

Savage Blast at LBJ From Left

During the last presidential campaign a book appeared that, despite its rightish ideological bias, shook up the Johnson camp.

It was called "A Texan Looks at Lyndon" by J. Evett Haley. The Fair Campaign Practices Committee, wondering if there might be a violation involved, assigned political reporter Robert Sherrill to review it.

Later somebody suggested to Cliff Carter at Democratic Headquarters that Sherrill's review be reproduced along with other bales of pro-Johnson material. "Hell, no," responded Carter. "If you'll read that review closely you'll see what he's saying is Johnson isn't THAT bad!"

What the incident implied then has been made clear now. Sherrill (former Time-Life and Miami Herald writer, now the Nation's man in Washington) has written a book, "The Accidental President" (Grossman; \$5). It is the angriest, most inflammatory assault on the ethics and record of a White House incumbent since Victor Lasky's ill-tempered and unfortunately timed "JFK: The Man and the Myth."

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SHERRILL SPEAKS from slightly left of center, but his attack will surprise no one except those who still believe those old campaign legends about LBJ being a Texas liberal to whom FDR was "Just like a daddy."

"Books have been written about Lyndon Johnson," says Sherrill in his preface, "to show how powerful he is, how complex he is, how sly and nefarious he is. All of these qualities are rather obvious, but recognizing his power and complexity and slickness somehow misses what I think is the central point for a lot of us, namely: why do we find him such an insufferable and dangerous fellow? Many of us not only voted but worked for him last time and, judging from the sinking bonfires on the Republican side of the river, we'll probably be doing it again in 1968—and hating ourselves for it."

This is not simply an aberration of the Democratic anti-war liberals who believe Johnson has done just about what Goldwater was supposed to do if LBJ hadn't been given their support in 1964.

It is true that nobody seems to like Johnson actually. Even among hawks there are none of those paeans of affectionate rhetoric to which politicians have traditionally treated our wartime leaders.

In prosperous Iowa, which Johnson carried by 62 percent in 1964, a high Democratic state official told Sherrill that Johnson "comes over to the people as just a blob. People are distrustful and suspicious of his motives and his looks."

A newspaperman after studying the anti-war protest movement among students said he thought that much of its virulence "can be traced to the character of Lyndon B. Johnson. Not a single student I've talked to in the past several weeks — left, right, and indifferent — respects the President."

By Donald Stanley

"No President," said the Christian Century, scarcely a radical voice, "has ever tried so hard to expose himself to the electorate and to win popular support, but no President has aroused such a combination of grudging respect and personal dislike from the public."

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SHERRILL'S BOOK is a compilation of charges and evidence (some of it marred by hasty mistakes but most of it credible) aimed at tearing down some of LBJ's most cherished self-images.

● He is not a liberal, says Rep. Wright Patman, an old family friend, so much as a do-gooder. Until 1964 when the dead Kennedy gave him one, Johnson never had a program, says Sherrill. "He is directed not by a philosophy or a schedule of achievable progress but by glandular gooses, most of them brought on by the approach of November."

● His power comes from and his allegiance goes to the big oil interests in Texas. Sherrill, whose assignment to that state by Time a few years ago gave him a good grounding in its complex political structure, says Johnson has been the chief wrecker of Texas liberal hopes to raise the serf status of Mexicans, Negroes, poor whites and unions.

● Vietnam is Johnson's War. "Nothing that Kennedy said, nothing that Ike said or wrote, committed American fighting men to an Asian fight." His jockeying with the four year old problem of overhauling the draft, says Sherrill, is based on his attempt to take over from Congress a duty granted the legislative branch by the Constitution.

● His Great Society, says Sherrill, is withering but it was scarcely "great" anyway. "Any civilized democracy is expected in the 20th century to educate its children properly, take care of its aged and ill, and guarantee equality in the voting booth," he says, quoting a New York Times writer.

All this is explosive stuff — salted with backstage incidents depicting the discomforts attendant on working for the leader.

In "The Accidental President" Sherrill is speaking for a significant part of what was once the great Democratic coalition. That party must mourn, for its options are insignificant. The book, its ammunition and its implications, its disillusionment and its bitterness should give most pause to the other party.