

# JFK BOOK: Women's Wear Daily Got to It a Stitch Ahead of Time

When William Manchester's "The Death of a President" goes officially on sale April 7, the fact will seem anti-climactic. No book, no matter how good, could possibly live up to the pre-publication publicity attendant on the \$10 volume detailing the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

It seemed that after the thousands of words written in the world's press, the four-part serialization by Look Magazine (which paid \$665,000 for the privilege), followed by a long, highly personal defense of his work by the author, the lawsuits, the bitter fights between Manchester and his publisher, Harper & Row, and the Kennedy family, nothing remained to be said. Then, last week, a fashion trade publication, a Pittsburgh department store and a trucking firm combined, inadvertently, to give Manchester's work another pre-sale shot of publicity.

## Books Hit Pittsburgh Store Prematurely

A trucker delivered prematurely a shipment of the books to Kaufman's in Pittsburgh.

The store decided to break the release date and put the volume on sale. Women's Wear Daily bought one, and, in its Tuesday editions, ran a review. Immediately, the nation's wire services and daily papers followed suit. The book was withdrawn from the shelves, but the damage had been done.

Paul Healy of THE NEWS Washington bureau, who was riding in the Dallas motorcade when the President was killed, had read an advance copy and, ironically, had come to the office in the National Press Building

Left to right: Author Manchester and critics Smith ("Reasonably authentic account") and Healy ("Subjective and highly emotional").



Tuesday prepared to write his review. He was not kind to the book. "For one thing," he wrote, "its veracity on several points relating to the events in Dallas already has been challenged successfully by several observers who were on the scene." For another thing, Manchester's treatment is subjective and highly emotional, although this is precisely what will probably keep the book on top of the bestseller list. The author tells the story in the spirit of a Camelot-like fairy tale."

Healy did, however, credit Manchester with weaving interviews with 269 persons into a "compelling narrative." It is more than a peephole into history-in-the-making," he said.

Merriman Smith of United Press International, who also was in the motorcade and who won a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting of the tragedy, was less critical. Like Healy, he referred to several historical inaccuracies in the text, but said it was well worth reading. It contained, he said, a "gripping, incredibly detailed and reasonably authentic account of the assassination." The



book, decided Smith, is "much better than the buildup."

Release of the book stirred up a controversy in another area. The Defense Department immediately fired a salvo of denials at Manchester's charge that President Johnson had no idea of how to operate the country's atomic trigger when he took the oath of office. Manchester said Johnson had never been told how to order the nation's nuclear weapons into action in case of attack.

And attack, the 44-year-old author wrote, was feared by top officials, including Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who at first saw the assassination as a step in a conspiracy to take over the government.

In a formal statement, the Pentagon insisted that Johnson "did know what to do" had there been need for immediate atomic retaliation. The Pentagon also denied Manchester's assertion that White House communications had broken down at the height of the turmoil, or that Defense Secretary McNamara had ordered a worldwide military alert.