

**SENATOR  
SAM ERVIN  
SAYS**



It is not easy to write about Lyndon Johnson for he was too complex a man to define in the usual phrases.

I knew him as a friend, as a former colleague, and as 28th President of the United States. Always approachable, I recall that a year or so ago I was invited to a wedding reception after his tenure of office had ended and I began referring to him as Mr. President. In typical fashion, he quickly said: "Aw, drop the formality and call me Lyndon like you used to do in the Senate."

By any standard, Lyndon Johnson had great capabilities.

He was an adroit politician who understood as well as any man the strengths and weaknesses of his fellow human beings. He used his immense talents with consummate skill to develop a legislative program when he was Senate Majority leader. As President, he built his "Great Society" program on a sure knowledge of the Congress and what it would take to win approval of a multitude of programs. At the end of his Presidency, some 400 new social programs were on the statute books, a remarkable achievement.

A product of the Texas frontier, he also had deep roots in the South. Without the campaigning of Lyndon Johnson, it is doubtful that John Kennedy would ever have been President. A major share of the Johnson power came from the loyalty of friends on whom he could rely. It was a two-way proposition. He never forgot a friend. He had a saying that you could rely on a certain individual as "one you can go to the well with." In dry Texas that meant a lot, and it meant a lot to Lyndon Johnson.

He was a product of a generation that came to value compromise. An early protege of Sam Rayburn, he understood "the art of the possible," and he made consensus and "public opinion" polls a part of his

strategy to achieve governmental action. Many an American came under the magic spell of his opening words: "Come let us reason together."

One of the grim ironies of fate was that this man who won one of the largest popular votes ever given an American President became a victim of "consensus government." The tragedy was that as a man of peace he decided to listen to too many counsellors on how to wage the Vietnam war. In the end it was his political undoing. Even in the moment of death, he was not permitted to share in the satisfaction that at long last a cease-fire had been achieved in Southeast Asia.

Lyndon Johnson was a man of great compassion. His heart went out to the poor, the oppressed, and the downtrodden. With a fervor unknown in government since the early days of the Depression, he sought and won passage of vast new programs designed to build what conceived to be a "Great Society." In swift succession new statutes went on the books to aid Appalachia, broaden economic opportunity, clean up the air we breathe and the water we drink, channel new monies into education, and restructure medical care. Controversy still swirls around the wisdom of many of these programs—some of which I did not support—and already efforts are underway to curtail many of his favorite governmental projects. Whether the "Great Society" will survive in the decades ahead remains to

be seen, but that is not really the point when one assesses his many years of service to the Nation.

No one can gainsay the fact that Lyndon Johnson fought with all of the resources at his command for the things in which he believed. Memories are still too fresh to predict what place he will achieve in the future assessment of his administration.

This much is certain. There was never any pause in his desire for a better America.

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