

Manchester Defends His Book

To the Editor:

In a letter to The Times published Dec. 2, Theodore H. White takes sharp issue with a Dec. 18 column by James Reston, who defended the right of my book to live. Mr. White, is, of course, clearly entitled to express his views. Similarly, I am entitled to reply.

Mr. White makes two key points. The first is that no writer should agree to submit his manuscript for approval. I may say that under ordinary circumstances I should never have agreed to do so. I merely ask that readers of The Times recall the nation's emotional climate in the wake of the President's murder. It was difficult to think clearly. I vividly recall that after the telephone call from Washington asking me to undertake this project I turned to my secretary and said, "How can I say no to Mrs. Kennedy?" She replied, "You can't." Nor could I. One did not, I felt, bargain over a national tragedy.

Mr. White's second point is far graver, for he challenges my personal integrity. He charges that I broke faith with Mrs. Kennedy—that "The issue is whether Mr. Manchester is to be given an exemption from pledged word. . . ." I consider this an assault upon my character, and set forth the basic facts, which are as follows.

Signed No Contract

I signed no contract with Mrs. Kennedy. I signed an agreement with another member of the family who was representing her. When the manuscript was completed in the spring of 1966 we looked toward publication in late 1966 or early 1967. The instrument

I had signed provided for family ratification. It was unthinkable that the Kennedys be asked to read the book—that would have meant reliving their private tragedy; it would have been too much. Therefore a team of men, each of whom had been close to President Kennedy, was designated to represent the family.

Over a period of four months the author and Evan Thomas, who had edited "Profiles in Courage," worked closely with the men so designated. At the end of this period the team appointed by the Kennedys assured the family that the manuscript was satisfactory. A member of the family then sent a special delivery letter to Mr. Thomas, and a telegram to me, stating that "members of the family will place no obstacle in the way of publication" of the work.

With the full approval of the family, first serial rights were then assigned to Look. The magazine agreed that the author should exercise complete supervision over the presentation, and I signed a binding contract with Look.

Under these circumstances it seems inaccurate, unjust and cruel to accuse me of a breach of faith. Mr. White and I are members of the same craft. We know the rules. He has abided by them; so have I. In over twenty years as a professional writer I have never broken a confidence, never published a statement made off the record, never exploited a source. Now my honor has been attacked by one of my most distinguished colleagues. In the light of the above facts I believe that I am entitled to an apology.

WILLIAM MANCHESTER
Middletown, Conn.,
Dec. 23, 1966