

Power and Pragmatism
Lyndon B. Johnson: Hill Country Politico to Congressman, 1908-1941

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Lyndon Johnson once said: “I seldom think of politics more than eighteen hours a day.” Driven by a ravenous need to accumulate power and exercise control over others, Lyndon Johnson was obsessed with politics, and was determined to win the Presidency. Although indeed partially ideologically motivated to help the most impoverished members of American society, Johnson was not an idealistic crusader, but instead an intense pragmatist who almost always made the political choices that would best advance his career and increase the amount the power he possessed, not the choices that would most immediately benefit society. Johnson’s desire to accumulate power is rooted in a complex set of motivators, each of which played an intricate role in the development of his political ambition. Having witnessed his father’s downfall from a state legislator to a disrespected member of the Texas Hill Country, Lyndon Johnson possessed a strong desire to repair his family’s reputation. The Hill Country also exposed Johnson to the suffering that many Americans endured simply because of the unlucky circumstances of their birth. Johnson was motivated to help these underprivileged Americans, but not at the expense of his own political viability. And, to ensure his political viability Johnson employed a wide array of techniques to consolidate power. Johnson developed close connections with influential Washington politicians, and courted the backing of wealthy Texas business interests, using these friendships and connections to make himself useful to his colleagues in Congress. In addition, Johnson was careful not to fall victim to the idealism that plagued his father by not taking controversial positions and making ideological stances, thus preserving his future political viability, and revealing his belief that to achieve the power necessary to create positive change, one must employ calculated pragmatism.

Psychological Motivations

The ascension of Lyndon Johnson to the presidency has its roots deeply embedded within the desolation of the Texas Hill Country. Characterized by “250 miles of featureless...plains,” the Hill Country “was a trap” for all those who dared to enter it.¹ Those who settled in the Hill Country consciously “left civilization as far behind as safety,” as conditions in the Hill Country were far “more primitive than in other states.”² The plains of central Texas were so inhospitable that they “required an end to illusions, to dreams, to flights into the imagination—to all the escapes from reality that comfort men—for in a land so merciless, the faintest romantic tinge to a view of life might result not just in hardship but in doom.”³ This is the land in which Lyndon Johnson’s family chose to settle. But, the Johnsons “were impractical”—they “were dreamers” who had “a streak of romanticism in them.”⁴ The Johnsons were idealists who aimed to conquer the hostility of the Hill Country. Sam Johnson, Lyndon Johnson’s father and a son of the Hill Country, had an insatiable ambition “to become something more than a farmer.”⁵ However, he found it difficult to emerge from the tight grip of Hill Country poverty, and “he found it necessary to make a living immediately” instead of pursuing his ambitions.⁶ Sam Johnson was forced to put his ambitions on hold, and conform to the realities of the Hill Country—although he always strived to be something more than a farmer, a farmer is what he was forced to be.

Although the Hill Country trapped him, Sam Johnson did not let go of his ambition to become something more than a Texas farmer. In 1904, Johnson decided to run to fill the seat of the 89th District in the Texas House of Representatives. Johnson defeated his opponent, and

¹ Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1982), 8.

² *Ibid*, 17.

³ *Ibid*, 26.

⁴ *Ibid*, 27.

⁵ *Ibid*, 41.

⁶ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 42.

found a home in the State House in Austin—“the young man who had hated the cornfields found that he loved the cloakrooms.”⁷ A master of persuasion and legislating, Sam Johnson felt comfortable in the Texas State House, and began to identify himself as a champion of populist causes.⁸ Like his family who had previously settled in the Texas Hill Country, Johnson possessed a strong sense of idealism—a quality lacking among the many state legislators who “trade[d] votes for cash” and accepted the offers of powerful lobbyists to “pay for their Austin meals and hotel bills” to offset the “low salaries” that legislators were paid.⁹ Johnson was a populist; “he fought against...powerful” interests such as the “Texas Medical Association;” he fought to “regulate banks [and] railroads,” and to “force producers of sulphur, oil, and natural gas to pay through taxes enough to ameliorate the living conditions of the people of the state from whose earth they were mining such immense wealth.”¹⁰

As a young boy, Lyndon Johnson was drawn to his father’s idealism and political involvement. Even at the age of three, Lyndon would follow his father to the barbershop, “where he insisted on sitting in a chair, having his hair covered with lather, and...getting a shave like Sam.”¹¹ When Lyndon turned ten, “Sam began taking him to the legislature, where [he] would ‘sit in the gallery for hours watching all the activity on the floor and then would wander around the halls trying to figure out what was going on.’”¹² But, Lyndon enjoyed “going with [his father] on the campaign trail” even more than going with him to Austin to observe the legislature.¹³ From a young age, politics was “engrained” in Lyndon Johnson; he was exposed to

⁷ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 44.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹¹ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908- 1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 49.

¹² *Ibid.*, 50.

¹³ *Ibid.*

the art of legislating, and to the importance of retail politics.¹⁴ Lyndon Johnson grew up in a “highly politicized” home—an environment conducive for “endowing children with the motivation prerequisites for later [political] participation.”¹⁵ By being exposed to politics at such a young age, Lyndon Johnson was instilled with “the belief that [he had] the power to take part in the democratic process,”¹⁶ giving fuel to his political ambition by making him believe that he too could be a political figure like his father, and thus “significantly increase[ing] [his] propensity to consider running for office as an adult.”¹⁷

But, while Sam Johnson’s idealistic political career did undoubtedly contribute to the development of Lyndon Johnson’s political ambition, Sam’s idealism proved fatal to his financial success, causing a rift to emerge between Sam and his son that would prove to not be repairable and would also help fuel his son’s political ambitions. Because so many legislators were complicit in legislating on behalf of entrenched and powerful interests in Texas, such as oil and gas interests, banking interests, and the railroads, “state jobs—better paying than legislative seats—were available to many...legislators.”¹⁸ However, Sam Johnson “refused to come to terms with the realities of Austin,” and thus when he sought a better paying job, he received no offers.¹⁹ Because Sam Johnson could not make a better living by obtaining a state job, he had to find a way to supplement his income as a state legislator. When he was not “in Austin for a legislative session or driving a hundred miles to...help a Civil War veteran get his pension,” Sam would work “hard at real-estatin’.”²⁰ Unfortunately, the same idealism that plagued Sam Johnson in Austin plagued him in his real estate investments as well. Upon the death of Sam’s mother in

¹⁴ Dallek, 51.

¹⁵ Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox, *It Still Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don’t Run for Office*, Rev. ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 65.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 66.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 68.

¹⁸ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 49.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 49.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 85.

1917, Sam knew that he had to keep her most prized possession—the Johnson farm, a 433 acre piece of land in the Hill Country—in the family.²¹ Unwilling to allow the farm to be sold to an outsider, or divided up amongst his siblings, Sam bought the ranch—an investment that was a consequence of “the old Johnson pride,” and an investment marked by his ambition to “restor[e] the once-grand Johnson fortunes.”²² However, to restore these fortunes, and to fulfill his idealism of remaking the Pedernales Valley back into “Johnson Country,” Sam Johnson was forced to not only “sell every piece of property he owned,” but also had to place a “mortgage of \$15,000” on the property and borrow “additional money from at least three banks, going deeply into debt.”²³

Falling victim to the same legislative idealism that plagued him in his failed search for a state job, Sam Johnson’s idealistic goal of restoring the Johnson Ranch to its former glory clouded his judgment, causing him to minimize the harshness of the Hill Country—the routine failure of the Hill Country soil to lift farmers out of poverty. He made a “stand” in the “cotton field” that was as “gallant as any he had made in the cloakroom...trying to make [the] soil pay out the dreams he had planted in it.”²⁴ But, just as Austin was hostile to idealistic lawmakers, “the Hill County was a land that broke romantics, dreamers, wishful thinkers, and idealists—it broke Sam Johnson.”²⁵ Not long after purchasing the ranch, Sam defaulted on the payments, and lost the ranch to the mortgage holder. However, not only did Sam lose the ranch, but also he “still owed banks the money he had borrowed” to pay for farming equipment; and, “he still owed” money to “merchants” all over the Pedernales Valley.²⁶ The Johnson family was forced to leave the farm and move back to Johnson City, where Sam Johnson’s reputation, and therefore

²¹ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 85-86.

²² *Ibid*, 86.

²³ *Ibid*, 87.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 89.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 90.

the reputation of the Johnson family, was severely damaged. Facing financial ruin, and owing money to people all across the valley, Sam Johnson faced ridicule from those who had formerly viewed him with great esteem and respect. Johnson was “unable to pay back bills at Johnson City stores,” and was forced to travel to other Hill Country towns to find merchants who would extend him credit.²⁷

The demise of Sam Johnson not only as a politician, but as a respectable member of the Texas Hill Country, not only ruined Sam Johnson, but it also destroyed his relationship with his son, Lyndon. As his father continued to fall deeper into debt, and continued to lose the respect he had once garnered from the Hill Country community, “the distance between” Lyndon and his father “became wider and wider and Lyndon’s rebelliousness and disdain became more and more evident.”²⁸ Whereas Lyndon Johnson clung to his father on the campaign trail, and relished the opportunity to accompany his father to the State House in Austin, after Sam Johnson was ruined by his idealism and by the harshness of the Hill Country soil, “defiance” of his father “became a predominant feature of his behavior.”²⁹ Lyndon began to defy his father by sneaking the car out “after his parents had gone to sleep,” and by “ignor[ing] his [father’s] orders” such as “not to use his shaving mug.”³⁰ Lyndon Johnson witnessed how his father was destroyed by his idealism, and how Sam Johnson’s romanticism impoverished the Johnson family, tarnishing the family’s reputation. Sam Johnson had gone from respected legislator—a populist who worked tirelessly on behalf of his constituents—to a member of society who faced ridicule from the people he at one time represented in Austin. Witnessing his father’s fall from respected politician to mocked citizen, and his family’s fall from respect to scorn, fueled Lyndon Johnson’s political ambition,

²⁷ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 93.

²⁸ Robert E. Gilbert, “Lyndon B. Johnson’s Physical and Psychological Pain: The Years of Ascent,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26 (Summer, 1996): 703.

²⁹ Dallek, 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

instilling in him a passionate desire to “overcom[e]...a low respect position through the use of power and other available means.”³¹ Lyndon Johnson would use his father’s downfall to fuel his “burning ambition” to “restore” prestige to the Johnson family name, and to seek “revenge” on the forces of idealism and romanticism that “deprived” his father, and his family, of the power he believed they deserved.³² The destruction of his relationship with his father accentuates the importance of power and respectability to Lyndon Johnson; whereas Lyndon revered his father when he was an influential legislator and respected citizen, he rebelled against his father when he dragged his family deep into debt and eliminated the Johnson family’s respectability. Therefore, Lyndon Johnson’s political ambition was guided at least in part by a passionate rejection of idealism, and instead a full embrace of practicality and pragmatism—an insatiable desire to restore the Johnson name, to help his family emerge from the “marginal position” in society that they occupied after Sam Johnson’s failures.³³

Ideological Motivations

In addition to the psychological motivations associated with being exposed to, and surrounded by politics from a young age, and with witnessing the destruction of the fortune and reputation of his father and family, ideological motivations also account for a degree of Lyndon Johnson’s intense political ambition. While in college, as a teacher “at a Mexican-American grade school in Cotulla, Texas,” Lyndon Johnson was exposed to “one of the crummiest towns in all of Texas.”³⁴ Cotulla and the surrounding area “was a flat, treeless, wilderness” in which “three-quarters of the town’s inhabitants were Mexicans living in hovels or dilapidated shanties without indoor plumbing or electricity” who “worked at nearby ranches or farms for slave

³¹ Laswell, Harold Dwight. “The Political Personality,” in *Power and Personality* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1948), 50.

³²Ibid, 44.

³³Ibid, 50.

³⁴ Dallek, 77.

wages.”³⁵ The other residents in the town were white, and lived in better conditions—many lived in small houses and enjoyed conveniences such as electricity and plumbing. As a teacher in Cotulla’s segregated Mexican school, Johnson was exposed to students who were “mired in the slums...lashed by prejudice...[and] buried half alive in illiteracy.”³⁶ However, whereas “the other five teachers in the school...kept their distance from the children, doing the minimum required in their jobs,” Johnson “threw himself into his work with unbound energy.”³⁷ Johnson was not content with sitting idly by and watching his students suffer because of the difficult conditions to which they were born into, through no fault of their own. Rather, he was determined to give his students an opportunity to emerge from poverty.

Believing that the Mexican-Americans he taught in Cotulla were hindered by circumstances beyond their control, “the wretched condition of his students struck a sympathetic chord in Lyndon Johnson.”³⁸ Johnson sympathized with his students because of his conviction that “his Mexican-American pupils possessed” genuine desires to be successful and productive citizens, but that these desires were being “stifled and denied...by the impoverishing conditions of their lots.”³⁹ Because they had the same desires to be successful as others who were born into conditions more favorable to success, Johnson believed that if given the same opportunities as other citizens, his students, too, would be able to achieve their respective dreams. Therefore, Johnson tirelessly served as an advocate for his students, and committed himself to ensuring that his students were given access to the same resources and educational instruction as other, more fortunate students. In fact, Johnson was so committed to guaranteeing that his students had

³⁵ Dallek, 77.

³⁶ Ibid, 78.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991),

access to all the resources they would need to succeed, he “invested half of his first month’s salary to buy” sporting equipment for his students so they could play, and develop an “ability to compete”—a skill Johnson deemed one must have to be successful. In addition, “Johnson refused to accept the fact that many of his students had never learned English,” because he was “convinced that without English their future opportunities would be severely limited.”⁴⁰ Consequently, Johnson forbade his students from speaking Spanish on school property.

The commitment to his students that Lyndon Johnson exhibited during his time teaching in Cotulla reveals the intensity of his compassion for the plight of his Mexican-American students, and his belief that giving the underprivileged an opportunity to emerge from poverty would allow even the most unfortunate people to achieve their dreams. His desire to give his students, and other underprivileged people like them, more opportunities to emerge from the depths of poverty is revealed by his unwavering advocacy on behalf of his students, and by his willingness to devote not only his time, but also his personal financial resources to give his students access to resources that could help make them better able to achieve success. As President, in his March 1965 “speech proposing the voting rights bill, [he] explained that his convictions on this issue were rooted in his experience as a teacher of Mexican-American students in Cotulla, Texas.”⁴¹ Johnson “told the joint session of Congress,” and the country, how his “students were poor...often [coming] to class without breakfast, hungry,” and how his students, “even in their youth [knew] the pain of injustice.”⁴² As he revealed in his speech introducing the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Lyndon Johnson’s experiences as a teacher in Cotulla, and the abject poverty amongst Mexican-Americans he witnessed while there, was at least in part what motivated him to seek an office that would allow him to pass legislation to give

⁴⁰ Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 66.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 64-65.

⁴² *Ibid*, 65.

those students, and millions like them, a chance to improve their lot. Johnson was motivated to seek political office in part because of the knowledge that with political power, he could personally have a hand in ensuring that those born into unfortunate circumstances would be given the opportunities necessary to guarantee that they, too, would be able to achieve their goals and dreams.

An Insatiable Desire for Power

While Lyndon Johnson's political ambition was indeed fueled in part by ideological motivations—a desire to use his accumulated power to help give the underprivileged the opportunities they need to emerge from the depths of poverty—Johnson was always pragmatic, and chose political viability over ideological purity. Johnson was motivated by an insatiable desire for power, and ultimately an innate need to dominate others. Sometimes he was forced to temporarily suppress his domineering nature in order to win the favor of others, but eventually, once he established the necessary relationships with colleagues and subordinates, he sought to, and would employ almost any means necessary, to dominate them. Furthermore, once Johnson had firmly established his domination over his subordinates, and established himself as a formidable figure, he took pains to ensure that those around him were aware of his power.

After being elected to the United States House of Representatives to represent the Fourteenth Congressional District of Texas in a 1931 special election, Richard Kleberg soon called Lyndon Johnson—a young man who had gained a reputation of being a wonder boy of Texas politics—to ask Johnson to accompany him to Washington and serve as his private secretary. Johnson jumped at the opportunity to join Kleberg on Capitol Hill, and once there, he sought to dominate. He saw a chance to satisfy his instinctive need to accumulate power in leading “The Little Congress”—a “moribund organization” modeled after the House of

Representatives that was created “in 1919 to provide congressional secretaries with experience in public speaking and a knowledge of parliamentary procedures.”⁴³ The Little Congress, however, had deteriorated into not much more than a social club, in which only a handful of congressional secretaries attended meetings.⁴⁴ But, Johnson harbored a desire to revive the Little Congress as a means of increasing his own power and visibility in Washington; and, as a congressional secretary who had just recently arrived in Washington, he devised a plan to become the organization’s Speaker. Johnson formed a coalition of new congressional secretaries and a group of “unfamiliar faces”—people such as mailmen who were on the “legislative payroll” but who previously had not participated in the Little Congress—to win an election that some veteran congressional secretaries claimed he stole by stuffing the ballot boxes with the votes of every Capitol Hill employee he could find.⁴⁵ His colleagues questioning the morality of the techniques Johnson employed to gain power within the Little Congress reveals how desperate of a desire he had to accumulate power, and how Johnson planned to utilize the Little Congress to further increase his own power. In his acceptance speech after being elected Speaker, Johnson, revealing his intentions to transform the Little Congress into an organization that was defined as something more important than a social club, enthusiastically proclaimed: “My election will mark a New Deal for all Little Congresses.”⁴⁶

After his election to the Speakership of the Little Congress, Johnson aimed to transform the organization from an inactive and meaningless one, into an organization that could help him accumulate power and establish a reputation in Washington. Immediately, “Johnson announced meetings would be held not every month but every week, and would include not only debates but

⁴³ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 261.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 263.

speeches by ‘prominent figures.’”⁴⁷ Johnson’s assistants knew the sole purpose of wanting to invite important speakers to address the Little Congress was so that Johnson would have “an excuse to go and see Huey Long or Tom Connally or a Texas Congressman who was head of a committee he thought he might need for something, and invite them to speak.”⁴⁸ Inviting powerful Congressman to speak to the Little Congress gave Johnson an excuse to see these men, and Johnson would ensure that each Congressman he invited to speak would “remember him.”⁴⁹

In addition to being able to accumulate power through the connections he made with influential Congressman, Johnson organized important debates in the Little Congress, and “he asked newspapers to cover them,” increasing the publicity of the organization, and consequently, as the organization’s leader, increasing Johnson’s media visibility.⁵⁰ The Little Congress held “votes on pending legislation,” and these votes became “previews of upcoming votes in the Big Congress,” causing the press to cover the Johnson-led organization more frequently.⁵¹ Indeed, press coverage of the Little Congress was so abundant, and the debate and votes in the Little Congress were such accurate predictors of how the debate and final vote on pending legislation would unfold, that “members of Congress wanted their bills debated by the Little Congress for publicity, and because it would help them prepare for debate on the floor.”⁵² As Speaker, “members of Congress” began respecting and “call[ing] upon” Lyndon Johnson to ensure that their respective bills were considered by the Little Congress. By making powerful Congressman reliant on him, Johnson revealed his need, and his ability to quickly consolidate his power. Johnson saw the Little Congress as a tool to make himself useful to Congressman—to make

⁴⁷ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 263.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 263-264.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 264.

them need him to help further their own political and legislative agendas. After revealing his need for power by arranging to have “the ballot box for the [Speakership] of the Little Congress stuffed with illegal ballots” just so he would ensure himself victory, once Johnson became Speaker, “he took pains to let everyone know he was on the inside...strutting to display not only his power but the fact that he had obtained the power by trickery.”⁵³ Johnson saw the Little Congress as more than a body that would teach congressional secretaries about policy issues and congressional procedure; he saw the Little Congress as “a means of entrée to men of power”—as a way to not only establish himself as a formidable figure on Capitol Hill, but as a way to prove to himself, and to others, that he was capable of accumulating power and commanding attention in Washington.⁵⁴ Johnson sought to dominate and control his colleagues, and to alert Capitol Hill of the power he was amassing—an indicator that his political ambition was in large part fueled by a deprived ego that he desired inflate.⁵⁵

Deciding to Seek National Office

With the death of Congressman James B. Buchanan of Texas’ Tenth Congressional District in 1937, Lyndon Johnson finally had an opportunity to seize the national power he had craved for so long. But, Johnson understood that he was not the frontrunner to win a special election to fill Buchanan’s seat; in fact, he knew his chances of winning the seat were poor. In addition to understanding that he “was not well known in the district,” Johnson also knew that he had to compete against “five veteran politicians,”⁵⁶ including “C.N. Avery, [a]...businessman who had been Buchanan’s campaign manager and secretary” and who claimed had been

⁵³ Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Means of Ascent* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1990), 8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 397.

⁵⁵ Laswell, 46.

⁵⁶ Dallek, 144.

“asked...to run” by Buchanan after he learned “he was dying.”⁵⁷ Avery was considered a logical successor by many members of the Austin political class—the city at the center of the Tenth District—but only if Buchanan’s wife, who most considered to be Buchanan’s natural replacement, decided not to run.⁵⁸ While Johnson knew he would have to contend with numerous formidable challengers, and with low name recognition in the district, he also knew his age was also a liability. At the age of twenty-eight, Johnson’s young age was a “drawback,” as “particularly in a farm district” where people are more “conservative in personal relationships,” people “place a high value on ‘experience.’”⁵⁹ The experience Johnson did have was helping the constituents of Richard Kleberg—residents of the Fourteenth District—and therefore the Tenth District “did not know what [Johnson] had done, or what he was capable of doing.”⁶⁰ After being appointed State Director of the National Youth Administration, Johnson did move to Austin, but the “directorship was not a job which entailed substantial contact with the public,” meaning that “in most of the district’s scores of small towns he would very hard put to find a single familiar face.”⁶¹

Although he was not considered by most of the political establishment to be a viable political candidate, the strength of Johnson’s ambition—his insatiable desire to emerge onto the national stage as a recognizable figure who could someday be President of the United States—propelled him to launch himself into the race to fill Buchanan’s empty seat. After hearing of Buchanan’s death, Johnson “couldn’t focus on [his] day’s work” as Texas State Director of the National Youth Administration; instead, he “kept thinking this was [his] district and this was

⁵⁷ Dallek, 147.

⁵⁸ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 390.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 391.

[his] chance.”⁶² Johnson was so excited simply about the prospect of running for Congress that ““there were times when [he] thought [he’d] explode from all the excitement bottled up inside.”⁶³ Indeed, Johnson viewed the special election to fill Buchanan’s seat as “quite possibly his only chance” to be elected to national office “for years and years to come” because “once Texas sent a man to Congress, Texas kept him there.”⁶⁴ Long tenures in Congress were not unusual for elected representatives from Texas; the Texas House delegation had an average tenure of fourteen years—longer than that of any other state.⁶⁵ Texas political history revealed to Johnson that “the man who won Buchanan’s seat would be in that seat to stay,” and he therefore understood that he had to take advantage of the opportunity to run.⁶⁶ Johnson knew that “a seat in the House of Representatives” was the first step on the “only ladder he wanted to climb”—elected national office—and was “indispensable” to the point that “until” he took that step “the others would be out of reach.”⁶⁷ Although the political environment was not ideally conducive for Johnson to win the special election, his need to climb the national political ladder motivated him to seek a seat in Congress. Johnson knew that because Texans typically stayed in Congress for long tenures, taking a risk and entering the special election to fill Buchanan’s seat might be his only opportunity to reach Congress for the foreseeable future. He viewed a seat in the House of Representatives as the most effective way to emerge onto the national political stage—a crucial step towards his goal of winning the presidency—and therefore, even though the prospects were not good, his desire to reach “that last rung” of the political ladder “which he never spoke of” convinced him to enter the race.⁶⁸

⁶² Dallek, 144.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 389.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Formulating a Winning Strategy

Because he was considered such an underdog in the 10th Congressional District special election, Johnson needed to develop an effective strategy in order to achieve his goal of being elected to national office. Part of the Democratic solid south, Texas voters “had...supported the Roosevelt administration’s response to the Great Depression,” and in his 1936 re-election bid, “87 percent of Texas voters” casted their ballots for President Roosevelt.⁶⁹ Johnson and his campaign strategists formulated a strategy in which Johnson’s campaign would wholeheartedly endorse President Roosevelt, and any program he had passed, or will pass in the future. The centerpiece of the campaign would be Johnson’s unequivocal endorsement of President Roosevelt and his policies. By being more vocal in his support of President Roosevelt and his New Deal than other candidates in the race, Johnson “distinguish[ed] himself from the rest of the crowded field,” and solved his problem of lack of name recognition by making him “easily recognized by voters” as “FDR’s man.”⁷⁰ In addition, by strongly supporting the President, Johnson was able to “ride Roosevelt’s ‘coattails’ in Central Texas where the president was extraordinarily popular” and received both “behind-the-scenes” and “overt” support from the Roosevelt Administration.

While Johnson’s support of President Roosevelt certainly helped increase both his name recognition and support in his Congressional race, his ability to raise money and effectively spend it also helped him win an election that the political establishment said he could not win. To begin his campaign, Johnson solicited a \$10,000 contribution from Lady Bird Johnson’s father; however, Johnson always had a burning need to raise additional money. Thus, “Johnson personally importuned successful businessmen he had dealt with as [Texas State] NYA Director”

⁶⁹ Patrick L. Hughes, “The Election of a Texas New Dealer: Lyndon Johnson’s 1937 Race for Congress,” <http://www.austinecc.edu/lpatrick/his2341/election.html> (accessed November 14, 2012).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

and he commissioned Secretary of State Ed Clark, a strong Johnson supporter, to solicit “funds from state employees and those doing business with the State of Texas.”⁷¹ Many believe Johnson was able to raise between \$75,000 and \$100,000 in his first race for Congress, “a figure that would make the campaign one of the most expensive congressional races in Texas history up to that time.”⁷² But, not only was Johnson able to raise large sums of money—amounts so large that “his opponents simply couldn’t keep up—but he was also able to spend this money effectively, concentrating almost exclusively of the central message of his campaign: being “FDR’s man.”⁷³

Just as Johnson passionately threw himself into his work helping Mexican-American students in Cotulla, Johnson dedicated himself completely to his work on the campaign trail, making a concerted and ultimately a successful effort to campaign harder, and meet and shake the hands of more Texans than any of his opponents. Johnson wanted to win the special election so badly that he began to campaign even before Texas Governor Allred announced the date of the special election. Determined to make an effective appeal to Texas voters, Johnson “worked like a man possessed from before sun-up till well after midnight,” racing “across the 8,000 square miles of the Tenth District speaking at rallies, attending barbecues he paid to stage, consulting with political leaders, and talking with every single voter he could possibly find.”⁷⁴ Moreover, Johnson did not limit his campaign efforts to the larger cities in the district, and instead focused also on reaching out to rural voters, driving to “individual farms and ranches, flattering them by his attention and appealing to their sense of political isolation.”⁷⁵ By working tirelessly to win the votes of rural voters, and by demanding that “each and every person who worked for him—whether friends from school days at Southwest Texas State or staffers from the

⁷¹ Hughes.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

NYA office—work just as long and as hard as he did,” Johnson was able to win the election by a plurality of 3,000 votes largely because he won four of the five rural Hill Country counties by overwhelming margins.⁷⁶

Becoming Roosevelt’s Man in Congress

After running for Congress as an adamant supporter of President Roosevelt’s New Deal programs, Johnson as Congressman-elect sought to associate himself with Franklin Roosevelt. As a new Congressman, Johnson understood that acquiring good publicity was critical to being able to appear politically well-connected, thereby establishing himself as a person who other legislators could rely on to make their respective legislative goals realities. Shortly after the special election, President Roosevelt went to Texas for a fishing vacation in the Gulf of Mexico. Upon learning of the President’s trip, “Johnson had asked Governor Allred to do all he could to make sure” Johnson was able to meet with President Roosevelt.⁷⁷ Ultimately, Johnson was indeed able to meet with President Roosevelt—spending an entire day with him on a train that traveled across Texas. Johnson knew that being photographed with President Roosevelt would make him appear to the public and to his colleagues in Congress to be closely connected to the President, giving him credibility and making others believe that he was able to wield influence with the White House. When he met the President, Johnson ensured that photographers were able to capture the “big bronzed right hand” of Roosevelt “clutch[ing]” Johnson’s hand, making Johnson appear as if he had not just a collegial, but even a friendly relationship with Roosevelt that would allow him to exert influence with the White House.⁷⁸ Johnson so desired to be pictured with Roosevelt that when the President was talking to Governor Allred on the train,

⁷⁶ Hughes.

⁷⁷ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 447.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Johnson “placed his...hand on the rail, and slid it a few inches toward the President, so that he could shit his body slightly in front of Allred without blatantly leaning into the picture.”⁷⁹

In addition to understanding the importance of publicity to acquiring the power he desired to attain while in Congress, Johnson also understood the importance of establishing relationships with influential political figures as a means of increasing his own political power. In talking with President Roosevelt on his train trip through Texas after Johnson’s special election victory, Johnson was able to court the president and make a favorable impression on him, leading Roosevelt to remark to his trusted advisor, Thomas Corcoran: “I’ve just met the most remarkable young man. Now I like this boy, and you’re going to help him with anything you can.”⁸⁰ By expressing to Roosevelt—a former Secretary of the Navy under President Wilson with a keen interest in naval affairs—that he had “a long-standing interest in the U.S. Navy” and that he desired to “[establish] a naval air base at Corpus Christi,” Johnson was able to establish a personal connection with the President.⁸¹ Through research, Johnson knew that Roosevelt possessed a strong interest in the Navy, and thus emphasized his own interest in the Navy in an effort to develop a common bond with the President. Roosevelt was so impressed by the new Congressman, and so taken aback by his interest in the Navy, that he promised Johnson that he would personally ensure Johnson a seat on the Naval Affairs Committee, and even gave him the phone number of Thomas Corcoran, inviting Johnson to call Corcoran whenever he could “be of help.”⁸² President Roosevelt and Thomas Corcoran talked about Johnson with other powerful Washington insiders; Corcoran, referring to Johnson, even told House Naval Affairs

⁷⁹ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 447.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 389.

⁸¹ Dallek, 160.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 161.

Committee Chairman, Carl Vinson: ““This is the boss’s protégé.””⁸³ By talking with powerful Congressman about Lyndon Johnson, and by shedding him in such a positive light, Roosevelt and his staff helped Johnson develop contacts with influential politicians, and develop a reputation as being politically connected, before he even was sworn in as a Congressman. In addition, Roosevelt’s fondness for Johnson, and his willingness to make the White House staff available to him marked Johnson as a “strong Roosevelt man and gave him access to Administration officials who could help his congressional career.”⁸⁴

Courting Rayburn and Acquiring Information

Just as Johnson was able to increase his power and enhance his reputation by developing a close relationship with President Roosevelt, Johnson knew that if he wanted to acquire power in the House of Representatives, he would have to foster a close relationship with the House Majority Leader, and future Speaker, Sam Rayburn. Johnson showed deference to Rayburn, bending down to kiss his head when the two men crossed paths in the halls of the Capitol.⁸⁵ Recognizing that Rayburn was an unmarried and “lonely man,” Lyndon ensured that he and his wife Lady Bird would become Rayburn’s “surrogate family.”⁸⁶ Johnson referred to Rayburn as a father figure to satisfy what he aptly recognized to be Rayburn’s “psychological need to have a son.”⁸⁷ Johnson and Lady Bird would routinely invite Rayburn to their home for weeknight dinners and for Sunday breakfast, during which time Rayburn would shed his “laconic demeanor” and would instead “become more animated while he told political stories.”⁸⁸ Although Rayburn was a far more powerful political figure than Johnson at the time, Johnson

⁸³ Dallek, 162.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 161.

⁸⁵ Ibid,166.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

recognized Rayburn's emotional void of not having a close family, especially of not having a son, and thus Johnson sought to effectively fill his psychological emptiness. In acting like a son to Rayburn, Johnson was able to make Rayburn at least somewhat psychologically dependent on him for emotional gratification, thereby making Rayburn willing to aid Johnson in his quest for political power.

By showing deference to Speaker Rayburn, and by acting like a son to Rayburn, Johnson made Rayburn feel compelled to act as a father to him, making it his own personal responsibility to effectively introduce Johnson to the true sources of power on Capitol Hill. At the end of each day, Rayburn invited a handful of House leaders—nicknamed Rayburn's Board of Education—to his hideaway office to socialize and discuss Congressional business.⁸⁹ But, because of his fondness for Johnson, even though he lacked seniority, Rayburn routinely invited him to join the "Board of Education" meetings. In attending these meetings, Johnson became privy to critical information about House business that was desired by not only other Congressman, but by White House officials as well. More junior White House staffers, who could not easily obtain information from the "closed, confused world of Capitol Hill" began to realize that "Johnson, thanks to his attendance in Rayburn's hideaway, often had the information" they needed.⁹⁰ People in the White House and on Capitol Hill began to understand that even if Johnson "didn't himself have the information they needed, he could get it from Rayburn."⁹¹ In many ways, Johnson became Rayburn's protégé—someone people could turn towards to understand what Rayburn was thinking. Whether Rayburn intended it or not, Johnson became the "one through whom [Rayburn] communicate[d]" with those people who desired to ascertain the critical

⁸⁹ Dallek, 166.

⁹⁰ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 453.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

information that he possessed.⁹² The information Johnson possessed, and his unfettered access to Rayburn, made him a Congressman that other Congressman, as well as members of the White House staff, wanted and often needed to befriend—someone who people were forced to rely on if they wanted to know about the inner-workings of the legislative process.

Intense Pragmatism: Never Taking a Stand

While Johnson used the information he gathered from his close relationship with Rayburn to make other Congressman and White House staffers dependent on him, thereby increasing his own political power, Johnson's hesitancy to take stances on controversial issues made him devoid of strong adversaries on either side of the political aisle. Over the course of his eleven years in the House, "only once did Lyndon Johnson appear in support of a national bill he had introduced before the committee to which it had been referred."⁹³ In addition, no national bill Lyndon Johnson introduced in the House ever received serious consideration. Moreover, while Johnson would indeed deliver speeches when he returned to his Texas Congressional District, he would not "fight publicly" for legislation in Washington, delivering less than one speech per year on average until he ran for the Senate in 1948.⁹⁴ Johnson did not seek out reporters to comment on national issues, and made a concerted effort to not reveal his true opinion when asked by members of the media. In private conversations with other Congressman, Johnson would speak "very volubly," but "wouldn't take a position...or...say anything of a substantive nature."⁹⁵ Instead of taking controversial positions, Johnson "was witty" and "would tell stories" about the Texas Hill Country to his Congressional colleagues, making him well liked among his fellow

⁹² Meg Greenfield, "The Good Child, the Head Kid, the Prodigy, and the Protégé," in *Washington* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 45.

⁹³ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 547.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 547-548.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 550.

Congressmen.⁹⁶ Possessing ambition to run for a seat in the Senate, and eventually to win the Presidency, Johnson was “always aware that what he said might be repeated or remembered even years later,”⁹⁷ and he recognized that if he took a controversial stand, it “might come back to haunt him someday” if the political environment or mood of the country changes.⁹⁸ Additionally, Johnson’s reluctance to take controversial positions is a direct result of him witnessing his father’s political and financial downfall—a collapse Johnson attributed largely to his father’s boundless idealism. Johnson was determined “to avoid confrontation and choice, to prevent passionate and emotional divisions over issues”—rather than be an idealistic crusader like his father, Johnson exhibited immense pragmatism, even detachment from contentious national issues.⁹⁹

By refusing to take stances on controversial issues and by acting so congenially towards his fellow Congressman, Johnson was able to appease Congressman from disparate locations along the political spectrum, increasing his likeability, thereby preserving his political viability and increasing his power. Because of “his charm, his storytelling ability, his desire to ingratiate and his skill in doing so,” Johnson “was very popular with his fellow Congressman.¹⁰⁰ The popularity that Johnson garnered amongst his colleagues made other Congressman more willing to trust Johnson, and more willing to approach Johnson if they needed a favor or information. Furthermore, Johnson’s hesitance to take a position on controversial issues convinced “congressional liberals [that] he was one of them [and] congressional conservatives [that] he was one of them.”¹⁰¹ Liberals and conservatives in Congress alike trusted Johnson, thus making both

⁹⁶ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 550.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 551.

⁹⁹ Doris Kearns Goodwin, “Lyndon Johnson's Political Personality,” *Political Science Quarterly* 91 (Autumn, 1976): 389.

¹⁰⁰ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 552.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

groups feel comfortable advocating for him as being a trusted member of their respective ideological camps. Johnson's intense pragmatism gave him few legislative victories in the House, but it left him with not only a minimal number of enemies, but also a large cohort of Congressmen who felt comfortable identifying with Lyndon Johnson ideologically, thereby making him popular with a diverse group of politicians and consequently increasing his power.

Brown & Root

During the first hundred days of President Roosevelt's first term as President, he signed into law numerous pieces of progressive legislation designed to help the economy emerge from a Great Depression; one of these laws was the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act, a bill which empowered the Public Works Administration to give \$3.3 billion in loans and grants to support the building of public works projects across the country. Seeing this bill, and other bills with the same intended goals, as opportunities to finally achieve their dream of striking it rich by building a massive contracting operation, Herman and George Brown applied, and were selected, to be the contractors charged with building the \$10,000,000 Marshall Ford Dam in the Texas Hill Country. Although the project needed approval by Congress before Brown & Root—the company run by the Brown brothers—could receive both \$5,000,000 appropriations that they would need to build the dam, the brothers decided to accept the contract before it received final approval by Congress because it was widely believed that Congressman Buchanan's power would make Congressional authorization of the project an absolute certainty.¹⁰² However, before the project was approved, Buchanan died, making the Brown brothers anxious that the \$1,500,000 they borrowed to “buy the new equipment” they needed to begin construction on the project would cause them to go into bankruptcy.¹⁰³ Without Congressional approval, Brown &

¹⁰² Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 380.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 381.

Root would not receive the second \$5,000,000 appropriation to build the dam, and thus only receive the first \$5,000,000 appropriation. After all their costs, including the \$1,500,000 investment they made in equipment, Brown & Root “would be losing \$500,000” without the second appropriation—“most of what they had accumulated in [the] twenty years” they had spent trying to build their contracting businesses.¹⁰⁴ Thus, when Buchanan died, the Brown brothers became extremely nervous about the possibility of failing to attain approval for their project—a failure that would likely throw them into bankruptcy.

Understanding the importance of developing a strong relationship with Brown & Root to his political future in Texas, Johnson utilized his warm relationship with President Roosevelt, and his unfettered access to White House staff, to help obtain complete Congressional authorization of the project, thus giving Brown & Root the second \$5,000,000 appropriation they needed to make a hefty profit. Johnson made use of his close relationship with White House aide Thomas Corcoran, urging Corcoran to “raise the subject of the Marshall Ford Dam with the President.”¹⁰⁵ Because of his fondness for Johnson, President Roosevelt told Corcoran: “Give the kid the dam.”¹⁰⁶ With the support of Roosevelt, Johnson was able to obtain congressional authorization for the project; however, Work Relief Administrator Harry Hopkins claimed that giving Brown & Root the second appropriation of \$5,000,000 “would violate...fundamental work relief provisions” because the dam was not being built by a government agency and because the “labor involved was highly paid skilled labor.”¹⁰⁷ Although “the precise nature of their maneuvers [is] not known,” under pressure from the Johnson-friendly White House staff, Hopkins withdrew his objection and Johnson was handed the “papers approving the additional

¹⁰⁴ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 381.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 460.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 461.

\$5,000,000 appropriation.”¹⁰⁸ But, after Herman and George Brown received the second \$5,000,000 appropriation, they wanted to expand the dam at an added cost of \$17 million—requiring another appropriation. Johnson worked tirelessly to secure this additional appropriation for George and Herman Brown—an appropriation that would be “the base for a huge financial empire” that had its roots “in that deserted Texas gorge.”¹⁰⁹

Because of Johnson’s tireless work on their behalf, Brown & Root secured an enormous profit from the Marshall Ford Dam contract, and in return “Herman Brown let Johnson know that he would not have to worry about finances in [his] [reelection] campaign.”¹¹⁰ Herman Brown’s support meant that not only had Lyndon Johnson secured the support of Brown & Root, but also the support of “Brown & Root subcontractors, of banks in Austin with whom Brown & Root banked, of the insurance brokers who furnished Brown & Root performance bonds, of the lawyers who received Brown & Root’s fees, the businessmen in Austin who supplied Brown & Root with building materials, and the local politicians...accustomed to receiving Brown & Root campaign contributions in return for road building contracts.”¹¹¹ Johnson’s ability to effectively utilize his friendships and connections at the White House to help secure Brown & Root the large Marshall Ford Dam contract helped Johnson solidify a strong relationship with a company that would largely finance Johnson’s future campaigns. A strong relationship with Brown & Root helped Johnson gain the trust of critical stakeholders in his district, aiding Johnson in his quest to solidify control over his own Congressional seat, and giving him access to campaign donors that would not only ensure his own future political viability, but made him able to distribute an abundance of campaign cash to his colleagues. Johnson’s control over large amounts of

¹⁰⁸ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 461.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 475.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

campaign cash that he could contribute to his congressional colleagues increased his power within Congress by making his fellow Congressman rely on him for their own political success. Because fundraising is critical to winning elections, Johnson's access to campaign funds made him a Congressman who many sought to befriend, as he would be able to provide his colleagues with the money they needed to have electoral success.

Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee

Just as Lyndon Johnson saw in the Little Congress the potential to turn an inactive organization into an organization he could use to increase his own power, Johnson saw in the Democratic National Campaign Committee (DCCC) a dormant organization that if he could gain control of, he could use it to wield enormous power. A committee that historically did little to help Democratic Congressional candidates raise money, Johnson saw in the DCCC an organization in which he could reinvigorate. Although he was unable to convince Rayburn and President Roosevelt to appoint him as chairman of the DCCC in 1940, Johnson was able to convince his party leadership to give him an informal role of "assist[ing] the Congressional Committee."¹¹² Within the first week of his informal job at the DCCC, Johnson managed to obtain a \$30,000 contribution from Brown & Root — "more money than the Democratic National Committee, which had in previous years been its major source of funds."¹¹³ Because of the benefits they reaped from the Marshall Ford Dam contract that Johnson obtained for them, George and Herman Brown not only contributed money to the DCCC, but they also convinced their partners and friends to contribute, making Johnson able to take credit for an unprecedented influx of contributions to the DCCC. Johnson instructed all of his friends from Texas who contributed money to the DCCC to enclose with the check a letter stating which Congressmen

¹¹² Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 626.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 628.

they desired their money be given to. But, Johnson would dictate to the contributors which names to place on the list—people who Johnson specifically wanted to receive campaign funds. Although Johnson was not the chairman of the DCCC, he would make sure that Congressman who received money from him for their respective campaigns knew that it was he who was responsible for obtaining the money they were receiving; he sent each campaign cash recipient a telegram that read: “As result of my visit to Congressional Committee few minutes ago, you should receive airmail special delivery letter from them which is to be mailed tonight.”¹¹⁴

In addition to sending letters to all recipients of DCCC funds, Johnson ensured the Congressman who were beneficiaries of his Texas money knew that it was he who was helping them win reelection to Congress by sending each Congressman a questionnaire asking how the DCCC would best help them.¹¹⁵ Congressman began to view Lyndon Johnson as not only someone who truly cared about them and their reelection efforts, but also as someone who would deliver on the requests they made. Many Congressman requested funds from the DCCC in the questionnaire believing that their requests would be fruitless; however, “to their astonishment, their hopes were answered.”¹¹⁶ Johnson personally wrote telegrams to Congressman with messages such as: ““Today I’m asking a Texas friend of mine to give me \$500 for you. If he does I’ll take it to the Cong. Committee and ask them to rush it to you tonight.””¹¹⁷ Not only did Johnson respond to the requests of his colleagues for campaign contributions, but he also made sure that his fellow Congressman knew that it was he who was responsible for them receiving the money they received from the DCCC.

¹¹⁴ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 629.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 630.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 631.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 634.

In addition to providing his colleagues with campaign contributions, Johnson also provided them with support from other leading Democrats who could help bolster their candidacies. For example, when “nationally prominent New Dealers and Cabinet members were heading out of Washington on speaking tours for Roosevelt,” Johnson also asked them “to speak for the local Democratic congressional candidate.”¹¹⁸ Johnson also assisted Congressman who needed help dealing with problems in their district that were threatening their respective reelection efforts. Congressman Martin Smith, for instance, asked Johnson to help him resolve a strike that shut down the lumber mills in his district—a situation that was “arousing resentment towards the New Deal and threatening his reelection effort.”¹¹⁹ In response, and in conjunction with his White House allies including Thomas Corcoran, Johnson contacted labor leaders in Smith’s district to help end the strike. Because of Johnson’s tireless work on behalf of his colleagues, “suddenly, Democratic candidates...realized that there was someone in Washington they could turn to, someone they could ask not only for money, but other types of aid.”¹²⁰ By forcing his fellow Congressman to rely on him for campaign contributions, Johnson was able to consolidate power—his access to large sums of Texas money, his ability to utilize his political connections to help candidates solve non-financial problems, and his ability to convince Congressman that he was needed for them to have electoral success, made him an increasingly powerful figure in Congress and in the Democratic Party.

Conclusions

A Senator who used his maiden speech to defend the right of southern states to maintain the rigid structure of segregation, and a President who signed into law the most significant pieces civil rights legislation in United States history, Lyndon Johnson is an extraordinarily complex

¹¹⁸ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 638.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 641.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 638.

figure. Born in the depths of the Texas Hill Country, Lyndon Johnson was exposed to the poverty that plagued those who, through no fault of their own, did not have access to the same opportunities as the more privileged sections of American society. Johnson possessed a desire to help those who he believed were left behind simply by the circumstances of their birth. But, Johnson also rejected the idealism that many liberal crusaders possessed; he saw how his father's downfall, and thus his family's downfall, was engendered by Sam Johnson's blind allegiance to idealism. Lyndon Johnson was determined not to repeat his father's mistakes, and thus defined himself as a politician driven foremost by an insatiable desire for power, but also by intense pragmatism. Johnson understood that he could not help the underprivileged if he did not consolidate the power that would be necessary for him to possess if he were to be able to help all those he desired to help. Thus, Johnson was forced to take positions and make political calculations that while maybe contradictory to his own values and goals, would ultimately allow him to help those who were impoverished because of the unfortunate circumstances of their birth. The fulfillment of much of the liberal agenda during his presidency reveals the wisdom behind Johnson's pragmatism. While certainly driven by an unquenchable thirst for power, dominance, and control, Johnson's ability to consolidate power and his reliance on pragmatism instead of ideological crusades made it possible for him to witness the fulfillment of his true ideological platform during his Presidency.