



Challenge Is Needed

No Censors in

By Charles Bartlett

WASHINGTON — William Manchester has defined the issue between him and the Kennedys, in his rococo account of the imbroglio in *Look*, in terms which should not be left to stand unchallenged.

On the eve of the publication of a volume which his agent has estimated may net him some \$2.5 million, Manchester presents himself as the valiant historian battling evil censors who attempted to tamper with his purist, definitive epic.

Certainly it can be said that the Kennedys made mistakes in this affair. The greatest of them was the choice of Manchester and this could never have happened if Pierre Salinger had not pushed him forward at a time when everyone was confused.

MANCHESTER was not, as he presistently infers, a friend of John Kennedy. Secret Service records show that the late President saw him once, for 19 minutes on Feb. 17, 1962. The President did not like the book which emerged from this meeting. Its sycophancy made him wince and he remarked to a friend that it had a sick ring.

A second mistake was the contract with Manchester which tied the author so tightly to the Kennedy family's approval that they ran an inevitable risk of winding up with responsibility for the contents.

A great many biographies have been written under terms which exchanged the right of access to family papers for the right of editorial review. Right now a distinguished writer, John Bartlow Martin, is doing a biography of Adlai Stevenson under a contract which gives the heirs authority to propose changes in the manuscript.

Martin can reject these changes but the agreement provides that all differences between him and the Stevensons are to be finally settled by Judge Carl McGowan, a trusted friend of both parties.

CERTAINLY the Kennedys would have fared better in the end if they had asserted merely a right to edit the material which Manchester secured directly from them. This would have been a right to which they could have clung lightly without controversy.

The celebrated telegram of July 28, in which Kennedy promised that members of the family "will place no obstacle" in the way of publication, was sent after Evan Thomas, his

has had to replate at great cost to correct a sharp injustice to Gen. C. V. Clifton, who had stirred Manchester's animosity by declining, under orders, to supply him with a transcript of the telephone communications between Air Force One and Washington on that fateful day.

NOW Manchester alleges in *Look* that he "begged" Theodore Sorensen to avoid making changes requested by the Kennedys in the book that he wrote. "Ted took the easy way," he writes, "giving way on point after point . . .

editor, warned that Manchester's tension could become a serious health hazard if he did not get some form of clearance. Kennedy was advised by both Manchester and Thomas at this time that the telegram did not alter his rights under the contract.

Manchester was correct in assuming that Kennedy could not afford to sue. A politician would never take the risk but in this case, the decision was made by the widow and the senator loyally supported it.

The vindictiveness which emerges in Manchester's account of these events is a symptom of the frailty of the book. Harper and Row

the Kennedy Family

I spent two hours begging him to hold his ground."

Sorensen has no recollection of any conversation with Manchester on this subject. They never discussed his book but Sorensen mailed him his last chapter, which concerned the assassination, for comment. Manchester returned it with an observation that it was great. Sorensen edited his own book on his own initiative, accepting and rejecting suggestions from the Kennedys. He possibly

aroused Manchester's rancour by assisting Mrs. Kennedy in her court suit.

The Kennedys have been badly bruised by the Manchester affair. But they do not deserve to be impugned as censors by an author who broke the agreement that was to guide his labors. He is a rich historian but far from infallible and his notion that his words deserve to be read untouched and uncorrected reveals a delusive sense of the importance of his talents.