

COVER STORY

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McGinniss gets hit from all sides

Author stands
behind 'The
Last Brother'
despite
charges of
plagiarism

By Deirdre Donahue
USA TODAY

NEW YORK — An angry red flush comes and goes over author Joe McGinniss' face. But if the controversial author is angry, upset or frightened about the titanic reaction — all of it negative — to his new book on Sen. Edward Kennedy, *The Last Brother* (Simon & Schuster, \$25), he's not admitting it.

Sitting in his publisher's office in Manhattan, McGinniss, 50, presents a calculatingly calm exterior as he defends his reputation, his techniques and his book, for which he received a reported \$1 million.

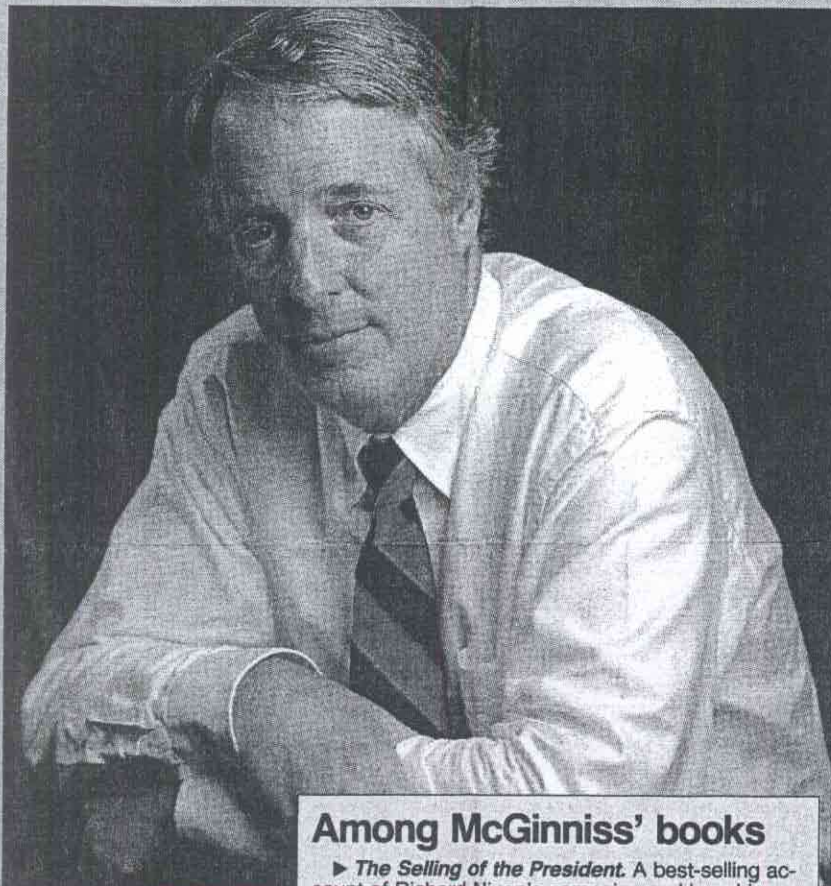
"This was never a book intended to contain a great deal of original reporting," says McGinniss. "I wasn't out to unearth new facts about Teddy Kennedy. I was trying to assemble the pieces that already existed in an original and fresh way so as to give a reader a sense of what life may have been like for this guy."

Rushed into bookstores this week, the 626-page book has ignited a firestorm.

The reviews have been savage. And the articles even more damaging. *The Washington Post* critic Jonathan

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Chronicling Kennedy



By Peter Freed
UNDER FIRE: Writer Joe McGinniss' book on Sen. Edward Kennedy is the talk of the publishing world. 'The Last Brother' has not only gotten poor reviews, but also has other authors up in arms saying their material was lifted and threatening to sue. McGinniss' book contains no previously unpublished information.

Among McGinniss' books

► **The Selling of the President.** A best-selling account of Richard Nixon's campaign and how his media advisers, including Roger Ailes, were manipulating Nixon's image.

► **Going to Extremes.** A look at Alaska's physical beauty and changing economy.

► **Fatal Vision.** The best-selling story of Dr. Jeffrey MacDonald, convicted of murdering his pregnant wife and his two daughters. MacDonald later sued McGinniss, claiming that the author misled him. (He expected to be exonerated by McGinniss, who portrayed him as guilty.) McGinniss' publisher settled out of court without admission of liability.

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'You can't copyright his

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Yardley judged it the worst book he's reviewed "in nearly three decades." *Newsweek* claimed it contained "the cheapest kind of novelistic landfill." And *Time* said it was "the world's most slowly executed book report."

And there's more, including threats of lawsuits from historian William Manchester, who says his 1967 account of the Kennedy assassination, *The Death of a President*, has been plagiarized by McGinniss.

"I'm not going to stand still for this," says Manchester. "My blood is up. I'm going to do something."

And Leo Damore says that McGinniss has "virtually lifted" his book about Chappaquiddick, *Senatorial Privilege*. "I am so shattered by this. You have to talk to my lawyer because I intend to file. (McGinniss') position is that I gave him a license to steal. I never told him to steal my book."

Also unhappy is historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, who wrote *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*. Although she does not intend to sue Simon & Schuster — her own publisher — she believes McGinniss has ripped off her research by not including footnotes.

McGinniss responds that lots of books don't have footnotes, including Manchester's. (*The Death of a President* does have extensive source notes and a bibliography.) And he points out that he singles out all three authors and their books in *The Last Brother's* afterword.

"Quotations and facts, once they are published, are in the public domain," he says.

Many of the outraged re-

views and articles about *The Last Brother* stem from the press' love affair with the Kennedys, whom it still sees as mythic heroes, McGinniss says. "It's hard to watch a dream die. ... If someone tells me, this wasn't really a dream, this was a nightmare, you just didn't understand it, there's a natural, psychological resistance to that." (Damore's book, however, is very critical of Kennedy.)

Moreover, McGinniss believes the Kennedys are masters without peer at public relations.

One fact that seems to have gotten lost in the controversy: McGinniss' book doesn't reveal anything about Ted Kennedy's life that hasn't been documented before. Readers eager — or dismayed — at the prospect of further revelations about Teddy, the Chappaquiddick accident, the JFK assassination and what happened that night with nephew William Kennedy Smith in Palm Beach will search in vain for gory new details involving women, wine or Mafia conspiracies.

The Last Brother begins with its most controversial section. McGinniss presents Nov. 22, 1963, as seen through Teddy Kennedy's eyes. It follows Teddy as he looks for a phone to reach his brother Bobby and travels to Cape Cod to tell his father that JFK has been murdered.

The rest of the book is a more conventional narrative that describes Teddy as an affable, average boy warped by a mixture of parental neglect, family arrogance and the machinations of a diabolically ambitious father with ties to the mob. The book concludes

The first critical salvo about the book was heard in late May after Simon & Schuster released the opening chapters at the American Booksellers Association convention in Miami to promote the book. It contained a note — now removed by a joint publisher/author decision — that said "some thoughts and dialogue attributed to figures in this narrative were created by the author based on such research and his knowledge of the relevant people, places, and events."

McGinniss insists this was simply to alert readers that he was employing an unusual — though not unprecedented — technique of getting inside someone's mind. It's a technique Truman Capote used in *In Cold Blood*, says McGinniss.

McGinniss writes that Teddy may have entertained these thoughts as he and Eunice took a walk at Hyannis after the assassination: "Suppose — not that there is any evidence he considered this — he suddenly just veered left, away from his sister, and plunged, fully clothed, into the rolling, frigid waters of Nantucket Bay? Just swam out into the mist until exhausted?"

Although this mixing of fact and fiction may infuriate professional historians, not to mention the subject, it's not the kind of writing that lands people in court.

Which is where Manchester and now Damore are at least threatening to see McGinniss. The problem, according to Manchester, is not McGinniss