

LBJ AND THE KENNEDYS

by Michael Janeway

Carrying on a family matter.

So much went wrong between Lyndon Johnson and the American people that it has seemed best for everyone's peace of mind to compress it all into truisms. File (under *T* for *Tragedy*, see *Vietnam, War in*) and forget. One day, when historians get around to it, and if the guards at Pharaoh's pyramid cooperate, some intriguing riddles of the man's life and time could become the subject of a rich and fascinating revisionist discussion. Then perhaps we can look at the Johnson story in a clean, well-lighted place, and see beyond truisms to some truth about his troubles and his complexity.

Truth is very dimly visible in Lyndon Johnson's memoir, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969*.* As the critics have shown, it is a guarded, self-serving wax museum of a memoir. It lacks his country-slicker wit, a genre of which he is a master. With some notable exceptions, we do not hear the voice of the needful, driving "President of all the people," who wanted not just our votes but our worship and love. He tries hard to help us forget the "arrogance of power" that disturbed even his old and close friends. An ever-so-reasonable, almost primly discreet statesman in retirement is the author of *The Vantage Point*. He lifts a bit of the brocade curtain here, and just a little there. Yet, in spite of the excessive interior and exterior decoration, it is an intriguing book on several counts, if one has the patience to read between Lyndon's lines.

He has tried to put it all right with the world in his book, and it doesn't quite fit. John F. Kennedy began, and Lyndon B. Johnson continued. The Continuer healed the nation's wounds, abolished poverty, brought the Emancipation Proclamation to life, created the Great Society, and saved the Free World from the dark threat of unchallenged aggression on the banks of the Mekong, though not without cost.

*Holt, Rinehart & Winston, \$15.00

He discusses costs, but strictly on his ear-blocked terms: "A certain degree of violent disagreement with our Vietnam effort was inevitable, but I am convinced that it passed the bounds of reasonable debate and fair dissension. It became a self-inflicted wound of critical proportions. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that this dissension prolonged the war, prevented a peaceful settlement on reasonable terms, encouraged our enemies, disheartened our friends, and weakened us as a nation." Those who sabotaged his effort to (and I quote) "escalate peace," and who insisted on inflicting wounds upon themselves, could just find themselves another healer. He had done his best. Johnson City was glad to see him, and he it. Farewell to the weakened nation.

But a specter is haunting Johnson City: the specter of illegitimacy. Johnson knows as well as he knows anything that political legitimacy is not just the stuff of bloody history and great plays. How does the sovereign come to power? What doubts (fair or unfair) do people have about his rule now or his acquisition of power in the past? How does he react under the pressure of those public doubts? What does he take his compact with the people to be? Does it include sending men to die in battle? By whose leave and by what sanction was that part of the compact established? These are all questions that bear on the degree of political legitimacy a sovereign enjoys.

We think of political legitimacy in its strictest sense as rule by hereditary right. When the hereditary line was broken or in doubt, trouble ensued. Divine right of kings gave way to rule according to laws and constitutions. When the laws or constitutions are tampered with, trouble also ensues. If the tampering is not brazen or palpable, but merely suspected and argued about, then the trouble could be as minimal as yesterday morning's "tut-tut" from Walter Lippmann. But when there is a long and complicated background of suspicion of tampering, when foul play is in the air, when the plot includes something

like a medieval set of elements: assassination, resentful surviving kin, and a furtively conducted war of dubious origins and purpose, then we are talking about questions of political legitimacy as relevant in the last decade as in Machiavelli's time, or Shakespeare's. Indeed we have been talking about them for years now, but it has been a very superficial discussion of surfaces and shadows, of "credibility" and "charisma."

Some of these questions bothered the electorate. Some of them nagged at Johnson. The doubts rolled back and forth across the line of compact whereby sovereignty passes from the people to one man. At a certain moment in early 1968, the line broke down; Johnson sensed something like a national uprising, and he yielded to it.

The Tet Offensive of early 1968 was the beginning of the end. Johnson maintains a looking-glass view of that crucial last chapter in his effort to hold the eyes of the public on the alleged light at the end of the tunnel. "I announced," he writes, "that Tet had been a military failure for the enemy," but warned of "their second objective . . . a psychological victory. . . the defeat the Communists suffered did not have the telling effect it should have had largely because of what we did to ourselves." The "self-inflicted wound," "what we did to ourselves": wearing these blinders, Johnson can face the mirror and see a President who did not falter, and a people who did.

In the wake of the "Glorious Revolution" of 1689, arguing against fears of "mischief" if "rulers should sometimes be liable to be opposed when they grow exorbitant in the use of their power," John Locke wrote: "I grant that the pride, ambition, and turbulence of private men have sometimes caused great disorders in commonwealths, and factions have been fatal to states and kingdoms. But whether the mischief hath oftener begun in the people's wantonness, and a desire to cast off the lawful authority of their rulers, or in the rulers' insolence, and endeavors to get and exercise an arbitrary power over their people; whether oppression or disobedience gave the first rise to the disorder, I leave it to impartial history to determine." Locke was talking about tyranny and rebellion as they were then practiced. We are talking about a dual collapse of political confidence, that of the people in their President and the President in the people. We are also talking of pride, ambition, turbulence, factions, mischief, and disorder; but not, I think, so much of the ruler's insolence or arbitrary exercise of power as of his fears about the legitimacy of his rule. This is hard to see, for the popular picture of Johnson is the simplest version of the Lockean one: the ruler went too far, and the people put a stop to it. But Locke (or Machiavelli, anyway) would have asked, "How did the ruler come to power?"

When John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dal-

las, both Mr. and Mrs. Johnson could hardly have been more sensitive to the situation they faced. Johnson writes in *The Vantage Point* that "a troubled, puzzled, and outraged nation wanted to know the facts" about the assassination. Then Ruby shot Oswald and "the outrage of a nation turned to skepticism and doubt. The atmosphere was poisonous and had to be cleared. I was aware of some of the implications that grew out of that skepticism and doubt. Russia was not immune to them. Neither was Cuba. Neither was the State of Texas. Neither was the new President of the United States.

"Lady Bird had told me a story when I finally arrived at our home in northwest Washington on the night of November 22. She and Liz Carpenter had driven home immediately after our arrival at the White House, while I stayed on to work. On their way to our house, Liz had commented: 'It's a terrible thing to say, but the salvation of Texas is that the Governor [John Connally] was hit.'

"And Lady Bird replied: 'Don't think I haven't thought of that. I only wish it could have been me.'"

It was a most hideous beginning for Johnson's presidency. He was as aware as anyone of the flood of conspiracy theory and counter-theory that followed the assassination. Then, too, it was not the first crisis of political legitimacy he had survived, but only the most awful one.

These experiences, and the effects they had on Johnson personally, constitute the source material for some future "secret history," the barest outline of which is discernible in *The Vantage Point*. It is the secret history of Lyndon Johnson's private wars with his Texas constituency, with the Kennedy family, with public opinion, and with himself.

To summarize the early chronology: in 1941, LBJ was first counted in, and then out, in a special election for a vacant U.S. Senate seat. It is generally understood in Texas that his conservative opponent stole the election. In 1946 Johnson faced his first serious opposition for the congressional seat he had held for five terms. The opponent made an issue of Mr. and Mrs. Johnson's expanding business interests and claimed that Johnson was misusing his office in pursuit of wealth. It was the first but by no means the last time Johnson would hear that charge, buttressed with ever-more-specific details. In 1948, he won his Senate seat, but by a margin of only eighty-seven notorious votes. It was always awkward, to say the least, for him to justify what happened in 1948—each side claimed the other stole or rigged votes—on the grounds that after 1941 he had a turn coming to him. The impression that "Something Is Rotten in the State of Texas" (the title of a 1951 Collier's article on the subject) dogged him down through the years.

A pattern set in early: be careful what you run for. Above all, never again fall into a race like that of 1948. Build a fort to retreat to; even be prepared for "them" to wipe you out (Mr. Johnson's intimates often speak of his "Alamo complex"). Don't appear to

want to make a race. Make your supporters force you to run, thus binding them to you while leaving you the last option of pulling out if the candidacy looks threatened. Don't reach until the reaching is safe; wait for the cinch play; then perform as only you can.

His leadership of the Senate Democrats in the 1950s was such a cinch play. It was as if the opportunity had been set up for Johnson's particular skills: a volatile mixture of activism tempered by caution, and altruism marinated over a period of years in a most persuasively articulated self-protective opportunism. He played the role brilliantly. It was a performance bested only by that in his first year and a half as President for expertise, accomplishment, exuberant pleasure in achieving great ends, and pure *tour de force*. The focus of that period was one of the most fabulous cinch plays any politician ever enjoyed: the 1964 campaign.

I am ahead of the story. Johnson's constituency was cranky in the 1950s, and he fretted about it constantly, seeing menaces everywhere, exaggerating them, and appeasing them. This was the period in which his liberal critics added a new nickname, "Lying-down Lyndon," to the one with which he emerged from the 1948 race, "Landslide Lyndon." He knew that the Senate leadership job at once protected him from potential conservative opposition in Texas and made him tempting prey. His two predecessors as Senate Democratic leader and his senior Texas Senate colleague had each been recently retired by homegrown challengers. Challenge didn't come when he expected it, in 1954, and safely re-elected, Senate Minority Leader Johnson became the Majority Leader as a result of Democratic gains in the 1954 elections. Adlai Stevenson was the front-running candidate for the 1956 Democratic presidential nomination.

Enter former President Lyndon Johnson, author of *The Vantage Point*. In 1955, he records at the outset, "Senator Kennedy's father . . . called me at my ranch. He said that he and John Kennedy wanted to support me for President and would like to work for my nomination at the 1956 Democratic Convention if I would run. I thanked him but said that I did not wish to be a candidate. As it later developed, my name was placed in nomination, but purely for reasons of local Democratic politics. . . . [As a favorite-son candidate] I cast the vote of the Texas delegation for John Kennedy for the Vice Presidential nomination at that convention."

"A few days later, after I had returned home, I wrote the following letter to Joe Kennedy:

August 25, 1956

Dear Joe:

For a week now I have been taking care of Lyndon Johnson—sunning, swimming and sleeping as much as my folks would let me. But in addition, I have been

thinking of a lot of things, one of them being that phone call from you in October of last year.

You said then that you and Jack wanted to support me for President in 1956 but that if I were not interested, you planned to support Adlai Stevenson. I told you I was not interested and it occurs to me that you may be somewhat mystified about my activities in Chicago last week. When I see you I will explain how they involved a local political situation here in Texas and were not inconsistent with what I told you last October.

But this note, Joe, is being sent your way to tell you how proud I am of the Democratic Senator from Massachusetts and how proud I am of the Texas Delegation and other Delegations from the South for their support of him in Chicago last Friday afternoon. In my opinion, that session of the Convention lighted the brightest lamp of hope for a truly great Democratic Party. I hope we can talk about this sometime when you are in Washington.

With all good wishes and warmest regards, I am

Sincerely,
Lyndon B. Johnson

What is this curious letter, rich in flavorful allusions, doing in this book? It is one of the very few documents from Johnson's files to wind up here on view. Pursue the narrative a few steps further. Several chapters along, discussing his attitude toward the presidency, Johnson writes, ". . . in 1955 I suffered a serious heart attack. I recovered, but the experience left me deeply aware of my physical limitations. There was also the problem of geography. I frankly did not think that anyone from the South would be nominated, much less elected, in my lifetime."

Pieces of the story of how Johnson wound up on the 1960 ticket as Kennedy's candidate for Vice President have been told in carefully researched fashion elsewhere. The version Johnson offers is doctored and sketchy, but does note the difficulties caused him by Robert Kennedy's riddlesome efforts to suggest that maybe Johnson wasn't welcome on the ticket after all. Johnson records that after he and John Kennedy came to their agreement, Speaker Rayburn learned that "a wild story was making the rounds to the effect that Mr. Rayburn and I had threatened John Kennedy with defeat if he did not put me on the ticket. A number of people were convinced that Bobby had leaked the story to satisfy those to whom he had given assurances that I would not be selected."

"Mr. Rayburn told me he was going to nail this lie right away. He apparently did so with a single telephone call to the candidate. The newspapers the next morning carried Senator Kennedy's forceful denial that there was any truth to the story. Kennedy and I went on from that day to join forces, and campaign and win."

Johnson's account passes in silence over two relevant circumstances of that day in 1960. The first is that Kennedy invited Johnson onto the ticket in spite of Johnson's acid personal attacks on JFK and on Joseph Kennedy before and during the convention in

which LBJ, too, sought the presidential nomination. The second circumstance was that Ambassador Kennedy was one of those voices, and perhaps the key one, urging his son to take Johnson on the ticket, though the sound of LBJ's attack on the Ambassador's pre-World War II sympathies was barely still.

The first circumstance doesn't fall in with the drift of what Johnson is telling us, but the second does (assume for the moment that the discrepancy will help make a more colorful story when it is finally told in full). Johnson is suggesting that he, Joseph Kennedy, and number-one-son, John, "put something together," as it were, as early as 1955: an understanding that together, Johnson, with his Southern Protestant base, and Kennedy, with his Northern urban Catholic base, could do for each other what neither could do alone—combine to make a truly potent team that would effectively overcome the regional or religious prejudices that each would arouse in the electorate if he stood alone. That is what Johnson meant in his 1956 letter to Joseph Kennedy ("... lighted the brightest lamp of hope for a truly great Democratic Party"—this in the wake of the convention that nominated Stevenson and Estes Kefauver and was surely going down to defeat). Johnson is suggesting that he was at the center of "The Founding Father's" strategy for making his son President. Johnson was no power-hungry usurper, no unwanted albatross to the Kennedy ticket. Why, he didn't even want the 1960 presidential nomination, he says again and again in *The Vantage Point*; it was just that Speaker Rayburn and others "kept pressuring me." As for those attacks on Joe at the convention, well, Joe and Lyndon were shrewd, foxy-grandpa types, not pretty boys. If there was an understanding, it would have been broad enough to cover a number of contingencies.* It could well have been broad enough to allow for all-in-the-game personal attacks of the kind Johnson made and permitted his staff to make, especially if an important part of the exercise was to make Johnson's presidential bid credible. (Alas, I can only offer it as spicy hearsay, though my source was, in 1960, one of Johnson's most trusted aides and had it from LBJ, but Joseph Kennedy is supposed to have told Johnson during a golf game in the late summer of 1960 that inasmuch as "these kids" weren't going to be equal to the task of running the United States government, a great deal of the job was going to devolve upon Joe and Lyndon, and therefore it was a good thing all around that they could get along.)

Bearing in mind that we're talking not about any documented, historical God's truth but about Johnson's suggestion of his version of it, recall what happened next. Johnson's vice presidential years were

*Was a Johnson-Kennedy ticket as acceptable to both sides as a Kennedy-Johnson ticket and let the best man take top spot? Was Johnson seriously trying for the presidency in 1960, or just making a race to wind up where he did? His closest confidants can argue it both ways, and have.

miserable. "Never once in those three years [1960-1963] did I have any reason to believe that John Kennedy looked upon me as a liability," writes Johnson, but the fact is that in the fall of 1963 the Bobby Baker case was becoming a major embarrassment to Johnson and thus to Kennedy. Baker's name does not appear in *The Vantage Point*; Johnson refers only to "reports circulating in Washington that I was going to be 'dumped' from the ticket in 1964. . . . I believed those reports to be rumors and nothing more." He does not mention here what he told any number of people at the time, and what has been reported in some detail since: that he believed that Robert Kennedy was masterminding the Baker case as an instrument for getting him off the 1964 ticket.

But what Johnson omits is well known. Taken together with what he now brings to the record, it adds up to this message: one interested party wasn't in on the Joe-Jack-Lyndon "understanding," and he must have resented deeply the way his father and brother not only dealt him out of it but dealt Lyndon in as the heir in case anything happened to Jack. Of course, John Kennedy had to have some Vice President and it couldn't be Robert Kennedy, but the point is that something did happen to Jack, and Lyndon took over, and he and Bobby . . . Well, that's a long story. Robert Kennedy is portrayed in this book as the spoiler, the moody, resentful second son, lying in wait for Johnson, ready to challenge him for betraying his brother's memory whichever way the new President turned. Johnson, in turn, portrays himself as enduring all this like Job, aware that in the end it might just be his own fervent loyalty to John Kennedy's memory that drove Robert Kennedy to as much fury as if Johnson had, in fact, betrayed it.

Legitimacy, hereditary legitimacy, thy name is Joseph, father of John Kennedy, who made his son President and Lyndon Johnson his son's heir. (Making John President was no easy trick, for it involved money and votes, in the spring, summer, and fall of 1960, that aroused questions comparable to those that LBJ had lived with since 1948. It is another story, but a relevant one. Johnson has nothing to say about it in *The Vantage Point*. It cannot have added to his sense of security about his past, present, or future. And, by contrast to Johnson's insecurities and his tendency to show them, there was the example of John Kennedy's confident nonchalance toward the stories of chicanery at the Los Angeles Convention in 1960 and at the polls in November. In the absence of clean-as-a-whistle political legitimacy, "grace under pressure" and pure gall can carry the day.)

With those allusions he does make, Johnson endeavors to draw legitimizing lines through all that has been thrown into doubt about his relations with the Kennedy family, his designation as Vice President in 1960, the scandal lapping near him in 1963,

the sudden assassination of the President in Dallas in the company of the Johnsons and the Connallys, and last but hardly least, the war in Vietnam.

"Rightly or wrongly, I felt from the very first day in office that I had to carry on for President Kennedy. I considered myself the caretaker of both his people and his policies. He knew when he selected me as his running mate that I would be the man required to carry on if anything happened to him. I did what I believed he would have wanted me to do. I never wavered from that sense of responsibility, even after I was elected in my own right, up to my last day in office."

Johnson cites any number of remarks by Kennedy to show that the fallen leader "believed in our nation's commitment to the security of Southeast Asia. . . . Our policy would be 'steady on course.' At a joint session of Congress on November 27, 1963 . . . I gave my solemn pledge to the Congress and to the people of the United States: 'We will keep our commitments from South Vietnam to West Berlin.'" The last statement appears three times in the first fifty pages of the book.

But Johnson has a second point to make about the origins of his Vietnam policy, and he is frank to the edge of rawness about it. He recounts how, at his first meeting on Vietnam after the assassination, Henry Cabot Lodge spoke about the role of the Kennedy Administration in encouraging the coup against Ngo Dinh Diem. Johnson writes: "I told Lodge and the others that I had serious misgivings. Many people were criticizing the removal of Diem and were shocked by his murder. . . . I thought we had been mistaken in our failure to support Diem." Controversy over whether or not to support him "led to a crucial decision that never received the serious study and detached thought it deserved. Too much emotionalism was involved . . . a message prepared in the State Department was sent to Saigon on August 24. In effect, it told Ambassador Lodge to advise Diem that immediate steps had to be taken to meet the outstanding Buddhist demands. If Diem did not act promptly, the Ambassador was instructed to advise key Vietnamese military leaders that the United States would not continue to support the Saigon government militarily or economically. This ultimatum meant the removal of Nhu and his politically active wife. . . . If Diem refused, the United States could no longer support him. If the military leaders then took over, we would support them.

"This hasty and ill-advised message was a green light to those who wanted Diem's downfall. Once the Ambassador acted on his instructions, preparations for a coup were stimulated. In my judgment, this decision was a serious blunder which launched a period of deep political confusion in Saigon that lasted almost two years. . . .

"There were profound regrets in Washington [about Diem's murder] as there should have been. . . . One of his [President Kennedy's] final acts con-

cerning Vietnam was to order his principal advisors and the top echelon of our Mission in Saigon to conduct a full-scale review of all aspects of the situation. . . . Fate decreed that their report would come to me and not to the man who had requested it. Vietnam and the consequences of Diem's murder became mine to deal with."

The steady implication through this narrative is that Johnson inherited not only the Kennedy commitment in Vietnam, which the new President was pleased to honor, but a mess. "Too much emotionalism," "hasty and ill-advised message," "serious blunder": these are the strongest words Johnson uses just about anywhere in the book in comment on anyone but outright enemies of his policies abroad and at home. As other records show, the message to Saigon was the work of Roger Hillsman, Michael Forrestal, and Averell Harriman, though their names do not appear in Johnson's account of the incident. All were very much of the Kennedy Administration (though as it happens Hillsman was already on the skids before Kennedy's death, and Harriman later served Johnson well). The telegram to Saigon was dispatched on a day when John Kennedy, Dean Rusk, and Robert McNamara were all away from Washington, and these circumstances* combine to permit Johnson to place the blame for the Vietnamese disaster squarely in the Kennedy Administration's lap, while simultaneously exonerating John Kennedy, Dean Rusk, and Robert McNamara personally. Nonetheless, President Kennedy permitted some second-level bureaucrats to make a mess, and "the consequences of Diem's murder"—most especially escalation to "keep our commitments"—followed from that.

Johnson's tone is a good deal more restrained when he writes, some pages later, of Robert Kennedy's offer in June of 1964 to become Ambassador to South Vietnam: "He said that the Vietnam situation was 'obviously the most important problem facing the United States' and he wanted me to know that if I felt he could help, he was at my service. . . .

"I did not accept his offer because I feared, as did Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, that the potential danger to the late President's brother was too great. But it was a courageous offer for him to make."

Johnson's straight face is set at two Delphic levels in this passage. First, given all that had passed between him and Robert Kennedy by that time (the President was just then preparing his heavy-handed suppression of RFK's own vice presidential boom), could Johnson have heard Kennedy's offer and not wondered what was behind it? These were the months, after all, in which Johnson was most divided in his mind about what to do in Vietnam, and most sensitive to the dangers of escalation; months when

*Chester Cooper's authoritative account in his *The Lost Crusade* states that Kennedy and Rusk knew a good deal about the cable, but that McNamara didn't. At any rate, the principals were away from Washington.

Robert Kennedy's thinking was still close to that of his friends Robert McNamara and Maxwell Taylor. This was the period in which Johnson had good reason to ponder whether, if he failed to follow the tough policy being urged on him, Robert Kennedy and his associates, in search of vulnerable points in Johnson's armor, would not pick the most obvious one: Johnson doesn't know anything about foreign affairs; he lacks the nerve and ability to play the international game. Johnson has run out on my brother's commitment to the gallant people of South Vietnam. . . .

But that is all for the future "secret history." For now Johnson finds it sufficient to say that he, Rusk, and McNamara feared for Kennedy's life if he went to Vietnam, and he completes the circle he is drawing around the Kennedys' responsibility for the mess in Vietnam with the implication that the fear was based on anticipation of understandable Vietnamese attitudes toward the President's brother in the wake of the Diem murder. After all, in June of 1964, we were in neither a shooting nor a bombing war.

Johnson concludes his references to Robert Kennedy this way:

"During the four and a half years of my Presidency I had never been able to establish a close relationship with Bobby Kennedy. It was not so much a question of issues; on most matters of national importance we had similar views, after he became a Senator. We even agreed on Vietnam for a long time. We did not come to any sort of parting of the ways on that question until 1966. Perhaps his political ambitions were part of the problem. Maybe it was just a matter of chemistry. I honestly do not know. I recognized and admired his leadership qualities. . . .

"When tragedy struck him down, I was glad that my last meeting with Bobby Kennedy had been friendly." The notes and transcript of that meeting, held on April 3, 1968, and reproduced in the book, include these lines: "He [LBJ] never wanted to be President and had been counting the days to the end of the term ever since the beginning.

"He had never thought of his Administration as just the Johnson Administration, but as a continuation of the Kennedy-Johnson Administration. It was carrying on a family matter."

The distance between Lyndon Johnson's public words and private sentiments became so great by the end of his presidency that it is difficult now for the discerning reader to know which is which. There are and always have been several Lyndon Johnsons. One of them went before an audience in New Orleans at the peak of the 1964 campaign and pursued an all-out civil rights speech through "less than overwhelming" applause to a truly audacious conclusion, the point of which was to express his disgust with the politics of racism, to Dixie's face, in the very language of racism which he publicly

and privately abhorred, and at the risk that his use of that language might be misunderstood: "I told the New Orleans assembly a story about Senator Joe Bailey, who was reared and educated in Mississippi and elected to the House and then the Senate from Texas. Bailey had been talking to Congressman Sam Rayburn about the economic problems of the South and had mentioned the great future the South could enjoy if it could develop its resources.

"I wish I felt a little better, Sammy," Joe Bailey said to Mr. Rayburn. "I would like to go back to Mississippi and make them one more Democratic speech. . . ."

"I looked over the members of the audience, then gave them the old Senator's final words to Mr. Rayburn on that occasion: 'Poor old Mississippi, they haven't heard a Democratic speech in thirty years. All they ever hear at election time is "Nigger, Nigger, Nigger."'"

Five months later, Johnson told Congress, in an address almost as moving to read now (whether or not he has mixed in some corn in the retelling) as it was to watch over television then:

"I speak tonight for the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy. . . . At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was a century ago at Appomattox. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama.

"I could feel the tension in the Chamber. I could hear the emotion in the echoes of my own words. . . .

"I looked up at the Presidential box. I could barely distinguish the faces of Lady Bird and our daughter Lynda. But I felt them with me. Then I looked straight ahead in the Chamber at my Southern friends. I knew that most of them were not with me. I went on.

"But even if we pass this bill, the battle will not be over. What happened at Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and state of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life.

"I paused for breath. In that fleeting moment my thoughts turned to the picket lines in Birmingham, the sit-ins in North Carolina, the marches in Selma. A picture rose before my eyes—a picture of blacks and whites marching together, side by side, chanting and singing the anthem of the civil rights movement.

"I raised my arms.

"Their cause must be our cause too. Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And . . . we . . . shall . . . overcome."

That was one Lyndon Johnson. The other one really did feel doubts about his occupancy of the White House. The critics find these implausibly

stated in *The Vantage Point*, and so they are when he goes off to the garden to eat worms: "One reason the country could not rally behind a Southern President, I was convinced, was that the metropolitan press of the Eastern seaboard would never permit it." Nobody loves me. (Once he asked Dean Acheson why. "Because, Mr. President," Acheson replied, "you are not a very likeable man.") Never permit it? The press helped build Johnson up in 1964 and 1965, though it poked in his closet and watched him for warts. The Southern issue was a real one, but not, after the Selma speech, the one that divided Johnson from the press or the country. But his harping on it is a measure of his concern about more profound insecurities.

Johnson is more plausible when he writes of his March, 1968, decision to quit: "A great misconception has been built up by the press that I was a man who was hungry for power, who would not conceivably give up power willingly. Those who believed this estimate did not understand that power can lose its charm when a man has known it as many years as I had." And when the doubts the public felt about the man came to be focused on a war that looked like his nasty, stealthy, deceptive piece of work, and when Camelot, now represented by the heir who would never accept "the Kennedy-Johnson Administration," glowed brighter as Robert Kennedy's inevitable challenge came nearer—then it was time to go.

No more 1948s. No more 1963s. No more metropolitan press of the Eastern seaboard. No more advisers urging you on, then running out on you when the "orchestration" of escalation doesn't go according to war-game plans. Let Bobby have it, and let the myth of Camelot float down to gritty, mean realities.

The first wave of revisionist reconstruction of what actually happened in the evolution of our Vietnam policy has helped show what Johnson takes pains to argue here: that he inherited not just a war but a messy administration of it. Johnson doesn't have to worry about that part of his story. The Pentagon Papers have helped make it clear that for a long while during his first months in office the Kennedy group pressed him on, and he held back. His post-assassination fears about his legitimacy in the eyes of "Kennedy Opinion" blended in with his older, Texas-based fears of conventional anti-Communist public opinion (more accurately, his fear of

how susceptible that public opinion was to right-wing demagogues, and MacArthur-style generals "going public"). That he therefore accepted his inherited advisers' recommendations and pursued their dangerous policy to its bloody wasteland of an end—all that is another story. When it is told in detail we will come to a deeper awareness of what sort of a man Lyndon Johnson was, and what we have been through with him, and just what sort of "tragedy" his presidency was. Why did the brave man who told the "Nigger, Nigger, Nigger" story to the New Orleans campaign crowd, who cried "We shall overcome" to Congress and the nation, overcome so little, in the end, of his fears about his legitimacy as our President? Why did he waste so much that was good in him and in this country in Vietnam? Johnson feared what people thought of him. For a while in 1964 and 1965, Vietnam was part of a cinch play. ("The Big Stick" in Vietnam buys protection for New Deal politics at home; it ties up the Kennedy faction, and Curtis LeMay.)

Johnson's "tragedy." The truth is that it was not Lyndon Johnson who was illegitimate, but rather the war in Vietnam, deception by deception, from our adoption of the bankrupt French colonial enterprise, through the stealthy escalation, to "Vietnamization." But by the time the public found out about the war, the "Kennedy-Johnson Administration" was in every sense the Johnson Administration. The more Johnson tried to make acceptable and legitimate that which was neither, the deeper into his trap he burrowed. The Viet Cong, the North Vietnamese, Eugene McCarthy, Robert Kennedy, Clark Clifford, Mrs. Johnson, the American press, and "public opinion" combined to change the rules Johnson established in 1964 and 1965. Together these players helped him or forced him to make a new beginning, setting the country on the long journey back from futile escalation and bloodletting. Johnson can't see that, or won't, and his book ends in a poignant but pathetic effort to argue that Vietnam and his presidency came out as he had planned, no thanks to anyone but himself, Dean Rusk, and our fighting forces. History will probe more deeply. The outcome of Johnson's Vietnam policy involved not the public's self-inflicted wounds but those that Johnson had been inflicting on himself all along. This was a brave, wise man when he knew his mind, found his moment and his cinch play, and felt his strength. But those moments were too few. □