

About the Manchester Book

BY RAYMOND MOLEY

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Last September I wrote, and my syndicate distributed to client newspapers, a piece about what I called the Frick case. That legal action was brought by Helen Clay Frick in a Pennsylvania court to suppress a book written by Sylvester K. Stevens, a responsible historian. Miss Frick claimed that she was offended by uncomplimentary references to her father, Henry Clay Frick, the famous Pittsburgh manufacturer.

The attorney retained by Dr. Stevens was Simon Rifkind, formerly a federal judge. In soliciting information about the case I established a contact with Judge Rifkind, and he not only expressed his views of the issues, but supplied me with his briefs in behalf of Dr. Stevens.

He said, in effect, that a review of a history by courts and judges was likely to be unfortunate and that history had a certain built-in process of correction by later historians. Hence, he brought suit in the federal courts to enjoin the Pennsylvania court from suppressing the Stevens book.

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It is an interesting coincidence that Simon Rifkind was retained by Jacqueline B. Kennedy in her suit against Harper & Row, Cowles Communications, which publishes Look magazine, and William Manchester.

The court, a New York state court, was asked to enjoin and restrain the defendants pendente lite (while the litigation is pending) "from publishing or granting to others the right to publish all or any part of" the Manchester manuscript which deals with the history of the Kennedy assassination.

It would be untrue and unfair to charge Judge Rifkind with inconsistency between his contention in the Frick case and his argument in the Kennedy case. For in the present instance the basis of the suit is the alleged violation of a contract entered

into with Manchester, providing that before publication the completed manuscript should be reviewed by Jacqueline and Robert F. Kennedy.

At this writing, it is possible to make some valid observations about the whole sensational imbroglio.

It is quite common practice for the family of a deceased member to select or employ a professional writer to compose his biography or an account of a specific incident in his life. In such an instance an author

enjoys access to material not available to other historians or writers. And generally the manuscript is shown to the family before publication.

A responsible historian, however, is generally careful to note in his book that the family has in effect asked that it be written.

This enables future historians to evaluate the book in that light and with reservations, for it is an inspired text and is only the story that the family chooses to reveal. Here, as Judge Rifkind said in the Frick case, other historians are at liberty to correct the account according to their material and the views of other witnesses.

In the present case, so many have viewed the text and so many changes have been made in it that its value as a true and final account will be highly doubtful. And many others will write the story with wholly different conclusions.

The whole episode displays a gross lack of good judgment on the part of Robert Kennedy. As the brother and alter ego of President Kennedy, Robert sought to shape the news. Pressure, social favor, exclusive information and threats were used to control what the press told the public. Whether those methods would have succeeded in re-electing John F. Kennedy, we shall never know.

But now brother Robert has attempted to control history, with a disastrous impact upon himself. Clio, the muse of history, has a strong character. She has resisted seduction by greater figures than Robert. She will prevail again.

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