

The Path to Power Study Guide

The Path to Power by Robert Caro

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Plot Summary

This is a biography of Lyndon B Johnson. Robert Caro is the author of this thorough work about this politician. Lyndon Johnson is presently known as one of the best reputed presidents of the twentieth century in the USA. The book begins with an introduction. In it, the author provides a preliminary explanation of two sets of characteristics described as a recognizable "strain". In this case, they mean that it very clearly indicates a specific lineage. One of those described is the "Bunton strain" and the other is the "Johnson strain". It is quite true that one reason these people enjoyed making these kinds of descriptions is that they handled a lot of livestock. Being familiar with animal husbandry, they felt it was natural to extend this form of observation and control about breeding to people. Another reason is simply that they were looking for another way to communicate to others some very obvious facts. One of these was that they were readily able to recognize that Buntons seemed to recur with such a degree of exactness as to call descendants "copies", even though this isn't exactly possible. Robert Caro explains to readers that in order to understand Lyndon Johnson, one has to understand both Buntons and Johnsons in terms of these "strains" of the lineage.

From this beginning, the book provides an extensive account of the author's rise to power. This includes his political power. There is also a long and very real look at the difference between the author's financial and business experiences and his political life. His business life and his political life were not the same at all. He seemed able to do extremely well in one area but to have chronic troubles in a different area of the same life. This successful politician was viewed as an unsuccessful businessman. He was saved when an older man offered him the ownership of a newspaper. Even so, later on in his political career, Lyndon Johnson declined a third term in political office because he felt he should concentrate more on curing his financial woes. The book does a wonderful job of showing the true Lyndon Baines Johnson. The whole truth has long gone out of fashion American twenty-first century culture; the people are more accustomed to the forked tongue of advertising and making the best presentation possible. That being the case, it really is amazing to read this account that covers the whole truth rather just shifting from two views that are accurate descriptions of part of the truth about this great American politician.



Book 1, The Trap : Chapter 1, Introduction & Chapter 1

Book 1, The Trap : Chapter 1, Introduction & Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

The author provides an enlightening and insightful account of Lyndon Johnson. During the Introduction, he describes how Lyndon Johnson, in his early thirties at the time is offered an opportunity to go from being financially poor to quite well off. He realizes that he is essentially in luck, and that an older man is offering to save him from financial difficulties in a way that should last for the remainder of his life. He gives readers a succinct introduction prior to moving on to the far more detailed version given in the regular book. Buntons have extremely pale skin, "magnolia white" and equally extremely dark brown eyes - so dark one would easily miss it for black. The men are big and strong. They have a piercing gaze. The women are much smaller, but may well be equally vigorous on the female scale of things and share readily in the same sharp gaze, dark eyes and light skin. Those are physical attributes. Aspects of character also associated with this same strain are well known to be ambition, creativity, the so-called fiery temperament, and strong practicality. This is vital, since the combination of these practical powers along with the ability to think big are the cornerstones of Bunton success.

The Johnson line is introduced as being the weaker strain for a specific reason. This is their lack of practicality. They share many of the other character traits of the Buntons. The Johnsons are even more ambitious but may be lacking in some of the balancing pragmatism. For readers who have heard of LBJ's reputation as one of the country's superior presidents, it comes as a shock to learn that he came from and clearly showed this Johnson strain and was known at his college as "the biggest liar", but for some reason he succeeded anyways at being elected.

The story of this line of people took place in Texas. The author begins to explain Hill Country. This was an area of Texas that was hard to conquer and to settle. It is described as having been a true paradise in its natural state. There was a great deal of grass there. Most of this had been there for a century. It had been created by fires, both natural ones set off by lightning and also by ones started by the Native Americans as part of their hunting practices. Fire naturally cleared away undergrowth and old dead woods and made it possible for there to be plenty of grass there. The fires also helped to create the soil. The hills were made of white limestone.

Chapters 1 & 2

Chapters 1 & 2 Summary and Analysis

Much of what is most important about the first chapter has already been covered. However, there is a little more to explain. John Wheeler Bunton was the first of the bunch to set the precedent that made the family so proud to watch for the lineage in certain ways. He had been a warrior and a businessman. He had been an Indian fighter - when this was a respectable challenge, and had brought success to his family in the Texan frontier. He and his wife settled into Comanche territory and created a territorial foothold in the area. They did have to put some effort into keeping their turf, and the wife is credited with having scared off some Natives by brandishing a rifle. The Bunton fame also includes having founded the first Philosophical Society of Texas; it didn't last long. The author points out that although a great deal has been lost, in the 1980s the family still had two hundred acres of land there in Texas.

Next the author gets into the "Johnson strain". In this group one finds those who tried the Texas Hill Country. This terrain had not even been interfered with by the Spanish, nor by their political descendants, the Mexicans. While they had claimed it, they had not done anything with it. There was a reason for this. The land was resistant. Those who learned to understand how the Comanche operated were able to flourish - but it was still hard when they did and vigilance was required. Texas Hill Country was home to the Comanche people, who did not recognize the foreign claims to power over it and may not have even understood the concept. They were willing to fight for their territory. A century or two later, readers will understand that the Johnsons faced something that customarily "only mad dogs and Englishmen" would dare try. The settler population of Texas increased from 40,000 to 140,000 from 1837 -1847. After they had beaten back the Comanche, the Johnson Buntons proceeded to bring cattle to the area for grazing. What they learned was probably something the Native

Americans could have told them, had they secured a better mutual understanding prior to fighting. The grass was holding down a delicate layer of soil on the hills. Fire had created the landscape. Grazing animals could use the land but only when use was restricted to being occasional, or else the land would suffer. That is in fact what happened. The settlers grazed the terrain far too much, and the entire landscape was wrecked. The hills were literally grazed down then washed away. Five years after bringing cattle to the area, rains had washed away the hills that the grass could hold into place only when grazing was not excessive. These hills had been pounded away by the rains and carried down hill. Now, white limestone shone clearly.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 2 The People's Party. This chapter is about the emergence of a political group that had two main points on its agenda. First, was to protect farmers and their investments. The second was to do politics that weren't rooted in the white-supremist agenda. This took place at the tail end of the nineteenth century. The farmers in the Hill Country of Texas were suffering horribly, partly from their own practices and in part due to other systems and operations the government had used. Profits for some farmers were insufficient to even buy seed money for the following year. The need to distribute goods was intense, and the government's attitude towards railways, roads and other distribution channels had a tremendous impact on those farmers. The People's Party both succeeded and failed. They failed in their own right and succeeded in getting their agenda on board with American politics. Their agenda was absorbed by the Democratic Party and thrived through it.

There were two other political groups whose agendas were supported in a similar manner. One was the Populists - these were Southerners who did not follow the white-supremacist political route. The other was known as the Alliance. These groups too, were essentially absorbed into the Democratic Party of the end of the nineteenth century.

The entire work is 768 pages long, excluding notes at the end and the introductory materials. As such, some chapters will be given more attention than others. This will be done with the intention of giving readers the best understanding of what the book is primarily about and to give those details most crucial to supporting these themes. Chapter 3, The Johnson Strut. Three of the nine children created through Sam Ealy Johnson and Eliza Bunton Johnson were sons. All three of the sons were basically Buntons. Among these were Lyndon B. Johnson's father. The author explains that there are specific traits that require a counterpoint for success in the environment of the Texas Hill Country. Ranchers there have to be very hard and tough as well as practical if there is any hope of them bringing their ambitions and dreams into reality. Their idealism can operate well when this counterpoint is present. They were also proud, arrogant, a bit fierce and extroverted. Caro reports that ambition, and big ideas, when not properly supported by balancing traits and atmospheres, can lead to ruin instead of to success. The author's ability to analyze character in this way is exceptional.

Chapters 3 & 4, cont.

Chapters 3 & 4, cont. Summary and Analysis

LBJ's father Sam stayed in the Hill Country, one of the three siblings left. Sam managed to become a teacher. This sounds humble, but given the circumstances it was far harder than readers might imagine. There were problems with the Texas public schools. Most Texans obtained only a little education, as the young people were truly needed by their parents for farm work. The cost, even of the public schools, were prohibitive to many. Another factor was the ethnic nature of the settlers. Many of these had arrived as foreigners such that, for some students in Texas, the only education available was provided in German. Such factors made it so that not a university in the nation would accept any of the graduates from a Texas public school. Sam Johnson had to overcome that just to get his teaching certification. He was able to make sure he was well enough educated to pass a state-level examination for teacher certification. He went ahead and taught for some years. After that, he was able to be earn a living as a farmer for some time. He then developed ambitions to become a lawyer but felt stuck in being a farmer. His son Lyndon was named after one of his lawyer friends.

Chapter 4: The Father and Mother. Given that Sam Johnson has been introduced above, here the focus is on Rebekah. LBJ's mother was a college educated woman of the nineteenth century. She had been taught to protect herself from the sun, and while she may have shied away from it a bit too much, she did prevent skin cancer or other ill effects from too much sun. She was very much an ideal girl of a quiet demeanor. She shared with her husband attraction and an interest in politics and ideas. Their love for one another was known to be the genuine article. Rebekah was forced to live with her husband in a rural atmosphere which does not appear to have agreed with her. Actually, she did pretty well considering she was the best educated and most highly literate woman in the entire Hill Country of Texas. She learned to handle laundry and to carry plenty of firewood, and the other women and men acknowledged her ways well enough that she was able to teach public speaking "elocution lessons" to local people. Her husband was the only intellectual companion that she had. She and her husband raised their children for the more "urbane" atmosphere. They were well prepared for college despite their location out there in Texas.



Chapter 5 & 6

Chapter 5 & 6 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5: The Son. Lyndon was named when he was three months old, after a crisis. The crisis was caused by the fact that each parent had a legitimate agenda for naming the baby. The issue was resolved when the wife refused to make breakfast one morning until after they had named their infant. They named him Lyndon Baines Johnson. Lyndon is the name of one of the father's favorite lawyer friends. Baines is Rebekah's maiden name. Johnson is Sam's surname and Rebekah's married name. Lyndon had a few quirks growing up. One was that he found means to run away and to hide himself. This developed into a special family specific drama. At one point a large bell was hung so that it could be rung, not at meal times, but to indicate that Lyndon had gone missing and the search must begin. This seems to have been one of the original and more intense forms of hide and seek known. As Lyndon grew up, farm hands and others closely associated with the family learned that part of their job description was to seek Lyndon when he went missing. Lyndon Johnson showed a natural interest in politics. This, and many of his other behaviors were attributed to the Bunton strain. The local population was low enough, that people being in one another's business was rather customary.

Chapter 6 is titled "The Best Man I Ever Knew" and is about a man of whom it was said: he's straight as a shingle. The chapter reverts to earlier history. Here the focus is one again on Lyndon Johnson's father Sam. Lyndon's interest in politics came straight through the line, and included his father Sam. Sam Johnson's politics were based on the needs of the Texans, especially those of the Hill Country. Sam was part of the People's Party which believed in government as a benevolent and useful organization. This was not a blind view. These are people who saw that many of the problems farmers faced, especially those of getting their goods to market, were directly linked to decisions the government had made regarding the railroads and other roads. This same group of people felt that right relations with the government would create the solution to their situation by creating better conditions so that their work would not go to waste. Their attitude towards government could be called realistic - in a condition that some more idealistic people don't reach until after they have suffered a bout of disillusionment and disappointment about the institution.



Chapter 6 , cont.

Chapter 6 , cont. Summary and Analysis

Sam Johnson is working in the legislature at this point in the nonfiction book. He is recognized immediately by one of his friends from twenty years earlier. A set of characteristics and behaviors are shown to be consistent with how others view the Sam Johnson "identity". Sam was sticking up for Texas, for the common people as best he could in the legislature. One of his political goals was to support a higher tax of the sulphur mines in order to enrich the local populace. Sulphur had proven to be a great money-maker for Texas in the first part of the twentieth century. A man named Roy Miller, who was a lobbyist for the owners of the mines, was able to strike an incredible bargain. They would accept a tax, but they were able to secure a tax on the mines and their product so low that men like Sam Johnson felt it was scandalous. Another one of Sam Johnson's greatest assets was that he was able to stand alone. Often enough he did not have to and so did not, but when it needed doing and he did so, Sam Johnson continued to stick by his values. One case where he did this was when he faced conflict with the Texas Medical Association. He "fought" to have optometrists welcomed and respected by the TMA. When this conflict began, Texas did not permit optometry. While legality is always helpful, here is a case where law appears as a very strange bird indeed. The great thing about Sam was that he was willing to stick by his guns regardless of whether he won or lost. Often he won, and often he lost. Either way, he had his integrity and people loved that they knew where he stood on anything and everything. His greatest legislative success was the Blue Sky Laws that influenced how oil could be advertised and sold.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 is the last for Part 1, here defined as Book 1 of the summary. Here there is a great turn of fortune. Sam Johnson loses his best funding sources. It is at the same time that there is very noticeable set of changes in Lyndon Johnson's behavior. Robert Caro asserts that Lyndon's behavior changed because of the change in the parents' fortunes. That when the parents lost some of their own confidence due to the downturn that they somehow also lost little Lyndon's respect. What happened was that the eight year old was disobedient. He would cast off his shoes when just out the gate towards school. Readers may or may not find this funny. The most noticeable change was that Lyndon transformed into a successful junior dictator within the family structure. He was effectively able to delegate all of his chores to the younger children and flaunted his impressive leadership abilities by doing so. His parents were taken aback. Lyndon was capable of imitating his father's leadership style within the family, thanks to a prodigious supply of siblings. However, once Sam lost many of those under him, Lyndon behaved as if he were somehow no longer under his father either. Somehow the family tolerated this behavior, and Robert Caro claims that Lyndon was showing his true colors.

There are thirty-seven chapters in the book. Due to this, there are cases where details have to be prioritized. The summary is designed to reflect what is most important to understanding the book. Chapter 8 is called "Bull" Johnson. For a rural Texan, this was a well educated man, but for those who had had the advantages of excellent schools, he was definitely not well educated. Lyndon was adept at adoring his superiors. He was obsequious and fawning of his superiors but to those under him he was a bully. He was good at asserting himself with people who were in a position to be able to hire him and even had the courage to create positions for himself and to sell superiors on these. He was a great listener and he avoided conflict. He was the opposite of his father in that instead of always knowing where he stood, no one had any idea of his true ideas. He was also unlike his father in that he was notorious for deceit. People would call him Bull to his face when he was in the presence of ladies. Even so, he founded a club and became an editor - this somehow happened because when he founded the club he did not become any of the officers of that club. Lyndon was a great flatterer. He was dependent upon the emotional support of his mother as a grown man, which manifested as an incredibly potent stream of daily correspondence between them. Lyndon's relationship to his father remained difficult after the age of eight or so. Lyndon revitalized student government politics at San Marcos.



Chapter 8 - 12

Chapter 8 - 12 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9 is The Rich Man's Daughter. The bottom line here is that Lyndon and his father Sam had both wanted to marry their town rich man's daughter but were unable to do so. They married reasonably happily, but not their first choice. Chapter 10 is Cotulla. Here is where Lyndon had another of his earliest triumphs. He found opportunity within extremely challenging circumstances. He was able to get a good paying teaching position by allowing himself to be sent to a very poor village of Mexicans in Texas. Here, instead of there being so many Germans that the teacher gave lessons in German, the town was so Mexican that the students lived their lives in Spanish. Lyndon, however, was not fluent in Spanish. Here, adversity is offered as a great opportunity for the beginner. Lyndon lived in the rented room of a humble shack. What he did that was so powerful was that he cared. Robert Caro writes that Lyndon Johnson was the first teacher that school had ever had to actually care whether or not the students learned anything. He was made principal - in part because he was a man and the rest of the teachers were women, and in part because he was relatively "high-fallutin" for the area into which he was placed. Chapter 11 is summed up by clarifying that Robert Caro had begun his research ignorant of Lyndon's unpleasant traits or his ruthlessness but found out how real they were over the course of conducting his research. Chapter 12: The most important point here is that Lyndon Johnson could do meet and greets with all people.



Chapter 13 - 17

Chapter 13 - 17 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13: On His Way. Lyndon was able to get a place serving as Congressman Klerberg's secretary. He did everything that he could with this position. He continued to behave in a servile manner towards higher ups. The reason that he did this went beyond the role of employee - he worked his way into people's hearts by doing this. He continued to be strongly domineering towards those under him. His first year in this post was the 72nd Congress. The first main task was handling the mail. The mail was the main way that constituents were able to be in contact with the government's representatives. Sorting through it proved to be more educational than previously anticipated. The lifestyle on Capitol Hill was leisurely and ran at a relatively slow pace. LBJ practiced having people under him again, obtaining two aides. He lived in shared quarters - not just the same house - he shared his bedroom with the two younger men who were junior to him. One of these was Gene Latimer.

Chapter 14: The New Deal. Lyndon Johnson was not as strongly in favor of the New Deal as one might have hoped. Nevertheless, as Kleberg's aide, he obeyed. The plight of farmers in Texas was severe. Their real problem was overproduction. When FDR was elected, "First, he solved the banking crisis" (p. 252). Here is a case where a broadcast announcement by the president had an immediate and direct impact on the behavior of the American people. During his first Fireside Chat, FDR asked people to put their money back into the banks, and the next day millions did so. Lyndon was able to obtain many programs for the 14th District of Texas as part of the New Deal.

Chapter 15: Lyndon's other main feat in this case was to take over the Little Congress. Here, he found a run-down organization. It was meant to be a training ground for the aides and secretaries but had fallen into disarray so that it functioned as little more than a social club. Lyndon sought help, and also campaigned extensively - by doing so, he took over the organization and, happily, turned it around so that it became a very well respected organization. Soon, Congressman found out they could use it to gauge which direction a particular bill/vote was apt to go under present conditions which could then be changed.

Chapter 16: Flattery cannot be overdone. Lyndon used this vigorously with all of his higher ups and made great sides in his bid to garner their paternal attitude towards him. Whenever he had hiring power, Lyndon used this with great caution and he enjoyed it for the power that it was.

Chapter 17: Lady Bird. This is LBJ's wife. She is introduced as marvelous but painfully shy. Others in general were astonished at her ability to tolerate some of her husband's less pleasant behavior.



Chapter 18 - 20

Chapter 18 - 20 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 18: Sam Rayburn. Sam Rayburn was short and stocky. He was very tough, both physically and mentally. He had a very strong personality. His temper was well known and gauged by degrees. When he was in a bad mood, people steered clear of him as if of danger. When in a more congenial frame of mind, others liked to include him. He was very strong and determined: he was more of the sort where others would know where he stood and he would stick by it whether or not he had to stand alone and regardless of whether he might win or lose. One might say it depends upon "which end of it" one was - if he was defending your ground or championing your cause it was great; if he was the opposition then it's not so good "from that end". What everyone found out through many tests and trials was that Sam Rayburn was "not for sale"; he made no bones about letting others know this and he walked the talk as the saying goes. Sam Rayburn was also true to his word. He became something of a legend through years of service.

Chapter 19: "Put Them to Work". The economic Depression was taking its toll. The phrase "lost generation" was devised to describe the large portion of young adults who had completed or left school but had no work to go to. This left them underfunded, and overly available for whatever might come their way. Mrs. Roosevelt, in her role as First Lady (wife of the president) campaigned for these people and used the power of persuasion with her husband in order to get the National Youth Administration founded. This was because she felt the plight of the eighteen to twenty-five-year-old crowd was not really served by the CCC, and required some special handling.

Chapter 20: The Dam. There was a dam in the Hill Country of Texas. It had been built to control flooding along the southern Colorado that was sweeping away still more precious soil from an area that couldn't sustain this level of soil erosion. Important players were Herman Brown, and Alvin Wirtz. For Herman Brown, this Marshal Dam contract was his great chance to build something big. For Wirtz, dam projects provided a way to increase his power over others, especially over other men. The project was advanced by an adjustment made so that it would be named the Buchanan Dam, and there is said to have been an exchange that made it so that Buchanan, flattered, had asked for the dam named after him as a birthday gift. President Roosevelt is reported to have granted this wish with such an understandable personal connection - the birthday.



Chapter 21 -24

Chapter 21 -24 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 21: Buchanan suddenly died, but in this case, rather than a male colleague to replace him, the people felt that his wife was the one for the job. This was despite her rather quiet, shy reputation. Lyndon Johnson decided to go for this opening. Lyndon Johnson ran into a very basic normal human problem for this next step in his career. No one in the Tenth District knew who he was. He needed to change this. This chapter goes into more detail regarding how the dam project managed to go through. There was substantial drama involved with it, and the bill for it was nearly killed. Lyndon managed to get himself into a position where he was prominent for this project, which resulted in his winning the support of a man named Wirtz where he otherwise would not have been able to secure it.

Chapter 22: From the Forks of the Creeks. Lyndon Johnson was elected to Congress by fewer votes than any of the nation's other congressman. This did not appear to be so much a direct effect of himself but indicates the low level to which participation had sunk, for politics in that district. Caro shares that three percent of the district had voted for Lyndon Johnson, and only twenty-four percent even went to the polls - yet this measly three percent was enough to win. The support came directly from Johnson's home turf - Texan Hill Country - and from that region, it was clear and strong. His campaign had intentionally appealed to the poor - he claimed the new president was the first on record to actually truly help the poor instead of helping the rich. He campaigned to a special configuration of nature: the forks of creeks. This worked and created a special appeal.

Chapter 23: Galveston. Robert Caro begins by reaffirming that Lyndon Johnson had an incredible ability to charm older men and to do so rapidly. Within five minutes, people would say, Lyndon could get an older, more powerful man to help him. This continued to work when he was a middle aged politician as well as it had when he was a boy. "And it was the air of belief. He was more than a natural story teller. The subjects on which he dwelt - the subjects his anecdotes all illustrated - were the poverty of his constituents, and the need to do something about that poverty" (p. 457).

Chapter 24: Balancing the Books. Lyndon Johnson's work on the dam in Texas with Herman Brown solidified a political partnership. This effect was strong enough that decades later Tommy Corcoran attributed Johnson's career to that fact.



Chapter 25 - 28

Chapter 25 - 28 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 25: Longlea - while Herman Brown was immune to flattery, newspaper owner Charles Marsh was acutely vulnerable to it. He bought a run-down newspaper and "flipped it", making several thousands of dollars by retailing it to a chain that possessed deeper pockets. He repeated this type of behavior in the right way a few times and had not had financial troubles since. Lyndon Johnson sought out the older man's affections mainly by making himself readily available as something resembling a fan. He was deferential; he was a good listener and he was a supportive helper. Longlea was an incredible location, presided over by an impressive woman who had designed the house after a place in Sussex, England. She in fact did not suffer from the competition of another woman being her husband's lover during her marriage to him. She is said to have been like a Viking princess. Her husband abandoned a wife and multiple children in order to become "her man". He bestowed a great deal of financial wealth upon her. She arranged to have refugee Jews from Europe as temporary house guests as a realistic reaction to the mounting danger of Hitler. Lyndon Johnson found himself attending dinners where Alice Glass, this Viking Princess, was one of the people interested in him. There, in the womb of wealth, other guests heard about the reality of a poverty they had no contact with. She believed Lyndon was interested in helping others, and not merely interested in helping himself.

Chapter 26: The Tenth District. This chapter covers more details about how Lyndon found a team of people with whom he garnered support in the Tenth District of Texas in his bid to expand his power in the state of Texas. During this time it became clear that the New Deal had really helped the people of the Hill Country and that they greatly appreciated that help. However, readers have pointed out to them what the improved conditions were like. The school was not able to buy even one basketball and no money changed hands because people bought based on what would come in from the cotton crops. By the time the cash for the crop arrived, it made it so they stopped owing the storekeepers for what they'd bought.

Chapter 27: The Sad Irons. This chapter is about bringing the utility of electricity to the Hill Country of Texas. For readers who take this service for granted, the lack of electricity will be shocking, whereas those that don't are reminded to enjoy that they have access to this. Chapter 28: "I'll Get It for You". The rate of return on the investment for the utilities companies was viewed as making the countryside "problematic". This is a case where the politicians had to struggle with the utilities companies in order to make any headway. This worked, but turned out to be the culmination of decades of effort in the government to get utilities provided throughout the country.



Chapter 29 - 31

Chapter 29 - 31 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 29: Mr. Johnson Goes to Washington. Johnson gets his other main assistant, Jesse Kellam's appointment to a statewide agency made permanent. Now that Kellam was the head of the NYA, Johnson made an effort to utilize the power that he had found here. Johnson continued to be adept at making the most of those times when he did have hiring power. He did his best to use friends for these positions in part to be loyal and in part to consolidate his own power base. Important people meant those having money or political clout or both. Their needs were responded to first. After that, he would serve the others. A criticism emerges - people noticed that Johnson told others what they wanted to hear so much, that the end result was that he could not be believed and that others viewed him as chronically lacking sincerity. This was the dark side of Johnson's standard: listen and agree, shifting views. The man who had no discernible opinions of his own. Lyndon's father Sam died at the age of sixty, by which time it had grown apparent that the two looked a lot alike.

Chapter 30: A Contract & Three Telegrams. By now, it has grown clear that a number of the politicians had strong enough personalities that Johnson's efforts to dominate them caused irritation and resentment rather than success. There is a review of Cactus Jack - he is acknowledged as one of the most influential men in Washington. Meanwhile, Sam Rayburn's reputation remained that not only was it impossible to buy him, but he was majestic in his loyalty - once his friend, always his friend, it could be said of Sam Rayburn. Lyndon Johnson had strong feelings of fitting in and also experienced feelings of alienation or strangeness. Some of this was about power and status. Johnson was reminded of who he wasn't by Roosevelt's refusal to sign photographs sent to his office and by other means that ultimately discouraged his endeavor to become the party leader in charge of the following Presidential campaign in Texas.

Chapter 31: Campaign Committee. Johnson was able to get his position on the Campaign Committee. In fact, he now had a closer look at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. It was similar to Lyndon's two previous triumphs in that it was in a state of disrepair at the time he came into contact with it. "It had been established in 1882 to assist Democratic candidates for the House of Representatives with services and campaign funds, its usefulness has seldom if ever reached a significant level," (p. 607). By 1940 it had been observed that usually whoever spends more on their election wins.



Chapter 32 -33

Chapter 32 -33 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 32: The Munsey Building. Tommy Corcoran and Ed Clark are both famed for being great fundraisers. The chapter focuses on fund raising. It includes a "finagle". Where it was not possible to make a larger financial contribution directly, one ally siphoned in monies through multiple businesses that he owned. Readers notice at this point in the book just how much inflation there has been in the USA during the past seventy years. A few thousand dollars annually was a decent salary back then; it was equal to a lower-middle class salary. The chapter concludes with a restatement of what the oilmen want. They wanted tax benefits and protection from regulation. In 1940, there was still a ways to go before they could hope to get their way on that.

Chapter 33: Through the Back Door. In order to make sure that the benefits of his work with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee were not wasted, Lyndon Johnson wrote a large number of letters expressing humility and gratitude. There was something sincere about it, in that he showed his appreciation to those officials - more advanced and powerful in career than himself. Given that it was Lyndon Johnson, there was also something false about it: he treated each and every one as if that official were solely responsible for Lyndon's success with the DCCC. By doing this, the politician ensured that he was not forgotten by these officials, and he laid the groundwork for being able to interact with them more at a later date. Personalities proved quite relevant yet again. Lyndon ended up making progress by befriending other people who were in the staff and offices in the White House and on Capitol Hill in general. There was a tragic incident when someone died and for one politician with whom she had been friends and the go-between, that politician was suddenly abruptly stopped. Lyndon Johnson, on the other hand, had befriended both the lady who passed away and her assistant. When the woman died, Lyndon Johnson ended up making further inroads successfully because of the friendship with the assistant.



Chapter 34 & 35

Chapter 34 & 35 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 34: "Pass the Biscuits, Pappy". This begins with another tragedy. The Senior Senator from Texas, Morris Sheppard, died during the night of a stroke. Alvin Wirtz and Lyndon Johnson held a strategy meeting the very next day to see how to get Johnson into that Senate seat. Sheppard had held that position for twenty-seven years. At this point, Johnson faced the same problem that he had faced before: no one knew who he was in Texas. There were two congressional districts where he had managed to make sure that he was among the known. The rest of the state remained uncharted territory. This meant that on the political level, he faced the same issue as any so-called "new kid". Johnson's main competitor for a political race then was Mann - of whom it was said, "He possessed three enthusiasms somewhat rare among politicians: for God, for poetry and for the law as an abstract force that could promote the general good," (p. 676). In the years between 1937 and 1941, Lyndon Johnson had thickened up, especially fattening up in his gut and his butt. He continued to use positive reinforcement with the people of Texas, but he now added direct threats that if the people would not help him, then he would block them from receiving much needed government funding. Johnson came up with a surprising argument against a Governor O'Daniels. The new argument was that he was so essential in serving Texas that he must not be permitted to leave in order to serve as a Senator in Washington. Johnson failed according to Caro because he had relaxed but one single day after ten years of plotting and scheming. Due to it, O'Daniel won the Senate but only as a means of "getting rid of him".

Chapter 35: "I Want to See Lyndon". "The same thing is true about Lyndon Johnson....The things for which he stands will eventually win," (p. 741). Corcoran helped ensure that Johnson got to meet President Roosevelt. Lyndon Johnson helped himself as well, by sending a very complimentary brief letter to the president. Roosevelt felt only more sympathy towards Lyndon Johnson for his having lost the senatorial race. Roosevelt had come out of New York State and brought with him a unique attitude associated with the region. There was secrecy surrounding the receipt of funds for campaigns. In this case, there was also a thorough investigation after the fact. It was enough to make people uncomfortable. Franklin Roosevelt helped Lyndon Johnson to make the IRS more at ease with the support that had been delivered through Brown & Root. Herman Brown from the dam was behind Brown & Root. True as that is, the IRS declared an amount owed and there were never any charges of fraud pressed. Robert Caro writes that through his protection during this rough water, the president saved Lyndon's political career.



Chapter 36, 37 & Debts

Chapter 36, 37 & Debts Summary and Analysis

Chapter 36: "Mister Speaker". Rayburn had been cold to Lyndon Johnson for some time. However, Sam Rayburn was also known to be a man of his word, and one who paid his debts. As such, and knowing how much Lyndon Johnson had enabled Sam Rayburn to attain the Speakership of the House, Sam warmed up to Johnson again later on. Lyndon Johnson was reluctantly or belatedly endorsed by Sam Rayburn - Sam covered North Texas. Later, when Lyndon campaigned again, he repeatedly promised to serve in the military if the native sons were drafted. He had already accepted a position as a commissioned Lieutenant Commander for the Navy, and when it came time for Lyndon to "put up or shut up" Lyndon put up - and went to the service as promised.

Chapter 37: The "Perfect Roosevelt Man". The New Deal had been implemented rather successfully. At this point in the book, LBJ looks to his career after having served in the military for several years. The people of Texas wanted something new. Some of the leaders of industry in Texas hated Roosevelt. LBJ found that after his military service he no longer needed to back so much of Roosevelt's New Deal politics, and once he did not have to, he did not. This was viewed as typical by people who had known Lyndon Johnson for a very long time. This was shifty Lyndon - the man who has no strong opinions as far as anyone knows but is for some reason a dedicated politician despite this. If Lyndon had disagreed with Roosevelt, he had supported the president vigorously anyway, and only years later did he proceed without the veil of agreement. After that, there is one more section in the book entitled Debts, Bibliography, Notes and Index. The entire book has been written in clear language. There is no political jargon used. Even so, many insights are shared about the nature of Lyndon Johnson - the individual, his strategies, tactics and attitudes. There is also just over half a century of American politics encapsulated by the book. Lyndon's career was inevitable in reality it was purely the result of constant, relentless striving.



Characters

Robert Caro

This is the book's author. There is very little information about him given in the book. He is a professional biographer, obviously. He has applied his writing abilities and his research skills in order to make this book. He has provided readers with a pleasant introduction. There can be no doubt that this biography contributed greatly to Robert Caro's overall career and reputation. He hides his personality entirely during the main body of the book. He lets it show slightly during the Introductions and in concluding notes. Given the nature of the work, this is the correct thing to do.

Lyndon Baines Johnson

This man is the subject of the book. He is introduced succinctly in the beginning and then fades from it as material about his ancestors is covered. This is done because he argues that the genealogy is actually relevant to the man's identity and life. He is the Johnson Baines branch of the Buntons. The reason he is called this is because a set of biological and character traits have been directly linked to the name Bunton. Once associated with a heroic member of the family, the descendants made a sport of keeping this information intimately connected with the Bunton name.

Lyndon proved to be a politician. He was also something of a businessman, but this aspect of himself is viewed by the book's author as having been his weaker rather than his stronger side. He began to win elections while in college and then proceeded onto the legislature. There is one occasion when he suffers especially badly because he declines to run for public office for a third term because he feels he needs to be more financially responsible, and when he makes this decision it somehow backfires on him.

Rebekah Baines Johnson

Rebekah is Lyndon Baines Johnson's mother. She was a college educated lady. She was raised with ideas and literature. She was very dainty compared to the rural, farm working women, and refined and high-minded. However, she was raised in an atmosphere where her behavior was normal and only when she left did she discover that she was going to have to learn to cope without the type of environment in which she was raised.

The man she loved very much appreciated that she was actually interested in politics. He liked that she was an educated woman as well as being a pretty lady. He loved her very much and quite truly. It was mutual. Her husband was her only intellectual companion once she had married him and moved to a rural Texan environment. She did quite well with the local women, considering how much she did not fit in because she was an educated urban sort surrounded by barely literate farming women. It was very



lonely for her because of that, on top of how lonely it was for all the frontier farm women due to how much they were on their own tending to the so-called women's work. The author emphasizes that it was very real manual labor to be a farmer's wife in Texas Hill Country. Doubtless, Rebekah was able to get fit and healthy as much as her stature could or would do under those conditions. Fortunately, this did not reduce her abilities with literature but simply toughened up her hands.

John Wheeler Bunton

This is the man who was able to succeed so well out in Texas that his descendants used him to set the standard on what the "Bunton strain" is and how to discern it in descendants. Unusually pale skin called by the family "magnolia white" is one of the signs of the Bunton strain. Another is a set of piercing dark eyes - eyes so dark brown that they seem black. The hair that goes along with this is normally wavy and dark. These people are rather tall and strongly built.

There are also behavioral characteristics associated with this same strain. One of these traits is ambition. The ability to think big is important. This is matched or balanced out by a capacity for practicality. In fact, the Buntons were convinced that the fulfillment of any and all of their ambitions relied upon this other pragmatic characteristic to bring them to fruition. John Wheeler Bunton exhibited these qualities and made a fine reputation for himself as a Texan settler. Little did he foresee that his descendants would continue to be so proud of him that they would mark a set of his traits and name them "the Bunton strain".

Sam Rayburn

This man was a politician from North Texas. He was a senator and even Speaker of the House for some time. He was short, stocky, and balding by the time he made it to office. He was relatively short tempered. He was well known to be rather tough and fierce. It was also true that everyone knew that he could not be bought; he liked to proudly advertise this fact about himself. He was also good at proving it. He was known to be a man good to his word and was respected and feared by both supporters and opposition.

Cactus Jack

This is the nickname of one of the most prominent politicians from the gigantic state of Texas. Cactus Jack was known for his honesty and his longevity. He served the House for decades and was reputed to be clear enough about his values and difficult to move from them once he was set. He is mentioned at various locations of the book, almost always as a background figure and in reference to the Texans in Washington.



Sam Johnson

This is Lyndon Baines Johnson's father. He was a highly reputable and wealthy man for many years. Later in his life he fell on harder times - he lost his wealth but not his values. He was known to others as an honest and shrewd man. People always knew where Sam Johnson stood on any issue. He appears to have been content with this. He was not known for having extramarital affairs - this is only pointed out because there were others who were in fact known for that.

Sam is also used to exemplify the new "strain" of Bunton mixed with Johnson. Johnsons were even bigger thinkers, but lacking in some of the practicality and hardness found in the Buntons. Sam is primarily described early in the book, during the set up for his son Lyndon's political career.

Gene Latimer

This is one of Lyndon Johnson's first assistants. He was one of the White Stars from San Marcos, but not one of the most prominent ones. He is said to have been able to give his own personality over to the stronger one of Lyndon Johnson. He worked in an almost slavish manner for LBJ during Lyndon's years at Secretary to Congressman Kleberg of Texas. He is younger than Johnson, very loyal, and was able to make a career for himself in this manner.

Lady Bird

This is the famous nickname for the woman who dared to marry Lyndon Johnson and actually remained that way. She was known to be marvelous but also shy and terribly unglamorous. This shy woman was apparently quite bright, had excellent taste and made a fabulous hostess. She is reported to have had the ability to make anyone feel at home in her home when they were guests.

She is also known for having had the sympathy of many members of the public for having been able to tolerate her husband. This accurately indicates that people were aware that not all of his behavior towards her was good. Her husband was sometimes rude, left her alone way too much and later in life did her the further injustice of having extramarital affairs, and she somehow managed to get through it all and to remain well liked by others in general and mainly.

Franklin Deleanor Roosevelt

This is Roosevelt, the president famed for having saved the nation through his set of New Deal policies. The work with which he was faced was dire. He had been elected by a desperate people. His predecessor left office hated and branded as a man who didn't even care about the harsh reality of Americans starving to death due to the economic



troubles. He was in office as president during Lyndon Johnson's political career. He was able to help Johnson. LBJ served Texas under FDR and was able to get the most for his district that was possible. Later, LBJ would prove to be rather an opponent of the New Deal, but not until after he was ready to operate on the same level as FDR.

Mrs. Roosevelt

This woman was First Lady during FDR's term in office. She was renowned for her power. She was able to get the National Youth Administration going during her husband's term in office through the combination of having the president's ear, her own political savvy and being tremendously popular with the public. She is one of the examples of women who gave rise to the popular consensus that she probably could have been president herself, and if not, there was some acknowledgment that this had something to do with why she was the First Lady.

Hoover

This is the president prior to FDR. He was in office during the middle of LBJ's political career. He was popular when he began his work as president and was despised by the end. The reason was that he was inept at handling the economic Depression that hit the nation during the time that he was in office. His lack of compassion for the poor proved to be a source for the huge loss of popular support.

Kellam

This is another of LBJ's early assistants. He is junior to LBJ by a few years and could tolerate Lyndon's bullying. That was a necessity for being able to get anywhere with Lyndon. As he could take it, not without troubles but he managed it, Lyndon helped to make sure that decades later on, he was the head of the Texas chapter of the National Youth Administration. This was a real pay off for putting up with Lyndon from the first days of working in Washington as an assistant.

Alice Glass

This woman was famous as an unmarried partner to more than one man actually. She was involved with Mr. Marsh for many years. He had abandoned a family for her. He lavished her with financial wealth and kept her. She refused to marry him for years. Years deep into their relationship, after having developed a natural friendship, she entered into a clandestine romance with Lyndon Johnson. This was not a secret from everyone. They discussed marriage but ultimately their relationship - as a romance - broke off, but they are known to have remained friends for a great many years. It is also noted by Robert Caro that she never got over Lyndon Johnson.



Objects/Places

Texas Hill Country

This is an important location in the book since this is terrain that the Johnsons managed to do reasonably well in. It is marked off as territory that "not even the Buntons would try", unless they were the Johnson Buntons. It is introduced simultaneously as a paradise and as untamed, extraordinarily difficult country. The native tribe of the area are the Comanche. There was grass there, but the settlers used a horrendous grazing strategy and tore up the turf within a few short years. The land, as it had been, was essentially ruined. Fortunately, ruin in this sense, means change. After all, what had made the Texas hill grasslands in the first place was the devastation wreaked by fire.

San Marcos

This is the place where Lyndon B Johnson received his higher education. It was while he was attending higher education here that he made his first great strides forward in politics. San Marcos was actually caught up in the progress of the educational system in the state of Texas. It had been in a condition that by current standards of high quality schools was worse than pathetic. Many characteristics of Lyndon were revealed at this institution, both good ones and ones that are often more apt to pose a problem. The author records events that occurred at San Marcos across several of the book's chapters. These occur in the first 3 Parts of the book, but are focused in Part 2.

Cattle

These are not discussed in any detail with respect to their own characteristics. They are written of in this book in terms of their grazing. The effect of the methods of grazing cattle on the Texas Hill Country is a main topic of the early part of the book. It plays into the lineage. Ranching was a main occupation for Texans and still is today. As such, they are fundamental to the whole story and yet they are barely mentioned.

Bull

In this case, this is a specific nickname. In this case, the meaning of the term is not literal. Here, the "Bull" is not the male cattle, but deception. Lyndon Johnson was called Bull, often directly because he was so well known to be a liar - the feces of the powerful bovine being what it really was. Since cattle are so important for the western economy, the distinction is helpful. This is effectively communicated during the early chapters of the book.



Shoes

In this case what is meant are Lyndon's shoes during his early childhood, around the time he was an eight year old boy. Lyndon's parents had a change of fortune. Lyndon succeeded in becoming the family's "Little Dictator", delegating chores to younger siblings and behaving defiantly towards his parents. This involved his shoes; he was supposed to wear shoes to school but he went through a phase where he insistently cast off his shoes once he was out the front gate. He kept this up for some time.

National Youth Administration

This was an organization designed to provide help to people between eighteen and twenty-five years of age. This was devised as part of the New Deal social programs, and was pushed through by Mrs. Roosevelt mainly by pointing out that sooner or later these people were going to be able to vote. The NYA gave some jobs and other resources to young adults who had found their entry to adulthood to be confined by limited opportunities.

Little Congress

This is a political organization that was designed by the Congress for the aides to use to improve their political skills. In that respect it is like the "model UN". Lyndon Johnson used its rundown condition as a means of greatly advancing his career by successfully turning it around - he revitalized the entire group, and then found ways to nurture its popularity and importance in the greater scheme of things. This was one of Lyndon Johnson's greatest abilities.

Capitol Hill

This is set of buildings in the city of Washington DC where the politicians meet in their official capacities for the purposes of conducting business. This includes the Cannon Building and all of the buildings where official federal government law-making business is conducted. It is a reference to a real location and at the same time is often used as if it were purely symbolic.

Jumbo

Lyndon Johnson had the vulgar habit, in some company, to emphasize to others that his penis was exceptionally large and that he was willing to use it. As such, this is a reference to his genital organ. This is mentioned about three times throughout the course of the book in ways that may or may not suit the context.



Firewood

Firewood is mentioned in reference to one of the chores that Lyndon was able to delegate to a younger sibling shortly after his father's drop in income and his own rise as the so-called Little Dictator. In this context, this is not a reference to Hitler who became a big Little Dictator during the 1930s, but Lyndon, during the first decades of the twentieth century as an eight-year-old boy who figured out how to boss around the rest of his family in a way that was effective. One of the other children carried firewood for Lyndon.

Southern Colorado River

This is a reference to the part of the Colorado River that had a dam. The dam was improved and renamed after Buchanan. The building of the new dam with Herman Brown behind the actual construction of it proved to be an achievement that so suited Herman Brown that he became a strong financial supporter of Lyndon Johnson for decades as a direct consequence of his happiness with this. The dam was only needed because of the flooding of the Colorado River and the soil erosion that something had to be done about.

Longlea

This is the name of the house and estate that Alice Glass had with Marsh. He bought it for them, yet she designed it herself. It was modeled on an eighteenth century home in Sussex, England. There is a chapter in the book named after it. It was reputed to being as beautiful as Alice herself, but after the manner of a house rather than the manner of a woman.

Themes

Geneology in Action

The biography begins with a significant description of two ethnic strains. One of these is defined as "the Bunton strain", and includes a set of specific characteristics that may or may not be desirable depending upon what it is that one wants to achieve. Another is called the "Johnson strain". This is set against the Bunton line in order to exemplify advantages and weaknesses or shortcomings that might be of some legitimate concern. The author does not explicitly state, but shows clearly that Lyndon Johnson's lack of ethics stems directly from the consequence of mixing the Johnsons with the Buntons. The ambitions demanded their outlet, and where the Johnson strain left Lyndon without an additional degree of much needed toughness and practicality, he made up for this lack with a level of ruthlessness not found among the Buntons. The ambitions were even greater than those of the Buntons, and the Johnsons, including Lyndon, tried things that others would not dare to try.

Robert Caro has provided these primary descriptions in order to enable readers to analyze the entire life of Lyndon Johnson according to how well or poorly the events reflect this lineage. Are Lyndon's relatives mistaken in interpreting him according to the human breeding or are they right? Can people's lives be predicted by a proper understanding of what has been done whenever breeding has taken place? Certainly circumstances have their influence. These can be changed through a variety of means, when that is considered important. Proponents of family pride and breeding will enjoy the opportunity the book presents. Lyndon Baines Johnson is one of the Bunton Johnsons and evidently a Baines as well. Despite all of our knowledge of genealogy, it remains a bit mysterious. How true it is that some people appear to be veritable copies of previously existent ancestors, whereas others are very clearly blends of their ancestors. When the forms are new they seem to represent a change-over, or they emerge in a living manner that is mimicked by new technological devices within a culture. When people do seem to be recreations of pre-existing ancestors, then this seems to exemplify how the same old form behaves under the altered circumstances of history or location.

How 20th Century American Politics Works

Lyndon Johnson is one of the most popular posthumous presidents of the twentieth century. To most this is obvious. For those more ignorant, this is a biography which proves to be an excellent introduction to politics from the insider's perspective. This inside scoop begins with aspirations and ambitions during childhood. Any and all signs of leadership ability turn up in the book, but may not have been met well during the childhood. Properly speaking, the first political tale in the book takes place in higher education.



Lyndon Johnson got his feet wet by doing a "fixer upper job" on the campus politics of San Marcos. He made things happen where there was nothing going on. He repeats this approach in the legislature when he finds the Little Congress has been dilapidated. He gets in there and fixes it up and gets it going. This shows his ability to find opportunities where others might not even see there as being one. Another way that he does this is when while being a secretary to a congressman, he finds that he can extend his influence by responding to mail that in the past had always only been redirected. This proves to be highly effective.

Some of the subject's tactics are shown clearly during the book. These include two dramatically different behaviors: being fawning towards superiors and anyone who might really help him, and by the same token being very aggressive about his domination of those subordinate to him. His human tactics included what Robert Caro calls making himself the son of anyone in power over him. He used flattery endlessly and with terrific success.

Lyndon is reported at least once of also having made great headway because he knew the rules of Congress. He also learned to wait out when necessary. This type of patience is necessary for long term survival in politics since changes of which party is in power does have a significant impact on who can speak and how people have to maneuver in order to get things done. Despite the dark side of Lyndon Johnson, which included buying votes and threatening others with aggressive domination, there was also the bright side - he was a fast and excellent thinker and was adept at creating conditions and improving organizations. Through this lens, readers begin to be able to see how politics works in a way not discernible from purely external accounts of bills being passed or the results achieved by political activity.

American Politics in the First Half of the 20th Century

The book begins at the tail end of the nineteenth century. During its course, there is not a presentation of the entire political history of America. What the author gives readers are highlights from the life of Lyndon Baines Johnson and the nation. The economic Depression of the 1930s comes under discussion during the work. Readers not knowledgeable in history and geography might not have been particularly aware of what conditions were really like. The book focuses on Texas, as Lyndon Johnson worked mainly with the challenging Hill Country of Texas. The vast expanse of Texas although the vastness being one of its great strengths, proved to pose very real problems at certain times.

Poverty was one factor in Texas. Since it was so tough for people to live there in the first place, the economic Depression was devastating. Despite his rather unsympathetic opinion of the New Deal, Johnson did garner as much support for the 14th district of Texas as he possibly could during this time, just like all others. The CCC and NYA proved to be of tremendous help. Roosevelt saved a nation that people largely felt Hoover had made the mistake of abandoning in the midst of a crisis.

Roadworks were a great source of income as were roadside parks. There were times when Johnson is said to have had to corral his team and explain that they had funding and problems, now they needed to come up with actual and appropriate solutions to them. The roadside parks along Texas highways proved to be an excellent solution to a very real problem.

Style

Perspective

The author is a man of the later twentieth century and may still be living in the twenty-first century. He is a skilled researcher in the sense of the humanities. He is an adept writer. He writes from a definite American bias. The mode of personal expression within such a context is a bit different from how it might be in certain other types of books. He is a professional. He expresses himself primarily during the Introduction of the book and at the very end, in the chapter entitled "debts" which comes before the notes.

He is a grateful and diligent scholar. He has created the book as a married man and he enjoys this privileged position thoroughly. He acknowledges his wife's highly valued contribution to his success. He explains that while many others might have hired a slew of assistants, his wife took care of all of this. He tells readers that his wife Ina became an expert in at least two distinct fields just so that she could help him effectively with the book.

The author seems to have a relatively strong grasp of American culture and politics. While easy enough to take for granted, for those ignorant on this subject, this is in fact very helpful. He is adept at finding ways to describe people. He does a wonderful job of accentuating the distinctions between people of differing regions and political parties.

Tone

The tone of the work is informative. When compared to technical documentation, the writing is casual and loose. The biography is clearly designed for mass scale consumption in society and not designed as a textbook. The writing is clear and expressive. It is neither too simple nor overarching in its complexity. The level of vocabulary indicates the book has been written for a college educated readership. For some it will almost seem too plain in its style, whereas for others this will be noticed as being just right in terms of its presentation.

The author writes in a knowledgeable manner. He seems to understand politics and also people. He does a fine job of presenting the truth in the form of a story. Not everyone is able to give facts a real feeling of being a story, but Robert Caro is able to do so. As such, the readers are able to enjoy a sense of wonder as the subject's life is described such that it unfolds for the reader.

Now that LBJ has lived and died it is a different perspective. In this respect, there is a real trick to the whole thing, since it is taking place in reverse and yet it is unfolded from beginning to end. Readers will not experience this as confusing, because it is set forth quite clearly. Nevertheless, there is something about it conceptually that makes it distinctive.



The tone is rather cheerful. The author makes it apparent that his aim is to share the truth, the whole truth actually rather than only the half of it. Readers find this refreshing, at times terribly disappointing, but also powerful. It somehow undoes the trick of the half-truth, but when it does it only makes it more accurate, which people are used to in real life anyway.

Structure

The book is divided on more than one level. There are six parts to this book. During the first part, the lineage of the family is introduced in order to take the subject of the biography in better context. The time span is covered up through times during Sam Johnson's life when Lyndon was already alive but his main concerns were to go without shoes and being able to boss around his younger siblings. He was on a drive to increase his level of control within the family. While for some readers this is a laughing matter, for others it isn't. Readers may or may not have their own history with wielding power within the family or with longing to have more control. Ultimately, laws at the schools that enforced the wearing of shoes indoors strongly supported parents who wanted their children to wear shoes. Such items, while extremely beneficial at times, can also hinder the development of healthy feet and toes. Bare feet make the best of the toes and the feet in ways that shoes obstruct. There really is good reason on both sides of the argument.

Part 2 covers Lyndon Johnson's life and his entry into manhood, higher education. Most importantly, his entry onto the stage of politics is included. By the end of this Part, the subject of the biography is part of the Legislature of the USA, at the federal level of government. Part 3 takes place as his career matures. The entire book highlights main events in the subject's political career. Some of these are quite straightforward but another important aspect is the way that the author is able to get across his methodology and approach. His morality and ethics, his *modus operandi*, as well as who he knows and the other elements of how he achieves his ends are all combined during the the book's presentation.

Biography is a specific genre. Human character is strongly highlighted by such works. While the characters in stories are significant, they are often overshadowed by plot. In newspaper writing, events and plot nearly blot out the identity of the real life characters involved. In the biography, both events and insight into an individual and into what motivates him or her the most is pronounced. Robert Caro has created a sound biography of a prominent figure of American twentieth century politics.



Quotes

"Another pattern with significant implications is established in this volume. Lyndon Johnson's use of money as a lever to move the political world." p. xx

"The dreams of John Wheeler Bunton proved too big for the land to support cotton could not be grown profitably enough in central Texas to support a huge, elegant plantation, and the showy French sheep didn't produce enough wool or mutton." p. 7

"As Georgia's land wore out under repeated cotton crops, men searched for new land on which to plant it, and when, after the War of 1812, Georgia's western territories were cleared of Indians, settlers poured into them in a great migration." p.15

"Among the nine children of Sam Ealy Johnson and Eliza Bunton Johnson were three sons." p. 40

"He wanted more." p. 70

"It was, in fact, more a case of his insisting on leading them." p. 71

"I would crawl out of bed and scramble into his room like a little puppy, snuggling my always-warm body against his," Sam Houston says." p. 103

"For a while, nonetheless, the romance flowered. In May of 1928, Carol visited Johnson City on two consecutive weekends, staying with a college friend." p. 163

"But while Hopkins could give Johnson a good time, he couldn't give him a job." p. 204

"In some districts, this might not have mattered much. With air travel still in its infancy, distances insulated Congressmen - and their secretaries - from their constituents; few came to Washington to be greeted, entertained, and taken on tours of the capital. Because the national government touched the lives of its citizens only occasionally, there was little communication between them and the Representative who was their link to it; the office of a Congressman representing a typical Western district might receive only ten or fifteen letters a day, most of them from job-hunters or from veterans needing assistance to obtain or increase government pensions." p. 221

"All during the 1920's, farmers held out a hand to their government, but the administrations of Harding and Coolidge were deaf to their pleas." p. 241

"Did his vocation- his 'very unusual ability' - work only with his contemporaries?" p. 265

"The issue was the tariff. The House, newly Democratic, was, under the spur of the newly inaugurated Woodrow Wilson, debating the Underwood Bill, which would begin to reform the tariff laws that Populists hated by, for example, placing shoes as well as steerhides on the free list." p. 314



"If he drove men, he led them to. Once, a long awaited WPA certification of children whose families were on relief and who were therefore eligible for NYA employment arrived late on Friday afternoon." p. 358



Topics for Discussion

Do you believe that LBJ was actually poor when he was thirty-one, or do you think he was middle class and lying to make it sound as if he had less than he did?

Was LBJ a good president in your view?

What is a White Star?

What is the Little Congress and what was its purpose?

Give some opinion regarding what Lyndon Johnson did when he brought press to the Little Congress.

Succinctly declare whether or not you like LBJ as a politician at this point. Give three main points why or why not.

Agree or disagree with the idea that the "Johnson - Bunton strain" can be used as a plausible explanation for Lyndon Johnson's abilities and success.

Do you think Lyndon Johnson was amoral? Defend your answer.

What are the three main things you learned about American politics from reading this book?

Do you think this book could be used as a textbook? Why or why not?