

Post 12/26/66

Inside Report . . . By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Pandora's Box

Serious Democratic politicians here, both inside and outside the Johnson camp, are alarmed over the political impact of the Manchester book on their party and, consequently, on the 1968 presidential election.

President Johnson himself has displayed no signs of distress to his intimates over the pre-publication of juicy bits and pieces alleged to be in the book "The Death of a President" by William Manchester.

And yet these disembodied excerpts put Mr. Johnson in a highly unflattering light in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy at Dallas.

Showing no concern, the President instead has confided to intimates that "the ultimate record will be clear." If those words mean what they imply, they mean only one thing: that a massive refutation of the Manchester version, almost all of it gathered in interviews with Kennedy intimates, is in the offing.

One predictable effect of any such refutation would be to heighten the tensions between the Johnson and Kennedy wings of the Democratic Party. Because fairly or not, all the anti-Johnson overtones found in the Manchester book are automatically going to be attributed to allies of the Kennedys who gave the author most of his material. Mr. Johnson himself refused to see Manchester.

It would be only natural for Johnson allies to strike back at the Manchester book—and hence at the Kennedys—with their own version of the traumatic events during those fateful hours after the assassination. Moreover, despite the fact that the White House has told this column that no precise reconstruction of events has even been thought of, there are indications that close friends of Mr. Johnson, including Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas, may now be compiling the record.

FOR EXAMPLE, in the President's personal files today are notes dictated on the spot and recollections put down months later by members of the Johnson official family who flew from Love Field back to Washington on Air Force One. A minute-by-minute account of what Mr. Johnson did, and of much of what he was heard to say, was dictated by Clifton C. Carter, a long-time Johnson intimate, on the flight back to Washington.

Jack Valenti, the President's man Friday from the moment of the assassination until he quit the White House earlier this year, was never interviewed by author Manchester. But Valenti also has a set of notes giving his version of the new President's conduct from Love Field until late that night in the new President's temporary quarters in the Executive Office Building.

Valenti took time out in the rush of events the following week to replenish his record. A note written on Nov. 25, for example, recalled that despite the emotional tensions of the moment, Mr. Johnson had reached for a glass of water on the flight back from Dallas with a steady hand. Valenti took pains to scribble his demeanor and his mood. No part of this record has been released.

Beyond this, reliable politicians now report that verbatim transcripts of telephone and other conversations between the President and others in the post-assassination period have been carefully filed for future use. Although these reports cannot be confirmed, they

suggest that ammunition for a counter-attack against the Manchester book—if one is needed—has been stored up for use at any time.

ALL THIS gives Democrats who aren't principal actors in the drama a distinctly uneasy feeling, and no wonder. If the Manchester book does in fact portray Mr. Johnson in the unflattering hues suggested by the advance publicity, Johnson allies are certain to attack the book's authenticity and produce their own version.

And that, without question, could start a vicious round of recrimination. Already, for example, some Johnson allies are saying Sen. Robert Kennedy of New York advanced the Manchester publication date from post-election 1968 to post-election 1966 to embarrass the President. In fact, the earlier date was picked for only one reason: that Kennedy is completely out of the 1968 presidential picture, but very much in the 1972 picture. If publication were delayed until 1969, he could be charged with using the book to help his political prospects.

But this kind of charge will continue. And if Johnson intimates do decide that the Manchester book is really harmful to the President, and come up with their own version of what really happened, discord will shake the Party to the benefit of the high-flying Republicans.

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