



LBJ and the Kennedys

DREW PEARSON

Washington.

The battle over the William Manchester book "The Death of a President" goes deeper than the removal of certain emotion-packed paragraphs from the book. It involves the ill will smoldering between the two top political families of the nation, an ill will which may influence the next election.

The paragraphs which make the book worth \$650,000 to Look magazine tell how Mrs. Kennedy arrived at the Dallas airport with the body of her husband to take the plane back to Washington to find that the President's plane, Air Force One, was now under the new President.

When the body of the late President had been put aboard the new President's plane, Mrs. Kennedy went into a rear compartment to kneel beside him.

She remained there the entire trip to Washington, sitting on the floor and refusing to leave except when Lyndon Johnson, before the plane left Dallas, came in to tell her he was going to be sworn in and he wanted her to be with him. She stood beside him in her blood-stained dress and later made it clear that she fiercely resented the haste with which the transition was made from the one President to another. Pouring her heart out to Manchester about these events, she said that she did not want "that man" coming in to comfort her.

* * *

There had been some delay in Dallas trying to decide whether Johnson should be sworn in there or in Washington. However, the new President recalled that within minutes after President Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945, Secret Service men were at Vice President Truman's office to take him to the White House and he finally decided to take the oath immediately.

After returning to Washington, the Johnsons remained in their own home while Mrs. Kennedy returned to the White House. She remained there for two weeks until moving to the Georgetown home of Ambassador Harriman. The Johnsons suggested that she remain in the White House as long as convenient.

When the Johnsons finally moved in they found that Jackie had carved on the mantel in the Lincoln bedroom an inscription that the room had been occupied by John F. Kennedy from 1961-1963. Many other Presidents had occupied that room. But only the name of John F. Kennedy is on the mantel.

* * *

Jackie regained her composure after returning from Dallas to Washington. But the Kennedy family's resentment against the Johnsons continued. It became evident 30 days after the assassination when no member of the family would attend the final memorial service at the Lincoln Memorial ending the 30-day period of mourning at which President Johnson spoke.

Repeated requests were made to have at least one member of the family present. Finally Sargent Shriver said he would come. In the end his seat remained empty. President Johnson spoke eloquently in tribute to the late President, but no member of the Kennedy family was there to hear the praise.

This was the beginning of Jackie's boycott of the White House. Not once, since she departed on Dec. 6, 1963, has she returned, not even when the Johnsons dedicated the Jacqueline Kennedy Rose Garden adjacent to the executive offices in her honor.

This friction between the two top political families of the nation had begun long before the tragedy of Dallas. It began when stories began to be published by reporters close to the Kennedy family that Vice President Johnson was an unwanted fifth wheel on the Kennedy administration.

He was pictured as a gawky, uncouth Texan who didn't fit into the Kennedy's jet-set scheme of things and that President Kennedy had a hard time conjuring up projects to keep him busy.

President Kennedy himself went out of his way to make sure there was no friction between him and the Vice President. But Johnson deeply resented the derogatory stories which came from some of the White House staff, and—he suspected—from Bobby Kennedy.