

## *The Antihero*

### **The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson,**

by Eric F. Goldman, *New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968. 531 pp. + index. \$8.95.*

PRESIDENT JOHNSON's first intellectual-in-residence at the White House concluded, after a three-year hitch, that his boss was "an extraordinarily gifted President but the wrong man from the wrong place at the wrong time under the wrong circumstances. . . ." The evidence he gives in this detailed, acutely argued, skillfully narrated, and steadfastly magnanimous book fully supports the first part of the judgment, the second part—the succession of four wrongs—is supported to some degree, but the author misses a fifth wrong altogether, though it is the one true and certain root of the Johnson failure.

Professor Goldman shows well how a strong, imaginative, and compassionate President operates in normal times and in times of crisis. We see LBJ settle a paralyzing, nation-wide strike on the railroads by dint of skillful stick-and-carrot treatment for the contending parties. Historians of all persuasions will value Goldman's inside yet coolly professional account of the way the landmark statutes of LBJ—the civil rights act of 1964, the voting rights act of 1965, Medicare, the education act—came to pass. That favorite myth of the American Left, that filibusters balk the American consensus, can hardly survive (in logic at any rate) Mr. Goldman's report on how the filibuster was smashed on civil rights and voting rights—twice in two years.

The Goldman prose is competent, and not without lighter and loftier stretches. There is a truly comic account of Bashir Ahmed, the camel driver of Karachi, when the then Vice-President fell on him with "Our President wants to see your camel. He has plans to make things better for you." Bashir Ahmed "looked at the Vice-President and murmured a few words in Urdu which are

difficult to translate except as "Is this for real?" The chapter on the White House arts festival with Goldman's evenly cold distaste for the "arrogant know-nothingism" of LBJ and the "arrogant know-it-allness" of his "Metroamerican tormenters" is already famous after separate magazine publication. Goldman's analysis of President Johnson's celebrated unlikeableness—that he was a mama's boy of indifferent social background, hence insecure throughout life, hence secretive, devious, irascible—will do as well as any amateur freuderie, and is perhaps more persuasive than most. Quite outside the general tone and temper of the book is the chapter on Lady Bird, Claudia Taylor Johnson. It is just, perceptive, full of respect, and verging on respectful affection. If you haven't time to read it now, don't worry. It will be waiting in the anthologies.

But what about the fifth Johnson wrong, about which Mr. Goldman, after all a prisoner of his class, says hardly a word? He is more or less plausible when he explains that Johnson was the wrong man because devious, secretive, and socially insecure; that Texas was the wrong place because it was Texas and not, say, Massachusetts; that the time was wrong because Johnson followed John F. Kennedy; and that the circumstances were wrong because they were the Vietnam War. But the truth is that no Democratic President could have dodged the blow that dropped Lyndon Johnson. This is so because his failure is simply the collapse at last of a wrong system of ideas, a complex of assumptions, a pattern of desires, all out of touch with the world as it was, is, and will be, and with people as they are.

The country has been operating for a generation on the premise that peace is easily possible and that repose is the destiny of man. America is rich enough to do anything it wants to do, which puts the national leadership under obligation to trigger whole waves of revolutions of rising expectations. These expectations, however broad and high, are not only self-justifying morally, but self-executing economically—

to wish is to guarantee instant availability of the wherewithal to gratify. Where conventional wisdom or mere law stands in the way the wisdom will be thrust aside just because conventional, and the law, regarded merely as the codified will of the owning class, is voidable in behalf of "human" rights. These domestic notions balance abroad with the faith that communism is merely an updated form of democracy led by jovial, if somewhat uncouth, ward bosses with whom business, if pliantly bargained, can still be done. When this catalogue of illusion collapsed, so did Lyndon Johnson.

With what might be called 60 per cent accuracy Goldman identifies the inspirational source of the policies—generous, well-intended, unworldly policies—that had been moving us before and during the Johnsonian dispensation. The source is what, he calls Metroamerica, and the central argument of the book comes close to being this: that Lyndon Johnson failed because he never achieved the respect, much less the affection of the Metroamericans. The Metroamerican is variously defined, but mostly he has "tended to take his style of life from the successful classes of the Northeast." And Professor Goldman, who teaches history at Princeton University, makes clear his view that the tone and temper, the ethos and ethics, the idiom and ideology of the successful classes of the Northeast are determined in the Ivy League universities and their analogues in other parts of America.

But Professor Goldman seems to forget that there always have been two camps in the old Northeast, that this area, which doubtless has prevailed in intellectual and aesthetic, as well as in economic and social, leadership, is not homogeneous and has nurtured throughout this middle third of the century a sturdy and increasingly worried, and by 1968 all but despairing, dissent from the Metroamerican views that actually have prevailed. As early as 1913, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., indubitably a Northeast American intellectual leader, warned that "law and order pay." The

phrase about the revolution of rising expectations had not been formed, but as long ago as 1913 Holmes observed that he could

understand a man's saying . . . I want this or that and I am willing to pay the price, if he realizes what the price is. What I most fear is saying the same thing when those who say it do not know and have made no serious effort to find out what it will cost. . . .

Twenty years later Joseph Eastman described the preferential treatment accorded trade unionists under the anti-racketeering laws as a "shameful fact." Eighteen years after that, a leading journal of Metroamerica published a warning that anything like a normal peace with the Soviet Union was impossible, "since the Soviet Union is not at peace within itself," and so is incapable of firm compacts with states consensually governed.

But, as stated, these propositions were all from the minority Metroamericans. And at length, in the aftermath of Senator Joseph McCarthy, Seymour Martin Lipset, now teaching at Harvard but then at Berkeley, conceded that "the liberal consensus within the academic community has served to intimidate conservatives much more than outside prying and criticism have inhibited those left-of-center."

In the very months in which Professor Goldman was completing his manuscript, however, and with rising momentum since the book was published, the ideas prevailing in Metroamerica—and their consequences—have attracted new attention. And if he is right in saying it was majority Metroamerica which dealt Lyndon Johnson out of play, it may be that we approach a reassessment of Metroamerica's credentials as caller of the turns. A northeastern college president explains that the kids who seized his buildings "have absorbed well the ideas we taught them. What they demand now is that we put these ideas into practice." A distinguished biologist agrees that the trouble "is not student trouble but adult trouble. We made a mess of things:

If adults exhibited a fair amount of unrest, students would be glad to stay in their classes to prepare for the better world we keep telling them about. . . ." Indeed says the college president, "I cannot argue with them when they know that our gross national product increases by more than a billion dollars a week and they know that this increase alone would solve the nation's problems of health and education. . . ." (Commerce Department figures put the GNP rate of increase at some \$16 billion a year.)

Yet the very circumstances in which they speak suggest one lesson which the liberal consensus has failed to communicate to the student radicals. The majority, the college president is quoted as saying, wanted due process for themselves but were not at all sure they could accord the same to their elders. Their elders, professional and parental, had forgotten to transmit Justice Holmes' admonition that law and order pay. The kids had seen a presidential campaign turn in part on the allegation of their teachers and parents that "law and order" was undeniable mere code for race hatred. They had seen whole platoons of "moderate" professors instantly "radicalized" by the appearance of police on campus to cope with crime. Those of them who had heard of their elder's heroic defense of freedom against the merely rhetorical terrorism of Senator McCarthy, had seen the same men or their successors easing admissions, altering curricula, and recruiting faculty under direct coercion of trespass, breaking and entering, kidnapping, arson, and mayhem by the kids. "The liberal society can absorb any revolution if we reject all elements of it that attack the procedures and modes through which liberal society renews itself," said the college president when the kids finally let him out of his own office. Now, he tells us! In both domestic and foreign policy the liberal consensus still pushes the rising expectations, still does not know what they will cost or how to achieve them, and is only now abruptly aware that ways and means are

an ineluctable factor in the equation. We have a war to finish abroad, a country to rehabilitate at home, and have bungled the skills for weaving both jobs into a pattern. Lyndon Johnson is part of that bungling, but it is not his bungling alone, nor exclusively his responsibility.

Reviewed by C.P. IVES

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### *A Compulsive Apologist*

**Fidel Castro**, by Herbert L. Matthews.  
New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969.  
382 pp. \$6.95

IN FEBRUARY 1957, *New York Times* correspondent Herbert Matthews interviewed Fidel Castro in the Sierra Maestra and began a series of articles which, in his own words, "literally altered the course of Cuban history." Now retired from the *Times* Matthews, at age sixty-nine, has published a biography of Castro which contains no surprises and which is the almost inevitable product of Matthews' continuing admiration for the Cuban Maximum Leader whose fortunes he once revived.

Central to an evaluation of this biography is an understanding of the author and his peculiar approach to his subject. In an earlier book *The Cuban Story*, Matthews wrote: "What does one know of this revolution who does not know Fidel?" This same perspective underlies *Fidel Castro*. Much of the book is an effort to refute many of the major conclusions reached by Theodore Draper, Andrés Suárez, and Boris Goedenberg, who have made studies of the Cuban Revolution without the bene-