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Book Review: The Kennedy Assassination Tapes

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Shortly after John Kennedy was murdered in Dallas, a commission was appointed to investigate the assassination. The transition from Kennedy to Lyndon B. Johnson was both wrenching and bitter. According to Johnson, even though he had taken the oath to become the nation's president, millions of Americans saw him as illegitimate, "a pretender to the throne." Johnson appointed Chief Justice Earl Warren to head the commission and hoped its findings would somehow bring about a degree of emotional closure for the country.

In a fascinating new book, transcripts of telephone calls Johnson made as he worked to stabilize the country and keep it functioning in the wake of Nov. 22, 1963, are presented. What makes them especially remarkable is they are presented with historic clarity and in context for, perhaps, the first time. This is riveting reading. In essence, we are able to eavesdrop on history being made. The conversations underscore Johnson's uneasy relationship with Robert Kennedy, the genuine warmth he had for Jacqueline Kennedy and her immediate family, and doubts expressed by Warren and other members of his commission.

In addition to the nearly verbatim transcripts, Max Holland presents a commentary that keeps this book focused. The conversations provide a rare insight into our government and its leaders during one of our nation's most turbulent periods.