, the FBI's JFK Task Force had more than 90 employees working on assassination records processing.