

September 28, 1964

Mrs. John F. Kennedy
1040 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York

Dear Mrs. Kennedy:

You must be aware of the respect--nay, admiration--I feel for you. One of the reasons I wanted to write *A Day in the Life of President Kennedy* was because I felt (and still feel) that for the first time in the history of the Republic we had a dedicated and incorruptible president and a first lady who was more than a fine wife, a good mother and a dutiful daughter; we had a woman who was willing to work to lift the cultural level of the entire country. Nothing has altered these opinions, Mrs. Kennedy.

I am sure that you will recall that, after your husband's death, it was I who wrote to you, and to Robert Kennedy, advising that you endorse one author who would write the "official" story of the tragedy. I told you that, in researching *The Day Lincoln Was Shot* from 1930 to 1954, I found so many sensational and inaccurate versions of what happened on Good Friday 1865--all of which are still on our library shelves--that something should be done at once to discourage the half-truth hacks. You did it. You selected a writer and opened the doors of information to him. It is a good move, and I have no quarrel with it.

You might permit me a small amount of envy at not being chosen. I too am a professional writer of substance, and I entertained the forlorn hope that because the President had selected me to write *A Day in his Life*, and had asked, on two occasions, if I could not expand the magazine material into something big enough for a book, that I might be qualified to write the tragedy too. Still, when you made your choice I had agreed to a contract to write such a book for Random House, and I knew all along that many books would be written about that tragic day in Dallas. They will be written, whether you stand in the doorway to history or not. They will be written whether I die this day or not. Some writers will be conscientious and careful and objective. Some will be careless and, as Scotty Reston wrote on page one of this morning's *Times*: "It (the Warren Commission report) has provided enough material to intrigue the novelists and dramatists for generations to come..."

2. Mrs. Kennedy

Even you write: "...sometime in the future when the pain is not so fresh I suppose I must let it appear for I have no right to suppress history..." This morning, ten thousand newspapers throughout the United States published a recreation of Nov. 22nd, 1963. Next week, Bantam Books will place 500,000 copies of it in the bookstores. The Government Printing Office has a backlog of orders for the Warren Commission Report. G. P. Putnam's-Coward McCann-John Day sent an announcement to me that they are publishing the European best seller: "Who Killed Kennedy?", by Thomas G. Buchanan. The Salinger-Vanocour book has been on the Times best seller list for many weeks. The UPI's "Four Days" has sold millions of copies. Others are being set in type.

Don't you see, Mrs. Kennedy, that this is not a matter of earning a profit out of a tragedy? It is living breathing history and it is going to be told and retold down the corridors of time as long as man is able to feel a bruise on his conscience. If you could tell me that the story is not going to be published, that the host of books will stop now, I would be a mean and small man not to agree to stop my research at once. You cannot think well of me if you do not think that I appreciate the unrelenting pain in your heart. Long ago, the prayers of this sinner were sent, not for John F. Kennedy--who is beyond pain--but for you and the children, who must live with the secret silent memory of perpetual sorrow. These things have occurred to me, and others too. What of highschool, when the children must study American history, and when they find that, as part of their schoolwork, they must study the public deeds of their father, and the misdeeds of the generation which took him away from them?

Have you asked Putnam not to publish the sensational and poorly researched Who Killed Kennedy? The reason I ask is that I would like to know why you single my book out for personal attention. You have asked Bennett Cerf of Random House not to publish it. Robert Kennedy has spoken to two executives of Random House and asked them not to publish my book. I wish you would be candid with me, as I am with you. Either you, or Robert Kennedy, could have contacted me at any time and could have told me why you want to stop it, but not stop the others. Is it fair to write that all the people Mr. Manchester interviewed were asked not to discuss those days with anyone else--and they have all kept that faith, and will continue to do so. So that leaves nothing but the Warren Commission Report--which will be public anyway--for an author like yourself to base a book on."

3...Mrs. John F. Kennedy

I cannot believe that you mean this. It doesn't even sound like you. To say that one man may write history, but another may not, amounts to a personal copyright. The best I can do, Mrs. Kennedy is to repeat an earlier offer: If you want to discuss the matter, or Mr. Robert Kennedy does, I shall be happy to do it, and do it with an open mind. If you want to deny me any personal assistance, I will respect your wishes, but I ask, in fairness, that you reopen the doors to the other parts of the story. In return, I shall permit anyone you designate to study my manuscript for errors of fact or good taste before publication.

May I hear from you?

Sincerely,

Jim Bishop

Copy to Mrs. K

April 4, 1966

Mr. Robert Loomba, Editor
Random House
457 Madison Avenue
New York, New York

Dear Bob:

Thank you for the kind note. I appreciate it. My intention remains the same: to complete one more book before doing the Kennedy thing. The book about the president requires enormous research, and when Mrs. John F. Kennedy warned that she would shut off my sources of information, she wasn't speaking idly. They have been shut.

Still, the book is a natural for me and I intend to write it. I have no desire to hurry, so that my book may be published before hers. In fact, it does not seem to have occurred to the Kennedy family that, once their book is published, it becomes source material for all other books to follow. The Sorenson and Schlesinger books are now used as bibliography for dozens of Kennedy books as yet unborn, so what will prevent authors tomorrow and a hundred years from tomorrow from using whatever small pickings may be found in the Manchester book?

What was the President's source material for Profiles in Courage? Old books. What was my source for The Day Christ Died and The Day Lincoln Was Shot? No eyewitnesses were available. Those subjects had been done hundreds of times. Still, the Lincoln book sold over 3,000,000 copies; the Christ book has passed 2,750,000. I cannot tolerate a race between Manchester and me toward the publication of a book which will be written again and again and again. Patience, my friend. Let the Washington book come first, then Kennedy. If the Washington research does not start soon, I will go back to prodding on the Warren Commission Report. After that, Dallas. The Texas section alone will require a lot of digging.

Kelly and I expect to be in New York May 10th--Ginny is having her 7th--and we will stop in for lunch.

Best wishes,