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precision, Professor Divine has revised contemporary notions of both Eisenhower and the presidency.

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Merle Miller, *Lyndon Johnson: An Oral Biography* (Putnam, New York 1980), 645 pages cloth, \$17.95.

Biography has long been a popular literary form for the mass reading public. As of late, however, several serious and important biographies of political figures have appeared which bridge the gap between the popular and scholarly audiences. Ronald Steel's heralded narrative of the long and influential life of Walter Lipmann provided a perfect vantage point for viewing much of "the American Century" of politics. The first volume of Edmund Morris' biography of Theodore Roosevelt presents a penetrating and readable account of the early political career of the young president-to-be. William S. McFeely's recent biography of Grant is suitable reading for students of American history and the presidency, as well as for a wider audience.

Merle Miller's study of Lyndon Johnson offers less for scholars and browsers alike. Miller, author of several novels as well as the best-selling biography of Harry Truman, *Plain Speaking*, has again employed his technique of "oral history" in the examination of the life of an American president. The result is uneven, though certainly interesting. An extraordinary character such as Lyndon Johnson could make a success out of virtually any attempt at biography, and indeed Miller's book is most fascinating when LBJ's exuberant personality comes through the text and attacks the reader.

Surely, the main difficulty with Miller's "oral biography" is its methodology. This self-proclaimed "new way of dealing with the men and women and the events of the recent past" amounts to little more than stringing together over five hundred pages

of reminiscences, quotes and speeches by and about Johnson. Miller attributes this "methodology" to Professor Allan Nevins of Columbia University, but one could assume Nevins had something more sophisticated in mind when he suggested the use of "taped interviews" would be a "valuable addition to the historical record." Plainly, the historian of recent politics must turn to tapes and interviews to comprehend his subject. However, history is more than just the sum of those tapes and interviews. Miller has put together his interesting data with a loose and unimpressive narrative of Johnson's political career. The biography would have been hardly less informative had Miller chosen not to contribute a single word of his own.

While Miller's approach to history makes for highly interesting reading, his methodology puts the work outside the scope of serious scholarship. There are some references here, but most of the account is based upon verbal testimony. The book is a series of anecdotes and personal accounts of conversation with and about the President. Still, if this is not history as we know it (and need in regard to LBJ), it does provide a fascinating glimpse of an enormously complex politician.

Lyndon Johnson could bully, cajole, and manipulate as well as any political figure in Washington politics. Miller's oral history is particularly revealing in showing Johnson at work. He clearly was at his best in the Senate—bargaining, dealing, and always perceptive of his strengths and weaknesses in his role as leader of his party. Because Miller focuses upon personality, he is especially successful in presenting a portrait of Johnson in the vice presidency where his enormous ego obviously suffered greatly. Also, the personal accounts of the Kennedy assassination and Johnson's response are quite moving. One disappointment, though, is Miller's handling of the Johnson ventures into the Dominican Republic and Vietnam. Much that has been written about Johnson has revolved around presidential personality (or "presidential character" as James David Barber describes it). Was

Johnson's response to these situations somehow a reflection of his own personality? Psychological reductionism hardly provides adequate explanation in political analysis; yet, one would expect more insight into the connection between Johnson's grandiose self-perception and these military struggles. At least Miller spares his reader the annoying and amateurish psychoanalyzing that mars Doris Kearns' otherwise more perceptive biography of Johnson.

Johnson was at or near the center of political power in Washington for three decades, from his arrival in the House in 1937 as an ardent supporter of Roosevelt and the New Deal, to his emergence in the 1950's as the skillful leader of his party in the Senate, to his dramatic rise to the Presidency. One would expect to take in more of the politics of the era in a biography of such a central figure. Johnson was engaged in the battle for civil rights legislation, the censure of McCarthy, and the escalation in Vietnam; yet, little beyond Johnson himself emerges from this work. There is none of the breadth and insight into American politics that is found in other recent political biographies, especially Steel's. "Oral history" makes for good after-dinner conversation, but it is not well-suited to capturing the politics of an era.

Merle Miller's book is more successful in capturing the essence of Lyndon Johnson. Many of those who have written about him have been much too close to remain objective and free from the influence of their personal relations with Johnson. Miller is neither awed nor revolted by his subject, and so the presentation is at least fair-minded. Even his treatment of Johnson's notoriously crude manners is developed to persuade the reader that LBJ was simply "natural" and "uninhibited" rather than vulgar.

Despite the compelling portrait of a president, Miller contributes little new to an understanding of the divisive political conflicts Johnson generated. This biography offers more for the popular reading audience; scholars of the presidency will be interested, but will have to await books such as Robert Caro's for a comprehen-

sive analysis of this president and his politics.

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Jacob K. Javits with Rafael Steinberg, *Javits: The Autobiography of a Public Man* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), xii, 528 pp., cloth, \$16.95.

A note of sadness rings from *Javits: The Autobiography of a Public Man*, for you get the impression that the former senator from New York was not ready to write this book. Until his defeat by a relatively obscure party member from Nassau County, Javits was one of the foremost national legislative leaders. He shaped many key laws of the 1960s and 1970s, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Medicare, the National Endowment for the Arts, the War Powers Resolution, and ERISA. His influence in foreign affairs was enormous. Had he been re-elected, he would have become Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—"a life-long dream" of the senator's (p. 490). Although he admittedly waffled before deciding to run again in 1980—and that vacillation probably contributed to his defeat—Jacob Javits had no desire to retire and write his memoirs. His wife was afraid that his life might be endangered if he left the senate; and, as he says candidly, being a senator is what he knows how to do best.

Javitis must not be read for its literary value. Its style is immature and at times flabby. The sections meant to be exciting fail to arouse, and the romantic passages about his wife, Marian, fail to evoke. If you compare the chapter about his confrontation with Senator Joseph McCarthy with, say, Theodore White's bout with HUAC as described in *In Search of History* (both men had substantially similar experiences with favorable results), the shortfalls in Javits' prose become clear.

But Senator Javits is not the least bit pretentious, and he hastens to admit that he never was a good journalist. So we can