

Post Daily Magazine

The Kennedys vs. Manchester

RFK's WIRE

ARTICLE IV

By WILLIAM H. RUDY

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IN THE EARLY spring of 1966, two newspapermen, Edwin O. Guthman and John Siegenthaler, were reading unedited copies of "The Death of a President" at the agreement of Harper & Row editor Evan Thomas and Robert Kennedy. Two writers, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Richard Goodwin, had received copies from the author.

Goodwin, in April, made only three suggestions, a person close to Manchester recalls. These were to change the title from "Death of Lancer" ("Lancer" was the Secret Service code word for JFK), shorten the closing section by five pages, and delete one quote by Jacqueline Kennedy. All were made.

Friends of Goodwin recall he had more suggestions.

He had told them he thought "on the whole it was all right, but there were some passages that were maudlin and sloppy and there was also this venomous portrait of Lyndon Johnson," they remember.

One of those involved recalls: "During the summer, from May on, drafts were in circulation and Harper's received suggestions from a number of sources and probably found this irritating and around the middle of September they took the position that they would listen to suggestions, but would not state whether any changes would be made in the text. They said they would use their own judgment, which of course was a violation of the contract."

Evan Thomas was suggesting to Manchester other changes. Thomas will not discuss them now because "the relationship between author and editor . . . is a pretty special one."

No editor has failed to have comments about sentences, pages, passages which, if released out of context, must of necessity be harmful to the author. We couldn't stay in business if we did it," he says.

Thomas wrote his objections to Siegenthaler and Guthman on May 18.

"The book was in part tasteless and gratuitously insulting to President Johnson and even to the memory of the late President Kennedy," the letter said.

Manchester, it said, seemed unable to resist turning the story into "a magic fairy tale."

"The marvelous Irish politician who became one of the world's great statesmen is almost deprived of his miraculous self, seen as the child of Arthur and Guinevere, while Black Jack Bouvier's daughter is somehow deprived of her hard-won stature by being born of elves in a fairy glade, by being dressed in magic cloth of gold.

"The Texans in their polka dot dresses and bow ties are seen as newly-arrived scum plucked from the dung heap by magical Jack," the letter says in part.

It was also noted that "the fact that Manchester wants so badly to present Oswald as a product of the Dallas-Birch sickness intrudes to the point of suspicion."

But the editor also wrote that "this is such a good book, I can't see any publisher leaving any stone unturned, no matter what the consequences, and there will be bloody consequences when truly-dedicated Manchester comes across my markings . . ."

THE NEXT DAY, ONE CLOSE TO THE SITUATION

recalls, Thomas met with Manchester and told him of the cuts he had made, and exactly one month later he met in Washington with Siegenthaler and Guthman on their suggestions.

One of those involved says the feelings of the three were "remarkably close."

Meanwhile, on May 24, Schlesinger had written



ARTHUR SCHLESINGER JR.

his criticisms to Manchester. The book, he said, was "extraordinarily good and potentially great" but he had some objections.

A friend of Schlesinger says he felt "the portrait of Kennedy was wrong."

One of Schlesinger's objections, the friend says, was the presentation of the President as "a man who resents shooting deer and is preoccupied with the decor of his office and his wife's clothes." This, he said, "is not the Kennedy we knew."

Schlesinger suggested that the book open with an account of the "public issue and political infighting of the autumn of 1963." The suggestion was accepted.

The objection also was made that Johnson was presented as a symbol of "the forces of violence and irrationality."

But Manchester recalls that Schlesinger was disturbed by some of the cuts agreed upon by Siegenthaler and Thomas. The deletions, Schlesinger is represented as feeling, attacked "the integrity of contemporary history."

"That was the first time I'd known about the cuts, since I'd never seen the edited manuscript," Manchester says. "I called Evan Thomas and told him that I couldn't figure out what Arthur was talking about."

JULY BEGAN RELATIVELY QUIETLY. IT ENDED

with one of the most controversial episodes of the entire dispute—Bobby Kennedy's letter and wire to Evan Thomas and Bill Manchester.

Jacqueline Kennedy was gone most of the month. She left for Hawaii on June 5 and did not return until July 25, and was playing no part in the affair, although during her absence her press secretary, Pamela Timmins, read the manuscript and had some suggestions for changes.

Manchester was beginning to get unhappy, several persons recall, about the many amendments that were being urged from so many sources. Time and time again in conversations among the principals, the writer is described as "sick," and he had described himself that way, too.

To complicate matters, he put the serialization rights up for sale. An author generally gets the money from such a sale, and under the memorandum of understanding with the Kennedys it was specifically stated Manchester could do so.

Six magazines were invited to bid, and, on July 19, 1,200-page manuscripts were delivered to them by Don Congdon, Manchester's agent. Look editors were so excited by what they read that Warren Rogers, the magazine's Washington editor, was told to talk with Robert Kennedy, whom he knew well.

Kennedy had no objections to serialization at this time, Rogers recalls. The Senator was quoted as telling him: "Look has been good to us and vice versa." There was some objections to fall publication dates, but, Rogers says, "Finally, Bobby told me to get in touch with Siegenthaler and Guthman. He gave me a friendly punch on the arm and said, 'Call John. If there's anything else I can do, let me know.'"

Look, obviously favored by Robert Kennedy, got the rights with a bid of \$306,000 plus \$145,000 for world rights, all to go to Manchester—along with a \$15,000 consultant's fee.

While this was going on, Kennedy was under pressure to let the worried Manchester know that with all the changes being suggested, he was not going to block publication of the book.

One person who engaged in much of the negotiations of the time recalls that at the Washington meeting in mid-July, Thomas said: "Do you think Bob would write a letter to Manchester saying the book will be published—in 1968 or whenever? He's going to be despondent over all these changes."

Bobby Kennedy has since said the messages were sent at the urging of Harper's: "They told me the man was sick, that he might jump out of a building or something."

Time passed and Thomas is said to have brought up the subject again. He is quoted as saying: "Manchester is making changes. I think we're going to get 99 per cent of them."

The implication was, this principal says, that "everything is jolly—don't worry."

"Evan said he was going on a cruise and he wanted the assurance before he left," the story continues. "He called and asked: 'Can you get him (Kennedy) to do it? I'd hate to leave Manchester behind without it.'"

Thomas was said to have drafted a letter and given it to Angie Novello, the Senator's secretary. Then he called Siegenthaler and read it to him.

Siegenthaler was said to have changed a couple of words, and called Miss Novello and dictated the revised draft. She gave the proposed letter to Kennedy. He put it in his pocket and carried it around for four or five days.

ABOUT THIS TIME, KENNEDY ADVISERS

learned that bids for serialization had been asked. One of them told Manchester: "You shouldn't have done that," but the author is quoted as replying: "Don't worry. I haven't signed any contract. I've got control."

"And then he said: 'I need a letter. Evan said you people were going to send me a letter,'" this participant recalls. "I said, 'Relax! Don't panic.' You see, Manchester began to sound concerned over the phone."

"The next day I talked to Bob. I think this guy is going to break down," I told him. Then I told the Senator: 'I'd just send him a letter that he's going to get this book published.'"

The next day, July 28, the message was sent to Thomas and to Manchester.

In it, the Senator said that while he had not read the account, he knew of his brother's respect for Manchester "as an historian and a reporter." He also had been told other books were planned on the assassination and he added:

"As this is going to be the subject matter of a book, and since Mr. Manchester in his research had access to more information and sources than any other writer, members of the Kennedy family will place no obstacle in the way of publication of his work."

A final paragraph said that if the account was published in segments, it would be expected that incidents would not be taken out of context or summarized in such a way as to distort the story.

Another participant, however, says the message was sent because Bobby Kennedy wanted to give consent for publication, but without putting in writing that it was an official version, sanctioned by the Kennedys.

It was pointed out that the message was sent after Thomas had conferred with Siegenthaler in Nashville and Guthman in Los Angeles on changes resulting in "the marked-up manuscript, which was then OK with the Kennedys and was submitted to Look."

According to this version, the wording of the message was worked out by Kennedy and Thomas with the aim of giving final approval to the manuscript. This source, however, concedes that it was understood Siegenthaler and Guthman still would make more changes.

MIKE LAND OF LOOK RECALLS: "JULY 28 WAS

a red-letter day at Look. Our bid had won and the future seemed rosy indeed. No one at Look had any qualms about the book or saw any problem with the Kennedy family in the future."

This was five days after Jacqueline Kennedy had returned from Hawaii where, apparently, she had known nothing of the serialization plans. She had some second—and third—thoughts.

Continued Tomorrow.