Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream Study Guide

Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream by Doris Kearns Goodwin

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Doris Goodwin provides an insightful, intimate look at the private Lyndon Johnson that the public never knew. From his meteoric rise to power and the presidency, the reader gains full understanding of this complicated, driven figure of twentieth century politics and the almost Shakespearian-like fatal flaws which lead to his downfall.

Born into a family in which husband and wife shared exponentially different views and values, Lyndon Johnson grew up in small-town Texas, consistently torn between the cultured civility of his mother and the "down-home good 'ole boy", drinking, and sometime politician father. He grew up on the banks of the Perdernales River and in the small town of Johnson City, where he completed his rather mediocre high school education.

A two-year stint in California, during which he came to know poverty and the challenges faced by the unskilled poor, led the young Johnson into college and an eventual career in politics. The strategies and behaviors which led to political success were honed in college with subversive takeovers of student organizations, and fine-tuned during the Roosevelt and Truman administrations as a legislative assistant, Director of a New Deal program in Texas, and, finally as an elected official from his district. Johnson served in both the House of Representatives and the Senate before becoming vice-president under John Kennedy and then, with the assassination in 1963, president.

Johnson's personality and basic views of human nature drove his every political action. Unequaled energy coupled with the compelling drive to control every aspect of governmental institutions and to avoid controversy at all costs led Johnson into ultimate positions of secrecy and manipulation which worked so long as he could maintain that control. When he could no longer maintain complete control, Johnson's empire crumbled. A child of the New Deal and post World War II era, Johnson's views of the world were rather simplistic. All humans only wanted the freedom of democracy, the fulfillment of all basic necessities, and the hope of a better future. Johnson, as the paternalistic leader of the most powerful nation in the world, could bring this about. From his Great Society at home to the proliferation of democratic ideals throughout the world, Johnson knew what was best for every human soul. Containment of a unified Communist threat drove foreign policy long after the Communist world had splintered and led to the disastrous involvement and escalation of the Vietnam War. Great Society programs, unmanageable and thus doomed to failure, resulted in unfulfilled promises to the poor and minorities.

The fall of Lyndon Johnson and his Great Society was swift and complete once the truth about the war and the failure of most domestic programs were revealed. Coupled with out-of-control inflation, Johnson saw no way out other than retirement from public life. Announcing his intention not to seek re-election in 1968, Johnson retired to his ranch, the one small piece of America over which he still had control. He managed it as if it were a country of its own, and died with his Great Society in 1973.

Though history has not been kind to Lyndon Johnson, the aftermath of his "reign" has resulted in a more assertive and active Congress, which certainly felt the sting of having acquiesced so completely to a power-grabbing executive. Still not the force it once was, Congress continues to grapple with the role it should play in checking the decisions and actions of the Executive branch.

Chapter 1, Growing Up

Chapter 1, Growing Up Summary and Analysis

The complexity of the personality of Lyndon Baines Johnson has its roots in his relationships with his mother and father during his childhood and adolescent years.

Born in Stonewall, Texas, Johnson spent his early years in a small farmhouse, about a mile away from the expansive ranch home he later built to raise his own family. His mother, Rebekah Baines, was the daughter of an apparently middle-class family that prided itself in its commitment to education and civility.

Rebekah marries Sam Johnson, a small farmer and real estate investor. He was a big man, burly, hard-drinking, and vulgar in speech, and the complete opposite of her father. Lyndon was the first child of this union, and it became Rebakah's solemn vow that he would be raised with all of the cultural and educational advantages with which she had been blessed. This is in contrast to the rough, crude Sam Johnson, who wanted his son to become a "man". The result would be a child who constantly struggled with his identity, attempting to emulate and please two polar opposites.

Having graduated high school as an unremarkable student, he decided to go to California with some older boys who had spent the summer repairing an old Model-T for the trip. In California, Lyndon barely survived. When he was truly on his last financial leg, Johnson landed a job as a clerk for an attorney. Armed with maturity, he hitched a ride home and, during this journey, experienced an epiphany of sorts. He would become a politician. It would be a "manly" profession and would please his father. Further, the career, if a success, would give him back his mother's admiration and love.

The first step on Johnson's road in politics had to be a college education. Overjoyed, his mother immediately enrolled him in San Marcos University, about thirty miles from home. On his own in college, he was able to learn to use "those resources he had developed as a child as a protection against the unremitting tensions at home: negotiation, charm, manipulation, avoidance, and control".

Chapter 2, Education and the Dream of Success

Chapter 2, Education and the Dream of Success Summary and Analysis

Johnson took an outdoor cleanup crew job to help pay for tuition. Lyndon showed unbounded energy and enthusiasm, completing all tasks in a stellar manner. Soon, however, Johnson applied for a better job, assistant to the janitor in the science building, and was immediately hired. Again, he worked like a racehorse, finally going after and obtaining the job he truly coveted—assistant to the president's secretary. Eventually, he relieved the overworked and a bit lazy secretary of appointment setting responsibilities, and became the "go to" guy for faculty and staff wishing to see the president.

Because he ran out of money, Johnson had to curtail his formal education at San Marcos and take a temporary job as teacher/principal of Mexican-American children in Cotulla, Texas. President Evans obtained the nine-month position for Lyndon, and he was able to earn twelve credits, as well as enough money to return to San Marcos for his degree.

Back on campus, Johnson resumed his leadership role and finished his degree. In the summer of 1928, Johnson attends the Democratic National Convention and from that moment, Johnson claims, he knew he wanted to be in front of people.

His first chance at public speaking came in 1930 at the legendary South Texas Picnic, at which local candidates gave their campaign speeches. Each candidate was called, and when Pat Neff, candidate for Railroad Commissioner, did not respond to his name, Lyndon Johnson ran onto the stage declaring that he would speak for Neff. Thunderous applause followed, and Johnson was immediately nabbed to manage the campaign of Willy Hopkins, candidate for state senator from the district which included San Marcos College. As Johnson completed his senior year, he propelled Hopkins to victory. So impressed was Hopkins that he recommended the then teaching Johnson to Richard Kleberg, for a position on his Washington staff. Lyndon Johnson was named Kleberg's legislative secretary, and he boarded a train for Washington DC a few weeks later.

Chapter 3, The Making of a Politician

Chapter 3, The Making of a Politician Summary and Analysis

Housed at the Dodge Hotel with all other legislative secretaries, he had, within two days of conversation, selected the five who were the brightest and most knowledgeable—those five he would use to master an understanding of the informal power structures. Adding to this, he established a regimen of reading to include three daily newspapers, a local Texas paper, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, the daily Congressional Record, copies of pending legislation, and a variety of pamphlets, newsletters, and committee reports.

It was 1931, and the public had come to realize that the Depression was not a temporary blip on a radar screen, but rather a long-term pervasive illness. It was a time for younger politicians with new ideas and ambitions to inspire the nation.

Richard Kleberg was far more interested in the social life of Washington than in managing his legislative office and responding to the needs of his constituents from Texas. Johnson was a problem-solver and soon came to be known by Texans as a man who could get things done in Washington.

The young Johnson's other goal was to get onto the Congressional floor as much as possible. Only in this way could he learn the true working of the House. He was nominated for "Speaker", the top office, and won by promising to transform the Little Congress into the vibrant force it had once been. He was twenty-three years old, the youngest ever to be elected Speaker.

Johnson met Claudia "Lady Bird" Taylor, and with typical single-mindedness, decided that her reasonableness and intellect was the perfect match. Eight weeks later, the wedding took place, probably one of the smartest moves Lyndon Johnson ever made. Unlike his mother, Lady Bird strove to keep him organized and to support his obsessive endeavors, never trying to control his actions nor to establish expectations and withhold affection when they were not met.

In 1935, President Roosevelt signed an executive order establishing the National Youth Administration, an agency that was to provide jobs for young people forced out of work or school by the Depression. There was to be a director appointed in each state. The afternoon of the signing, Johnson contacted all representatives and senators from Texas to propose himself as the best candidate for the job. While touring the Kansas NYA Director through some of his projects, Johnson learns of the sudden death of Congressman James Buchanan, the representative from Lyndon's own district. Johnson contacted Senator Wirtz, one of his mentors, and got his commitment to manage the six-week special election campaign. At age twenty-nine, and in the throes of appendicitis, Lyndon Johnson carried the election by a landslide.

In Congress, Johnson deferred to senior members, refrained from controversy, and determined to "wait his turn" in this world of seniority for three long years. A few months later, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and Johnson enlisted in the Navy. His war experience was short-lived, however, because Roosevelt called all congressmen and senators back to Washington twelve months later.

In 1948, a Senate seat once again opened. If he ran for this seat, he would have to give up his seat in the House, and he was internally stalled by his fear of losing everything. When other Texas Democrats began to banter about the name of John Connally, his friend and ally, Johnson immediately announced his candidacy for the Senate seat. It was a hotly contested race, and Johnson had to play down his ties to Roosevelt and Truman, concentrating instead on the platitudes of peace and prosperity. Throughout Texas he flew, drove and stomped, visiting twenty towns a day. Johnson won by eighty-seven votes, amid cries of ballot stuffing by his opponent, who took the issue to the Supreme Court. The fight sullied Johnson's reputation, however, and many continued to believe that he had stolen the election.

Chapter 4, Rise to Power in the Senate

Chapter 4, Rise to Power in the Senate Summary and Analysis

For three years, Johnson aligned himself with the Southern Democratic bloc of the Senate, keeping a low profile. He declined, however, to join the Southern Caucus, a group of twenty-two senators who met weekly to discuss pending legislation and to adopt a united position. Johnson knew that, by doing this, he would forever be "branded" a conservative when that position might at some future time be an unfavorable one. He continued to vote with them on the floor, and that was enough for the time being. His behavior pleased both the Southern Caucus and a wide constituency base back home.

When the Democratic Party Whip position became available, Johnson got the job. It was not a particularly sought after position, because it confined one to Washington most of the time, and did not allow the jaunts and trips home most senators wanted. Johnson used the whip position to establish solid relationships with all Democratic members and to gain their trust and respect. Then, when the position of party leader opened two years later, he got it. At first, it was Minority Leaders, for the Democrats were two fewer than Republicans, but that shortly changed, and Lyndon Johnson became the youngest Majority Party Leader ever.

True to form, Johnson began to change the position of Majority Leader and to use it to develop a loyal following among more junior senators. Already, segregation was being challenged in the courts, labor unions were gaining significant power, and the national political scene would change accordingly. To Johnson, these changes in society meant new alignments would have to be made while continuing to keep the old alliances intact. One of the most astute maneuvers he performed during this time was to gain support for the numerical change in committee membership. He convinced the "old guard" party members that increasing the numbers on important committees while decreasing those on less important ones would allow junior senators to be "guided" and taught by the senior members. Eventually, he was to be in charge of office assignments as well, and it became quite easy to tell who was in his favor and who was not. And, when the Democrats gained control of the Senate in 1955, Lyndon Johnson's title was changed from Minority to Majority Leader.

With almost Machiavellian style, Johnson also established a network of "intelligence", so that he could know and understand each Democratic senator inside and out. Tirelessly, as was his style, he sought a personal relationship which each and every Democratic senator in office, attempting to meet their needs and desires while he courted their support on major pieces of legislation. With only fifty senators to get to know, this one-on-one relationship with each was difficult but not impossible. It was Johnson's strength that allowed his continued rise to power. It also was his biggest

liability when, as president, he was unable to maintain this method of relationship and persuasion.

The other quality that surfaced significantly during his Senate years was Johnson's duplicity. Openly respectful to everyone, he privately ridiculed or damned as was politically expedient. All of this was in private, of course, while he continued to play the paternalistic role of party leader to all of his colleagues. This worked very well individually, but not so well during press conferences. Johnson literally froze during these times, realizing that his words would be "out there" for everyone to read. As persuasive and powerful as he could be behind the closed doors of his office, he was a tongue-tied, mush-mouthed "bumbler" when a group of reporters were firing questions. Private duplicity had no place in the public eye, nor would it be tolerated..

Chapter 5, The Senate Leader

Chapter 5, The Senate Leader Summary and Analysis

Johnson's method of obtaining passage or rejection of any bill was to rely solely on behind the scenes. The fate of any bill was decided before it reached the Senate floor, and this cancelled the need for any discussion or debate. To further quell discussion and potential criticism, Johnson only convened the Democratic Party caucus once a year, filling the meeting time with a prepared speech and "housekeeping" chores. Some senators and political science organizations saw his behavior as an attack on basic democratic principles of public debate and decision-making.

Because deals were made privately, constituents back home did not have to know every detail of their senator's bargaining, and this was a good thing. The concept of one leader guiding his "subjects" extended, in Johnson's mind, to his presidency as well. He was the president as the only one who should conduct foreign affairs, without open investigation or debate by Congress, because the US had to present a united front to the world. Only in times of crisis should Congress use its "reserve power" to initiate action, and, in Johnson's mind, if it had to be done, he would be the leader of such action.

In the 1950s, Johnson got his chance to lead Congressional initiatives in two areas—space exploration and civil rights. The Soviet Union had launched Sputnik and, in so doing, sprinted ahead of the US. Johnson lead the Congressional initiative to investigate the US space program, establish NASA, and begin the Apollo Program. In 1954, the Supreme Court case, Brown v. Board of Education, segregation of public schools was declared unconstitutional.

By 1957, Johnson knew that if the Democratic Party and he were to survive, action had to be taken. Moving between liberal and conservative Democrats, he was able to forge a compromise civil rights act that appeased everyone. Liberals got important provisions, such as the establishment of a Justice Department Civil Rights Division, Negroes got further protection of voting rights, and conservatives saved southern states from forced federal action in civil rights violation cases.

Lyndon Johnson's phenomenal success in Senate leadership was the result of his practical understanding that the body was composed of nothing more than interest groups. He then needed only to practice pluralistic politics; that is, have thorough knowledge of the needs and desires of each group and use them as bargaining chips to negotiate a compromise consensus and get a bill passed. His pluralistic politics did not include the disenfranchised, those for whom there was no voice in the Senate. His reduction of the Senate to mere negotiation among its members rather than its traditional forum for debate of principles and issues and his subordination of it to the presidency on matters of foreign affairs would result in the turmoil of the 60s, when these issues and principles became fodder for public unrest and turmoil.

Chapter 6, The Vice-Presidency

Chapter 6, The Vice-Presidency Summary and Analysis

Johnson's second failure on the national political scene occurred during the race for the Democratic nomination for president in 1960. While John Kennedy crisscrossed the country talking to the public and winning primaries, Johnson spent his time negotiating with senators, under the completely false notion that they could control their state delegates to the national convention. John Kennedy was the overwhelming selection. The bone thrown to Johnson was the vice-presidency and, though a bitter pill to swallow, he believed he could once again take a "meaningless" job and turn it into one of power and prestige.

Kennedy gave him some important assignments, such as Chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee and invited him to staff meetings and briefings. Johnson attended but began to feel very uncomfortable amid the intellectuals with whom Kennedy surrounded himself. The Kennedy White House years saw a re-birth of culture and civility. More and more, Johnson felt he was seen as a rough "cowboy", certainly not an equal in the Kennedy's eyes.

As vice-president, Johnson's constitutional role was to serve as president of the Senate. Free from Johnson's control, floor debate began again. Johnson's one attempt to be named Chairman of the Senate Democratic Conference, from which point he believed he could again wield control, was withdrawn amidst a flurry of negative votes. His leadership role in that body was gone forever, and he had nothing with which to replace it.

The press played up the cultural disparity between the two executives, Johnson the crude cowboy and Kennedy the sophisticated Ivy League aristocrat. In despair, Johnson tried to define a future for himself after Kennedy's reign. Johnson needed to bide his time, be outwardly respectful and loyal to Kennedy and the Democratic Party, and hope that, in time, the Democratic nomination would be his.

Chapter 7, The Transition Year

Chapter 7, The Transition Year Summary and Analysis

In November, 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated in Johnson's home state. Because of the circumstances of his rise to the presidency, Johnson himself felt "illegitimate", a usurper of the office. The National Democratic Convention was eight months down the road and Johnson had to somehow convince his fellow Democrats and a grieving nation that he was presidential material.

Fortunately, the national government is a self-sustaining system no matter what the crisis. The "wheels" of government continued, and the day-to-day work got done. Johnson's task was to calm the public chaos and assuage the fear and uncertainty. His performance was stellar, and within four months he had affected a dignified transfer of power. His first address was to a joint session of Congress where, in Kennedy's name, he urged passage of the Civil Rights Bill that had been hotly debated for a year. He sounded like a president, and Congress was relieved. Back at the White House, Johnson met individually with each cabinet member and urged him to stay on out of loyalty to Kennedy and the nation. Gradually, Johnson added some of his own staff, but the general climate was still Kennedy's. Johnson needed that climate if he was to gain enough support for the Democratic nomination that summer.

Allowing himself only four hours of sleep a night, Johnson met with every key governmental and societal leader, issued executive orders, proposed legislation, put pressure where necessary, and set about the accomplishment of Kennedy's goals—tax reform, civil rights, medical care for senior citizens, and anti-poverty programs. The legislation had been written, but thus far Congressional opposition had been strong enough to prevent passage.

Johnson became keenly aware of all of his constituencies and studied them avidly. Business, labor, civil rights and Congressional leaders were continually summoned for private meetings because Johnson knew he would need their support and not just for the short-term. He listened, asked questions, and became intimately aware of their personalities, needs, goals, fears, and passions.

The relationship between Johnson and Congress was a bit more complex because, here, he had a history. Increasing minority participation in government, through appointments, and achieving passage of the Civil Rights Bill would be tricky indeed. Johnson relied on his old skills of negotiation, compromise, and relationship-building to forewarn his former conservative Democratic colleagues of pending action. Private invitations to the White House where their favorite liquor was served resulted in "good 'ole boy" conversation and Johnson's manipulation to gain favorable outcomes.

Johnson knew that he had no hope of the 1964 nomination without the support of liberals and civil rights leaders. To gain this support, he had to take an uncompromising

stand on the pending civil rights legislation. He turned to the Republican leadership, in the form of Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois. He had built this relationship early on, supporting legislation which included federal projects for Illinois, and it was time to "call in the marker". Achieving Dirksen's support resulted in the passage of the most sweeping civil rights legislation ever, as well as support from enough Democrats to assure his nomination.

The additional factor in the success of Johnson's domestic programs was the rather calm international situation at the time he took office. Several thousand American troops were in Vietnam, as advisors, but the situation was not critical. Johnson's view of the world was simplistic. If we could just provide enough aid to feed, clothe, and educate the poor of the world, they would all love us and adopt our political, economic, and social values and behaviors. It was our further duty to ensure that all democracies of the world could rely on the US for continued and staunch support and protection, especially from Communist aggression. So naïve was this thinking, it is no wonder that Johnson's foreign policy decisions were what eventually destroyed him.

Johnson wanted to defer any decisions on a course of action in Vietnam until the election of 1964 was won. Philosophically, he truly believed that if South Vietnam fell to the Communist North, a domino effect would ensue, and he was committed to the old policy of containment. What he failed to realize, however, was that Communism itself was splintered and that Ho Chi Minh was as much as nationalist as a Communist. In August of 1964, just before the convention, a US destroyer was supposedly attacked by North Vietnamese war planes, and Johnson's response was immediate—the ordering of air attacks on North Vietnam. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution paved the way for Johnson to escalate this conflict into a full scale war and to engage in what was until today the most controversial and highly criticized military action in American history.

As Johnson looked toward the Democratic National Convention, he struggled with the problem of Robert Kennedy, still Attorney General, and a natural selection for vice-president. They never got along but, even more important, another Kennedy in the White House, even as vice-president, was a threat to Johnson's rather broad-sweeping power. Besides, he wanted to win this election on his own merits, not on the "coattails" of another Kennedy. Johnson called Kennedy to his office, explaining that he (Robert) would not be his choice, using ticket balancing and the need to retain the Southern states at all costs as his rationale. The selection was Hubert Humphrey, a man with whom Johnson had a special relationship during his Senate days and who would be perhaps the most subservient.

The Republicans had placed Barry Goldwater, considered a "right-winger" by most, and the American public was too taken up with social and economic reform to consider giving the reins to one who would strive to undo that. Johnson swept the election by the largest margin in history, and to Lyndon Johnson, votes translated to love, the one thing he needed from his adoring public. Johnson took his landslide victory as a mandate from the people that his policies, his goals, and his beliefs were theirs as well.

Chapter 8, The Great society

Chapter 8, The Great society Summary and Analysis

When Lyndon Johnson spoke at the University of Michigan, he used and broadly defined the "Great Society" which he envisioned for America. Generally, this term referred to a series of programs of relief for the poor, increased job opportunities and wages, assistance to senior citizens, equal educational opportunity, and more, that Johnson hoped to implement during his first fully elected term of office. He wanted to think of himself as the new FDR, reigning over an America in which everyone worked and prospered.

To accomplish his goals, Johnson created a task force for each area to be reformed. The duty of the task force was to identify the problems and design legislation setting up programs to attack the identified problems. Once the legislation was designed, Johnson pushed it through Congress. Taking once again the paternalistic role so characteristic of his politics, the Great Society was Johnson's personal configuration of an entire nation, if not the world.

Johnson had learned a valuable lesson from Kennedy and that was the utilization of a congressional liaison team. This group was to spend its time becoming knowledgeable about every representative and senator and to serve their needs as much as possible. Often, the key to getting a bill through Congress is timing, and the liaison team was able to counsel Johnson relative to exactly when a bill message should be sent, who should introduce the bill and in which House, what experts should be available for committee questioning, and even in what order important legislation should be introduced. Armed with every bit of information possible about non-committed congressmen, Johnson cajoled, twisted arms, made promises, negotiated and blackmailed until he had the votes necessary. .

Johnson had decided not to launch any civil rights legislation in 1965 because the 1964 law was still fresh in everyone's minds. He had ordered a task force to begin work on a voting rights bill, but it was for the future. Then, Martin Luther King organized a march from Selma to Montgomery, primarily to promote minority voter rights and registration in a racially-charged southern state. Governor George Wallace sat back as state police bludgeoned unarmed marchers on national television. Pressure was on Johnson to send in federal troops, but he held back. He did not want to make a states' rights martyr out of George Wallace and jeopardize the voting rights bill he planned for the following year. It is conceivable that he was angry with King and the marchers for bringing this issue to the forefront when he was not ready for it. Regardless, the police brutality only stimulated more demonstrations. Finally, in the chaos, Wallace called Johnson for a meeting, during which Johnson convinced him to allow federal troops to restore order. Given the mood of the country, he proposed the voting rights legislation immediately, through a televised speech before Congress.

Johnson's personal position on civil rights has been the subject of much debate. As a Southern Democrat, it is reasonable to assume he believed in segregation. On the other hand, his behaviors present an opposite picture. As soon as he was president, civil rights became an abiding concern. A critic might state that Johnson really had no moral compass, that his stand on issues was strictly a matter of career advancement. A supporter might contest that Johnson had to "play the game" until he was in a position to effect civil rights change which he always inwardly supported.

It became evident to the president that the strategies he used to control fifty senators would not work with the huge bureaucracy that was the White House staff. His solution was to compartmentalize and fragment this body and create enough tension and stress that they were suspicious of one another. He discouraged and in some instances forbade communication between staffers and kept them so busy they had only time for his assigned tasks. Cabinet heads were a bit less subservient, and Johnson successfully asserted his power by declaring that no new policy or procedure would emanate from a cabinet department without his pre-approval. Cabinet members were forbidden to speak to the press unless Johnson pre-approved the message. Further, Johnson took control of each department's budget and staffing.

The other necessary area of power consolidation was the Democratic Party itself. The president is always the acknowledged leader of his party and its national committee. Each party has a huge network of people in Washington, and this network is usually used to promote the president and all party members serving in Congress, to raise funds for campaigns in every state, and to serve as liaisons between local and state party members and the national office-holders. Johnson personally cut staff and slashed the budget, moving control of the National Committee into his own hands. This was a major political error, for when he needed a large cadre of party figures to come to his defense, the organization was simply not in place.

Controlling the media is every president's nightmare, and Johnson knew that a bad press would damage him severely. He had never been comfortable with impromptu sessions in which he did not know what questions would be asked, so he planned carefully to avoid them. Press conferences were always held on weekends, when many reporters would be out of town. In times of trouble, Johnson would avoid calling a press conference for months. He used a reward/punishment system, granting interviews to those media members who treated him well and "freezing out" those who were critical. Because his cabinet and staff were forbidden to speak to the press, Johnson was able to control what, when, and if information was released.

Thus, in 1965, Johnson was able to consolidate his control over the legislature, swallow up his cabinet and staff, reduce the National Democratic Party headquarters to a shell, and determine what, when, and how the media received information. All potential sources of criticism, he believed, had been neutralized. At the same time, he managed to have the most legislation passed in the shortest period of time, including the Voting Rights Act, Medicare, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the New Immigration Reform Act. His kingdom was in superb condition.

Chapter 9, Vietnam

Chapter 9, Vietnam Summary and Analysis

Johnson's beliefs about Vietnam were inextricably tied to his own personality and to history as he had lived it. Above all, he did not want to be perceived as a coward, and not to take a military stand in Vietnam would mean he had capitulated to a bully. He had been a senator throughout the post World War II era and saw Communism as a unified dangerous threat to the free world. If South Vietnam were to fall to Communist North Vietnam, then all of Southeast Asia was in jeopardy. Unfortunately, this simplistic view was a dinosaur and, while many shared it, political scientists and historians were already pointing out the splintering of the Communist world and the nationalistic rather than Communist goals driving Ho Chi Minh. This conflict in Vietnam, they posited, was essentially a civil war. The American public did not view the trouble in Vietnam as an American issue in 1965, but Johnson's fear was that, were he to do nothing, his political opponents would charge him with being soft on Communism and aggression. .

The other huge error in Johnson's policy for escalation was the idea, shared by others as well, that the US could defeat the Communists and set up a peaceful and prosperous democracy in Vietnam. Johnson, in his paternalistic fashion, simply could not accept that many cultures do not lend themselves to democracy. Further, he failed to understand the Vietnam conflict as a civil war with elements of revolution within South Vietnam itself. The government of South Vietnam was largely corrupt and dysfunctional, propped up by US dollars and military advisors, and large groups of Ho Chi Minh supporters (most notably the Vietcong) who roamed the country at will, assisting North Vietnam in its consolidation plan.

Bombing targets were selected by Johnson himself, through detailed discussions with Defense Department and CIA officials. He truly believed that by keeping the war contained but nevertheless defeating Hanoi, he would avoid World War III. Meanwhile, the bombers could hardly pinpoint targets amid forests, fog, and villages, and often the solution was to bomb large areas in hopes of hitting the designated targets. While Johnson envisioned a peaceful democratic future Vietnam with modern technology, good schools, and roads, his bombings were destroying the entire environmental balance of the place.

As bombing and land involvement increased, the errors in reporting began. Such errors invariably touted American successes and Hanoi's failures. Meanwhile, Johnson was hearing what he wanted to hear and remained convinced that Hanoi would come to the bargaining table. When that did not happen, and as the South Vietnamese Army continued to fall apart, it became clear that ground troops would have to be increased. By June, 1965, fifty thousand American troops were on the ground engaged in actual combat, and Johnson continued to insist the US was not at war.

Despite advice to the contrary, Johnson insisted upon keeping Congress and the public in the dark, providing only small pieces of information as money for the defense budget was increased. His later justification was that, if he publicly asked for vast sums of money at one time and informed Congress and the public of the scope of this war, Russia or China might be forced into action. Another obvious consideration was the potential demand of "hawks" to immediately blast North Vietnam to oblivion and end the war quickly. As well, if Congress were to involve itself in the conduct of a war, it was unlikely that Johnson would get much more movement on his Great Society programs.

In the end, both Congress and the public turned on Johnson. He chose to begin the bombing; he chose to fight a secretive ground war; he chose to send soldiers to their deaths; and, he never asked Congress or the public for their approval.

Chapter 10, Things Go Wrong

Chapter 10, Things Go Wrong Summary and Analysis

As Johnson's Great Society programs began to be implemented, huge numbers of government employees were involved. It became impossible for Johnson to monitor and evaluate all of this. Further, he made it clear that he wanted no "bad news" from those who compiled the data and presented progress reports. His response was always the same—present a good report to Congress and try to fix the problems from within. In retrospect, many claim that the president could have established the structures to oversee improvement and attack problems within the departments and agencies; however, by that time he was mired in Vietnam and obsessed with personally controlling every aspect of the war. Bureaucrats got sloppier, money was wasted, and programs faltered.

The "house of cards" began to tumble for economic reasons. In 1964, Johnson had successfully passed a tax cut, and consumer spending accordingly rose. Government was increasing its expenditures on Great Society programs, and still all demands were met with the existing budget. Once defense expenditure increases were added to this mix, however, inflation became a greater problem. Eventually, when spending escalated beyond reasons, Congress called for budget cuts. By this time, the US involvement in Vietnam was so entrenched that he had no choice but to cut spending on Great Society programs. Finally, when he could not sustain the expenses and inflation had become almost a crisis, the beleaguered president proposed a tax surcharge. The conservatives would only approve it if every penny went to the war. Liberals would support it only if none of it was used for the war. Johnson could not cajole, promise, or twist arms anymore.

The war was now affecting the personal lives of many Americans, and inflation was eating up their money. Between 1966 and 1968, Johnson's approval rating dropped thirty-six points, and he was powerless to turn it around. Having promised the good life to all and having promised a quick resolution to Vietnam with minimal pain, Johnson became a liar and a man of poor character.

Another critical phenomenon which Johnson failed to foresee in his vision of the Great Society was the continued racial tension nationwide. Beginning in July of 1965 in the slums of Los Angeles, rioting occurred for three straight summers, leaving 225 dead and thousands injured. What Johnson failed to grasp was that all of his promises to blacks were seen as empty, and this frustration led to anger. It was time for Johnson to take leadership, and he was stalled. One school of thought says simply that he was not up to the task at hand, that it was just beyond his ability. Another says that the demands of Vietnam prevented his ability and willingness to tackle the issue.

Chapter 11, Under Seige in the White House

Chapter 11, Under Seige in the White House Summary and Analysis

Conservative hawks damned Johnson for not destroying North Vietnam and bringing a quick end to the disaster. Liberal doves insisted he had put the US into the throes of a civil war, and that he should pull out immediately. Johnson continued to defend his strategy of "moderate" war because, to him, the conservative position would result in World War III and the liberal position would label the US as a cowardly nation. Troop strength had grown from eight hundred advisers in 1960 to a peak of almost five hundred thousand. Casualties went from twenty-five hundred in 1965 to one hundred thirty by 1968. The cost in dollars was more than the average American could fathom.

No longer able to deny the facts and lack of progress, Johnson sought to discredit his loudest critics. Young people were "naive" and had no real grasp of the world situation. Professors and other intellectuals were living in a dream world of idealism in their "ivory towers". Reporters were sabotaging him in order to win Pulitzer Prizes. These groups were all conspirators he eventually said, out to get him because they could not tolerate his success and his popularity. Leading the pack, of course, were the Kennedy's and the Communists, who controlled the three major television networks. Staffers began to whisper words such as "delusional" and "paranoia" when discussing the president.

The movement to end the war had to begin, then, somewhere other than in Congress. And begin it did. Throughout the country, young people gathered to protest what they deemed an immoral action, one that included needless deaths of both Americans and Vietnamese, as well as the physical destruction of a once-beautiful country. This generation, unfamiliar with World War II and the Cold War aftermath, saw Communism as far less threatening than its own government. Disgusted with the mores and values of the middle-class as well, the dissenters marched, bombed, burned flags, and left for Canada to avoid the draft. Johnson saw them as fringe radicals who did not vote anyway. He was so certain that he had the support of middle-America (the silent majority), he would surely be re-nominated and win the 1968 presidential election.

Chapter 12, The Withdrawal

Chapter 12, The Withdrawal Summary and Analysis

Faced with mounting criticism and a crumbling Great Society, Johnson withdrew to the White House, accessible only to those who continued to support his Vietnam strategy. Tuesday lunches were held, during which bombing targets and ground troop movements were determined. Gradually, attendance declined, as former "loyalists" became disenchanted and increasingly concerned about the president's tirades, paranoia, and irrationality. By March, 1968, it was over, and Johnson had announced his intention to retire from public life. It is commonly accepted now that two events finally convinced Johnson that the "gig" was up. First and most important was the Tet Offensive.

Tet is the name for the Vietnamese New Year. During this time, it was understood by both sides that fighting would cease. In 1968, however, the North Vietnamese and their Vietcong supporters in the south launched successful attacks in cities deep within South Vietnam, areas previously thought impregnable. Clearly, Johnson's assessments and reports were without any merit, and remaining support for his war quickly eroded. Congress and the Cabinet informed him that his policy had to change immediately. The press crucified him. Approval ratings dropped to thirty-six percent, and approval for his war policy specifically to twenty-six percent.

The second final event was the primaries. No Democrat really considered opposing Johnson except Senator Eugene McCarthy, an outspoken "dove". Supported by America's mobilized youth and disillusioned blacks, McCarthy was encouraged to launch himself as an alternative to the one individual who had created both domestic and foreign catastrophes. When McCarthy succeeded in securing forty-two percent of the primary vote in New Hampshire, others were encouraged to enter the fray, including Robert Kennedy, Johnson's worst nightmare.

Johnson struggled with the dilemma and weighed the consequences of "fight" or "flight". What he really wanted was some way to salvage his reputation and his legacy in the history books. Going down in defeat would do neither. It came to him suddenly, this final solution. He could withdraw his candidacy on the claim that it was impossible to run the country well, finish what needed to be finished, and campaign for re-election at the same time.

During the final months of his presidency, Lyndon Johnson withdrew from political life. Vietnam was not resolved, no new programs were proposed, and he had to watch Robert Kennedy soar to great popularity. Then, Kennedy was assassinated, leaving only Humphrey and McCarthy as candidates, neither of whom would be a match for Richard Nixon in November. As it turned out, Nixon did win, but only by a small margin, and the Democrats had to live with the defeat Johnson had handed them.

Epilogue

Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Johnson had planned a number of projects as he returned to his ranch. None was particularly appealing to him, however, except for the writing of his memoirs. He used several people to assist him, including the author of this book, but simply could not put into words an adequate piece. As well, he was convinced that the same conspiracy which helped to destroy his political career—that is, the press and the intellectuals—would take apart whatever he wrote. The book was doomed to failure, and Johnson put his energies into running the ranch.

During his later years, Johnson was not treated well by historians. Judgment of his presidency was harsh, and Nixon set about his own plans to begin dismantling the Great Society programs one by one. Nixon's second term began on January 20, 1973. The next day, a cease fire was announced, and Nixon revealed his plans for the final reversals of the bulk of Johnson's programs. On January 22, Lyndon Johnson died, along with his Great Society.

Characters

Lyndon Johnson

Obviously the focus of this book, Lyndon Johnson was one of the most powerful men in American political history, as well as one of the most tragic. Born into relative poverty in Blanco County, Texas, Johnson was the product of two parents who were diametrically opposed in their values and methods of child-rearing. The decision to go into politics probably emanated from his grandfather and father, both of whom held local and state elected offices. From his days at San Marcos College through his height of power as president, Johnson was able to develop and use his superior skills of persuasion, manipulation, coercion, and negotiation to achieve not just his own personal and political goals, but to literally push his programs through Congress and into the laps of the American public. His ambition and his simplistic view of society and human nature, however, resulted in failed domestic policy and a disastrous war in Vietnam. When he could no longer maintain control of the myriad of Great Society programs and his deceptive escalation of the military action in Vietnam, Johnson's empire came crashing down around him. Facing riots and demonstrations in the streets, anger and rebuke from the media, and impending revolt of Congress, Johnson left public life, retiring to his ranch in Texas where he died in 1973. Soon after then President Nixon announced the final dismantling of the bulk of his Great Society programs.

Sam Johnson

Johnson's father was a small-time farmer who also dabbled in real estate and cattle speculation. Because of this, income to the household was sporadic at best. He was the utter opposite of Rebekah with his loud and vulgar speech, his consistent drinking, and his friendships with some of the most unsavory men in the area. Evidently he was a great storyteller, however, and was well-liked by everyone, enough in fact to get himself elected to the Texas state legislature from his district. Having grown up in Texas when the land was still considered "untamed", Sam was a "man's man", who wanted his son to be the same. He was often absent from the household for long periods of time, particularly when the legislature was in session, and his influence on Lyndon was probably not as significant as was Rebekah's. However, as his son grew up, Sam devised "tests" to determine his "manhood", then punished through humiliation when Johnson did not pass these tests adequately. Johnson modeled this behavior with staffers and colleagues as he moved into politics. Sam and Rebekah's marriage was not a peaceful union, and there was continual discord about money and raising Lyndon. Sam was the brunt of Rebekah's "freeze-out" tactics but, unlike Lyndon, was able to simply leave the household and find comfort with a bottle and some friends.

Sam Ealy Johnson

Johnson's grandfather lived down the road and was probably the only family member who provided young Lyndon with the unconditional love a child needs. Sam had been a cowboy during most of his working years, driving cattle herds to market in Kansas. He was a Confederate soldier during the Civil War, returning to Texas to build a home and marry. When the railroads arrived in Texas, the need for cattle drives dissipated, but ranchers became increasingly concerned about their property and fenced it in. In the 1890s, commodity prices consistently slid downward while the cost of manufactured goods and railroad transport of cattle rose. Old Sam saw this as the work of "those people out East", and promptly joined the Populist Party. Though the party was gone by the time Lyndon was born, his grandfather's political beliefs in support of the common man probably had a significant influence on Johnson's own politics.

Lady Bird Johnson

Claudia Taylor, nicknamed "Lady Bird" by her father, grew up in a relatively affluent household in Karnack, Texas. Her mother having died when she was five, Lady Bird was raised primarily by an unmarried aunt who moved in to care for the three children. She was an outstanding student, graduating from the University of Texas with a degree in journalism. Unlike her husband, Lady Bird was calm and reasonable, supporting Lyndon in all endeavors, managing and organizing him, meeting his demands without complaint, and never wavering in her loyalty. It is difficult to know what she must have felt during the years of Johnson's political decline, for she never spoke of it publicly. Lady Bird took "mental" vacations when things got too much to bear, simply removing herself spiritually until her peace returned. As blustery and irrational as Johnson could be, Lady Bird was just as calm and reasonable, and, during his declining years, Johnson recognized that, without her, he never would have achieved the heights he did.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

FDR probably had the greatest influence on Johnson's political career. While Johnson had many personal mentors along the way, it was FDR's strong leadership during the Depression that Johnson most admired. To Johnson, Roosevelt was the ideal president, taking control of every aspect of governing a nation that needed to be dragged, program by program, out of its economic disease. Johnson came to emulate Roosevelt's power over Congress, and his Great Society was certainly an attempt to recreate a modern version of the New Deal programs of the 1930s.

Richard Russell

Senator Russell from Georgia became Johnson's mentor during his early years in the Senate. Totally unlike Johnson, Russell was a bachelor who was virtually married to his position. Conservative in dress and demeanor, he influenced Johnson to do likewise,

and Johnson followed his lead without fail. Having grown up in a small town in Georgia, Russell truly believed that separation of the races was correct for both whites and blacks. Johnson's politics and votes emulated those of Russell; however, he never joined the Southern caucus, which Russell lead. Unlike Russell, Johnson was keenly aware of the changing times and did not want to be labeled a Southern Democrat. From Russell, however, Johnson acquired a keen understanding of the inner working of the Senate and the informal power structures that were not seen publicly.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

Elected president in 1960, Kennedy served three short years before his assassination in Texas, throwing Johnson into the presidency. Johnson was never comfortable in the Kennedy White House, with its emphasis on cultural events and "high society". To Johnson's credit, however, he completed Kennedy's term with elegance and grace, pushing through Congress many of the former president's proposed bills.

Robert Kennedy

Senator Robert Kennedy became Attorney General during his brother's administration. Because Johnson kept all of President Kennedy's cabinet intact, Robert remained a part of the Executive Branch until Johnson's election in 1964. Robert opposed most of Johnson's political behaviors, and in turn, Johnson hated him. Robert's popularity with the public, however, and his base of power within the government, precluded Johnson's ability to quash Robert's increasing criticism.

Robert McNamara

Serving as Secretary of Defense under Johnson, Bob McNamara was a staunch early supporter of Johnson's Vietnam policy. As the war continued to go badly, McNamara counseled Johnson that it should be "capped". Not wanting to hear this, Johnson restricted McNamara's access to the White House and McNamara eventually resigned, believing that escalation was a disaster. He finished his career as Director of the World Bank.

Hubert Humphrey

Sharing the ticket with Johnson during the 1964 election, Humphrey moved into the vice-presidency from the Senate. A reasonable man, Humphrey came to his own conclusions about matters, but publicly supported the president until he could not longer tolerate the disastrous Vietnam policies. Humphrey was nominated by the Democratic Party in 1968, but lost narrowly to Richard Nixon.

Rebekah Johnson

A somewhat tragic figure herself, Rebekah grew up in a rather privileged environment. Her father, a lawyer and preacher, had once been the Secretary of the State of Texas and had also served in its legislature. She attended Baylor University, rare for a female of that time, majoring in literature and hoping to become a novelist. When her father lost most of their money on a speculative deal, he died, and she and her mother were forced to move into a smaller home. Rebekah had to seek employment as a teacher and contributor to the local paper. Soon after the death of her father, Rebekah married Sam Johnson, a relatively poor farmer who had managed to be elected to the State House of Representatives. All of Johnson's young life he recalled his mother bemoaning her fate and speaking unkindly of his father's habits and lack of civility. She doted on Lyndon, the first-born, however, and determined that he would be a child of culture. To this end, she dressed him like a "sissy", by Texas farming standards, and immersed his young mind in the literature of Tennyson, Browning, and the like. Rebekah had high expectations for Lyndon, and, when he did not meet those expectations, she quickly and severely withheld all attention and affection. Likewise, she abhorred her husband's friends and would react severely to his evenings of drink and invitations to dinner of unruly "peasants". The early relationship between Rebekah and Lyndon was somewhat Oedipal, as the young boy assumed most of the responsibilities of the father during his own father's lengthy absences from home.

Objects/Places

Perdernales River

A small river in central Texas. Close to Lyndon Johnson's early childhood home in Blanco County.

Johnson City, Texas

Johnson's home during later childhood and adolescence.

Austin, Texas

Home of the University of Texas, from which Lady Bird graduated.

San Marco College

Small college attended by Johnson, and the proving ground for his political strategies.

Cotulla, Texas

Town of primarily Mexican-Americans where Johnson taught for a year.

Dodge Hotel

Lodging site of legislative secretaries in Washington DC.

Karnack, Texas

Home of Lady Bird Johnson.

NYA

The National Youth Administration, a New Deal program providing employment to young people across the country. Johnson was the Director of the NYA in Texas from 1935-36.

KTBC

Bankrupt radio station purchased by Johnson which turned into a major profit-making enterprise.

Senate Armed Services Committee

Lead by Senator Russell from Georgia; Johnson's appointment to this committee allowed him daily access to this influential man. Oversees the defense budget and other legislation related to the military branches.

Party Whip

A Democratic Party position held by Johnson during his early Senate years. The whip is responsible for contacting all party members when important votes or discussion is to occur on the Senate floor.

Minority Leader

Leader of the minority party in either the House of Representatives or the Senate.

Majority Leader

Leader of the majority party in the Senate, another position held by Johnson.

Democratic National Committee

The national leaders of the Democratic Party, housed in Washington and responsible for fund-raising and campaign directing

Great Society

The name given by Johnson of his vision for America. It resulted in a package of legislative proposals for domestic reform.

Medicare

Senior health care bill which is one of the few Great Society programs still in place.

Vietcong

Citizens of South Vietnam who sympathized with North Vietnam and participated in the armed conflict against South Vietnam and the US.

Gulf of Tonkin

Bay off the coast of Vietnam and the site of a supposed North Vietnamese attack on a US Navy ship in 1964.

Saigon

Capitol of South Vietnam and headquarters of the US war effort.

Tet Offensive

A surprise attack on many urban areas of South Vietnam during the New Year's cease fire; considered the culminating event that led to Johnson's decline.

Tuesday Lunches

Weekly lunches held by Johnson to which only his supporters were invited.

LBJ RanchLBJ Ranch

Expansive ranch in Texas (Blanco County) to which Johnson retired when he left office.

Themes

Power and Control

Every human desires some measure of control over himself, his circumstances, his lifestyle, his goals, and his future. Without such control, an individual feels helplessness and in despair, becoming dysfunctional. The issue appears to be in the understanding of the limits of control and in using reasonable rationality in one's pursuit of it.

Goodwin traces the theme of power through control throughout this work, beginning with Johnson's utter lack of control over self as a young child to his zenith at the height of his Senate career through the first years of his presidency, and ultimately to the inevitable self-destruction it wrought.

During his childhood, Johnson's parents continually fought for control over him. It was not until he struck out on his own by leaving for California that he began to feel some power over self. Once he decided to become a politician, it became his overriding goal to establish control in whatever piece of the world he existed. Like ripples in a pond, Johnson's areas of power and control continued to become wider and wider, from student life at San Marcos College to the US Senate and, ultimately, to the White House. Al

long the way, he believed that he could exercise complete control through the use of the finely-tuned skills of pressure, persuasion, manipulation, secrecy, bargaining, and blackmailing.

As president, Johnson failed to understand the reasonable limits of control. In an era of tremendously complex domestic and international issues, Johnson reduced Congress to a body that merely approved whatever legislation he sent over. Cabinet Secretaries lost management of their budgets and their autonomy in the president's attempt to control every department and agency, as well as personally manage hundreds of staffers. Johnson controlled every report and evaluation prepared by every director of every domestic program he instituted. Reports on progress in Vietnam were deliberately embellished and the true amount of Defense spending kept from Congress and the public. No one was allowed to speak to the press without his approval of all content. The Democratic National Committee was scaled down to a skeleton force. Johnson truly believed he could control every aspect of government, the public, and the media. The ripples became too large, and eventually Johnson's "empire" collapsed around him. In defeat, he was at least able to control the reasons for his retirement. He withdrew to his ranch in Blanco County Texas, the one piece of the planet over which he could still maintain some power.

Ambition

Johnson's life played out like a tragic figure from a Shakespearian drama. In classical tragedies, the hero or heroine is endowed with a fatal flaw which ultimately leads to destruction. The universality of these personality flaws is what makes these tragedies timeless. Lyndon Johnson's tragic flaw appears to have been ambition to excess.

Once Johnson determined that his path in life was politics, nothing would get in his way. From plotting the secret overthrow of the "Black Stars" on the San Marcos campus to sizing up the strengths and weaknesses of every politician with whom he had to deal, Johnson never lost site of the goal. Every waking moment of his life was spent in study, development of strategies and skills, and in the manipulation of people and events to serve his own political goals. Like a chameleon, his style and his views changed as necessary, dependent upon who was listening and whose support was needed. Thus, he was a segregationist with the conservative Southern Democrats and a civil rights leader when the presidential election demanded it. Defeats, although few, brought despair, but always the revision of plans and strategies to make a "comeback". As with most whose ambition is out of control, Johnson was able to rationalize every questionable and unethical activity, including lying to Congress, the public, and the media about the progress of his Great Society programs and the war in Vietnam. Indeed, Goodwin draws many parallels between Johnson and Machiavelli throughout her work, always in the context of what actions must be taken in order to achieve political ambitions.

Like Shakespeare's Macbeth, Johnson allowed ambition to cloud the voices of a public that became suspicious of his ability to lead and, worse, his moral character. And, when the facts began to surface, his followers, with ambitions of their own, began to "jump ship" and align themselves with the "enemy". Johnson was doomed to a tragic end, and history has not been kind.

Paternalism

In a political sense, paternalism refers to the actions of leaders which replicate a fatherly concern and care for the populace. Throughout history, a paternalist approach to rule has typically been assigned to those dictators, royal or otherwise, who look upon their subjects as children to be looked after because they are incapable of making wise decisions themselves. Paternalism is not usually a term relevant to the democratic process, in which citizens choose their leaders and voice their opinions on matters of importance.

Johnson's paternalism stretches back to his college days, perhaps most pronounced when he served as a teacher/principal in the small Mexican-American school in Cotulla, Texas. School regulations and activities were entirely established and enforced by Johnson, who knew what was best for these poverty-level children and their families. He ruled kindly but forcefully, convinced that once these children got a taste of sound English skills, competition, and the values of America, they would want nothing else.

Interestingly, when Johnson left this position to complete his degree, everything in Cotulla reverted to its previous status, as if he had never been there. Johnson took no lesson from this. Throughout his series of progressively more powerful positions in national politics, this paternalist attitude prevailed. In his simplistic view of American society and the world, Johnson was convinced that if he could just bring food, education, and comfortable existence to all he would be rewarded with loyalty, trust and love.

Goodwin suggests that the roots of Johnson's paternalism came from the attitude of his mother toward the world. To her, all of humanity desired to be civil, cultured, and educated. If the privileged of the world could simply bring this to the underprivileged, the world would right itself. The mistake of both Rebekah and her son Lyndon was the inaccurate premise that all of humanity desired what they did. In a world of complex interest groups and wide variances of values and cultures, the principles of the "American Dream" and the proliferation of democracy throughout the world were not relevant and/or desired. When the American public and much of the world rejected Johnson, most of his despair came from the belief that his ungrateful critics did not appreciate all that he had done for them. Paternalism has worked in small societies which are unified in cultural background and basic socio/religious outlook. Paternalism is viewed with disdain in a society which is as diverse, complex, and committed to debate as that of the United States.

Style

Perspective

Doris Kearns Goodwin came to know Lyndon Johnson during the last two years of his presidency, as she served in the White House as an intern. She was in the process of completing her Ph.D. in history at Harvard University when she assumed this temporary position in order to experience the American political process first-hand. Upon his decision to retire, Johnson requested of Goodwin that she accompany him to Texas to oversee and participate in the writing of his memoirs. Although a reluctant participant in this process, she nevertheless agreed to spend her weekends and vacations at the LBJ ranch on this doomed project. The memoirs were never completed; however, Goodwin spent a significant amount of time with Johnson, recording and writing his life story, his aspirations, fears, successes, and failures from his personal perspective. Goodwin supplemented her material with historical references to classical and modern political theory and psychological research in order to paint a complete picture of the complex personality that was Lyndon Johnson. Her work is an intimate, detailed, and thorough journey into the mind of a man obsessed with power and control, yet suffering from the constant fear of failure and loss of love.

Tone

This biography must be considered both an objective and subjective approach to the life of Lyndon Johnson. Goodwin certainly details every era of Johnson's life, from his early childhood, struggling with the opposing forces of mother and father, to his deliberate, certainly obsessive march from college campus leader to President of the United States. As a biography, the factual detail is rich and comprehensive. It is impossible for any author, however, to write a purely objective piece of non-fiction, certainly a biography. Embedded throughout this story are Goodwin's own perspectives, analyzing his psychological motivations, comparing his actions to those recommended by Machiavelli, and inserting long commentary regarding the personality characteristics that promoted his rise to power and ultimate fall from grace. To her credit, Goodwin did not publish this work until Johnson had died because, while she made an attempt to impart a balanced view of this man in both his shortcomings and his greatness, the overall picture leaves the reader with an impression that is decidedly negative.

Structure

The book is composed in twelve chapters of varying lengths, dependent upon the detail needed to provide a complete picture of Johnson's life, presented chronologically, as is often the case, with a biography. Throughout this time line, however, references are made both to past and future, a technique that lends credibility to the themes of power, control, ambition and paternalism, and which allows the reader to see the clear cause-

effect relationships of action, circumstance, and downright luck that characterized the life of Lyndon Johnson. The continual hints of future turmoil, dissension, and ultimate defeat prepare the reader for an understanding of how it all went terribly wrong and provide a much more complete picture of the forces driving this complex personality. A comprehensive Foreward and and equally impressive Postscript complete the author's analysis and presentation of themes.

Quotes

"Lyndon Johnson was never the anonymous donor. Rather, his was a most visible benevolence which reminded recipients at every turn of how much he had done for them. Giving was a necessary part of a mission to reform, reshape, and thereby redeem. Paternalism was inextricably bound to such generosity. The cost to the recipient of the goods Johnson delivered seemed fair enough to him - gratitude, affection, a trust manifested by the willingness to let him decide what was best for them." Chap. 2, p. 54

"As war approached, we can begin to discern in Johnson's fragmentary references to foreign problems his lifelong tendency to impose his conception of relations within American society onto relations between discordant nations. Consequently, tangible divisions and real clashes of interest were considered disagreements that men of goodwill could resolve to the mutual benefit of all the parties. Johnson ascribed war to a few evil men overriding the preferences of "the people," who were basically good and who sought a tranquil prosperity." Chap. 3, p. 94

"The fact that most interactions in the Senate were face to face was essential to Johnson's ability to persuade his colleagues, and to do so in a manner which permitted them to believe that their actions were in accord with what they had always wanted and thought. Johnson's effectiveness in persuasion depended on his ability to keep others from perceiving that they were yielding to a stronger will. Trades and deals, even threats, could be understood and accepted, but not psychic submission. Awareness that this was an attribute of his leadership would precipitate his overthrow. Reliance on intimacy was the key to the Majority Leader's success in the Senate, and that success would continue so long as he was able to conduct his job through a series of one-to-one encounters. This was possible only in an institution like the Senate, where the limited number of relevant participants permitted Johnson to develop as many different political selves as there were individuals about whose opinions he was concerned. In the secrecy of his office, he could show a different side of himself to each one of the different Senators who entered." Chap. 4, p. 126

"Johnson was incapable of sympathetic understanding for Senators who were concerned with process instead of results. He had no patience or respect for those who challenged desirable results on the basis of concepts and ideas; he seemed almost to perceive them as individuals who had succumbed to fantasy. Tending to view reliance on the dictates of conscience to justify conduct as a sign of cowardice, Johnson saw preoccupation with principle and procedure as a sign of impotence. Such men were troublemakers, more concerned with appearing forceful than in exercising the real strengths that led to tangible achievement." Chap. 5, p. 137

"Johnson was angered by political criticism, but he was used to it; far more difficult for him to accept was the cultural critique, the implicit comparison between the Western cowboy and the urbane aristocrat. It is easy to imagine the uneasiness Johnson felt as John Kennedy came to be admired more and more for the very qualities Rebekah

Johnson had always hoped to find in her first-born son. The more praise Kennedy received for his oratorical ability, for his skill in debating, and for his brilliant parries at press conferences, the more uneasy the vice president felt in front of even the most friendly audience. Worse still was 'all the fuss and excitement,' to use Johnson's words, about Kennedy's transforming Washington into a cultural center." Chap. 6, pp. 165-66

"Despite, or perhaps because of, his own fears of illegitimacy (fears, as we have seen rooted in the conflicts of his childhood, which plagued virtually every step of his political rise), Johnson demonstrated a valuable insight into the national mood, an acute understanding that Kennedy's assassination had produced a crisis of legitimacy for his country as well as for himself. Kennedy's death had unexpectedly brought fulfillment of his greatest ambition in circumstances that must have inspired awesome guilt and doubts. For Johnson, the exhilaration of power was always accompanied by deep insecurity, the consequence of a sense, deeply concealed from conscious awareness, that his authority had been wrongfully acquired and would be taken away when its illegitimacy was discovered. The troubling impact of these inaccessible fears could only have been intensified by the events that had now endowed him with the highest authority." Chap. 7, p. 171

"Throughout his life Johnson had most successfully attained power in one of two situations: under conditions that allowed him to play apprentice to a master, whose power, by careful deference and emulation, he would use to increase his own authority until he had surpassed the other man's accomplishments or position; or under conditions that allowed him to assume the role of the caretaker, the strong protecting the weak. In both cases Johnson saw himself serving others, a perception that allowed him to rationalize this use of the relationship to gain power for himself and to do so without guilt. In the terrible wake of John Kennedy's assassination, Johnson was able to act as both apprentice and caretaker - faithful agent of Kennedy's intentions and the healing leader of a stunned and baffled nation." Chap. 7, p. 173

"Johnson seemed to regard the programs of the Great Society in the way overly fond parents look at their children. By building on the strengths of prosperity rather than on the necessities of depression, the program of the Great Society would fulfill all the hopes that had been beyond the reach of the New Deal. . . In the urgency of his desire to persuade others and, perhaps, to reinforce his own belief, he often spoke of hopes and possibilities as if they were established certainties. . . And so it went in message after message. The subjects might change, but the essentials remained the same: in the opening, an expression of dire need; in the middle, a vague proposal; in the end, a buoyant description of the anticipated results - all contained in an analysis presented in a manner that often failed to distinguish between expectations and established realities." Chap. 8, p. 219

"The decision to escalate (the conflict in Vietnam), though ultimately disastrous, was probably inevitable, given Johnson's nature and convictions: his belief that a Communist victory would be a serious defeat for America, that no problem was insoluble, that Americans could do anything. There was also his fear of appearing weak, and his self-deceiving conjecture that the struggle might end quickly and leave the Great Society

unimpaired. and the immediate public response was encouraging . . . the problem is that one cannot count on a continuation of the original opinion unless events vindicate the presidential action or things end quickly. Confidence in the president, strong as it is, cannot overcome anger at costly failure." Chap. 9, p. 263

"So it happened that in 1965 Johnson was able to take the American people into a war that turned out to be the longest in its history, without a declaration of war or even a specific resolution of support from the U.S. Congress. Advisers led to bombs and bombs led to troops and gradually America was at war with North Vietnam. And the Congress was called upon simply to recognize the situation and support the President's actions." Chap. 9, p. 280

"Johnson had to find a reason for the fact that the level of public support for his moderate position (in Vietnam) was steadily waning. At this point, more elaborate devices were brought into play, in particular the mechanisms of projection and conspiracy. The more his popularity slipped, the greater became his need for evidence that he was not at fault. The scapegoat emerged in a group composed o the intellectuals, the press, the liberals, and the Kennedys. . . That his polls were down meant only that the conspirators had been successful in creating a false image. This was something new, and ominous, in Johnson's internal pattern of thought. It was one thing to look for unworthy motives, however unfairly or inaccurately described. But to believe oneself the target of a giant conspiracy was such a leap into unreason that it could only mean some disintegration of Johnson's thought, that the barriers separating irrational thought and delusion were crumbling." Chap. 11, p. 314-15

"So strong was Johnson's need for affection, and so vital his need for public gratitude, that he experienced this rejection of his "good works" as an absolute rejection of himself. Denied the appreciation which not only empowered but sustained his self, the love which validated his identity, the anatomy which gave Lyndon Johnson's ego it shape was dissolved. . . The man who had battened on the goodwill of crowds, accelerating his pace in proportion to the crowd's number and affection, now could not leave the White House without being harassed by demonstrators and pickets." Chap. 12, p. 341

Topics for Discussion

The author takes the position that Johnson's relationship with his mother was Oedipal. What is the "Oedipus Complex" and what specific examples from the text support the author's view?

One of Johnson's manipulative skills was to take a relatively unimportant position and to broaden its scope of power and influence until it became a vantage point for control. Discuss this pattern, using at least three specific examples from the text.

Different qualities may be required for leadership in Congress and for the national leadership role of the presidency. What specific qualities of Johnson contributed to his successful rise to power in the Senate but became detriments in his presidency?

Johnson himself compared his Great Society programs to those of Roosevelt's "New Deal". In fact, Johnson seemed to see himself as the new, more modern FDR. Why was FDR able to achieve ultimate success in both his New Deal and in conducting a war while Johnson was not?

In the absence of legislative checks on presidential power during Johnson's terms, the press and the public eventually had to "step up to the plate". Given the continuing evolution of the power of the press and the technological advances that allow immediate information flow to the public, discuss the impact of this growing check on national leaders and the potential changes in the democratic process.

Goodwin asserts that part of the blame for the disastrous involvement in Vietnam belongs to the Senate, which had abdicated its role in foreign policy and in providing a check on presidential power. Analyze how Johnson's behaviors and relationships with this body resulted in this abdication.

Compare and contrast Johnson and the Vietnam War with George W. Bush and the war in Iraq. What similarities do you see between executive actions and Congressional responses?