

Post
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Ruthless Probing Of an Old Wound

By Marquis Childs

THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY of the assassination of John F. Kennedy has passed and, contrary to the hopes of those closest to the late President, the passage of time has brought an ever-increasing preoccupation with the details of that crime. Important revelations still to come promise no abatement in the almost-morbid concern with the tragedy that occurred on Nov. 22, 1963.

A flood of books raise questions about the validity of the findings of the Warren Commission. At least one and perhaps two have been serious efforts at analysis, while the others exploit the seemingly unlimited appetite, particularly in Europe, for the conspiracy theory. If in relation to the timing of the shots Lee Harvey Oswald was not the sole assassin, then a second assassin is the agent of a conspiracy still concealed.

While it was farthest from the intention of the author or the members of the Kennedy family who furnished much of the information, a book to be published first in four installments in *Look* Magazine in January and then by Harper & Row in March will raise new doubts and uncertainties. "The Death of a President" by William Manchester is said by those eagerly awaiting its publication to contain 200 headlines. *Look*, after hot competitive bidding won publication rights by a bid of \$550,000.

IT MAY MEAN a widening—possibly even a sharp break—between the Johnson and Kennedy factions. One of the President's close associates believes the book has "sinister implications." This refers to details of a quarrel between the then Vice President, Lyndon Johnson, and the President over the Texas trip. Politically, therefore, it could mean a further fragmenting of the Democratic Party.

An ironic commentary is that the concept of the Manchester book arose from the belief of Mrs. Kennedy, the widow, that if all the relevant material provided by members of the family and close associates were contained in one volume other authors might be deterred and the flood of books checked. It would, in short stop the conjecture, rumor, speculation that seem to have an endless appeal. For the widow and the family this is like the constant probing of an old wound.

An agreement was originally entered into with Manchester, the author of a warmly sympathetic biography of the late President, that his book on the assassination would not be released un-

til after 1968. In a letter last July Sen. Robert F. Kennedy released the author from that stipulation. The argument was that the objective had not been achieved, since other books on the assassination were being rushed to completion and it was advisable to come out with the authentic account.

Originally, too, there was some sort of understanding, although no one will be specific about it, that members of the Kennedy family would have a veto over material supplied for "The Death of a President." However binding this may once have been, it no longer applies and certainly not to magazine publication.

MRS. KENNEDY is understood to be deeply distressed over the import of publication of certain material made available to the author. An example is a letter she wrote to her husband before the assassination which is said to concern the relationship between the Johnsons and the Kennedys.

It takes little imagination to see what magazine publication will mean. A spate of headlines will rehearse with new details the awful events of that day three years ago. This will subject the widow and her children to a new blaze of publicity and public curiosity.

Even the most cynical will credit Mrs. Kennedy with a desire to shield Caroline and John F. Jr. from such a barrage and try to make it possible for them to lead normal lives. The censorious will say that she should have foreseen exactly this reaction to a book seeming to have the imprimatur of the family. She has already been criticized for keeping other authors from sources of information available to Manchester.

Mrs. Kennedy left Washington and moved to New York because the parade of sightseers past her Georgetown house meant a constant invasion of her privacy. She sought the anonymity of New York. She is a young and beautiful woman trying to lead her own life. She cannot be expected to bury herself in Europe as did poor Mary Todd Lincoln—old, deranged, impoverished, after that other assassination.

But something more than the fate of an individual or individuals is at issue.

The question, being widely asked here, is whether the public good is served by a constant rehearsal of a monstrous crime.

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