

Supplementary Material on Lyndon Johnson

Johnson was born into modest circumstances in 1908 in Stonewall, Texas, and was the oldest of five children. The other Johnson children were Rebekah (1910-1978), Josefa (1912-1961), Sam Houston (1914-1978) and Lucia (1916-1997). He was an average student but outgoing and talkative and was elected president of his 11th grade class in nearby Johnson City (named after his father's cousin, James Polk Johnson). He graduated high school in 1924. In 1926, he enrolled in Southwest Texas State Teachers' College. He put himself through school, became editor of the school newspaper, engaged in campus politics, and after dropping out for a year and teaching mostly Mexican children in Cotulla, Texas, he returned and graduated in 1930. From there, as Wikipedia tells us:

“Johnson briefly taught public speaking and debate in a Houston high school, then entered politics. Johnson's father had served five terms in the Texas legislature and was a close friend of one of Texas's rising political figures, Congressman Sam Rayburn. In 1930, Johnson campaigned for Texas State Senator Welly Hopkins in his run for Congress. Hopkins recommended him to Congressman Richard M. Kleberg, who appointed Johnson as Kleberg's legislative secretary. Johnson was elected speaker of the "Little Congress," a group of Congressional aides, where he cultivated Congressmen, newspapermen and lobbyists. Johnson's friends soon included aides to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, as well as fellow Texans such as Vice President John Nance Garner. He became a surrogate son to Sam Rayburn.

He was described by friends, fellow politicians, and historians as motivated throughout his life by *an exceptional lust for power and control* [italics added]. As Johnson's biographer Robert Caro observes, "Johnson's ambition was uncommon—in the degree to which it was unencumbered by even the slightest excess weight of ideology, of philosophy, of principles, of beliefs." Cato also speaks of Johnson's contempt for liberals. He writes, “While they spoke of kindness, compassion, decency, he had already displayed a pragmatism and ruthlessness striking even to Washington insiders who had thought themselves calloused to the pragmatism of politics.” Cato adds that, “... he [Johnson] was deceitful and proud of it. . .”

In 1937 Johnson successfully contested a special election for Texas's 10th congressional district, which covered Austin and the surrounding hill country. He ran on a New Deal platform and was effectively aided by his wife. He served in the House from April 10, 1937, to January 3, 1949.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt found Johnson to be a welcome ally and conduit for information, particularly with regard to issues concerning internal politics in Texas (Operation Texas) and the machinations of Vice President John Nance Garner and Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn. Johnson was immediately appointed to the Naval Affairs Committee. He worked for rural electrification and other improvements for his district. Johnson steered the projects towards contractors that he personally knew, such as the Brown Brothers, Herman and George, who would finance much of Johnson's future career. In 1941, he ran for the U.S. Senate in a special election against the sitting Governor of Texas, radio personality W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel. Johnson lost the election."

His loss was a rare political slip up and it cost him the seat in the Senate that he so badly coveted. He had planned meticulously for this Senate race and tried to anticipate – and have a contingency plan for – everything that could conceivably go wrong. He overlooked only one thing – himself. Cato writes that “. . . at the very end of that 1941 race – on Election Day itself – he had relaxed. In his euphoria over apparent victory, he violated an old adage of Texas politics by reporting too early in the day the vote totals from the corrupt counties he controlled, thereby letting O'Daniel know how many votes were needed from the corrupt counties *he* controlled, and giving him the opening necessary to win.”

Always in need of money, Johnson asked some of his Texas oil tycoon friends for some financial support and in response they offered him a nearly free partnership in an oil company which would have been worth close to a million dollars. They were stunned when he turned it down commenting that being known as an oilman would kill him politically. Being an “oilman” certainly wouldn't hurt him in the congressional district that he represented nor would it hurt him in the least if he ran for one of the Texas Senate seats. It dawned on them that although he had never talked about anything else but Congress, that he had his sights set firmly on the ultimate prize – the Presidency.

It was not until 1948 when one of the Texas seats in the Senate became available. His biographer Cato writes that “. . . he decided to take one last desperate gamble,

entering a race for the Senate although he would be running against Coke Robert Stevenson, the only man in the State's history to hold all three of its top government posts – Speaker, Lieutenant Governor, and Governor – and a public figure so beloved in Texas that in the last Democratic primary he had entered, the crucial election in a one party state, he had carried every one of the state's 254 counties, the only candidate for Governor or Senator who had ever done so. “The Cowboy Governor’, as he was known, was considered invincible.”

On Election Day, Cato tells us, “He stole not thousands but tens of thousands of votes, and when they weren't sufficient to defeat Stevenson (asked about the attempt made decades later to portray Stevenson aides as also stealing votes, Edward A. Clark, the longtime “Secret Boss of Texas” would laugh, “They didn't know how, and Governor Stevenson didn't know how”) he stole still more, and in this later theft which culminated in the finding of the decisive “votes” (supposedly cast by 202 voters who voted in alphabetical order) six days after the polls closed, he went further than anyone had ever gone before, violating even the notably loose boundaries of Texas politics. Even in terms of a most elastic political morality – the political morality of 1940s Texas – his methods were immoral.” Cato also comments, “Another quality that Lyndon Johnson had displayed on each stage of his march along the path to power was an utter ruthlessness in destroying obstacles in his path.” Lyndon Johnson would use any means whatsoever – would stop at absolutely nothing – to gain the power he so desperately sought.

If forced to choose between power and money, Johnson would choose power but he did not have to make that choice very often. His biggest financial backers were Texans Herman and George Brown (Brown and Root) and he served them well. He was able to persuade the Department of the Navy to grant them a contract to build sub-chasers and destroyers although Brown and Root had never built a ship of any kind at all. When some years afterwards George Brown was discussing the contract – which grew to an astonishing \$357,000,000 – one of the largest contracts the Navy had ever granted at that time – George laughed and admitted that at the time of the contract, “we didn't know the difference between the stern and aft, - I mean bow.”

Natural gas in the mid-40's was just a byproduct of oil production and as supply far exceeded demand, it was extremely cheap. During WWII however, the government had built huge pipelines over a thousand miles long to get the gas to production plants in the North and Mid-West. A company, Texas Eastern Transmission, was formed by the Brown Brothers and through Johnson's intervention, Texas Eastern

was allowed to purchase two of the biggest lines for \$143,000,000 – a fraction of what it had cost the government to build them. By 1959, Texas Eastern had assets of over \$ 1 billion. Calling in some favors owed to him by the Federal Communications Commission, in 1943 Johnson purchased (in the name of his wife) the largest radio station in Austin, Texas (KTBC) for \$17,500. In 1951, the station was earning \$3,000 per week.

In spite of the support of Brown and Root and the assurances of the Brown brothers to their fellow oilmen that Lyndon was “one of us”, Johnson was still viewed with suspicion and distrust by many of the large oil and natural gas producers in Texas and he needed their financial support. At the time, natural gas prices were subject to the Natural Gas Act of 1938 and the Chairman of the Federal Power Commission (FPC), Leland Olds, enforced its provisions rigorously. Olds (and the FPC) were an absolute anathema to the natural gas producers. Olds had first been appointed by FDR and at the end of his term as Chairman of the FPC in 1949, he was re-nominated by President Truman. Widely respected throughout the country, the Senate confirmation of his appointment was considered to be assured. Lyndon saw his chance however and used the limitless funds available from Brown & Root to assemble some of the best legal minds available. For three months the lawyers sifted through everything that Olds had ever written. Olds, a liberal, was going to be smeared as a Communist. Johnson stacked both the sub-committee and the full committee “who hated Communists almost as much as they hated blacks” and prepared and coached a long list of witnesses to testify against him. Elaborate precautions were taken to conceal this meticulously planned political assassination plot and when Olds walked into the Senate hearing accompanied only by his wife and an assistant, he was totally blind-sided. With his ouster, the price of natural gas almost doubled overnight. A freshman Senator had defeated the President of the United States. Lyndon had proved himself to the Texas oilmen beyond a doubt. The money began to pour in – usually in large paper bags containing \$40,000 to \$50,000 - and always in cash (\$100 bills were preferred.)

Evelyn Lincoln, JFK’s trusted private secretary/assistant, had accompanied the President to Dallas on November 22. On the flight back to Washington after the assassination, she compiled a single page list of people and organizations she felt to be suspect in the President’s death. The first name on the list was Lyndon Baines Johnson.