

Yes, Doctor?

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WOMEN have been equipped by nature to listen with varying degrees of sympathy to misunderstood men, a large body of humanity entirely surrounded by self-pity.

I have listened to my share. But never, even in my fanciest dreams, did I ever dare imagine that the day would come when I would be addressed, in wounded terms of self-pity, by a misunderstood man of such stature as Prof. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., historian, confidant of presidents and adviser to would-be presidents.

Dr. Schlesinger is terribly, terribly hurt because I have misunderstood his action, 24 hours after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, in calling John Bailey, Democratic National Chairman, about the "technical possibility" of beating President Johnson out of the Democratic presidential nomination in 1964.

In one of those "more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger" letters addressed to me, Dr. Schlesinger once more writes his own, preferred version of history. The historian objects to a column of mine in which I question the good taste and the consuming grief of a man who can, the day after the assassination of his friend, John Kennedy, "plunge into power politics" by even asking about "the technical possibility" of dumping the new president at Atlantic City in 1964.

DR. SCHLESINGER writes me: "I can only add that the notion that I summoned a lot of 'Kennedy partisans' to lunch the day after President Kennedy's death in order to organize them to dump his successor is the sheerest fantasy."

But he does not deny that there was a luncheon. Nor can Dr. Schlesinger deny that he called Mr. Bailey. The

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fact of his call and his question remain. It is part of the record. The crucial point is that Dr. Schlesinger has, up until now, given no reasonable explanation for that call to the Democratic National Chairman.

In a self-serving statement issued to the New York Times when the phone call became public knowledge (via William Manchester's "The Death of A President"), Dr. Schlesinger airily dismissed the call and the question as a "hypothetical inquiry."

THE wonder still remains that any hypothetical question should have interested a man just 24 hours after what he describes in his letter to me as "the most terrible day in their lives." "Their" refers to himself and intimate friends of the late President who lunched together that day.

At this point we reach the "credibility gap" between descriptions of this affair entrusted to their diaries by two eminent intellectuals of equal prominence: Dr. Schlesinger and his friend, Dr. John Kenneth Galbraith.

In his statement to the New York Times, Dr. Schlesinger terms it "a melodramatic distortion of a wholly academic conversation" that he conferred about the replacement of Lyndon B. Johnson by Robert F. Kennedy as a Democratic candidate in 1964.

However, according to Mr. Manchester, Dr. Galbraith confided to his journal, in reference to the by-now famous luncheon, as follows:

"Arthur (Schlesinger) was in a rather poor mood. He was reacting too quickly to the chemistry of the moment and was dwelling on the possibility of a ticket in 1964 headed by Bob Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey."

Which doctor do you believe?