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Manchester Book Opens Pandora Box

The American voter will umpire the political aspects of the dispute between Mrs. John F. Kennedy and William Manchester over the book of the assassination he wrote at her request and with her help.

The courts can adjudicate publication in its form and content, but it is too late to empty the case of its political impact. Pandora's Box has been opened and out of it has flown in dramatic detail the conflict that ensued when power suddenly passed from the Kennedys to President Johnson.

Manchester's account pictures the President as a boor who tried to use the shocked widow of his predecessor as a backdrop to his immediate assumption of power. The Kennedys resisted, and some of their party resorted to petty stratagems of their own.

This is not a mere footnote to history. It is appearing while Johnson is in the full flush of his power and the Kennedys are equally intent upon regaining it. The voters understand very well what is going on and will be able to relate the new developments to that struggle.

The President is in peculiar difficulty. He has always been overeager to justify himself, often to the point of obsession. This time he is being charged

with a capital crime, politically speaking, and he is entitled to a defense.

Few observers doubt that he aches to put his case to the public. In essence, it is that he was obliged to assume power at once with every stress on its legitimacy, actual and symbolic. He could not then know all that had happened and whether the assassination was a single act or a conspiracy.

Still, the Manchester story is not yet official and Johnson must suit his rejoinder to the dignity and crucial importance of his office.

Mrs. Kennedy charges that Manchester betrayed her personal emotions, but somewhere along the line she either took bad advice or failed to get good counsel about the political realities involved. The king is dead, long live the king, is a very old expression of the nature of people and of governments. To resent it is natural, but to quarrel with it is futile.

It seems apparent from the twists and turns of the prolonged negotiations over the Manchester book that at some point Robert Kennedy grasped the possibility that it might cut both ways. Whatever the reason, the Kennedys appear less united than formerly.

The public must share the blame for the situation which is unfolding at this untimely season. In its grief and sense

of guilt, it helped to create a flawless John F. Kennedy legend ~~and~~ ensnared his widow as its caretaker.

But Mrs. Kennedy is a young and vital woman who suddenly realized that maybe she had made a mistake. She has burst out of her regal cocoon with results she did not foresee; possibly she panicked. It is hard on Manchester, hard on the legend, but in the end she may have served herself and the country well.

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