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Associated Press Wirephoto

Greeting the governors



Prior to leaving for Guam, President Johnson hosted a day-long series of conferences and briefings at the White House for the nation's governors. With the President are Gov. John Dempsey, center, of Connecticut and Gov. Kenneth Curtis of Maine.

Manchester looses critical barrage

By Saville R. Davis
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Washington

The emotionalism which has dogged the Manchester book on the assassination of President Kennedy has burst its few remaining bounds.

Even Washington, which has an instinctive and often morbid interest in personalities and feuds, has rarely seen such a collapse of privacy in recent years.

If Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy choose to give detailed answers to the wounding personal attacks made on them by author William Manchester, if editors and publishers now tell their full story and it is garnished by yet-untold material and polemic from political and literary friends of both sides who were involved, there will be fuel enough for months of headlines and reading.

Washington is both shocked and entranced. The negative and positive effects on the political fortunes of Senator Kennedy, the consequence of taking the

heat off President Johnson's personality for a while, the traumatic public experience of seeing an overwrought author, admitted to the utmost intimacies, try to shatter the public image of a sensitive, fragile Jackie Kennedy, will be debated here for a long while.

Effects quite unclear

These effects are not now clear. Not until the new round of deep in-fighting begun by Mr. Manchester has completed its cycle will the press and public be able to make considered judgments.

In the meantime another public issue has been raised by the episode. The line between what is legitimately public and what can be reasonably called private was stretched taut by earlier disclosures and argument over the book and its publication. Now it is snapped.

The professional question of what history requires, both as to personalities and facts, now and later when the hurt of the assassination has lessened, has been posed and then engulfed in an overflow of emotion from which it will have to be extricated.

The language of the Manchester assault on the Kennedys has rarely been equaled in a modern public controversy in such high places. He twice used variants of the word "insane" to describe the Kennedy attitudes, one saying they were an "insane chorus" and again, "it is this sheer insanity that explains the Kennedy behavior throughout." He referred to Senator Kennedy as behaving

like "a frustrated urchin," and said that "like her [Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy] he appeared [in a personal interview] to be wholly irrational."

'Fragility' questioned

He spoke of Mrs. Kennedy's "imperious air," saying "her fragile manner had always been deceptive," and said "she had come to think of the author as a member of her court."

The violence of his language and the uninhibited way in which he spilled out the smallest details of his own reactions and highly reaction here that he caused the first reaction here that he had undone and 'discredited both himself and his work.

This tentative verdict, already harbored by much of professional Washington remains to be checked by the stories from the other side and from disinterested parties to the conflict, which are now expected to follow.

Mr. Manchester cites his "20 unblemished years of professional writing," his "passion of excellence," referred to his "noble task . . . dragged down to this level of a public brawl," and referred to himself as ". . . the zealous defender of the public's right to know."

'Coercion' charged

He protested the "attempted coercion" and said "it was as if the 1st and 14th Amendments had been stricken from the Constitution." He said this concern was "shared by tens of millions of appalled onlookers."

He said he was told it was "highly unlikely" that he could even get back his costs in writing the book. He told of eating in government cafeterias and when Arthur Schlesinger Jr. suggested separate checks, ordering a cheeseburger when his companion ordered a steak.

He considered these the two "loneliest years of my life" and recorded that he lost 20 pounds. For "20 months I inhabited the arena [of this solitary struggle] virtually unnoticed." He said he became a fugitive of sorts. He "remained dry-eyed" in public, and wept alone, he said.

The author said his battle to preserve the details in his book was a battle to preserve history.

But he said of cuts made by a group of Harper editors and Kennedy friends, "most were wise."

These are samples of the Manchester approach. He wrote his article about the controversy over the book by the same process that he wrote the book itself, taking the position that "history" requires publicity for all that is not private for reasons that are mandatory.