

# Manchester Book Dispute May Cause Deep Wounds

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BY ERNEST CONINE

Even if Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy wins her battle to prevent publication of "Death of a President," the country faces a season of divisive bitterness, of wounding charge and counter-charge, between the Kennedy and Johnson forces.

William Manchester's manuscript was read by editors of 25 publishing houses, as well as by friends of the Kennedy family.

It will be a miracle if a bootleg edition isn't published either here or abroad. In any event, gossip about what is in the manuscript—as well as many things which aren't—cannot now be stopped.

The reputations of both President Johnson and Sen. Robert Kennedy are likely to be hurt before it is all over.

More important, unless the American people show much understanding and common sense, there may be great damage to the country itself—to the underlying unity which must exist if our political system is to function properly.

Some of the Manchester book's juiciest pages are said to deal with the Kennedy-Johnson frictions which developed in the immediate aftermath of the assassination.

For a starter, we should all put ourselves in the shoes of those in both camps who were there when it

terrible strains to which all were exposed.

It is hardly a secret that many Kennedy aides had never thought highly of Lyndon Johnson even before the assassination. They didn't think he should have been chosen as Vice President, and some felt that he had deliberately avoided involvement in some of President Kennedy's more risky decisions.

Mr. Johnson has never commented publicly, but he would have been less than human if he had not resented this attitude.

Add to this underlying animosity toward Mr. Johnson the fact that John F. Kennedy was murdered in the Vice President's own state, in a city where a mob of right-wingers had spat upon Adlai Stevenson only four weeks earlier.

There was an immediate and widespread assumption, which was

certainly shared in the Kennedy entourage, that the President was a victim of Texas' virulent band of radical rightists. It wasn't until later in the day that Lee Harvey Oswald's Communist connections came to light.

Add further the fact that the Kennedy party, in the midst of their shock and grief, had to virtually shanghai the dead President's body out of Dallas, because a local official was insisting that the autopsy be performed there.

As one informant has put it, "the

Kennedy people had a penny of Texas and Texans when they got on Air Force One for the flight back to Washington."

Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that some felt an emotional resentment at finding Mr. Johnson already on board the Presidential plane—as though, in their eyes, he couldn't wait to take over.

The resentment increased when the new President of the United States delayed the take-off until U.S. District Judge Sarah T. Hughes could reach the plane and administer the oath of office.

Some of the Kennedy men felt that Mr. Johnson, by asking the still-shocked widow of the late President to witness his swearing in, was "using" her.

They were incensed that some of the Johnson staff could bring themselves to eat on the way back to Washington.

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Considering the high emotions of the moment, it is not surprising that there were several sharp exchanges.

But, in fairness, it should be recognized that the same events must have looked considerably different from where Mr. Johnson sat.

From the moment that Mr. Kennedy was pronounced dead, he was President of the United States—and bore the awesome responsibilities of that office.

He could not be sure that the assassination was not part of a Soviet plot which might include plans to launch an attack under cover of the confusion.

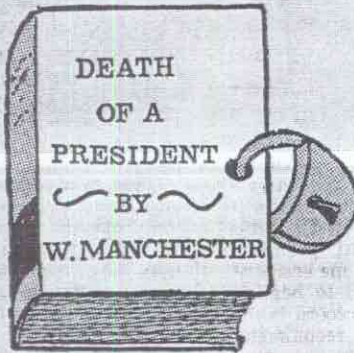
It was vitally important that he let the world know at once that the transition of power had occurred, and that the most powerful country in the world would not go leaderless during a period of mourning.

His first duty was to the American people, not to the sensitivities of the Kennedy group.

Seen in this light, his quick move to assert his own authority—and advertise that fact to the world—was not only right but necessary.

The country would be better off if everybody concerned would recognize that the whole episode, while regrettable, belongs in the past.

Unfortunately, new ambitions are probably too entangled with old hurts for anything so sensible to happen, now that the genie is out of the bottle.



Cartoon by Wick

happened, and try to understand the