

President	Lyndon B. Johnson
Chronological Order	36
Life Span	1908-1973
Home State	Texas
Elected	Vice President 1960, succeeded to the presidency 1963. Elected president in 1964.
Political Party	Democratic
Vice President	Hubert H. Humphrey
First Lady	Claudia (Lady Bird) Taylor Johnson
Children	2 daughters
Physical Attributes	6' 3.5", lanky, black hair, brown eyes, big ears
Undergraduate Education	Southwest Texas State Teachers College (History)
Military Service	Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy during WW II.
Profession	Teacher
Political Offices	U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senator, Vice President
Nickname	LBJ or Master of the Senate
Family Lineage	English, German, Scots-Irish
Religious Affiliation	Disciples of Christ
Biographical Notes	<p>1. Lyndon Johnson was one of our best presidents in terms of domestic policy. His Great Society reforms produced a host of laws and programs that continue to benefit the American people even today. Only FDR passed more significant legislation. Only Abraham Lincoln did more for African-Americans.</p> <p>He was one of our worst foreign policy presidents. At a time when there were a relatively small number of American advisors in Vietnam, he allowed the U.S. to be dragged into the war over a minor incident (the Gulf of Tonkin incident) and then continued to escalate our involvement in this unwinnable war.</p> <p>2. Johnson's unrelenting efforts on behalf of public programs translated into extraordinary legislative accomplishments. His War on Poverty and Great Society reforms included a litany of enduring significant laws. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 barred discrimination in public places and employment. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 outlawed poll taxes, literacy tests, and other barriers that had been erected to keep African-Americans from voting. Other laws governed Medicare and Medicaid, federal aid to education, environmental protection, food stamps, Head Start, public radio and television, and consumer protection laws.</p> <p>3. LBJ grew up on a farm in the Texas Hill Country, fifty miles west of Austin. His father Sam served in the Texas state legislature, and from the ages of ten to sixteen Lyndon often accompanied his father to the legislative chamber in Austin. Fascinated by the proceedings on the floor, he watched for hours and then wandered through the halls, soaking up the backstage gossip. Though a so-so student in school, Lyndon proved to be a "very bright and alert" observer of the legislative wheeling and dealing.</p> <p>Lyndon also loved the constant campaigning that was necessary to preserve his father's seat. "We drove in the Model-T Ford from farm to farm, up and down the valley, stopping at every door," LBJ recalled. "My father would ... talk about the crops and the bills he'd introduced in the legislature. ... sometimes I wished it would go on forever." Sam's love of politics and his hatred of bigotry – he took on the Ku Klux Klan when it still dominated in Texas – made a lasting impact on his son.</p> <p>But Sam's life also provided a cautionary tale as well. When Lyndon was young, Sam grossly overpaid for the land that had been the Johnson family homestead in a previous generation. The soil was not fertile, and</p>



Sam was constantly in debt after that. As a result, Sam was forced to take a low-paying job as a bus inspector, and there was no money to send Lyndon to the University of Texas. Instead, Lyndon worked on a road-building gang until he accumulated enough money to go to a small teacher's college.

4. After Johnson's junior year in college, he took a teaching job in tiny Cotulla, Texas because he needed the money to pay for his senior year. His class consisted of twenty-eight fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade impoverished Mexican-Americans, many of whom were barely literate. Unlike the other teachers at the school, who made a quick exit at the end of the school day, LBJ came early, stayed late, and organized extra-curricular activities for his students. "His being there," one student said, was "like a blessing from the clear sky." Johnson was deeply affected by this experience. He said later, "You never forgot what poverty and hatred could do when you see the scars on the hopeful face of a young child. They never seem to know why people dislike them. But they knew it was so because I saw it in their eyes."

After college, Johnson taught speech and debate at Sam Houston High School in Houston for a year. He was an excellent teacher; his debate team won the city and district championships and finished second in the state competition.

5. Sam Johnson helped Richard Kleberg, a wealthy Texan, get elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1931. Kleberg chose Lyndon to come to Washington as his private secretary (what would now be called an administrative assistant).

Kleberg – one of the heirs of the vast King Ranch in Texas – enjoyed the social aspects of being a Congressman, but was not interested in the day-to-day duties of the job, e.g., helping constituents who wrote to his office for assistance. Lyndon stepped into the breach. He acted on Kleberg's behalf to ensure that every constituent's letter was replied to promptly and each request was fulfilled. In doing so, he learned how to get things done in Washington and who to go to to get them done.

6. Lyndon married Claudia ("Lady Bird") Taylor in 1934. (She got her nickname at the age of two when her nurse said, "She's as purty as a lady bird.") It was clearly a matter of opposites attracting. Lyndon was loud, boisterous, and had a mean streak. Lady Bird was quiet, shy, and one of the nicest people you would ever meet. Also, Lady Bird came from a wealthy family, and Lyndon did not.

As First Lady, Lady Bird became an advocate for the beautification of the nation's cities and highways. She lobbied so strongly for the Highway Beautification Act in 1965 that it became known as "Lady Bird's Bill."

7. Shortly after Lady Bird joined Lyndon in Washington, they invited Congressman Sam Rayburn – a fellow Texan and a bachelor friend of Lyndon's father – over for dinner. Rayburn was widely feared and very powerful - he would become Speaker of the House in 1940 – but also very shy and socially awkward. He rarely visited anyone's house more than once.

But he liked Lady Bird right away. She was shy too; she reminded him of Texas and made him feel at home in the Johnson's apartment. Soon "Mr. Sam" was coming over regularly for Lady Bird's black-eyed peas, cornbread, and chili. Every Sunday morning, he would come over for breakfast, and he and Lyndon would read the Sunday papers together. Eventually, Rayburn came to think of Lyndon as the son he never had.

In 1935, President Roosevelt established the National Youth Administration (NYA), a \$50 million program that would be administered in each state by a state director. Rayburn – who hardly ever asked anyone for a personal favor – asked Texas Senator Tom Connally to put forth Lyndon's name for Texas NYA director, and he did. But the White House refused to accept Connally's recommendation. It felt that entrusting a statewide program to a twenty-six-year-old without administrative experience would be ill-advised. The administration announced DeWitt Kinard, a former union official from Port Arthur, as the new Texas NYA director and swore Kinard into the post. At this point, Sam Rayburn went over to the White House. What he said is not known, but the White House announced that a mistake had been made. The Texas NYA director was not DeWitt Kinard. It was Lyndon B. Johnson.

8. In 1937, LBJ was in Austin, serving as the state NYA director, when the district's congressman, James P. ("Old Buck") Buchanan, died. Despite being only twenty-eight years old, Lyndon decided to run for Old Buck's seat in the upcoming special election.

Lyndon had two immediate problems. First, he needed money to start the campaign, and he needed it fast to get a jump on the other, better-known candidates. Lady Bird quickly called her father, "Cap'n" Taylor, and asked him for ten thousand dollars. Cap'n agreed to send the money, and then Lady Bird asked, "Can you get it to us tomorrow morning?" Cap'n replied, "No, I can't. Tomorrow's Sunday. But I'll have it for you Monday at nine o'clock."

Lyndon's second – and seemingly insurmountable – problem was that before he had even announced his bid, there were rumors that Old Buck's widow would run for the seat. And if she did, she would win. Lyndon did not know what to do and was waiting to see what Mrs. Buchanan did. Then he went to see his father Sam for advice.

Sam said, "Goddammit, Lyndon, you never learn anything about politics."

Lyndon said, "What do you mean?"

Sam replied, "She's an old woman. She's too old for a fight. If she knows she's going to have a fight, she won't run. Announce now – before she announces. If you do, she won't run."

Lyndon raced back to Austin and told reporters that he was in the race to stay – whether or not Mrs. Buchanan entered it. When Johnson's decision appeared in the Austin newspapers, Mrs. Buchanan's son telephoned reporters and told them, "Mother has just reached the decision not to run."

Seven other candidates – several of whom were FDR supporters – opposed Johnson. To distinguish himself, Lyndon decided to position himself as the most enthusiastic FDR supporter of the bunch. His campaign manager, Alvin Wirtz, explained to him that to accomplish this, he must come out in favor of FDR's plan to pack the Supreme Court. Wirtz told LBJ, "Now Lyndon, of course it's a bunch of bullshit, this plan, but if you flow with it, Roosevelt's friends will support you." He did; they did; and he won the special election.

9. The special election occurred on a Saturday, and as soon as he won, Lyndon informed his friends at the wire services of his victory and gave them relevant background information. This particular Saturday was a slow news day, so his win became a national story. It made the front pages of newspapers across the country, and FDR became aware of it.

Shortly after, Roosevelt came to Texas and invited Johnson to ride from Galveston to College Station on the presidential train. The two men struck up a conversation, and LBJ did not get off at College Station; he rode with FDR to Fort Worth, 200 miles away. During the trip, FDR suggested LBJ get a seat on the House Naval Affairs Committee, and Johnson accepted his suggestion. Roosevelt was delighted and said he would personally see to the matter when he returned to Washington. He then wrote a phone number down on a slip of paper, gave it to LBJ, and told him that if he needed help in any other matters, he should call the number and ask for Tommy. "Tommy" was "Tommy the Cork" Corcoran, one of the president's key assistants.

When he returned to the Oval Office, FDR called Tommy – before Johnson did – and told him, "I've just met the most remarkable young man. Now I like this boy, and you're going to help him with anything you can." The support of FDR and Sam Rayburn, combined with Johnson's drive and determination, made LBJ one of the most effective first-time members of Congress in American history. Later, Corcoran recalled, "He got more projects and more money for his district than anybody else." LBJ was re-elected to the House five times.

10. One of Congressman Johnson's original goals was to bring electricity to the poor and rural Texas Hill Country. To do so required money – in the form of a federal loan from the Rural Electrification Administration (REA). To ensure that its loans were repaid, the REA required that there be, on average, three customers per mile of transmission line. The sparsely populated Hill Country had only 1.3 people per mile.

In June 1938, LBJ obtained an appointment with FDR, his first private meeting with the president since their Texas train ride together one year earlier. Johnson explained that rivers in the Hill Country could be dammed to generate power if he could get the REA loan.

FDR immediately picked up the phone and called the REA director, John Carmody, while Johnson listened to the president's end of the conversation. "John," Roosevelt said, "there's a young congressman in my office, Lyndon Johnson. He's an old friend of mine." After explaining Johnson's proposal for an REA loan, he listened while Carmody described the REA's regulations and why Johnson's proposal was not in compliance with them.

"John," FDR said, "I know how you've got to have guidelines and rules, and I don't want to upset it, but you just go ahead and approve this for me – charge it to my account. I'll gamble on those folks because I've been down in that country, and those folks – they'll catch up to that density problem because they breed pretty fast." And LBJ got his loan.

"You've got to remember," White House assistant James Rowe commented later, "that they were two great political geniuses." Without Roosevelt's intervention, it would have been years or even decades before the Hill Country entered the modern world. Twenty years later, Johnson was still immensely proud of this accomplishment. "Of all the things I have ever done, nothing has ever given me as much satisfaction as bringing power to the Hill Country of Texas."

11. In 1941, Senator Morris Sheppard of Texas died of a stroke, and a special election was held to replace him. LBJ immediately announced his candidacy, but the competition was stiff; it included Governor Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel, five-term congressman Martin Dies, and Texas attorney general Gerald Mann. This election would be Johnson's first statewide race; it would cover all twenty of Texas' congressional districts and its vast geographical area.

Initially, LBJ was in fourth place, because he was not a great speaker in front of big crowds; he was giving an hour-long, serious-minded speech, and people were walking out before the end. To change this, he turned his standard rally into part variety show/part patriotic pageant in a time of war. A twenty-four-piece band played current hits, followed by "America the Beautiful" and other patriotic songs. LBJ then spoke extemporaneously for a few minutes in front of a huge photograph of him shaking hands with FDR. Upon entry to the rally, each person received a raffle ticket, with winners of cash prizes drawn at the end of the rally. Johnson's crowds swelled, and he surged from fourth place into the lead.

Texas politics at the time was rife with corruption; in certain counties in South and East Texas, the local bosses could deliver the votes needed in a close election. Johnson's campaign had plenty of money – some of it from illegal contributions – and easily outbid the others for the ballot boxes in South Texas. On Election Day, LBJ was confident of victory and released the purchased precincts before all the precincts reported. This early release widened his margin to 5,000 votes; ballots from rural counties were still trickling in. The next day, a large number of O'Daniel votes suddenly appeared from counties in East Texas, and, because Johnson had already released his precincts, the O'Daniel campaign knew exactly how many votes it needed. When all the votes were "counted," O'Daniel won by 1,311 votes. Since it was a special election, LBJ did not lose his seat in the House of Representatives. But he had learned a lesson he would never forget.

12. LBJ purchased an Austin radio station, KTBC, in his wife's name in 1943. KTBC and its sister television station, which the Johnsons created a few years later, benefitted from one favorable FCC ruling after another - decisions that made the Johnsons rich. When he asked about the stations, Johnson always claimed that Lady Bird ran them and that he had absolutely nothing to do with them. But this was clearly not the case. Lady Bird was an integral part of running the stations, but LBJ was involved too. In particular, when they first bought KTBC, Johnson flew to New York and persuaded William S. Paley, the president of the CBS radio network, to make KTBC a CBS affiliate. Also, if a Texas company needed a political favor from LBJ, they knew that it was a good idea to buy some advertising time on KTBC for their products.

13. LBJ ran for the U.S. Senate in 1948 and faced Coke Stevenson, a popular, two-term governor, in the Democratic primary. On election night, Johnson was far behind Stevenson when 20,000 "new" votes suddenly appeared for Johnson from the famously corrupt counties of Duval and Starr in South Texas. Johnson still trailed, but it was now extremely close.

Days passed, and the election results were still not yet official. Then, six days after the election, a precinct in Jim Wells County, which is adjacent to Duval County, announced 200 previously uncounted votes for Johnson. These votes gave LBJ the election by 87 votes and the nickname "Landslide Lyndon."

Stevenson appealed the result, to no avail. Later it was discovered that the 200 new voters for Johnson signed in with names written in the same ink, in the same handwriting, and in alphabetical order. In other words, someone stole the election for LBJ.

14. When Johnson entered the Senate, the dominant power in the chamber resided in an informal coalition of southern Democrats and conservative Republicans. The two groups had an agreement: the latter would vote against civil rights legislation, and the former would oppose liberal social and economic measures. This coalition – which began in opposition to FDR's court-packing scheme – had solidified its authority over the years by securing strategic committee chairmanships and using clever parliamentary procedures. The undisputed leader of the coalition was Senator Richard Russell of Georgia.

From the beginning, Johnson realized that Russell's mentorship would be the key to obtaining influence in the Senate. The Senate dominated Richard Russell's bachelor life, just as the House dominated Sam Rayburn's. Johnson later said:

With no one to cook for him at home, he [Russell] would arrive early enough in the morning to eat breakfast at the Capitol and stay late enough at night to eat dinner across the street. And in these early mornings and late evenings, I made sure that there was always one companion, one senator, who worked as hard and as long as he, and that was me, Lyndon Johnson. On Sundays ... I made sure to invite

Russell over for breakfast, lunch, or brunch or just to read the Sunday papers. He was my mentor, and I wanted to take care of him.

15. Aided by Russell's support, LBJ was elected majority whip of the Senate in 1950, and minority leader in 1952. When the Democrats won control of the Senate in 1954, he became majority leader.

He was one of the greatest majority leaders in the history of the Senate. When he took the minority leader job, there was not much power associated with it, because almost all the important decisions – like who got to serve on what committee – were decided on the basis on seniority. LBJ convinced the Democratic Steering Committee to allow him to make committee appointments based on the ability and experience of a senator relative to a given committee, not his seniority. Johnson then used this power (and other similar powers) to get senators to vote the way he wanted them too.

He was a legislative genius because he excelled at both long-term strategy and short-term tactics. For example, in 1957 he pushed through a civil rights bill by having a clever strategy for dealing with the Southern Caucus of his party and by using the tactic of going one-on-one with recalcitrant senators until their votes went his way.

Going one-on-one with LBJ became known as getting the "Johnson treatment." He knew every senator's preferences and weaknesses; he would stand close and grab the other man's coat lapels with his huge hands; and he would cajole, threaten, and offer deals until the senator in question agreed to vote his way. George Brown, an LBJ political supporter, said, "Lyndon was the greatest salesman one-on-one who ever lived."

16. During the final years of the 1950s, Johnson was concerned that America had fallen behind the Soviet Union in the "space race." After all, they had circled the earth with a satellite, then a dog, and then a man, whereas U.S. missiles tended to explode on the launchpad. Johnson held hearings that spotlighted the Eisenhower administration's failures, hearings that led to the legislation that created NASA. LBJ remained interested in and involved with NASA the rest of his career.

17. At the 1960 Democratic National Convention, John F. Kennedy won the party's nomination for president on the first ballot. Kennedy had previously assured labor leaders and civil rights leaders that he would *not* choose Johnson as his running mate, but after securing the nomination, he surveyed the Electoral College landscape and realized that he needed Texas to win the general election, and he that needed Johnson to win Texas. Also, on the morning after his nomination, several southern governors told him that to win their states, he must put Johnson on the ticket. Kennedy then asked LBJ to be his running mate.

Johnson's advisors expected him to turn Kennedy down. Why should he leave his powerful post as Senate Majority Leader for the vice presidency – a primarily ceremonial position with no power? But Johnson had wanted to be president his whole life, and he knew that as a Southerner, with civil rights problems brewing, he could never get elected president from the Senate. He also knew that ten of the first thirty-four presidents had ascended, in one way or another, from the vice presidency to the presidency. He accepted Jack Kennedy's offer.

But Bobby Kennedy – who disliked Johnson intensely – could not accept this result. He made several trips to Johnson's hotel suite to try to change Lyndon's mind. Johnson wisely refused to talk to Bobby, letting friend and confidant John Connally speak to him instead. Connally had a strong personality - he would become governor of Texas in 1963 - but was no match for an angry Bobby Kennedy. So, he called for someone who was: Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn.

The moment Rayburn arrived, he asked, "Where is the little son of a bitch?" Rayburn went inside LBJ's suite, and Bobby Kennedy told him that liberal and labor leaders were going to stage a floor fight against Johnson's nomination, and perhaps Johnson would prefer to withdraw. Rayburn responded with a single question: "Are you authorized to speak for your brother?" Bobby said no.

Rayburn replied, "Come back and see the Speaker of the House when you are." Then, according to an observer just outside the room, "the door burst open, Bobby sprinted past us out in the hall, disappeared." And for the rest of his life, Lyndon Johnson hated Bobby Kennedy.

18. Johnson's job during the 1960 election was to win southern states, and to do so he took a page out of Harry Truman's 1948 playbook. He went on a whistle-stop tour of eight southern states in a train named "LBJ Special." The train stopped at almost every town it entered, and LBJ gave a short speech that emphasized his southern roots and how much the Democrats could do for the South. In between stops, he negotiated with the local politicians who rode on the train, making sure that they would actively support the Kennedy-Johnson ticket.

On election night, Kennedy and Johnson carried seven southern states (including Texas), plus Missouri, a

border state, in what turned out to be an extremely close election. Two years later, Jack Kennedy told his close friend Kenny O'Donnell that about putting LBJ on the ticket, "You have to admit that I was right. We couldn't have won without him."

19. LBJ became president after Kennedy's assassination in Dallas on November 21, 1963.

Johnson handled the transition with a deft touch that surprised many onlookers. Despite his reputation for having a domineering personality, LBJ did not start by making wholesale changes. Instead, he went to great lengths to convince Kennedy's closest advisors to stay on in their posts, because he knew he needed their expertise, particularly in foreign policy. He also chose to support most of Kennedy's pending legislative agenda.

There was, however, one notable exception to the smoothness of the transition. When Johnson arrived back in Washington from Dallas, he assumed that he would be able to use the Oval Office the next day. This upset JFK's secretary, and when she told Bobby Kennedy, he was furious. When told of the secretary's objection, Johnson backed off immediately, but this contributed further to the animosity between LBJ and RFK.

20. When LBJ became president, his first legislative priorities were Kennedy's tax cut bill and civil rights bill, which were both hopelessly tied up in congressional committees. The tax cut bill was tied up in the Senate Finance Committee by its chairman, Senator Harry Byrd (D-VA). The civil rights bill was tied up in the House Rules Committee by its chairman, Representative Howard J. ("Judge") Smith (D-VA).

LBJ began by working on Byrd. He invited the older man, who he knew well, to the Oval Office for lunch to solicit his "wisdom" in this trying time. Johnson spoke little but listened intently, and finally, Byrd's price for cooperation on the tax bill emerged. He would move on it only if the new proposed federal budget was less than \$100 billion – an extremely low figure.

Johnson did not even try to negotiate the number – he knew Byrd would never budge. Instead, he harangued and cajoled the various government departments for lower budget requests and ultimately got the budget to come in under Byrd's magic number. Byrd then helped LBJ pass "their" tax cut bill.

LBJ then turned his attention to Judge Smith. The Virginian was acting on principle: there would be no civil rights bill on his watch because it would harm the southern way of life. Period.

But LBJ was not just the Master of the Senate; he had spent twelve years in the House too. And he knew its rules inside and out. In particular, he knew there was an arcane rule which said that if the majority of the House voted yes, a bill could be pulled out of a committee and brought to a vote by the full House, without the permission of the committee. So, LBJ lined up the votes in the House and threatened Judge Smith with this maneuver. The Virginian knew he was defeated and allowed his committee to vote on the bill. The bill passed the committee, then the House, and went on to the Senate.

21. The bill encountered stiff opposition in the Senate from southern senators led by Richard Russell. The senators – all Democrats – promised a filibuster to kill the bill, and as a result, Johnson needed Republican votes to overcome the filibuster.

Johnson won over Minority Leader Everett Dirksen by allowing him to add some harmless amendments and giving him some pork barrel projects. Dirksen got him some Republican votes, but the vote was still going to be very close. In the Senate, tensions rose as the clerk began the roll call, with each senator responding "aye" or "nay." When the clerk called California Senator Clair Engle's name, no one heard a sound. Engle had been hospitalized for weeks following surgery for a malignant brain tumor. The night before the vote, after speaking with Engle's wife and doctor, Johnson arranged for an ambulance to transport Engle to the Senate so that he could vote. Seated in a wheelchair, unable to speak, he pointed to his eye when he heard his name called. "I guess that means 'aye,'" said the clerk, and the chamber erupted in applause. His vote defeated the filibuster, and the bill – the Civil Rights Act of 1964 – passed and was signed into law by Johnson.

22. Before the battle in the Senate over the civil rights bill, LBJ went to see Richard Russell. "Dick, I love you," he began. "I wouldn't have been leader without you. I wouldn't have been vice-president, and I wouldn't have been president. So, everything I am, I owe to you, and that's why I wanted to tell you face to face because I love you: don't get in my way on this civil rights bill, or I'm going to run you down."

Russell replied, "Well, Mr. President, you may very well do that. But if you do, I promise, you'll not only lose the election, but you'll lose the South forever." Russell was wrong about the former; LBJ won the 1964 presidential election. He was right about the latter; the Democrats lost the South forever. (N.B. From 1968 to 2020, the only Democrat to carry the South in a presidential election was Georgian Jimmy Carter in 1976. In

addition, southern senators and House members have become overwhelmingly Republican.)

23. In March 1964, he was undecided as to what his Vietnam policy would be. As he explained to Sen. William Fulbright if we withdraw "Vietnam will collapse, and the ripple effect will be felt throughout Southeast Asia" On the other hand, "We can send Marines, a la Goldwater ... but our men may be bogged down in a long war." Johnson told Fulbright that for the time being, we should stick to "providing training and logistical support."

24. The situation changed on August 2, 1964, when North Vietnam torpedo boats attacked the U.S. destroyer *Mattox*, while it was patrolling the coast of North Vietnam in the Gulf of Tonkin. At first, Johnson's instinct was to downplay the significance of the attack. He knew that a couple of days earlier South Vietnam forces, encouraged by American advisors, had raided North Vietnamese coastal installations. Perhaps the North Vietnamese had mistakenly concluded that the *Maddox* was involved in the raid. The *Maddox* also reported an attack on August 4, but this might have been a false alarm.

His advisors counseled him not to ignore the attack. One warned, "You're going to be running against a man who's a wild man [Barry Goldwater] on this subject." General Maxwell Taylor said that failure to respond would send a signal "that the U.S. flinches from direct confrontation with the North Vietnamese."

Johnson became convinced that he needed to use the incident to show the American people that he was just as tough as Goldwater. So, in his speech to the nation that night, he emphasized the attack on the *Maddox* – he did not mention the South Vietnamese provocation or the fact that the second attack might have been a false alarm. Three days later, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which authorized the president "to take all necessary measures to repel" and counter attacks on the armed forces of the United States and to defend the freedom of South Vietnam. The resolution passed unanimously in the House and nearly so in the Senate (two senators dissented).

25. In 1964, LBJ ran against ultra-conservative Barry Goldwater of Arizona. Goldwater won only his home state and five states in the Deep South, giving Johnson a landslide victory, 486 to 52 electoral college votes. Johnson had coattails; the Democratic majorities in the House and Senate grew to 295-140 and 68-32 respectively.

26. The percentage of eligible black voters registered to vote in 1964 was eighteen percent in Alabama and six percent in Mississippi due to intimidation and impediments like literacy tests and poll taxes. Johnson felt strongly that a voting rights act was needed, but he decided to wait until 1966 to pursue one since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had just passed. However, Dr. Martin Luther King forced Johnson's hand in 1965 when he began a voter registration drive in Selma, Alabama.

On March 7, an infamous day that became known as "Bloody Sunday," more than 600 civil rights activists gathered at Brown's Chapel in Selma to begin a peaceful fifty-four-mile march to Montgomery. When they reached the narrow Edmund Pettis Bridge, they walked in a two-person-wide column, singing "We Shall Overcome," the anthem of the civil rights movement. Helmeted state troopers and Sheriff Jim Clark's mounted posse, armed with nightsticks, bullwhips, and billy clubs, met them at the top of the bridge. As television cameras recorded the scene, the state troopers and the posse charged and began striking the marchers repeatedly. When it was over, more than sixty marchers lay injured, including John Lewis, whose skull was fractured by a billy club. As the marchers retreated to Brown's Chapel, the mounted posse pursued them. The carnage, which was witnessed by millions of television viewers, awakened the conscience of the nation.

In response, Johnson addressed a joint session of Congress eight days later and called for a voting rights bill. He said, "There is no Negro problem. There is no Southern problem. There is no Northern problem. There is only an American problem. ... Because it's not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And we shall overcome."

In Selma, Martin Luther King, John Lewis, and King's closest aides watched Johnson's televised address in the home of a friend. When LBJ uttered that last sentence – the anthem of the civil rights movement – all eyes in the room went to Dr. King. Throughout all the hardships they had endured, and all the triumphs they had shared, none of them had ever seen Dr. King cry. But he was crying now — tears of joy, tears of relief, tears of thankfulness. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, which prevents racial discrimination in voting, was passed five months later.

Johnson also pushed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 through Congress. The act replaced the long-standing preference for white northern Europeans embedded in U.S. immigration laws by an equal openness to people of all colors. The result would change the face of America.

27. On February 7, 1965, the Viet Cong performed a night raid on the military base at Pleiku, and the attack killed many U.S. advisors and helicopter pilots as they slept. McGeorge Bundy, LBJ's national security advisor, who was in Vietnam, hurried to Pleiku and was horrified at the carnage. He called the White House and urged immediate retaliation against the Viet Cong's ally and sponsor, North Vietnam.

Up until now, the U.S. had resisted the temptation to take the war to the North, even as the situation in the South had been deteriorating for months. But now LBJ ordered bombing in North Vietnam, and shortly after he committed the first U.S. ground combat troops to Vietnam.

28. Johnson viewed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution as a "blank check," and he unwisely escalated our involvement in the Vietnam War without a national consensus. When he expanded the war in July 1965, by sending 100,000 more ground troops to join the fighting, he announced only half the deployment. In January 1966, when he and his advisors decided to send in another 120,000 troops, LBJ again attempted to conceal the move by announcing the deployment of 10,000 troops each month for twelve consecutive months.

29. LBJ nominated Thurgood Marshall to be the nation's first African American Supreme Court justice in 1967. From his days as a teacher and National Youth Administration official, Johnson understood the importance of role models for African American and Mexican American children. Such men and women demonstrated to the children that they could aspire to any job in the United States and do it just as well as anyone else.

Marshall was an inspired choice. He served as Chief Counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund from 1940 to 1961. He won twenty-nine of the thirty-two cases he tried before the Supreme Court, including the ground-breaking *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine that perpetuated racially segregated schools. President Kennedy appointed him a federal judge in 1961, and Johnson chose him to be Solicitor General in 1965. Marshall served on the Supreme Court for twenty-four years.

30. As the war dragged on, Americans saw television coverage of the carnage in Vietnam, and an antiwar movement developed, especially on college campuses. At demonstrations, chants of "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?" and "One, two, three, four, we don't want your f**king war" were heard.

In the fall of 1967, the antiwar movement produced a presidential candidate to oppose LBJ for the Democratic nomination for president, Sen. Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota. In March of 1968, McCarthy did well against LBJ in the New Hampshire primary, and Sen. Robert Kennedy entered the race shortly after. Two weeks later LBJ announced on national TV: "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president."

31. 1968 was an incredibly violent year in America. In April, white supremacist James Earl Ray assassinated Martin Luther King Jr. by shooting him at a Memphis motel. The murder sparked riots in several cities, e.g., Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Chicago, and Kansas City. In June, Senator Robert Kennedy was assassinated after celebrating his California presidential primary victory with his supporters. Sirhan Sirhan, a twenty-four-year-old Palestinian, shot Kennedy in retaliation for the senator's support of Israel following the 1967 Six-Day War. Johnson tried to get a strict gun control bill passed in Congress in the wake of these tragedies, which included provisions for gun registration and licensing of gun owners. The gun lobby fought the bill, which got watered down and did not include these two key provisions.

In August, antiwar protestors demonstrated in the streets of Chicago at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. The protestors were met by the Chicago Police Department in the streets and parks before and during the convention. During the evening of August 28, hordes of police officers indiscriminately beat protestors, reporters, photographers, and bystanders in front of the Democratic Party's convention headquarters; this "police riot" was broadcast live by the major television networks.

32. The 1968 presidential election was a three-sided race: Democrat Hubert Humphrey, Republican Richard Nixon, and George Wallace of the American Independent Party. By October, the race between Nixon and Humphrey was close. And at that time, LBJ had a deal in the works whereby all four parties involved in the Vietnam War (the U.S., South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the Viet Cong) would meet in Paris and begin peace negotiations. Nixon feared that the peace talks would help Humphrey and "steal" the election from him. At the last minute, just like voter fraud (in his mind) had stolen the election of 1960 from him.

To avoid this, Nixon decided to sabotage the peace talks by convincing South Vietnam not to attend. He

contacted the government of South Vietnam privately and told them that they would get a better peace deal from a Nixon administration than from the Johnson administration. In particular, Nixon's campaign manager John Mitchell told Anna Chennault, a friend of South Vietnam President Thieu: "Anna, I'm speaking on behalf of Mr. Nixon. It's very important that our Vietnamese friends understand our Republican position, and I hope you have made it clear to them." He said if Mrs. Chennault could persuade Thieu to refuse to go to the peace table, Johnson's bombing halt would backfire on the Democrats. Subsequently, Thieu declined to attend the peace talks, any chance for peace vanished, and Nixon (301 electoral votes) defeated Humphrey (191 electoral votes) and third-party candidate George Wallace (46 electoral votes). And the Vietnam War went on for seven more years.

33. LBJ loved to tell (and embellish) stories, and one of his favorites was about how to tell the difference between a Democrat and a Republican.

When his father lay dying in the hospital, he told Lyndon, "Son, get me my britches. I'm going home." Lyndon tried to convince him that he would get better medical care in the hospital, but Sam said, "I want to go back among our people, where they know when a man's sick, and they care when he dies." That's the difference between Democrats and Republicans, LBJ would say, "Democrats do care when a man is sick, and they care when he dies, and Democrats care year in and year out." Republicans care too, "just before every election time."

34. When LBJ was vice-president, he went to see Senator John Stennis of Mississippi to lobby him on behalf of JFK's civil rights bill. While discussing the public accommodations portion of the legislation, he told a story that encapsulated why it was needed:

Well, you know John, the other day a sad thing happened. Helen Williams and her husband, George, who [are African Americans and] have been working for me for years, drove my official car from Washington down to Texas, the Cadillac limousine of the vice-president of the United States. They drove through your state, and when they got hungry, they stopped at grocery stores on the edge of town in the colored areas and bought Vienna sausages and beans and ate them with a plastic spoon. And when they had to go to the bathroom, they would stop, pull off on a side road, and Helen Williams, an employee of the vice-president of the United States, would squat in the road to pee. And you know, John, that's just bad. That's wrong. And there ought to be something to change that.

35. Shortly after assuming the presidency, Johnson told his aides, "I'm going to pass the civil rights bill and not change one word of it. I'm not going to cavil, and I'm not going to compromise." When they advised him to go slowly and to wait until after the 1964 presidential election, he replied, "Well, what the hell is the presidency for?" if not to do things like this.

36. When an aide disappointed LBJ, he would let them know immediately. Once, Joseph Califano, his top domestic aide, came into the Oval Office and described to Johnson an agreement he made with Arkansas Senator John McClellan. After he finished, Johnson, seated behind his desk, said, "Open your fly." Califano knew he was not serious but was surprised nonetheless.

LBJ got up from his chair and said, "Unzip your fly because there is nothing there. John McClellan cut it off with a razor so sharp you didn't even notice it." LBJ then picked up the phone and called McClellan. "John," the president said, "I'm calling about Joe Califano. You cut off his pecker and put it in your desk drawer. Now, I'm sending him back up there to get it from you. I can't agree to anything like that. You've got to realize that the transportation system of this country needs something besides more highways in Arkansas."

37. LBJ knew that very few men in his family had reached the age of sixty-four, primarily due to heart problems. And he had a near-fatal heart attack in 1955 at age forty-six. After the attack, Johnson, a ninety-cigarette-per-day smoker, abruptly quit the habit. He said it was the most difficult thing that he had ever done.

LBJ resumed smoking after he left the White House. On January 22, 1973, he died when his heart gave out during his afternoon nap at his ranch in the Texas Hill Country. He was sixty-four years old.

38. In the run-up to the election of 1940, it was projected that the Democrats would lose fifty House seats and control of the chamber. Even if FDR was reelected, the loss of the House would hamstring his legislative agenda. More and more – even though he had been in Congress for only three years – FDR had come to rely on LBJ's advice regarding the award of federal contracts in Texas. Johnson used this as leverage to coerce

contractors to make huge contributions to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; the committee spread the money out nationwide, not just in Texas. On election night, the early returns were not good, and FDR called LBJ and asked, "How many seats are we going to lose?" Johnson replied proudly, "We're not going to lose. We're going to gain." And, in a stunning turnaround, the Democrats gained five seats and retained control of the House.

FDR knew that the large turnout for congressional Democrats helped him get reelected since voters often vote a straight party-line ticket. Presidential aide Jim Rowe recalled, "It impressed the hell out of Roosevelt" that Johnson had played such a key role in the election. FDR wrote a thank you note to LBJ saying, "I am still getting letters telling me of your fine cooperation in every way, and the results speak for themselves."

See the next page for a list of references.

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