

Book Says Robert Kennedy and Johnson

Felt a Mutual Respect

By HENRY RAYMONT

A new political biography of Senator Robert F. Kennedy contends that his relationship with President Johnson combined sharp personal rivalry with considerable mutual respect and concern for the unity of the Democratic party.

While their antagonism frequently dominated the news, particularly after Mr. Kennedy publicly broke with the Johnson Administration over the Vietnam war, the professional bond that continued to link the two political leaders was little known outside the circle of their intimate advisers and friends.

This is the conclusion of two

of Mr. Kennedy's closest advisers, William Vanden Heuvel and Milton Gwirtzman, in their book "On His Own: Robert F. Kennedy 1964-1968," which will be published this week by Doubleday & Co.

"The relationship between Kennedy and Johnson was much more complex than that portrayed to the public," the authors wrote. "It grew out of the nature of the men and the nature of the Presidential office. It involved elements of respect as well as antagonism. They could have made the most effective team of their time, but they were too entwined in bitter memory to cooperate in any meaningful way."

Mr. Vanden Heuvel, a candidate for the Democratic nomination for Governor of New York, was Mr. Kennedy's assistant at the Justice Department and remained with him until the assassination.

Mr. Gwirtzman, a Washington lawyer, was closely associated with the Kennedy team during the New York senatorial campaign in 1966 and the Presidential primaries of 1968.

Calling on personal recollections, interviews and some heretofore unpublished letters, the authors describe efforts by both President Johnson and Mr. Kennedy to moderate their antagonism to prevent wider factional splits in the party.

"But, as always in politics, the evidence of personal conflict was considered far more newsworthy than any attempts at conciliation," Mr. Gwirtzman said in an interview yesterday. "Hints of a Kennedy-Johnson split became one of the most sought-after news items in Washington. The media did not create the tension and distrust between Kennedy and Johnson, but they did magnify it into something with a life of its own, beyond the acts of the two men."

The authors offer considerable details on a series of White House meetings between Presi-

dent Johnson and Mr. Kennedy. Most of the meetings were cool and sometimes acrimonious, such as the President's rebuff to Mr. Kennedy's Vice-Presidential ambitions in July, 1964, and the bitter exchange in February, 1967, over charges that Mr. Kennedy had leaked a story about Hanoi "peace feelers" to the press.