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Every since I can remember, I have been obsessed with politics. In fifth grade, I wrote a short book, *The Amazing World of Politics*, which attempted to analyze the 2004 Presidential candidates. My Sunday mornings have always been spent watching *Meet the Press* and *Face the Nation*, clamoring to absorb and understand the past week's top political headlines. Last summer, I served as an intern in Senator Ben Cardin's (D-MD) Capital Hill office. Before my internship began, a friend recommended I read Robert Caro's *Master of the Senate*—one book in a five book series detailing Lyndon Johnson's life. I excitedly immersed myself in the book, enamored with Johnson's political astuteness and his ability to consolidate and exert political power. Before the summer had finished, I had read three of the five books in Caro's series.

The following fall, I enrolled in GVPT479H: Seminar in American Politics: Political Ambition. My professor, Dr. Lee, tasked all of her students with writing a research paper examining the political ambition of an American politician. We were asked to analyze his or her ascent to political power, how he or she consolidated political power, and how he or she wielded power. After reading much of Caro's series, I was excited to conduct further research on Lyndon Johnson, focusing mostly on his early life—analyzing how he rose from the depths of Texas Hill Country poverty to the United States Congress, and ultimately to the Presidency.

To begin the research process, I conducted some preliminary searches using JSTOR and the Academic Search Primer through the University of Maryland Library Database. These searches provided me with access to numerous scholarly articles from academic journals in political science and history. When sorting through the numerous articles that became available as a result of my database searches, I explored the articles that dealt with the development of Johnson's political ambition, and the articles that discussed the time period of Johnson's life that I discussed in my paper. Also, I conducted searches for scholarly literature that more broadly attempted to explain the psychological, social, and personal motivating factors that convince prospective politicians to seek political office. By analyzing various theories of what fuels political ambition, I was better able to understand Johnson's rise to power.

In addition, I consulted the bibliographies of the books on Lyndon Johnson's life that I had already read—the Robert Caro series. By studying the sources Caro used, I was able to better understand which sources I should consult when conducting my own research. Also, examining Caro's sources helped me understand how Caro built and structured his arguments about what motivated and drove him to consolidate and exert political power, thus giving me insight into how I might want to go about building my own arguments.

Meeting and consulting with Dr. Lee also aided me in finding appropriate and useful sources to use for my paper. Dr. Lee recommended that I consult another acclaimed biography of Johnson's life—Robert Dallek's *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960*. Reading Dallek's biography gave me a different, and thus a crucially new perspective on Johnson's rise to power. Dallek's biography became not only a complement to Caro's biography, but it also provided me other unique insights into Johnson's life that I would not have gained without exploring biographical accounts of Johnson's life outside of the Caro series. Therefore, by consulting with Dr. Lee, I gained a new and helpful perspective about what helped fuel Johnson's political ambition, and what motivated him to seek political office.

Completing this research paper was definitely the most rewarding academic endeavor I have had thus far in my undergraduate career at the University of Maryland. Because of the amount of research required for this paper, I learned the importance of beginning the research process early, so that one has time to carefully examine, analyze, and scrutinize an eclectic mix of sources. When trying to answer questions of great complexity, it is critical that one consult a wide array of diverse and even opposing sources, from a large number of reputable scholars. I also learned the importance of working closely with a professor or mentor when conducting research, as often they are privy to and knowledgeable about useful information that can greatly aid the research process.

Fortunately, I also learned that I have a passionate interest in political ambition—in attempting to understand why people decide to seek political office. Often times we loathe our politicians for being corrupt or unable to compromise across party lines. Thus, many Americans have a burning desire to elect new leaders. But, running for political office requires great sacrifice and subjects candidates to intense scrutiny from both potential constituents and from the media. Therefore, many qualified candidates elect not to run for office. If we are better able to understand what motivates qualified candidates to seek political office, we will be better able to recruit effective candidates to run for office, thereby enabling voters to potentially elect more effective, honest, and hard-working politicians.