

History to Order Post 4/14/67

The first installment of the William Manchester book has now been published in *Look* magazine and discussion of it is more knowledgeable than it was when the whole matter was one of conjecture.

Subsequent installments may differ from the first chapter. But it is clear that in the chapter now printed we deal with neither biography nor with history, but with a highly personal, subjective, biased and even inaccurate account of a tragic period.

It is hardly to be denied that Mr. Manchester has a wish to well serve the memory of the President. But the Nation's memory of President Kennedy, like its memory of other great men, often needs most to be rescued from the recollections of "friends." It is no praise of President Kennedy to suggest, as Manchester does, that the President was so pliant as to be unable to resist the pressure of others trying to get him involved in a Texas political dispute against his will and inclination. He was not that sort of amiable, unresisting victim of the wishes and purposes of others. The description of his reaction to the Mediterranean trip of Mrs. Kennedy is equally offensive to his memory. Mrs. Kennedy's trip on a ship owned by a man having large interests in Government shipping subsidies was in conflict with the President's powerful Springfield, Ohio, injunction against having anyone in the Government "accept any gift, favor or substantial hospitality" from those doing business with the Government. Some of his closest advisers disclosed at the time that he disliked the whole idea but felt unable to do anything about it. That attitude toward it was consistent with his well known views on the subject.

What Mr. Manchester is presenting may be a picture of the times that he *thinks* does credit to the dead President. In some cases, the truth does the President more credit than Mr. Manchester's subjective, purposeful, distorted version of it.

This is not to condemn the book throughout. We have found, in the past, that even historical novels can make some contribution to comprehension of history. And as much can be said for "novelized" history. But it needs to be read with a wary eye for departures from strict accuracy.