

MARY McGRORY

A Kennedy Olive Branch?

Sometime in the next few days, the Kennedys are expected to make a public gesture of reconciliation toward the Johnsons in an effort to draw off the poison so freely flowing in the controversy over William Manchester's account of the assassination of President Kennedy.

An antidote is needed, the Kennedys realize, to put an end to the bitter misunderstanding about the chronicle, which will begin to appear serially in Look Magazine this week.

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Unless they say or do something of a placating nature publicly, the Kennedys know the world will go on thinking that Mrs. John F. Kennedy and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy have never forgiven President Johnson for supposed indignities inflicted during the first terrible hours after the tragedy in Dallas.

Publication of the first installment, which, like the others, according to one who has read them, contains nothing derogatory to President Johnson, will do little to quiet the storm. It will be assumed that the most lacerating alleged references were deleted as a result of Mrs. Kennedy's lawsuit against the author and his magazine and book publishers.

Although spokesmen for Mrs. Kennedy insisted that she appealed to the courts only to protect the personal privacy guaranteed under an agreement drawn up by the author, the personal and political aspects of the book have become hopelessly ensnarled.

Thanks mainly to interventions from various sources unable to bear the deprivation of being excluded from the furor, President Johnson came to be represented as the villain of the piece—appearing as an insensitive opportunist greedily reaching out for the prerogatives of power during the agony of the Kennedy family and staff.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Kennedy wrote several notes thanking the President for his consideration and solicitude during the changeover.

But during the furor, which has had the unfortunate effect of dim-

nishing everyone directly concerned, the rumor took root that Mrs. Kennedy was fighting not just to keep out highly personal material but indiscreet comments about the Johnsons which might have grave consequences for the political future of her brother-in-law, the junior senator from New York.

The President has maintained exemplary reserve during the acrimonious proceedings. Matters reached the abysmally absurd when it was soberly reported that he had affronted Mrs. Kennedy by calling her "Honey" on Air Force One during the ghastly return flight to Washington.

Now that the legal dispute, at least, has been settled out of court, it has become apparent that the real victim of the hapless account might be, not President Johnson, but Sen. Kennedy.

A Democratic colleague in the Senate, who had not read the book but heard all the rumors, put it this way: "This could really hurt Bobby. In the last two and one half years he has completely dissipated the picture of himself as a ruthless and vindictive operator. Now, with this book, which was commissioned by the family and is so hard on Johnson, people will think he has reverted to type and is getting even with the President."

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The idea of the book was born at a time when nobody could have foreseen that a crushed brother, a lame duck attorney general, would rise again to be elected senator from New York and outdistance the President in popularity.

But that is the situation and in the envenomed present the burden of proof of their contention that they wanted only "to protect President Kennedy and the truth" is on the Kennedys. They must make amends to President Johnson and are now said to be considering the best means.

Said a depressed White House aide, "I hope this peace can be made. It is one of the things the country needs most right now."