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Mansfield cover II (nation)

Mansfield's views on the leadership:

"How I'd love to be back teaching the theory," exclaimed Mike Mansfield, one-time professor of Oriental history. "When I was at the University of Montana, I knew all the answers from the book."

Mansfield, his temples greying now, has been confronted as Senator and as Senate Majority leader not with a theory but with a condition — the extraordinary condition that is the U.S. Senate. And he has built his career as Senator and as floor leader out of his own responses to that condition. A strange mix of parochialism and national responsibility he has combined to shape his working day. And the whole has been conditioned by his own almost unique personality.
"Hansfield has one unique distinction that sets him apart from just about every other person in public life — and certainly from his 99 colleagues in the Senate: his extraordinary modesty.

Nay, his nearly abject humility.

He categorically refuses to take the slightest credit for any success in running the Senate. If anything beneficial has somehow been performed by the Senate, the entire credit belongs to the Senate — his 99 fellows. But if anything goes wrong in the Senate, he tries as hard as he can to collect the full blame for it. By his own definition of success, he has embarked on a career as floor leader in which success, even the slightest success, has been forever forbidden.

"They are too kind," he said once of his critics. "I can think of no criticism made of me that has not been just."

He even deplores being called "leader." Hear his method of definition here: "In the Senate, the word 'leader' is a misnomer. You don't lead. You try to see what the Senators want and then you follow. I am a follower."
He literally abhors publicity or any abnormal notoriety. Knowing this, we used a somewhat different method of informing him that he had been selected for a Time cover. "Senator," I said, "I have very bad news for you." "What is that?" he asked. "We're going to put your face on Time's cover." His face flushed with a tinge of anger and embarrassment.

"That is bad news," he said, grimly. "Publicity is something I don't need."

His entire attitude about being a senator reflects deeply his own peculiar sense of self-abnegation. He declines to believe he is in any way particularly qualified for the post -- he believes there are literally thousands of persons in people-poor Montana who are better qualified than he, that he was elected only by luck and the happenstance of events.

"The job of senator is serious," he said, "but we're pretty expendable. We're the employees, the servants of the Senate. We represent the Senate temporarily. We people the institutions of the Senate."

Even in describing his athletic prowess as a youth on the football team of the Montana School of Mines, he sticks to the same deep modesty. "I was the oldest and slowest fellow on the team. I was number sixteen on a squad of sixteen." He played end or tackle "or wherever they needed me." "I caught one pass in my season on the team — and I was outside the lines when I caught it." So it didn't
He is a man who takes great pride in his openness.

"When it comes to parliamentary tricks," he says of his floor leadership, "I have none. And if I had any, I wouldn't use them. An open door policy is the only way I can operate. It's the only way I can hold the trust of my colleagues."

"I make no deals of any kind. There's a lot of talk on how we operate up here. The only way is to let all the senators know all the time what we're doing, and trust in their maturity, their intelligence and their love of country."

Mansfield radically differed from Lyndon Johnson in how he thought the Majority leader should act in two primary areas — the first on the control of Senate power and the second on the means of persuading his fellow senators. Where Johnson claimed to himself the actual floor leadership, Mansfield preferred to disperse that power among his most talented and senior allies in the Democratic party. Where Johnson whip-lashed his colleagues into party line, Mansfield preferred to appeal solely to their intellect.

In both areas of approach to the leadership, Johnson and Mansfield reflected perfectly their own inner personalities — the egoist as against the self-deprecating man.
Johnson has always held Mansfield's utter regard. He supported
Johnson for President against Kennedy in the 1960 race. (Significantly, he
did not try to knock in line his own Montana delegation to the Democratic
convention and the members split their votes among the various candidates.)
But, patently, Mansfield infinitely admired Kennedy more as a man than he did
or does Johnson. Johnson had been Mansfield's chief sponsor in the Senate.
Johnson named Mansfield as his whip and assistant leader — and Mansfield
was loyal to him in the Democratic convention, as he was on the floor as his
whip and as he is now as President Johnson's chief lieutenant in the Senate.

But, here, let's let Mansfield describe in his own words
how utterly he and Johnson are different types of men:

"He was an extrovert — I am an introvert," says Mansfield
of Johnson. "He was outgoing — I was a loner and still am. He was enthusiastic
in his pursuits, about everything — and I'm kind of reserved. He had a great
parliamentary talent for welding his colleagues together that I do not possess.
He is a proud man. He always thinks of victory — but he never forgets the
policy of compromise. I always seek victory, but I recognize that there are
so many divergent avenues that I take a half foot rather than none. He would
took but I do so less grudgingly."
"He used always to say 'Come, let us reason together.'

He did that in his own way, and I try to do it in my way. We are not similar men. Although basically we are similar in what we seek, what we want, what we hope for our country. He was extraordinary — magnificent."

But mark how startlingly different are Mansfield's views about John Kennedy:

"He was a great man," says Mansfield of Kennedy, "who never had a chance to fulfill his destiny. He was a man among men. He had a cool exterior, but he had his inner torments because of the decisions that confronted him. He trusted me implicitly. He was understanding, decent, kind, and he had a grace and a style that set well on him and on the Presidency.

He had a humaneness that a lot of people didn't understand.

"John Kennedy was everything I'd like to be and what I would like my son to be if I had a son. There are too few like him."

Mansfield attempted to establish an oligarchy of the talented men in the Senate — giving to each Committee chairman, for example, full responsibility for each major bill to emerge from his committee.

He pushed Humphrey into an utterly responsible post as party whip — and made of it something more than the meaningless job of whip that Mansfield held under Lyndon Johnson. But even so, Mansfield intended from the beginning to be leader.
But as he understood the leader's role,

Despite his renowned diffidence and modesty, Mansfield was unwilling to disperse his job -- as he understood it -- among others of his colleagues.

"There can be only one majority leader," Mansfield said in 1961, and that was Mansfield himself.

It was not a Mansfield's distaste in accepting the post that led to the appearance of his not asserting the prerogatives of the highest job in the Senate. Rather it was the chiaroscuro contrast of his approach to the job as against that of Lyndon Johnson. It was not that they were dissimilar men: they were opposites. And even though opposites, Mansfield has the highest possible opinion of Johnson as majority leader.

"In my opinion," said Mansfield of Johnson, "he was the best majority leader the Senate has ever had. He was a great strategist, a great parliamentarian, a great leader. He had a verve for the job; he was just wound up in it."
And he refuses to use the whips on the boys, to threaten or cajole them. Such tactics Mansfield not only eschews; he simply is not capable of them. They categorically offend his very nature as a man. He has an entirely different approach, the soft sell as against the hard sell or the forced sale.

"I hope through logic," he says, "that enough of my colleagues will come along. At times enough doubts have been resolved that they do. I've always urged the Democrats to vote as their consciences dictated, but if they had any doubts to give the Administration the benefit of that doubt. People mostly give me the benefit of their doubt."

This technique, one that essentially respects the integrity of his fellows, Mansfield has coupled with an easy schedule of senate sessions. He has never seen much point in holding the Senate in session late in the day unless there was some prospects of getting some business done, of getting some votes taken.

"I've tried to hold the Senate to a reasonable hour, so senators could get home to their families for dinner," says Mansfield.
Here's how Mansfield described his approach to leadership in 1961, shortly after he took floor command: "I'm not the leader, really. They don't do what I tell them. I do what they tell me. We've had a dispersal of responsibility. How can I know everything that's going on? The brains are in the committees."

And Mansfield intends to use those brains in the Senate's service.

"I have found that there is a great difference between the theory of politics as I used to teach it, and the practice of politics as I have to practice it."

"I operate on the theory, and I believe in this wholeheartedly, that every senator regardless of what he stands for he takes is an equal, he is on an equal basis with every other senator and I treat them all alike. I expect to be treated as courteously in return, and I am. I do not believe in arm-twisting. I do not ask a Senator to vote one way or the other. I hope by logic and persuasion that he can be brought to see the light if need be, but each senator is there to vote as he sees fit, as he thinks best. And each senator has as much right as the next senator to vote one way or the other."
That was the theory which Mansfield started to practice — in marked contrast to the arm-twisting vemdettas engaged in by Lyndon Johnson — in 1961. How has he found the results? In 1963, he made this answer: "frustrating, exhilarating, and depressing." But it's Mansfield's way, and he is committed to it.

And here's how he described why he got frustrated and even depressed at time by the antics of his colleagues. He has leaned over backwards to accommodate the Senate schedule to their demands.

"I must say I've been at fault many times in that respect.

But when you have people, colleagues, come to you two or three times as week and say, 'Please don't bring up this bill on that day,' 'Please don't vote at this hour,' 'I have an engagement out home and I can't be here,' it places the leadership in a very difficult position, because the leadership cannot tell a senator to stay on the floor. He can ask those members to stay on the floor, but they can thumb their noses at him and they do it quite often.

"As I said before, the leadership has no real power, none at all. He has to operate on the basis of persuasion, accommodation, understanding, but he has to expect something like that in return....
"I have bent perhaps too often to extend favors of this kind to my colleagues. I have been criticized. The criticism is justified. But I do not know how else to operate if the Members themselves do not show a sense of maturity and recognize the fact that their job is here, to represent the people and the states, and that their engagements are of secondary importance."

In 1962, he made a similar statement of his views of the leadership, this time on the literacy test bill: "Obviously, it does not lie in the power and it most certainly not lie in the inclination of the Leadership to compel the Senate to act in one fashion or another or to act at all on this issue. The leadership will not engage in sham battles of any kind or any other kind of battles with any member or group of members of this body. The Leadership is in every sense a creature of the Senate, a servant of the Senate. It will try to act impartially in its regard for the equal rights and privileges of all members, conscious always of the continuing history of this body."
And here again, in 1963, Mansfield restates once more his theme of leadership and responsibility, this time in the face of a mounting storm of criticism. The date was November 27, and the speech was prepared before Kennedy was killed. Mansfield, because of Kennedy's death, did not read it to the Senate but placed it in the Congressional Record.
Let me turn briefly, now, to another matter, to the matter which is before the Rules Committee, a matter which has cast a shadow of uncertainty over the Senate. I do not presume to look down upon any man from some Olympian height of a superior morality. Most certainly will I not do so when we ourselves are largely to blame for the difficulties which have arisen because it is we who are responsible as a body and we provided little guidance in these matters to staff officials of the Senate. Can we say in good conscience that we made it clear that in the Senate we demanded more of ourselves and, hence, expected more of all those associated with us in the higher interests of this institution and the nation which it serves?

That, Mr. President, is the deeper question which is before the Rules Committee. And the answer which we give to it will affect this institution more deeply and for a long time after the sensationalism of the moment is forgotten.

I turn, finally, to the recent criticism which has been raised as to the quality of the leadership. I do not question the right of anyone to raise this question—certainly not the right of the Senate and the press, to do so. I regard every Member with respect and esteem and every Member in his own way has reciprocated that sentiment, and I am sure that no Member intends to do me ill. As for the press, it has been invariably fair, even kind, in its treatment of me personally. I have never been misquoted on any remarks I have made in the Senate and only on rare occasions have I been misinterpreted and, even then, understandably so.