

6-2011

Lyndon Johnson: A Psychological Character Study

Stephanie L. Vacchio

Union College - Schenectady, NY

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalworks.union.edu/theses>



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), and the [President/Executive Department Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Vacchio, Stephanie L., "Lyndon Johnson: A Psychological Character Study" (2011). *Honors Theses*. 1083.
<https://digitalworks.union.edu/theses/1083>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at Union | Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Union | Digital Works. For more information, please contact digitalworks@union.edu.

Lyndon Johnson: A Psychological Character Study

By

Stephanie L. Vacchio

* * * * *

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of Political Science

UNION COLLEGE
June, 2011

ABSTRACT

VACCHIO, STEPHANIE Lyndon Johnson: A Psychological Character Study. Department of Political Science, March 2011.

ADVISOR: Clifford Brown

Thesis: Lyndon Johnson's childhood had a direct and significant impact on his leadership style while President.

This thesis centers on Lyndon Johnson and his character traits and how they are translated into his leadership abilities. The ways in which he handled issues as president, his personal relationships with others, and his own personality traits all define who Johnson was as a man. These aspects combined can be viewed as "character", or the result of the environment someone has been exposed to for a prolonged period of time. In the case of Johnson, it is his childhood that has played the largest role in shaping his character and in turn his personality.

My thesis explores the psychological study of childhood and how it can affect the way in which an individual acts as an adult. Johnson's political career is analyzed through a lens that takes into account the environment in which he was raised as a child and the way in which the character he developed influenced his leadership capabilities. I discuss each stage of Johnson's life and how his character became both his biggest springboard and his largest obstacle.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Understanding Lyndon Johnson, iii
Chapter One: Model and Theories, 1
Chapter Two: Understanding Leadership Qualities, 27
Chapter Three: The Childhood of Lyndon Johnson, 43
Chapter Four: The Wonder Kid Arrives in Washington, D.C., 63
Chapter Five: The Senate Years, 84
Chapter Six: The Presidency Years, 131
Chapter Seven: Conclusions, 161

Introduction: Understanding Lyndon Johnson

In choosing to conduct a study of presidential character there were a number of ways to explore the topic. Though there are a number of past presidents to choose from, it was not difficult to narrow down my selection to just one president. Lyndon Johnson is perhaps of the most misunderstood and complex presidential personalities that the United States has seen to date. Johnson is a paradoxical figure; he could be kind and gentle one minute and mean and uncouth the next. He was an intelligent, capable President in one sense and yet could be quite insecure and unconcerned at times. Though Johnson is most infamously remembered for the U.S.'s involvement in Vietnam there is an underlying story that not many are aware of that explains the reasoning behind Johnson's actions. The story of his childhood and the psychological issues that resulted from the environment he was subject to as a young boy help to provide answers for Johnson's behavior. This story also explains the reasons for Johnson's giant success as well as the basis for Johnson's failures.

Johnson is an incredibly polarizing figure in contemporary American politics. The ways in which he handled issues as president, his personal relationships with others, and his own personality traits all define who Johnson was as a man. These aspects combined can be viewed as "character", or the result of the environment someone has been exposed to for a prolonged period of time. In the case of Johnson, it is his childhood that has played the largest role in shaping his character and in turn his personality (which can be defined as an outward projection of character).

The character traits that Johnson acquired as a result of his childhood upbringing had a direct and substantial impact on his presidential leadership style.

Johnson was brought up in a home where constant love, affection, and praise were not prevalent. That is, Johnson's mother did not consistently provide him with positive reinforcement. She simply applauded him when he did something she liked and ignored him when he went against her wishes. This type of parenting left an incredible mark on Johnson, both as a child and as an adult. In short, the way in which Johnson was raised led him to develop a large insecurity complex. This complex led him to both outstanding achievements and immense failures. Within Johnson himself we find a polarizing conflict that became magnified during his presidency. This conflict is perhaps the corner stone of Johnson's personality and the biggest obstacle in his way throughout his administration.

Literature and Research:

In order to better understand Johnson's childhood in relation to his presidential leadership style, it was necessary to research in three different parts. Firstly, a basic understanding of Johnson both as a child and as an adult was key. In order to comprehend Johnson to the best of my ability, I read almost every prominent biography written about Johnson. These include Robert Dallek's Portrait of a President, Doris Kearns' Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream, Robert Caro's The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Means of Ascent, Master of the Senate, Path to Power, and Johnson's own Autobiography.

After a firm understanding of who Johnson's was as a child, a man, a politician, a husband, and a father was established, it was necessary to contextualize Johnson's leadership style by reading the existing literature of this subject. Among the texts read are; James David Barber's The Presidential Character, Fred Greenstein's The Presidential Difference, Aaron Wildavsky's collections, The Presidency and Perspectives on the Presidency, Benjamin Page and Mark Petracca's The American Presidency. These texts allowed me to better understand the qualities of presidents (both good and bad, successful and very unsuccessful). Based upon Johnson's qualities, which were gathered from the biographies, I then was able to categorize Johnson and judge what kind of president he was. I came to the conclusion that though Johnson was a highly motivated man, his presidency was littered with times of poor judgment, paranoia, insecurity, and indecisiveness. In order to fully understand the decisions Johnson made and to understand why he acted the way he did during certain periods, it was necessary to understand what these personality characteristics were born from. That is why the third part of my research focuses on developmental psychology and an analysis of parenting during childhood years.

In order to understand childhood development, extensive research on childhood development was conducted. The major source for this research was a text on the subject matter written by Smith, Cowie and Blades. This text provided basic information on parenting and how it may affect a child. It also provided the scientific backing for my research model, which is entitled "The Cycle of Parental Oppression". This cycle illustrates that the way in which a child is raised can force

them to develop a negative self image, which can lead to a slew of other negative traits.

Research Model:

The model used in this thesis (illustrated in Chapter One) depicts Lyndon Johnson's journey from childhood to adulthood and the qualities he developed along the way. The way in which his mother raised him has a clear and direct affect; Johnson developed a severe lack of self-esteem. A lack of confidence in one's self can lead to a child's need for self-acceptance. In order to find ways to give himself praise, Johnson looked for other outlets aside from his mother. As a result, Johnson continually looked for ways to increase his power. Power became the outlet of choice for Johnson, but the cycle of oppression continues because no matter how much power Johnson was able to obtain throughout his entire life, he was never able to build up his self-esteem. In fact, one could argue that the more power he had, the more insecure Johnson became. His incredible insecurities were truly the basis for so many of Johnson's fatal flaws. But in many ways, his insecurity was both his biggest asset and his worst enemy.

The model above serves as a means of understanding how childhood development, personal qualities, and presidential leadership are all connected. Their connection is clear and direct, and allows us to better understand why Johnson made certain decisions while in office. The model and presidential leadership literature will serve as the first two theoretical chapters of this thesis. These will be completed by the end of this term. Following those two theory

chapters, I expect to include at least three other chapters; one focusing on childhood and insecurity, another on the qualities that were born out of insecurity, and a third on how Johnson's relationships with others shaped decision making during the early days of the Vietnam War.

The "Cycle of Parental Oppression" is applied to different stages in Johnson's life throughout this thesis. A basic understanding of which qualities are important to the Presidency is established in Chapter Two. Establishing the importance of different leadership qualities is vital, as this thesis looks at leadership qualities and how they are affected by childhood development. Chapters four, five, and six analyze different stages of Johnson's education and career and provides different examples of where childhood has affected his character as an adult. The most essential idea that should be gathered from looking at Johnson's life as a whole is that character traits do not change over time. In fact, character traits and the perceptions one has of themselves are simply reinforced over time rather than altered as time passes.

Chapter One: Understanding The Importance of Childhood Psychology in Regards to Leadership Qualities

Introduction to A Model for Understanding The Psychological Aspects of Lyndon Johnson's Childhood:

Upon reading numerous biographical texts on Lyndon Johnson, it was clear that his childhood and the environment in which he was raised in had a significant impact on his character. The character qualities that Johnson acquired as a result of his upbringing show a direct and significant effect on his presidential leadership style and his own personal relationship with power. To better understand this phenomenon I have created a model which follows Johnson throughout his life to explain how and why Johnson acted the way he did. The model serves as a tool to better comprehend Johnson as a person and then applies his personal qualities to his leadership during his presidency.

The formation of the model was based upon a great deal of literature. In order to portray just how Johnson's character was born out of his childhood experiences it was necessary to apply theories of developmental psychology, with a specific emphasis on infancy and early childhood. The qualities that Johnson developed as a child are directly linked to the ways in which his mother and father parented him. Their lack of positive reinforcement and encouragement from Johnson's mother caused him to lack self-esteem. Additionally, Johnson's mother's love was rather conditional, in that she offered her affection when she was satisfied with his behavior and actions. Thus, Johnson experienced a lack of "unconditional love" throughout his childhood. Johnson's insecurity with himself is perhaps the cornerstone of his character; his lack of confidence has manifested itself in almost

all aspects of his leadership. Thus, it was of the utmost importance to magnify this trait and to better understand why and how it came about. Childhood development is the basis for the first half of the model and explains the parent-child relationship that molds a child's personality for the rest of his or her life. Johnson's case, the relationship was a fatal one, giving rise to numerous qualities that caused him to fail but in some cases, succeed. These qualities will be further explained later on.

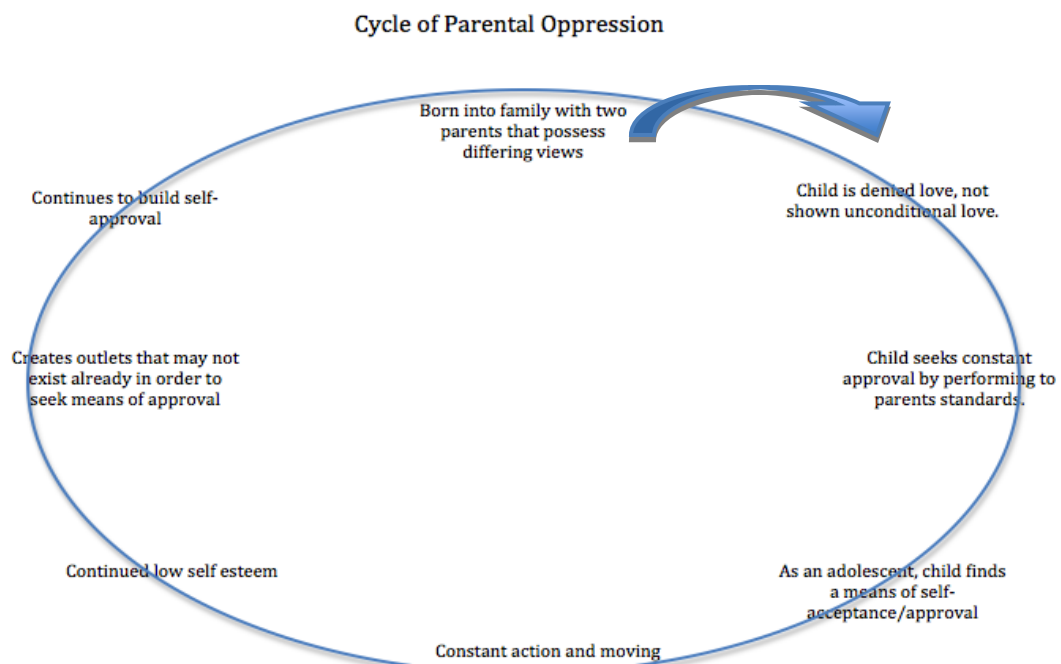
The second type of literature that this model is based on is readings about presidential personality and character written by scholars in various areas of study. These readings proved to be invaluable, as they served as a basis for studying the presidency in the context of personal qualities independent of psychology. Some of these readings serve as a "handbook" to predict the presidential performance of a candidate or president-elect based upon a certain combination of character qualities. The most famous of these studies is James David Barber's "Presidential Character: Predicting Presidential Performance in the White House". Barber's focus is on a certain set of attributes that he believes will either produce a very successful president or a failure.¹ This study focuses on personality and character, but looks at qualities independent of their origins. That is, Barber's study does not take into account childhood development of character, attributes, values, or mannerisms. However, Barber's study proved to be incredibly useful because he examines personality *type*. He looks at certain qualities and categorizes them into what kind of presidents would possess such a personality. It was necessary to understand what

¹ Barber, James David. *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House*. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009) 3.

type of president Johnson was to understand where the qualities stem from. In other words, Barber (along with a variety of other author's who will be mentioned later on), laid the ground work for understanding Johnson's presidential type and personality, while a study of childhood development helped to illustrate how Johnson acquired those qualities. The following model serves to showcase what happened in the intermediary and begs the question, how did Johnson's childhood experiences manifest themselves into the personality type he possessed as an adult?

Understanding the model:

The following model is entitled the "Cycle of Parental Oppression" because it illustrates how the way in which parents raise their children can have a significant and negative impact on their child's life well into adulthood. This particular model illustrates the negative repercussions of the way Johnson was raised. However, there are also a number of underlying positive qualities that are implied by the model that are not directly illustrated. These qualities will be highlighted when discussing the certain portion of the model that they can be found in.



The original basis for the model can be found in biographies concerning Johnson. Each biography tells the story of a young Johnson, raised in a home where there was never enough unconditional love. His mother, a young and intelligent woman married Johnson's father at a young age. She gave up on many of the aspirations she once had for herself when Johnson was born. As a concerned mother, Rebekah Baines Johnson wanted nothing more than for her son to grow up an intellectual and talented young man. To do this, Rebekah taught Johnson how to read before he started school and enrolled Johnson in a number of activities such as music lessons and dance lessons.² His mother wanted him to be successful but she also wanted him to find success on *her* terms. If Johnson did not do something to her liking or did not want to do something her way at all, she would ignore him. She would remove all love and affection from her relationship with her son the second he did not do something to her liking. On the other hand, if Johnson did something that Rebekah liked and did it well, she would "reward him" with love and affection- he would be the apple of her eye above all her other children.³ This type of behavior, where a parent gives and takes away love as a means of rewarding or scolding a child can have a disastrous effect on a child. Johnson's life illustrates this point perfectly. This type of environment where love is conditional is illustrated in the first, second, and third points on the model.

² Kearns, Doris. "Lyndon Johnson's Political Personality." *Political Science Quarterly* 91.3 (1976) 25.

³ Kearns, Doris. *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*. (New York: St. Martin's, 1991) 25.

The first point on the model reads, “[child is] born into family with two parents who possess differing views.” The idea that a child is raised in an environment where parenting is not cohesive, meaning parents do not share the same outlook when it comes to raising their child, is key. This point showcases the idea that Johnson was raised in a home where his mother was pulling him in one direction and his father was pulling him in another. To be specific, Johnson’s mother wanted him to be well rounded where as his father was concerned with him possessing “manly” qualities. When Johnson’s mother enrolled him in dance classes and he told her he did not want to go, she did not speak to him for days on end. However, Johnson knew that his father would be pleased with his decision.⁴ Rebekah’s behavior is best illustrated by the second point on the model, which reads “child is denied love, not shown unconditional love.” This point was developed by reading about the ways in which Rebekah treated her son in conjunction with theories of developmental psychology.

The idea that Rebekah did not offer her son all of the unconditional love she had to offer is perhaps the key to understanding Johnson’s entire character through his adulthood. The lack of positive reinforcement that Johnson did not experience caused him to develop a lack of self-esteem. After years of experiencing the same cycle; not performing up to his mother’s standards, enduring the removal of love and affection and eventually regaining both by doing something his mother approved of, Johnson began to think he was not “good enough”.⁵ When looking at this idea from a psychological standpoint, it is clear why Johnson developed such a

⁴ Kearns. *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 38

⁵ Kearns. *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 25

lack of confidence. According to basic theories of childhood development, if parents encourage their children in the proper ways children are more likely to develop high self-esteem. Proper encouragement implies that parents applaud their child when they do something well and offer to help them improve at something when they fail.⁶ More importantly, freedom to choose is incredibly vital for a child. Children whose parents force them into activities may begin to feel guilt upon taking their own initiative.⁷ This negative association with independence will lead them to let others make decisions for them. Johnson did in many ways experience guilt from not abiding by his mother's wishes. However, when looking at Johnson's own personal experience, it is clear that his lack of unconditional love led him to find a means of his own self-approval. Instead of allowing others to make decisions for him Johnson took initiative in order to find a way for him to obtain a more positive view of himself. This is illustrated by point four which is, "As a adolescent, child finds a means of self acceptance/approval."

In order to best understand point four, it is necessary to look at the individual stages of childhood psychology. According to neo-Freudian psychologist Erik Erikson, each stage of childhood and development can be defined by a certain conflict. The outcome of each conflict will produce a quality or a trait based upon on the way a child reacts to a certain situation. In the infant stages of a child's life, there is a conflict between trust and mistrust. Erikson labels this stage "hope". The conflict is designed to test whether or not a child is trusting of his or her parents. This stage

⁶ Smith, Peter K., Helen Cowie, and Mark Blades. *Understanding Children's Development*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2003) 33.

⁷ Smith, 121

is followed by “will”, which is found in the toddler stage of development. This conflict looks to see if a child is self-assured and independent. The conflict between self-independent and doubt is one that Johnson dealt with well after his toddler years.⁸ I would suggest that the internal conflicts within Johnson as a young boy were not entirely solved. Johnson grew up in a home where he experienced the trust *and* mistrust of his parents and where his self esteem ballooned but then was deflated by the same person who caused it to increase: his mother. The conflicts that Erikson presents could not have been resolved because of the immense amount of confusion Johnson must have felt as a boy. Between his parents pulling him in opposite directions, feeling the stress of trying to make both of them happy and Johnson’s mother offering and removing love, it is no surprise that Johnson found it necessary to find his own means of self-approval.

Once Johnson reached adolescence and was old enough to make his own decisions, he began looking for outlets for self-acceptance. This is a key point in the model as it explains Johnson’s behavior in politics. Doris Kearns suggests in an essay on Johnson’s character that the lack of absolute love from his mother, which caused his low self-esteem, also provoked him to find his own way to provide that love for himself.⁹ In order to find such an outlet, it is necessary that a person who wishes to do so is constantly moving. As a young adult, Johnson was extremely active. He was continuously looking for ways to validate his own self-worth. The notion that Johnson tried to find ways to approve of himself is illustrated in points four and five

⁸ Erikson, Erik H., and Robert Coles. *The Erik Erikson Reader*. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001) 137.

⁹ Kearns, “Lyndon Johnson’s Political Personality”, 387

of the model. The ultimate result of point four which is essentially where a child finds his or her own means of approval is that the child will break away from parental demands and begin to take initiative. Here we see the clear paradox between traditional theories of childhood psychology and this model. Most children who are not properly encouraged will eventually develop such low self esteem that they allow others to make decisions for them, as discussed above. Instead, Johnson's personality developed in such a way that allowed him to break free from the traditional cycle in certain ways. In Johnson's case this can best be attributed to the fact that Johnson experienced positive reinforcement *sometimes*. He understood what it was like to feel good about one's self and thus took the initiative to find ways to feel good about himself at all times.

The result of constant action and moving often leads to a specific outlet. As a young adult searches for a way to make him or her feel good about themselves, they eventually become infatuated with one specific outlet. For Lyndon Johnson, power was the outlet of choice. Even from a very young age, Johnson craved the spotlight. He wanted people to notice him and he wanted to be respected. It seemed natural that Johnson use power in order to build self-esteem. His strong willed personality made it easy for him to climb up the ladder of political power. Not only that, but power communicates a sense of accomplishment, which produces positive feelings about oneself. But the essential issue with power is that it can be limitless. Here in lies the problem for Johnson. Eventually he was able to reach the very top of the power ladder, but what Johnson may not have realized is that not all types of power were appropriate for his personality type. It has been suggested that Johnson, being

incredibly unsure of himself, paranoid, and manipulative, did not have the correct personality to succeed in the presidency. We can see this point illustrated by Barber. Barber classifies Johnson as an “active/negative” president. Active (as opposed to passive) presidents are constantly acting and moving. Given the model, this should be expected of Johnson. However, his negative (as opposed to positive) view of himself severely impacted his leadership style. Most successful presidents are both active and positive, meaning they have a positive view of themselves and possessed a great deal of confidence. Despite Johnson not fitting the more successful presidential type, it did not stop him from achieving as much power as possible.¹⁰

What is most interesting is that President Woodrow Wilson shares a similar experience. In Alexander George’s personality study of Wilson, he notes that Wilson too had a troubled childhood filled with negative feelings towards his father. In order to boost his own self-esteem, Wilson looked for ways to capture power, which like Johnson, eventually led him to the White House. The fact that two presidents have exhibited this type of behavior reinforces the model. The continued achievement of power leads to perhaps what can best be described as an “addiction” to success. Johnson strived to continually do better, to be better. Here we can clearly see a positive effect of the environment in which he was raised. Had his mother not used her love as a means of punishment, perhaps Johnson would not have grown to be so driven. The amount of tenacity Johnson possessed was astonishing. Very few men possess such a quality that allows them to gain as much power as Johnson did. For that, he is quite an admirable figure. However, the ways in which his influence

¹⁰ Barber, 24

was dispersed caused many to look at Johnson as a polarizing figure instead.

Despite his ability to accumulate power both in his life as a young adult and during his presidency, Johnson was still not satisfied. This is why Johnson continued to seek out more power, finding ways to become more influential even if it meant being dishonest, manipulative, and mean. His addiction grew larger and larger with every area of politics he dominated. However, his self-esteem did not grow. In fact, not only did Johnson continue to have a negative self-image, he perhaps grew even more insecure of himself. No matter how high up in Washington he became, he continually believed he was not as good as some of the other men he worked with. Often times he suffered from the belief that his education was not up to par with the men who graduated from Harvard or Yale that sat beside him.¹¹ As Johnson's Assistant Secretary of State George Ball put it, "Lyndon Johnson did not suffer from a poor education, he suffered from the belief that he had a poor education." This insecurity would plague Johnson no matter how much success he experienced. Thus, "continued low self-esteem" is a pivotal point in the model. It illustrates the idea that no matter how much power is acquired, a child who has experienced an environment where self-esteem was not developed properly will grow up never having the ability to maintain a positive image of themselves. This is so due to the fact that although someone may find success, there is no outside source to validate his or her achievements. Johnson continually lacked the positive reinforcement from his mother and truly believed that no matter what he did, he simply was not

¹¹ Halberstam, David. *The Best and the Brightest*. New York: Modern Library, 2001) 306.

good enough.

Though Johnson and Wilson both sought out power, there were often times when that power simply was unobtainable. Instead of giving up, they *created* their own power outlets. That is, they began to carve out ways for them to increase their influence if such ways did not previously exist. Johnson continually found ways to do this throughout his life, from childhood to adulthood. Manipulation was Johnson's specialty; he understood that power was all about getting people to do what *he* wanted. It was necessary to manipulate people in such a way that they did not realize they were being manipulated. For instance, when Johnson was in college at Southwest Texas State Teachers College at San Marcos, he wanted nothing more than to foster a close relationship with the college's president. In order to do so, Johnson began working as a maintenance work-study student picking up garbage and rocks.

Despite the fact that his coworkers did the minimum amount of work that would still yield a paycheck, Johnson went above and beyond and picked up litter with great enthusiasm. He soon applied for another job, this time working as the assistant to the janitor of the science building, and was given the new post almost immediately. After completing this job with enthusiasm, he applied for a *third* post, this time as special assistant to the president's personal secretary.¹² Again he was given the job without hesitation because he had such enthusiasm. Johnson's new job as assistant to the secretary was to deliver messages from the president to professors and staff members within the college. Johnson took pride in this job and

¹² Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 48

continued to carve his own path to power. Although he did not directly speak to the president, he often persuaded people receiving messages to have Johnson relay a direct message to the president rather than have them writing a letter in response to his. This allowed Johnson to create a new job for himself (one that had not existed prior) in order for him to foster a direct relationship with the schools president. Johnson did eventually build up quite a friendship with the president, and he regarded Johnson with high esteem. However, as illustrated above, Johnson could not stop at that. He needed to make himself known to the entire campus, which eventually he was able to do. This behavior continued well into his adult life as he went from state politics to congressman to senator and eventually president. Despite his intelligence and drive, Johnson often relied on his ability to manipulate people and situations in order to get what he wanted most.

Finally, the model concludes with the idea that individuals who cycle through this model will never be able to escape low self esteem. Despite the fact that Johnson continued to seek out ways to increase his power, he had a negative self-image well into his adult life. Though Johnson was admired and considered to be at one point the “master of the Senate” when he was the Senate Majority Leader, he still did not fully believe he was ever “good enough.” His tremendous insecurities affected everything from his plans of action when it came to policy as well as his own personal relationships with friends. From this one character trait stemmed a number of other traits that proved to be highly toxic to Johnson’s presidency. The way in which Johnson handled major policies on Vietnam, his Great Society, and his own personal life reflected the poor childhood he experienced.

Although Johnson's main insecurities stem from his belief that he could not live up to a certain standard that his mother had set for him, he also experienced other situations in his life which caused him to reinforce his self-doubt. As a child, Johnson's family was quite comfortable. They always had enough to eat and clothing to wear. But when Sam Johnson, Lyndon's father, used every dime of his savings to purchase back the Johnson Ranch (that the family had lost years ago) their financial situation began to change drastically. The Johnson's became incredibly poor, often having to eat meals at Sam's brothers home. Johnson soon realized that many of his schoolmates talked about him and how unfortunate his family was. His financial situation even prevented him to dating the woman he thought he was to marry, as her father did not want her to associate with "a Johnson".¹³ This embarrassed Johnson and his self-esteem continued to remain low. Similarly to the ways in which his lack of affluence affected him as a boy, Johnson also experienced insecurities when he found his way into politics, as he felt that his poor childhood and education were not acceptable in Washington, D.C. Though this model specifically focuses on Johnson's severe insecurities as a result of his childhood, it also has the ability to explain a number of other character qualities, insecurity being the seed for each of them.

Other Traits:

There is a great deal of character consequences that can be birthed out of insecurity. As explained in the model above, an infatuation with power as a result of

¹³ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 57

an insecure childhood encapsulated Johnson's life. The lack of loyalty he felt from his mother, seeing as though she would give love and take it away just as easily, deeply affected Johnson's personal relationships as an adult. He feared very much that his closest confidants would turn their back on him. This was certainly how Johnson felt after John F. Kennedy's assassination. He believed that his newly inherited administration had divided loyalties between him and the Kennedy's, and he was correct to make such an assumption. As a result, Johnson weeded out those who he considered to be infidels in order to ensure complete and absolute loyalty. Trust and confidence in his advisors was key, especially during the Vietnam War. It is interesting to note the conflict between insecurity and loyalty- which force has a stronger presence over Johnson? Though one stems from the other, we will see Johnson struggle with the two during the decision making process of Vietnam. This issue will be explored in greater detail in chapters to follow.

In order to assure loyalty, Johnson found his own ways to manipulate his staff. Even as a child, Johnson was known to have a "bully-type" personality.¹⁴ He often would bully children on the playground and constantly demanded that all eyes be on him. In his adult life, Johnson managed to create a mechanism in order to manipulate people. Johnson became famous for placing his hand firmly on the shoulder of the person whom he was speaking with and leaning in very close, almost putting his face to the other person's.¹⁵ This technique speaks volumes about Johnson's demeanor when it comes to his relationships with others. Johnson is often

¹⁴ Caro, Robert A. *Means of Ascent*. (New York: Vintage, 1991) 5.

¹⁵ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 65

described as being a bully because of his manipulative nature, which was formed out of his need to obtain power (as described in the model, points four and five). Johnson was considerably concerned with having the “upper hand” in his relations with his staff. Loyalty was extremely important and Johnson understood that he had to go to great lengths to assure himself that his staff would be steadfast to him and only him.

The Truth About Johnson’s Lies:

To many, it seemed as though Johnson had multiple personalities. His changing moods and his ability to lie through his teeth led people to believe that Johnson was “two faced”. This accusation is actually quite true; Johnson was a man of many faces. But this is not a result of a change in character. Johnson’s ability to transform into different people is simply a change in personality, which is shaped by environment. Changes in location (a change in environment) allowed Johnson to change how he portrayed himself. Depending on who he was speaking with, Johnson would alter her personality in order to manipulate that particular person. This was a tactic that Johnson used time and time again during his time spent in the Senate.

Johnson’s ability to essentially morph into different personalities is perhaps a result of being pulled in multiple directions as a child. It is clear that Johnson felt obligated to live up to his mother’s expectations. He wanted to be the child that his mother would be proud of. However, his father was pulling in another direction. Sam expected his son to be masculine. Johnson wanted to live up to the expectations *both* of his parents had for him. Thus, he became accustomed to playing different roles. But Johnson was also pulling himself in different directions. He wanted to be

better than every other student in his class and he wanted to be a model for his younger brother. The push and pull that Johnson experienced as a child forced him to act differently in different situations, a practice that continued throughout his adult years.

These changing personalities both as a child and as an adult are directly linked back to Johnson's tendency to exaggerate. Exaggeration was an easy way for Johnson to seem different. By making the positive things in his life seem far more interesting and exciting, Johnson believed that he would be able to downplay the negative things. For example, he would often embroider his athletic abilities or grades in school to mitigate the fact that his family had less money than most. Friederich Nietzsche describes a lie as a "condition of life." This definition of lying can be directly applied to Johnson; he was in many ways *conditioned* to lie.

Some psychologists believe that there are a number of different types of liars. Everyone lies, but the type of lie and the frequency of the lie varies depending on the environment of a person. Those who experience great amounts of pressure are more likely to lie than someone who is in an environment where there is less pressure. A person who believes that lying will generate an incentive that is worth the gamble they take when they construct a lie is also more likely to fabricate the truth.¹⁶ Both of these descriptions fit Johnson, but only at certain periods in his life. There were plenty of times where Johnson was under immense pressure *and* incentive was blatantly apparent. Johnson's run for Senate in 1948 is a prime

¹⁶ Kornet, Allison. "The Truth About Lying | Psychology Today." *Psychology Today: Health, Help, Happiness Find a Therapist*. Web. 06 Feb. 2011.
<<http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/199705/the-truth-about-lying?page=2>>.

example. If he *didn't* win in '48 his political career would be over (pressure). Additionally, if he *did* win he would be able to advance his career (incentive). The two theories mentioned above describe when someone might lie based upon their environment. But a man like Johnson needed no excuse to lie. Frequent liars embody specific character traits that cause them to lie more often than they tell the truth, even when a lie is unnecessary (unnecessary implying that there is no pressure or incentive present).

Studies have shown that recurrent liars tend to possess specific traits. Such liars tend to be incredible manipulative and are overly concerned with what others think of them.¹⁷ Additionally, serial liars often have excellent interpersonal skills, are very sociable and find it easy to talk to people they have never met before. It can be deduced that certain character traits condition individuals to lie. The argument presented in previous chapters illustrates that Johnson acquired his character traits as a result of his childhood. Thus, we can also conclude that the character traits one is conditioned to develop during the early stages of childhood can predict whether or not he or she will have the ability to lie as an adult. The following flowchart is offered to further illustrate this idea:

¹⁷ Kornet, Allison. "The Truth About Lying"

Childhood experiences



Development of certain traits as a result of the environment one is exposed to as a child

- Manipulative nature
- Bully like personality
- Lack of confidence
- Concern with outer image



Development of ability to lie frequently and with ease

Childhood-Adulthood Characterization of Lying

As stated, Johnson often had a difficult time choosing between his mother's demands and his father's expectations. What is perhaps most unfortunate is that Johnson's mother truly wanted the best for her son- she wanted him to grow up as a Renaissance man, not as a self-doubting and insecure boy. Despite her greatest efforts, Rebekah was unfortunately unable to accomplish what she set out to do in many respects. Her demands were incredibly high, and though Johnson loved his mother, he also wholeheartedly respected his father. Sam Johnson was a man of politics, and Johnson grew up infatuated with the way in which his father spoke to people. Sam was a populist and truly wanted to do well by the people in his town. Johnson respected this and adopted the same view when he was elected to office. The conflict between what was expected of Johnson was difficult and often times he did not want to choose loyalty between his parents. As a result, Johnson developed a

pattern of not being able to make clear decisions. In his adult life, this was a difficult feat to overcome, and it often created an obstacle in the way of Johnson's policy making.

The classic example of Johnson's lack of clear decision-making is the battle between "Guns or Butter". During the Vietnam War, Johnson had a difficult time choosing between "guns", implying that funding would go towards the war and "butter", where he would put funding towards domestic politics (his "Great Society"). Instead of choosing one over the other, Johnson decided that it was realistic to have both guns *and* butter; that he did not have to sacrifice one over the other. This in fact was not the reality; when Johnson choose to focus on both war time activities and domestic politics both programs fell short. Johnson was more concerned with the advent of his Great Society. He often personified his plan for a Great Society, calling it a girl who he wished to see grow up into a beautiful woman.¹⁸ Though he understood that Vietnam was crucial, his true loyalties were with his blueprints to revamp society, giving the disenfranchised a chance. Johnson wanted to be a hero, much like Franklin Roosevelt was. He wanted to be seen as someone who helped those who have been mistreated in the past; this was his goal and this was his passion. However, his inability to realize that he could not have guns and butter at the same time perhaps ruined his chances at ever being seen as a hero. Instead, his misfortunes in Vietnam (which can be attributed to his character

¹⁸ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 212

and the ways in which he dealt with policy and decision making) caused him to be viewed as a “murderer”.¹⁹

Johnson’s inability to decide led him to ultimately acquire a positive quality; the ability to compromise. Johnson was known for being an outstanding compromiser. One could argue that this quality is necessary when you are the Senate Majority Leader and must work with both parties in order to form legislation. The fact that Johnson’s ability to compromise is best viewed during his Senate years is a true testament to a point that was made earlier. Not all types of power are suited for all types of personality. Johnson’s ability to compromise with two sides was most helpful when he had the highest power in the Senate. However, when he was given the highest power in the nation, he was unable to use his compromising skills to the best of his ability. This is perhaps because there is less compromise amongst cabinet members and the President; much of the compromising Johnson did during his presidency was with himself and with Congress, not with his advisors. In his cabinet, Johnson had the final decision on issues, especially those concerning Vietnam (though Johnson seldom made decision on his own about the war).²⁰ As explored above, Johnson was unable to compromise what he truly wanted (the Great Society) for what was truly unavoidable (the threat of communism). The idea that Johnson’s personality type was best for the Senate is reinforced by this idea. However, that is not to say that Johnson lost his capacity for compromise. As long as Johnson’s insecurities ran rampant, Johnson would still have the clear ability to find a happy medium between two points. Not allowing him to

¹⁹ A full discussion of The Great Society and Vietnam can be found in Chapter Six.

²⁰ A full discussion of decision making in Vietnam can be found in Chapter Six.

choose between either parent gave Johnson many years of practice at finding a half way point between two very different ideas.

Though at times he resented his father, Johnson truly did idolize Sam. He found him to be a very intelligent and well-spoken man who made the realm of politics appeal to a Johnson as a young boy. Growing up, Sam Johnson was known for being a very persuasive politician. A variety of biographical texts retell one of Johnson's favorite stories (his own autobiography included). When Johnson was a young boy he often would go door to door with his father as he campaigned. Johnson's memory of riding in his family's Model-T driving throughout his town is one that remained near and dear to him- even after he resented his father for buying back the Johnson Ranch and loosing his family's savings. As Johnson grew from a young boy who followed his father on the campaign trail to a man with a campaign of his own, he kept in mind the interpersonal skills that his father exhibited so well. Johnson emulated his father's good qualities in order to please him; he enjoyed politics and speaking with people. In many ways Johnson was a demagogue; he knew how to talk to people and he especially knew how to convince people that the way he saw things was the *right* way.

Because Johnson had such a difficult time picking allegiances between his parents, he found ways to satisfy them both. His interest in politics and active effort to emulate his father clearly illustrates his desire to make his father happy. Alexander George has also written about Wilson's experiences with his father. Like Johnson, Wilson resented his father but at the same time harbored a great deal of respect for him. In many ways, Johnson did not want to be like his father- he did not

want to make the same poor decisions. But like Wilson, Johnson found certain aspects of Sam Johnson to be incredibly captivating and thus he chooses to single them out and to mimic them. Since Wilson's experience is so similar, we can see a clear parallel between the two past presidents and the environment they have grown up in. Though I do not choose to evaluate Wilson using this model, it can be hypothesized that his leadership style could also be explored through the Cycle of Parental Oppression.

Summation of traits:

The traits discussed above; need for loyalty, "bully-type" personality, indecisiveness, ability to compromise, manipulative, and fine interpersonal skills, were all formed as a result of low self esteem. The ways in which Johnson's parents raised him and the environment he found himself in play a clear role in Johnson's leadership skills. All of the afore mentioned traits have affected Johnson's presidency in some way, shape, or form. His insecurities with himself are the basis for many of the mishaps Johnson makes while in office. The formation of his character is a tangled web of different traits which are all unique but work together to create a specific personality type. Each traits can be clearly defined and as illustrated by the model, can be traced back to an origin found within the years of childhood. Whether or not the trait can be explained through a strict analysis of the model (i.e.- insecurity) or is an underlying characteristic not directly explained by the model (i.e.-drive and determination), each trait is significant. Individually, each trait gives us a glimpse into who exactly Lyndon Johnson was prior to his presidency

and can help us answer many questions. Perhaps the most famous question one can ask of Johnson presidency is why he acted the way he did when it came to decision making in regards to Vietnam. By assessing characteristics individually and then understanding how each trait interacts with another, we can grasp a better understanding of Johnson's decision-making processes.

Seeing as though the model suggests that insecurity is the basis for all other traits, it is not surprising that a full chapter later on will discuss the complexities of insecurity and just how it effected Johnson's entire existence- from childhood to adulthood. The Cycle of Parental Oppression discusses the origins of each trait and proves just how Johnson acquired them. The following chapters will discuss each trait in great detail, citing certain examples and experiences to illustrate just how Johnson exhibited these traits. What's more is that this particular chapter will also look at how Johnson's insecurity interacted with his other personality traits. It will also focus on drawing a complete illustration of Johnson's childhood, offering a great deal of history about Johnson and his roots.

When viewing presidential performance, or in Barber's case predicating presidential performance, many studies look at character in terms of morals. This study will look at the different stages of Johnson's life in the context of personality and decision-making. That is, the way in which a person makes decisions is based upon *who* they are- not just exclusively the morals they hold but the thoughts, ideas, visions, beliefs, traits and mannerisms they claim as their own. The way in which a person makes a decision and more importantly the way in which a person interacts with others to make a decision is key in this analysis of character and the

presidency. To best understand Johnson during his presidency, it is necessary to employ the methods discussed in the model *while* looking at the ways in which Johnson interacts with others. This portion of the study will look exclusively at Vietnam and the decisions Johnson made in conjunction with his relationship with his cabinet.

Conclusions about the model:

This particular model is of great importance. It creates a solid foundation for understanding Johnson's character and how it was formed. It is important to note that psychology is key in the model portion of this analysis. However; a look at leadership style will weigh more heavily later on when analyzing how certain traits are used in the political arena. I choose to use the model to explain the specific traits listed above because I feel as though they are both the biggest obstacles in Johnson's way and yet the best tools for him throughout the course of his leadership. In many ways, one could argue that if it were not for Johnson's troubled childhood he would have never been as determined and driven as he was. On the other hand, had it not been for his poor relationship with his parents he may have not made some of the fatal mistakes he did while in office.

Barber's work is quite well known but also quite criticized. It is necessary to understand why and how Barber assesses presidents and what the benefits of his analysis are. I applaud Barber on the method he uses the break down each president; his active/passive positive/negative system touches upon many of the traits I choose to include in this study of Lyndon Johnson. Specifically, it is

imperative to note that Baber uses self-confidence as a measure of how well a president will perform. Low confidence leads to a lack of confidence in decision-making and in turn may eventually lead to a failure presidency. This may not always be the case, though. Johnson clearly suffered from his insecurities, as did Wilson. But the majority of Wilson's misfortunes were not judged as harshly by history as Johnsons.

Wilson received the biggest criticism for his inability to reach a compromise during discussions about the League of Nations after the conclusion of World War I. It is interesting that Wilson's downfall is a lack of compromise, where as Johnson was quite a skilled compromiser. Though the two men do share the quality of insecurity due to their childhood experiences, they express that quality in quite different ways. This essentially proves the idea that character traits are unchanging while the way in which they are expressed can differ depending on the environment of an individual. Due to Wilson's incapability to compromise he is consistently placed within the top ten among most presidential ranking polls.²¹ This proves that simply because a president has a negative self-image that does not necessarily imply that he or she will automatically give a poor performance as president. Thus, although Barber does choose to include self-esteem as a factor when considering leadership style, he fails to take into account the origins of such an insecurity and the ways in which insecurity can become the backbone for numerous other traits.

²¹ "C-SPAN Survey of Presidential Leadership - Home - C-SPAN." *C-SPAN / Capitol Hill, The White House and National Politics*. Jan. 2009. Web. 06 Nov. 2010. <<http://legacy.c-span.org/PresidentialSurvey/presidential-leadership-survey.aspx>>.

Simply asking whether or not a president has a high (positive) or low (negative) level of confidence does not automatically allow us to predict whether or not they will succeed. Despite the flaws within Barber's theory, it is vital that one understands just how essential self-image is, no matter which study it is part of. Barber understood this idea when he first began studying the origins of presidential success in the 1970's.

This study will showcase ideas about Lyndon Johnson's character in the context of this model. Now that a certain foundation has been laid down it will be easier to understand the ways in which Johnson exhibited each quality and how they all worked together in a tangled, intricate web to create Johnson's unique persona. We will continue to explore the insecurities Johnson faced and exactly how they prevented him from excelling during his presidency. Additionally, we will look at a number of qualities that stem from this inadequacy with special attention to Vietnam and the relationships Johnson had with his advisors during the very beginning of the war. These relationships will be key to further understanding the model and just how Johnson's childhood truly left a major mark on his presidency.

Chapter Two: Understanding Presidential Leadership Qualities

What is the importance of character?

Since the advent of our nation, the office of the presidency has been viewed with high regard. It is the most visible office, in the sense that there is only one person who can be held accountable. The Senate, House of Representatives, and the Supreme Court all have numerous members who can shoulder both the blame and the praise for any decisions. The President, however, is to blame when something goes awry, or to be praised when policy works flawlessly. The visibility that the executive has during his administration is key; every action he takes is magnified. This is perhaps why Americans look to candidates who embody a certain set of values, personal traits, and characteristics. Americans want to choose a candidate who shares similar values with them and whom they believe can carry out their ideas for society.

The idea that personality has become an important part of the presidential selection process is pivotal. In addition to policy and political views, voters seem to choose their presidents based upon their “likeability factor”. The likability factor is a conglomerate of different character traits which include but are not limited to; level of confidence, trustworthiness, loyalty, candor, reliability, and consideration. These different qualities allow Americans to make judgments on whether or not they feel a candidate would be able to carry out plans for the nation in a manner that makes sense. Based upon certain personal qualities, Americans attempt to gauge whether or not a potential president will be able to carry out his or her policies in a timely manner, in a way that will rally support from congress, or in a way that ensures

Americans that the policy is in their best interest. As voter, we make these judgments time and time again, which is perhaps why numerous presidential scholars choose to study presidential character.

The study of presidential character can arguably be invaluable. By looking at performance and connecting it to the personal qualities of each president possessed, one can assess whether or not certain qualities are beneficial or hurtful to a president's success. Judging character in a potential candidate is helpful as it may suggest whether or not Americans will respond positively to a candidate and whether or not he or she will make a "good president". Here scholars look at two different parts of presidential character. Firstly, they assess which qualities produce a "good president" and which produce a "bad president". These assessments are often based on a number of different criteria; the ability to get things done while in office, relationship with congress, moral authority, and his or her performance within the context of the times.²² These areas are most often assessed in "presidential leadership surveys", which have been conducted by numerous organizations such as CSPAN, USA Today and Sienna College. Participants in these surveys, often historians and close observers of the presidency, assess past presidents based upon their actions while in office in accordance with the criteria listed above. These leadership surveys provide a basis for comparison among past presidents and allow for historians to gather what exactly will make for a "good president versus a "bad president". By forming a list of what may be the "top ten" most successful presidents and the "bottom ten", one can look at those presidents as

²² "C-SPAN Survey of Presidential Leadership"

individuals as opposed to in a group and analyze which qualities each man possessed. This process perhaps originated with political scientist James David Barber, who created a mechanism for looking at character in terms of successful presidents and failure presidents.

Methods of studying character:

Barber's assessment of presidential character is both praised and criticized. Though it does provide a basis for understanding which traits a "good president" embodies, it also leaves many questions unanswered. However, for the purpose of framing the study and assessment of presidential character, Barber's breakdown is valuable. Barber separates his study into four different categories. Presidents who are in constant motion, always trying to solve problems and to seek out new policies are considered to be "active" presidents. Those who are often sedentary are considered to be "passive". The "movement" category showcases one half of the "presidential equation"; the ability to get the job done through action.

	Positive	Negative
Active	ADAPTIVE: self-confident; flexible; creates opportunities for action; enjoys the exercise of power, does not take himself too seriously; optimistic; emphasizes the "rational mastery" of his environment; power used as a means to achieve beneficial results. <i>Thomas Jefferson, F. D. Roosevelt, H. Truman, J. F. Kennedy, G. Ford, G. W. Bush(?)</i>	COMPULSIVE: power as a means to self-realization; expends great energy on tasks but derives little joy; preoccupied with whether he is failing or succeeding; low self-esteem; inclined to rigidity and pessimism; highly driven; problem managing aggression. <i>John Adams, W. Wilson, H. Hoover, A. Lincoln, L. B. Johnson, R. Nixon,</i>
Passive	COMPLIANT: seek to be loved; easily manipulated; low self-esteem is overcome by ingratiating personality; reacts rather than initiates; superficially optimistic. <i>James Madison, W. H. Taft, W. Harding, R. Reagan, Bill Clinton</i>	WITHDRAWN: responds to a sense of duty; avoid power; low self-esteem compensated by service to others; responds rather than initiates; avoids conflict and uncertainty. emphasizes principles and procedures and an aversion to politicking. <i>George Washington, C. Coolidge, D. Eisenhower</i>

Key: Circled in green are the criteria for the “best president” (the most successful presidents have fallen into this category). Circled in red are the criteria for the “worst president” (the least successful presidents have fallen into this category).

However, the second half of the equation is just as important. Presidents who have great confidence and are flexible and considered to be “positive” presidents, where as those who have a poor self-image are considered to be “negative”. Though it may seem as though only the second half (positive/negative) of the equation is the part that is concerned with personal qualities, that is not the case. Both parts are equally derived from personality traits, as it is a person’s character that helps to form the way in which his or her confidence, work ethic, and sense of duty are expressed. Below is an illustrated breakdown of the definitions of each category (*figure 1*).²³

Barber’s method of understanding presidential character is one that has been criticized time and time again for its rather “simplistic” nature. This thesis will discuss character in terms of psychological history and childhood. The result of framing Lyndon Johnson’s character in terms of “childhood psychology” is the understanding that Johnson’s insecurities do in fact affect his leadership as he progresses in his political career. Barber provides a structural background for conceptualizing *what types* of presidents possess certain traits and how a lack of self-confidence translates into leadership qualities. However, there are a number of issues with Barber’s “breakdown” of qualities. For one, Barber assesses presidents independent of their own personal leadership style. For example, it is assumed that

²³ *Figure 1*, source:

http://academic.regis.edu/jriley/414%20presidential_character.htm

Dwight Eisenhower is a rather insecure president. This is a common misconception given Eisenhower's unique, individual leadership style. Each President's leadership style is based upon their own experience, and character and is shaped by individual factors that are distinctive to each man that has served as President. Thus, Barber's analysis of leadership serves as an excellent tool for structuring different qualities however; it does not take into account all factors that may affect leadership.

Barber's categories have become important to this thesis, in that he breaks down presidential traits to a very simplistic form. In order to assess whether or not a candidate will make for a successful president it is important to understand which qualities will help them achieve that. For example, Barber suggests that a candidate with a high level of confidence will make a better president than a candidate who has low self-esteem. However, this is not always the case. Woodrow Wilson is considered to be a president with very low self-esteem, but his drive and constant movement in many ways counteracted his lack of confidence and today he can be found in the top ten of most presidential surveys. There is a clear paradox in Barber's study of character however, regardless of whatever issues may exist the essential assessment of qualities has created a foundation for many other scholars to look at character as well.

Joseph Pika has also assessed presidential character but in more general terms. He looks at the idea of character and how it is connected to presidential performance in different areas of the presidency as opposed to overall performance. Firstly, Pika assesses how qualities shape conduct, with special attention to the attitudes and abilities prior to entering office. Talent and views will help to shape

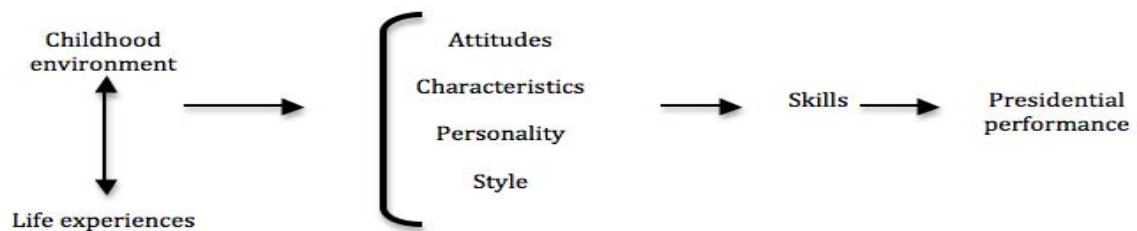
the relationship a president has with his staff and how he handles certain situations based upon the context in which he is handling it. Here Pika presents a valuable argument. He suggests that though the assessment of character is important when it comes to evaluation of success, it is also the environment in which a president is forced to perform in that perhaps shapes which traits are brought out. Thus, it may be valuable to look at both personal qualities *and* context when assessing a president (as the CSPAN poll does) Pika also presents another excellent point, which is perhaps the basis for this thesis. He suggests that character is shaped as a result of environment.²⁴ That is, family situation, place in community, education and experience all help to create a person's character. This is the main basis for the argument in this thesis. When assessing presidential character, it is important to look back at childhood and the environment a president was raised in to understand how and why certain character traits were formed. This is especially relevant to Lyndon Johnson, whom we will explore in depth later on. In short, Pika believes that social environment and life experiences will shape attitudes, characteristics, and "style". This will give rise to skills and performance in office, which will in turn allow us to evaluate if those skills were positive or negative contributions to his or her administration.²⁵ In addition to understanding environment, Pika even goes as far to suggest that childhood experiences, in particular the relationship a child has with his or her parents, shape their perceptions of themselves. This point is incredibly vital, as self-perceptions are the basis for not only Barber's model, but for this thesis

²⁴ Pika, Joseph August, and John Anthony. Maltese. *The Politics of the Presidency*. (Washington, D.C.: CQ, 2008) 124.

²⁵ Pika, 126

as well. Self-confidence (the perception someone has of themselves) is very telling and can give rise to numerous other traits. However, the origin of the perception one has of him or herself is even more important than the trait. Understanding childhood in relation to the traits a person possesses as an adult is key, as it gives insight into a person's mannerisms and views.²⁶ In order to illustrate the connection between childhood and performance, the following model is offered (*figure 2*).²⁷

The Childhood-Performance Connection



Based upon the information presented by Pika, it is clear that the connection between the environment in which a person has spent a great deal of his or her life in is an important factor in the shaping of character. Now that there is a clear establishment of where character is originated from, it is important to understand why character is important and how it is expressed in the presidency. Perhaps the most important aspect of the presidency is the idea that the president holds an incredible amount of power. That is why Barber's definition of a "good president" includes "enjoys the exercise of power". But power is complex in that it takes a

²⁶ Pika, 127

²⁷ *Figure 2: Adopted from Pika's Politics of the Presidential Performance, 126*

specific personality type to exercise it in the proper way. Political scientist Harold Lasswell has looked at personality in the context of power with the understanding that power and personality go hand in hand in the office of the executive. In the case of Lyndon Johnson, power and personality are almost inseparable. Lasswell argues that the pursuit of power is often exercised by those who feel as though power will “overcome low estimates of the self by changing either the traits of the self or the environment in which it functions”.²⁸ This is incredibly true for Johnson; his grasp for power was driven by his desire to seek self-acceptance and in many ways also to change the environment around him.

It is also important to note that not all personalities are suitable for the power that the presidency entails. The character traits of a person, as discussed above in figure two, shape the performance of a president and in turn create the foundation for how a president will use power. Seeing as though action and decisions are reliant upon personality type, it is safe to say that exercise of power is shaped by personality as well. Additionally, power in terms of context is also of importance. The amount of power a president can exercise may change in times of war as opposed to times of peace. The most classic example of this is Franklin Roosevelt’s administration during the Great Depression. Presidential historian Richard Norton Smith has argued that Roosevelt was able to exercise more power because his presidency began during a time of crisis. There was also an incredible amount of “good will” for Roosevelt, which gave him more flexibility and power as he had the backing of the American people.

²⁸ Lasswell, Harold D. *Power and Personality*. (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2009) ix.

James Pfiffner presents an excellent point in his work The Character Factor, as he brings together ideas on power and suitable personality for the presidency. Using Roosevelt as an example once more, Pfiffner suggests that certain traits are better suited for certain times in history.²⁹ Most Americans admire honesty and often choose candidates they feel will be frank throughout their administration. Roosevelt was quite honest with the public during his administration in the sense that he never asked for a declaration of war from Congress until attacked, but always kept the public informed about his sentiments towards the war. Roosevelt's honesty during the period before U.S. involvement in World War II put him at an advantage, as the American people placed great trust in him. It is important to understand that while "good qualities" and "bad qualities" will help to predict success in office, times of context may change the outcomes because new factors have been added to the political equation. Times of war, an increase in good will, and unexpected downturns can affect the way in which personality is expressed through power.

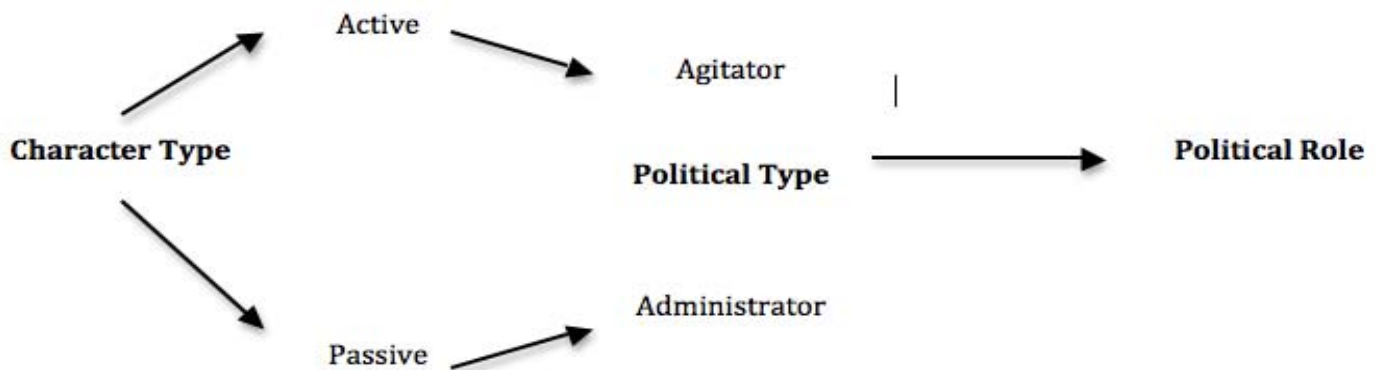
Lasswell also argues that character is a "self-regulating feature of personality and it renders the individual to some extent independent of changes in his or her environment".³⁰ *The idea that character does not change if there is a change in an individual's environment is important to keep in mind. Character is stagnant as it is an unchangeable part of a person's personality.* This is an incredibly vital point. The definition of character and its distinction from personality lay the framework for the

²⁹ Pfiffner, James P. *The Character Factor: How We Judge America's Presidents*. (College Station, TX: Texas A & M UP, 2004) 5.

³⁰ Lasswell, 174

analysis of Johnson's leadership qualities in this thesis. Values, worldview, mannerisms, and level of confidence are shaped as a result of the environment that someone has spent a majority of their life submerged in. It can be deducted that a person may be able to change character traits by spending a substantial part of their adult life in a new environment. New surroundings should be drastically different from the environment they experienced as a child in order to change the fundamental qualities they obtained at a young age. Lasswell also suggests "political types" and roles, which fall into accordance with some of Barber's political personalities, are connected. Certain personality types lend themselves to certain political roles. Personalities establish political types, which then in turn establish the type of role a person may play while involved in politics.³¹ To illustrate the idea of character as an unchangeable factor and its connection to political type, the following model is offered (figure 3).³²

Connection Between Character Type and Political Role



The connection between Barber's work and Lasswell's work is interesting. Together they enforce the idea that not all character types will serve the same function in politics. Some are best suited to agitate, while others are better suited to administrate. But above all, Lasswell argues that the "political man" is a "social type" in that he is able to connect with others on many levels (be it a connection with advisors, connection with fellow House or Senate members, or with the public). The idea of active types acting as "agitators" is a sensible connection. Agitators are political actors who set ideas into motion. As an active type personality, motion and action is key, and thus it is logical that agitators would be active political actors. In contrast, administrators are most often passive character types in that they often delegate jobs to his or her advisors or team members. An example of an administrator type who fits into Barber's classification of a "passive president" is Ronald Reagan. Reagan is considered to be a passive-positive president who had high self-esteem but often delegated jobs to members of his administration. Using the model above, Reagan would be considered a passive administrator whose ultimate political role would be president.

Similarly to how some qualities are expressed over others depending on the context of the times, "action potential" also varies. A president's action potential as defined by Fred Greenstein is the extent to which a president can act. Depending on the type of environment that a president is acting within he or she may be able to tackle more issues at once or make more drastic decisions. Variation in action is based heavily upon personality type. For example, Greenstein argues "personal variability is high when leaders can use it in the peripheral aspects of actions".

Additionally, situations with little precedent or historical background allow for more personal variation in action and problem solving. Essentially Greenstein is arguing that personal variation in action and action potential are twofold and is based upon both the context and personality. The origin of political action is essentially rooted in personality, which defines most aspects of political behavior within a political actor.

The Importance of Studying Presidential Character:

The studies above are all rooted in the essential demand for understanding presidential character. But why is character important? Sure, one can perhaps predict the outcome of an administration, but as illustrated by numerous scholars, character and its expression (not essential makeup) can be affected by the context of the times and the political climate. Though predicting possible performance can be a valuable tool, results can clearly vary if there is an unexpected and dramatic event. Presidential character studies also serve another purpose; to understand why and president acted after his administration has come to an end. Looking at character after a president has performed to the best of his ability based upon his specific character make-up is just as important if not more important than predicting performance. There are a number of “political mysteries” that historians and political scientists have attempted to uncover. Perhaps one of the better-known situations is the Vietnam War. The amount of poor decision-making and miscommunications involved in the Johnson Administration during the years of the war were unprecedented. Americans often wondered how it is possible for one

administration to plant America so deep into a war with little meaning or morale behind it. Vietnam is a classic example of how an analysis of presidents after decisions are made can be useful.

Understanding mistakes can help prevent similar mistakes from happening more so than an understanding of character alone can. Connecting character to action in a way that helps define which traits lend themselves to certain actions is more useful than understanding simply which traits are “good” and which are “bad”. Lyndon Johnson is a president who can certainly be analyzed using this method. His decisions in office are interesting as he made a number of very positive ones for the health of the nation but also choose to involve the U.S. in what some believed lacked a clear objective. It can be suggested that Johnson used different aspects of his personality to decide different policies for the nation during his administration. Additionally, Johnson’s immense lack of self-confidence played an important role in almost every decision he made.

Level of confidence is highlighted in Barber’s work and it will continually be highlighted in this one as well. I argue that confidence, a wealth or lack of, is the single most important character trait a president can have. Without it, Barber argues that a president cannot reach full success (though as illustrated by President Wilson, can still be considered a “good president”). However Barber’s presentation of confidence (his positive/negative scale) only scratches the surface. It is more important to understand what a lack of confidence is born out of- this can lead to a wealth of information on other traits and decisions a person makes during adulthood. Johnson is an excellent example of this as a study of his lack of

confidence reveals numerous other traits and allows for a better understanding of his difficulty in making clear decisions. The origins of self-image are deeply rooted in childhood and the environment in which a child is exposed to, which are shaped by his or her guardians. To best understand action one must truly understand motive, which is based upon character. A person's individual character varies and is contingent upon life experience, as Pika points out. Thus, the study of presidential character alongside childhood psychology can lead to a comprehensive study of Presidential personality in terms of decision-making.

Lyndon Johnson's story is quite interesting. His life as a child and his rise to the top of politics was extraordinary and there is much to be said about his incredible drive. However, the way he was raised as a young boy heavily influenced his character as an adult. Though he was always a self-starter with the need to be the center of attention even as a child, Johnson was also plagued by his insecurities. His mother never offered the constant kind of love and affection a child needed to grow up secure in his or her own skin and as a result Johnson doubted his self-worth. His family suffered from financial losses, which caused Johnson to grow even more insecure as many people judged him for being poor.³³ These childhood insecurities grew into lifelong battles; Johnson was never able to fully overcome his bouts of self-doubt though he did try. Insecurity led to paranoia, inability to make decisions, a bully-type personality, a demand for loyalty, and great manipulation. These qualities stem from Johnson's lack of self-confidence and all contribute to the way in which he made decisions as president.

³³ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 42

Though qualities can be assessed individually as scholars such as Pika and Greenstein do, it is important to understand the value of assessing qualities in conjunction with one and other. A person's character is complex and relies on a number of different traits working together to form a unique personality type. In order to understand Johnson as a leader, understanding which qualities are necessary to lead is key; Barber's work establishes this principle. A basis for "good" presidents and "bad" presidents is vital. However once that is established it is necessary to look at presidents as individuals seeing as each person's character is different from the next. Johnson and Wilson may have had similar character traits but the ways in which their traits work with one and other would ultimately lead them to different decisions, given their unique toolkit of leadership traits (or lack of leadership traits). This is why I argue that one must understand both the basis for leadership, childhood development, and how the two work together to express certain traits.

Lyndon Johnson will be used as a model to understand this principle and to look at how childhood leads to character development and how character does not change but is simply expressed in different forms as a child grows into an adolescent and eventually into an adult. Johnson's actions as a college student and a leader do not differ greatly from his experiences as a political leader in his adulthood. There are clear connections between the way in which a president was raised and how he acts as a leader. Johnson is an excellent example of this as he showcases both extremely negative qualities and poor decisions with positive

qualities and excellent decisions. The fact that he is such a polarizing figure lends itself to this study as he can portray both ends of a very large spectrum.

Chapter Three: The Childhood of Lyndon Johnson

In past chapters I discussed the importance of looking at character traits and uncovering their origins. These origins, as illustrated by several models, are often rooted in childhood experiences. These experiences shape the way in which we perceive ourselves as well as our relationships with others. As noted, Lyndon Johnson's childhood experiences were shaped by the way in which his guardians parented him. As certain qualities developed as a result of the environment he was immersed in, these qualities found ways to express themselves through actions and relationships. The outward expression of the character traits that have been cultivated since birth is what most would call "personality". It is important to note that there is an incredible difference between the terms "character" and "personality".

As discussed, character is a collection of personal traits that are unique to each person, due to the specific environment he or she was raised in for a significant portion of their life. In contrast, personality is *how* a person expresses the traits that they have collected over the course of their life. Simply because two people possess the similar qualities does not necessarily mean that they will express them in similar ways. It is feasible for two people to obtain similar qualities as a result of being raised in two very different environments. Each individual environment creates unique outlets for the expression of traits. A young adult who attends a college institution like Johnson did may not necessarily have the same "outlet for

opportunity” as someone who did not attend college. Instead, their character traits may be expressed differently as they enter the work force.

Understanding personality in relation to childhood:

Personality is defined by action. The outward expression of Johnson’s traits in this particular study is examined through the actions he takes over the course of his life; from childhood to adulthood. Character is essentially determined by childhood experiences; infancy through adolescence is the pivotal time period for developing traits and understanding what character is born out of. When looking at personality, it is imperative that the focus on action spans over the course of a person’s entire lifetime. Though character is rigid and cannot easily be changed, the way in which traits are expressed is contingent upon opportunity and environment. When looking at a person’s expression of character, it is important to look at a lifetime of action in order to prove two points:

1. If a person’s actions are consistent over a prolonged period of time, it can be said that character is a collection of traits that is developed at a young age and cannot easily be changed.
2. The ways in which character traits are expressed can change depending on whether or not a person sees a greater “outlet for opportunity”. Outlets can change depending on the environment someone find themselves in at any given point in their life.

When looking at personality there are two types of actions that can be examined. The first is personal action and the second is action of relationship. It is necessary to comprehend the distinction between the two types in order to best analyze personality. Personal action can be defined by the ways in which a person seeks a solution to a problem. He or she uses their traits in order to create a way to move past an obstacle. Though personal action can be defined many other ways, for this purpose of studying Johnson's political career this defining is best suited. The way in which Johnson deals with conflict (or in some cases creates conflict) is very telling of his overall character. Action of relationship can be defined as the way in which an individual conducts his or herself while dealing with others. This type of action serves as a useful lens to analyze Johnson's leadership under due to Johnson's ability to construct close relationships with others. Examining the way in which a person interacts with others showcases the idea that personality is changing while character is unchanging. Johnson is an excellent example of this idea because he would often change the outer expression of his traits (his personality) depending on whom he was speaking with. However, Johnson's basic, underlying character traits were not altered throughout his lifetime- they remained unchanged.

The way in which Johnson handles certain situations during his Congressional and Presidential career mirrors the actions he takes as a young adult. This shows not only a consistency in character but also gives insight into how character can affect the decision make process. For much of Johnson's administration decision-making was vital, as his time serving as President oversaw many changes to America. His decision making process was twofold; he

incorporated personal action as well as action of relationship in order to decide what was best for the country. Decision-making is a key focus because it allows a comparison between character and personality and different types of expression. These comparisons will be made in a later chapter that looks exclusively at Johnson's political career. This chapter will look at Johnson's childhood and how traits were expressed at an early age. Comparisons between the expression of traits during Johnson's childhood and adolescence can be drawn as the same traits are expressed in similar but slightly different ways as his environment changes after college.

As discussed, Johnson's childhood character will grow with him as he becomes an adult. During childhood, there are many instances where we can see Johnson express his personal qualities. At a young age we truly see Johnson's insecure nature develop. His insecurities, as illustrated through the model from chapter one, give rise to a number of other personal qualities. Most notably Johnson is incredibly manipulative throughout his life, especially during his childhood. In many instances (during both childhood and his political career) Johnson uses his skills of manipulation in order to overcome obstacles and reach the solution he wants whether or not it is an obtainable one. Observing the ways in which Johnson uses his skill of manipulation throughout different stages of his life provides great insight into how character translates into action.

Origins of insecurity:

Johnson was haunted by incredible insecurities throughout his childhood. The Cycle of Parental Oppression (chapter 1) depicts the origins of such feeling of inadequacy. Johnson's relationship with his mother proved to be detrimental to his upbringing. Instead of providing unconditional love, Johnson's mother issues love and affection towards Johnson as a "reward" for behavior she approved of. The issues that Johnson's insecurities created for him as both a child and an adult plagued him and greatly affected his ability to lead the nation as President. However, these same issues also affected his relationship with his peers as a child and as a young adult.

There are countless stories of Johnson's childhood that illustrate many of the qualities discussed in earlier chapters including his insecurity, bully-type, manipulative personality, and his need to accumulate power. These qualities can be seen through stories about Johnson's experiences in school at a young age. Johnson and his cousin Ava were quite close during their childhood years. He and Ava attended the same school, as they lived down the road from each other. Many biographies about Johnson use anecdotes and quotes from Ava, as her words paint a true portrait of Johnson's early life. Ava once said, "Lyndon had to be the leader in everything."³⁴ It is clear that Johnson had high hopes and aspirations for himself. His pushy, boss-like character and his desire to lead instead of follow are traits he also displayed as a political giant in Senate.

For those who knew the Johnson family, Johnson's love of power should not have come as a surprise. Johnson's father was a man who held himself to the highest

³⁴ Caro, Robert A. *Means of Ascent*. (New York: Vintage, 1991) 5.

of expectations. His maternal grandfather was also incredibly ambitious. Over the course of his life, Rebeckah Baines' father was a lawyer, a schoolteacher, a land renter, and the founder of the McKinney Advocate.³⁵ Mr. Baines' love for learning and his passion for teaching was passed on to his daughter. Rebeckah was incredibly ambitious and though at times may be considered to be too much of a "dreamer" because she had high incredibly hopes for herself. Sam Johnson was very similar in that sense, and though her father disapproved of their union, Rebeckah and Sam married and they too passed their ambitious nature on to their first-born son.³⁶

Sam Johnson encouraged his children to not accept anything at face value. He believed that his children should think critically about issues and to ask questions. Over dinner he often quizzed his children on current events and asked them what they thought about certain topics. As a populist politician, Sam looked for the best answers to the questions his constituents had; he was always looking for solutions to problems. These were skills that Johnson mimicked, especially as he transitioned from child to young adult.³⁷ Rebeckah, like Sam, encouraged learning in her household. When Johnson was a baby Rebeckah would read to him for hours each day and encouraged an appreciation for the arts. More than anything, it seems, Rebeckah wanted her children to stand out among all the other children. She often dressed Johnson in outfits that seemed rather costume-like such as a sailor outfit or a cowboy outfit, Johnson's personal favorite.³⁸ Rebeckah expected great things from her son and pushed him to excel even at an early age. Johnson began attending

³⁵ Caro, Robert A. *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*. (New York: Vintage, 1990) 16.

³⁶ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 54

³⁷ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 72

³⁸ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 69

school a year early. Though he was the youngest student, his reading skills far surpassed many of the other children in his class. Long before aspirations of the presidency were brewing inside of Johnson he was on a path to great achievements.³⁹

Though Johnson's reading abilities were fantastic for his age, he had reservations about reading aloud in school. At home Rebeckah would sit Johnson on her lap and they would read together. This was a practice he was used to by the time he began his formal schooling and refused to read any other way. As a result, Rebeckah asked Johnson's teacher if she would be able to have Johnson read while he was sitting on her lap. She obliged, and Johnson began the practice of reading on his teacher's lap, which lasted throughout the school year.⁴⁰ Even in his childhood, Johnson was a demagogue. He used his ability to flatter and "sweet-talk" in a way unlike anyone else. His cousin Ava recalls that he once said to his teacher, "I don't like you one bit. I just love you."⁴¹ Among all the tools Johnson kept in his arsenal of manipulation tactics, his ability to make people bend to his will was based heavily on his demagoguery. In his adult life, Johnson would often grab hold of someone's shoulder and bent in close to his or her face as he spoke.⁴² As Majority Leader, Johnson built a career out of bringing people to bend to his will. His ability to compromise and his skills at convincing people that *his* was not only the right way, but also the only way, allowed him to make great strides in Washington.

³⁹ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 68

⁴⁰ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 69

⁴¹ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 69

⁴² Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 76

Johnson's desire to get what he wanted was not something new one he began his political career. His need for dominance began on the playground, where like Ava said, he always had to be the leader. As Johnson watched Sam's political career blossom, he admired him more and more with each election. Sam was a winner; he never lost an election. He was also a populist and cared deeply about the issues his people were faced with. But more importantly, he was a thinker. Sam thought about issues; the negative and the positive, the good and the bad solutions, the populist view and all other views. When Sam Johnson got into an argument, his goal was not to necessarily win. He strived to understand someone else's point of view and appreciated the beauty of discussion. Though Johnson acquired Sam's love for politics and his genuine desire to help those in need, he was by no means the reflection of his father.

Throughout Johnson's childhood and political career, there is a single commonality; Johnson wanted to be a winner, no matter the cost. As a child, he had to be the leader of every game. He had to perform better than his classmates, and he had to be the center of attention. In order to achieve such goals, Johnson was bossy and driven. As an adult, Johnson looked to achieve even more; he wanted to win every election, he wanted to be on top of the Senate, and he wanted to be in control of the nation. He was able to achieve these goals as well by bullying, using manipulation, and even fixing an election.⁴³ If there was a problem that could be solved by Johnson outsmarting his competition, he did it. He was an expert at trickery and enjoyed flaunting his ability to outwit others. That was the difference

⁴³ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 9

between Johnson and his father; Sam was a man who could concede, where as Johnson believed that concession was not an option. Johnson fought on, where as Sam took a step back to listen.

Johnson's relationship with his father:

Though Johnson and his father did indeed possess a number of similarities, Johnson did not always want to mimic his father's personality. As a child, there was no man Johnson would strive to be just like than Sam Johnson.⁴⁴ His father was a hero in his eyes; caring, capable, and incredibly suave. Sam had the gift of public speaking. He was a man who could express how he felt articulately and eloquently, but never in a way that made people feel as though he thought he was better than them. When Johnson was a child he would often hide under the dinner table while his father and his colleagues would discuss political matters. Johnson mimicked his father's oration skills to the best of the ability, which led him to be an incredibly gregarious person.⁴⁵ Despite the fact that Johnson truly admired his father as a child, over time he grew to resent him due to Sam's poor judgment.

Perhaps it could be said that Sam Johnson was a bit overly ambitious. Though he believed in himself and was a capable politician, he was also a dreamer. He made his dream of buying back the Johnson Ranch a reality, but this decision only brought great troubles to him and his family. With his life savings depleted, Johnson's financial situation became increasingly difficult. Johnson was aware of his family's financial status and he understood that his lack of fortune made him an outcast in

⁴⁴ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 6

⁴⁵ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 14

school. His father, though a good man with the best of intentions, was regarded as the “laughing stock” of the town. Johnson’s last name suddenly felt as though it was a curse, limiting his opportunities. The embarrassment that Johnson felt as a result of being poor worsened his insecurities. He felt inadequate, unable to keep up with his peers. Those who were unusually cruel told Johnson that he would never be able to amount to anything because he was “A Johnson”. In many ways, Johnson’s drive and determination simply grew out of his father’s misfortune. He wanted more than ever to show those who doubted him that he was capable of achieving great things.⁴⁶

Johnson originally felt immense pressure to achieve as a result of his mother’s unwillingness to offer him love and affection unless he was excelling in areas that she approved of. He wanted to impress his mother and to feel her acceptance. Eventually Johnson came to believe that he would never be able to live up to what his mother expected of him and began to seek outlets that would bring about his own self-approval. Though the cycle of parental oppression did create a sense of insecurity, Johnson’s resentment towards his father and his social class also affected the way in which he viewed himself. Johnson lacked a positive self-image but demanded that others hold him in high esteem. He feared that people would mock him if he did not live up to the high expectations that he strived for. This fear continued to plague him as an adult; he never wanted to be seen as someone who was incapable of achieving what he set out to do. Failure would only leave room for someone else to move in and win. This is exactly how he felt when he lost his race

⁴⁶ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 9

for Senate in 1941.⁴⁷ Humiliation was both Johnson's greatest fear and biggest propellant in both his childhood years and as an adult.⁴⁸

The paradox of Lyndon Johnson:

It seems as though Johnson's entire life can be summed up by one word; paradox. Johnson was indeed a living, breathing paradox. At one moment, he could be the kindest, most charismatic little boy there was. But literally moments later Johnson had the ability to morph into a completely different person. He could be gentle, then cruel. He could be uncouth, then polished and well mannered. Johnson's greatest gift was that he could be anyone or anything anytime he wanted. His ability to quickly change his behavior and his attitudes may be attributed to the way his own mother acted towards him during his childhood. Rebeckah was a woman who took great pride in raising her children. At times she was loving, caring, and perhaps even a bit smothering. But despite the amount of deep and compassionate love she had for Johnson, she would be able to alter her behavior so drastically it would seem as though she did not care for him at all. Johnson was as amorphous as his mother. Though it may seem as though his personality changes, it is the core sense of insecurity that he's fostered since early childhood that truly guides Johnson through his adulthood. The "Johnson freeze out" was his own version of his mother's actions. Johnson was able to form unusually close relationships with his aids. He spoke to them as if they were lifelong friends but in return demanded total loyalty. When an

⁴⁷ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 9

⁴⁸ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 134

aid crossed him or he felt betrayed, Johnson would take away his praise and friendship and essentially “freeze” that person out.

Johnson would often “freeze out” his aids when he felt as though they had crossed him. Whenever Johnson sensed that loyalty from one of his staff members was wavering, he would employ the “freeze out” to send the message that loyalty was not optional in the Johnson administration.⁴⁹ However, it was not an act of malice; in fact Johnson almost always acted with good intent. Instead, the Johnson freeze out was an act of familiarity. He was simply imitating what had been instilled and taught to him as a child; unconditional love is not given, it is a reward that can be taken away if the giver is displeased. His core belief that the people he needed to trust and rely on the most might deceive him led Johnson to continue to use the “freeze out” as a means of keeping his relationships with others in check. He wanted to make sure that anyone who Johnson dealt with understood that loyalty was essential; it was the cement that held Johnson’s relationships together.

The paradox that we see within Johnson is one that tells an interesting story. Out of Johnsons lack of confidence grew great paranoia. His experiences with his mother led him to believe that failure and humiliation were never an option. What’s more is that Johnson feared the unexpected. He feared that his closest allies and friends would turn on him, much like his mother. Johnson lived life walking two steps ahead of everyone else, in a very literal sense. In his quest to always come out on top he would pour his entire existence into whatever he was working on. If he was in the middle of a campaign, he would work more than he would eat or sleep.

⁴⁹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 25

He lost incredible amounts of weight every time he ran for an office. Johnson was truly a man who dedicated himself to his work. But his drive came from his inability to loose; his unwillingness to accept second place overtook him. He lived his life paranoid that someone might try to outsmart him or cross him. In order to be the best he had to think like everyone else. He had to be able to be a different person when he spoke to different people. He was a charmer when he wanted to take a classmate out on a date, an aggressive animal when he wanted to get his point across in the Senate chamber, and a sweet caring father when he was with his daughters. But no matter who Johnson *seemed* to be, underneath his personality was his character. And his character was unwavering. He was an insecure man who truly believed that in order to be the best he had to always be two steps ahead. Changing his behavior at any given time was his way of getting a head start to the race. But often times because of his paranoid he was his only competitor.

Johnson acts out:

When Johnson was about fifteen years old he began to disrespect his parents. After years of trying to please both his mother and his father Johnson began to act out in ways that his parents surly did not approve of. As Johnson grew more aware of his family's financial situation he began to resent his father and would specifically disobey him. Once when Johnson was a teenager he took his father's car into town without asking him first.⁵⁰ He crashed the car and was so worried about what his father would say that he left the car in town and went to his Uncles house for the

⁵⁰ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 39

night.⁵¹ When Johnson's father asked him to finish his chores he would often find ways to pass them on to his sister, Lucia or his brother, Sam Houston. They were both younger and Johnson understood the type of power that he had over them. He was older and could coerce them into following his plan.⁵² Despite the fact that Johnson's father would grow increasingly angry with each mishap and would often spank him as punishment, Johnson did not mind. He enjoyed making his father upset because he resented him so much.

To scorn his mother Johnson would often ask neighbors and friends for food and claim that he had not yet eaten, even when his mother had cooked for him. He felt as though this made Rebeckah look inept and incapable of supporting her family.⁵³ By the time Johnson was a young adult, he wanted to disobey his parents in any way possible. Johnson understood that his mother and father wanted him to attend college. But because that was what they wanted, Johnson had no desire to continue with school. Often times Johnson would ask permission to do something and even though his parents would say he couldn't, he would go ahead and do it anyway.

When Johnson's father was away or traveling for business he would often take his father's role in the household. He would act like "the man of the house", perhaps trying to project the idea that he was a much better man than his own father would or could be.⁵⁴ The behavior that Johnson exhibited as a teen was not just a "phase" as many parents might label their teen's rebellion. Johnson was

⁵¹ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 103

⁵² Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 99

⁵³ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 107

⁵⁴ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 37

exhausted from having to please two different people. At that point in his life he had realized that no matter what he did it would never be enough to please his own mother. For that reason, he began to act out. But his actions were not solely based on this one factor. There are a few other explanations as to why Johnson's attitude towards his parents changed:

- A. Johnson perhaps felt that when he would make his parents look bad people would feel sorry for him. This garnered positive attention towards him while generating negative attention towards his parents.
- B. It is clear that Johnson resented his father. Johnson believed that because his father was somewhat of a "joke" to the people of Johnson City, he would never be taken seriously due to his familial relations.
- C. Similarly to B, Johnson found it necessary to win people over. If someone didn't love him, he would be determined to find a way to change his or her mind. The fact that he was related to Sam Johnson made winning some people over difficult. For example, Johnson dated a young girl by the name of Kitty Clyde. Her parents forbade her to see Johnson because he was poor while her family was well off.
- D. Johnson's general existence revolved around his desire to always be the center of attention. With younger siblings it may have been

difficult for Johnson to obtain attention from his parents at an age where he could be considered more independent.⁵⁵

Despite Johnson's best efforts to not attend college, he enrolled at San Marcos Teachers College in 1926. It was here that Johnson began to see that politics were about people. Specifically he understood the relationships you have with people and the ways in which you can manipulate them. Though he had plans to be a teacher, Johnson began to understand the effect he could have over his peers and the administration. Though Johnson was often mocked because of his family's reputation, he discovered a world while at college that was much different from what he knew at home. At San Marcos, Johnson was loved and respected. In many ways, he was a hero. He changed the dynamics between students at San Marcos. No one expected that Lyndon Johnson would go on to do the same thing for Americas all across the nation just a few decades later.

Creating outlets of power:

As discussed in the previous chapters, Johnson was a master at finding ways to make power outlets for himself. In college Johnson found that there was an unacceptable hierarchy of power; athletes dominated most of the clubs and student activities. Johnson was not an athlete when he attended college at San Marcos Teacher's College in Texas and found that he was disenfranchised when he tried to become part of campus life. In particular, he was not satisfied with the way student

⁵⁵ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 111

government functioned and believed the system was not effective. As a result, Johnson began to strategize and find ways for him and others like him who were not members of a sports team to become leaders at San Marcos.⁵⁶

While a freshman in college, Johnson wrote, “What you accomplish in life depends entirely on what you make yourself do.” Lyndon Johnson could make himself do anything; he was no stranger to hard work. But what was more important than his ability to succeed was his ability to get others to bend to his will. Throughout his life, Johnson knew how to find the right people. He understood the adage, “it’s about who you know, not what you know” perfectly. In school he would befriend his teachers and compliment them so much that Johnson quickly became one of their favorite students. As soon as Johnson arrived on campus for his first day at San Marcos, he had to quench his curiosity. He wanted to know everything there was to know about the school; what courses to take, which professors were the best, who to speak to about joining clubs. In many ways, Johnson’s thirst to learn about all things San Marcos would become a standard practice. While serving as the Senate Majority Leader, Johnson sized up the members of both parties. He understood their desires, their weaknesses, their wants and needs, what made them tick, what made them excited. When he would speak with a member of congress, he knew exactly whom he was talking to. It was not long before Johnson understood the intricately woven web of students, courses,

⁵⁶ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 49

professors, and leadership at San Marcos. Once he could understand what he was working with, he was able to find a way to overtake it.⁵⁷

Johnson overtaking San Marcos is a complete understatement. In order to change the way the student government functioned at San Marcos, Johnson knew he had to go to the top in order to maximize his power. Like all good politicians, Johnson knew how important it was to make friends. Johnson befriended the president of the college, Cecil Evans, though this was not an easy feat. He worked his way up from job to job throughout the college until he was able to secure a job working in the President's office. With a major ally behind his cause, Johnson slowly began to form a counter-organization to the already existent social fraternity, the Black Stars.⁵⁸ Johnson's organization was called the White Stars, a group that was specifically designed to take power away from the popular athletes who were at the head of the student council, the newspaper, and most of the other prominent clubs on campus.

After creating the White Stars, Johnson took his role as a member of the group very seriously. He believed that the operation should at first be incredibly covert; he and the other members followed strict rules. Johnson found it odd that ninety percent of the student body was comprised of non-athletes, but the small ten percent that were athletes controlled everything including the \$12,000 student council budget. Johnson used the White Stars to campaign on campus; it was the first of many races that he would eventually win. In order to increase his own power, he tried his best to show students that matter that were once "non-

⁵⁷ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 47

⁵⁸ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 49

negotiable” were now on the table. Students from any group at the college now had an outlet to voice their concerns and to suggest how the student council budget could be spent.⁵⁹ Johnson’s classmates described him as having great endurance, vitality, and a great power to persuade. These qualities, which no doubt grow out of Johnson’s hunger for power and his overt insecurities brought him to many victories. At San Marcos Johnson was honing the skills that he would use to win over millions of people as a congressman, as a leader of the Senate, and as the President of the United States.

Throughout both Johnson’s childhood and college years, he exhibited a number of qualities that communicate a sense of continuity among character traits. The main underlying commonality among Johnson’s behavior is the insecurity he felt due to the way his mother treated him as a child. Again, it is important to see the distinction between character and personality. We see Johnson’s personality change as he moves throughout his life. We see him obey his mother because of his insecurities, we see him forsake his father because of his insecurities, and we see him take charge and gain power because of his insecurities. The main character trait that follows Johnson in and out of different stages in his life is his lack of confidence. Though this trait never changes or disappears, we can see it expressed in different versions of personality. Even when Johnson quickly changes his attitudes, the changes are guided by a change in personality due to insecurity not a change in character. Johnson had the ability to be any man he wanted to be because he wanted to keep people on their toes; he was so worried that they would turn their back on

⁵⁹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 51

him that he was paranoid to a fault. Insecurity, though it often has a negative connotation, gave Johnson the impetus he needed to accomplish his goals. But in the same breath, insecurity also brought Johnson to make mistakes. It caused him to have destructive relationships, brought him to focus on politics in an almost obsessive manner, and deteriorated his health. However, had Johnson not been as insecure as he was he may not have been able to achieve so much. Lyndon Johnson was a man of intense drive. He had a work ethic like no other politics of his time, and a mind unlike any other man to set foot in the White House. Not many men will understand the success of Johnson. Not many Presidents will win office by such a landslide. And certainly not many men will understand what it is like to gain all the power you have ever wanted just to see it come crashing down so destructively.

Chapter Four: The Wonder Kid Arrives in Washington, D.C.

Johnsons' early career:

At 21, Lyndon Johnson was referred to as the “Wonder Kid”. By the age of 28, he became one of the youngest men elected to Congress. When he turned 32, he made his first run for the U.S. Senate, and lost. This loss angered and shocked Johnson; he truly believed that he belonged in the Senate. But Johnson’s notion of “belonging” turned out to be true; he reached his political prime in the Senate not long after he was elected in 1949.⁶⁰ In 1955 he became the Senate Majority Leader. His work as the Majority Leader left a major mark on politics; it seemed as though Johnson’s character and personality were essentially built for the position. Johnson’s path to becoming Majority Leader was one littered with both great success and great failure.

Johnson was no afraid to be deceitful, sneaky, and conniving when it came to elections. When he lost an election, he came back stronger than ever with a vengeance. When he won an election, he fought to keep his office he had worked so hard to win. Johnson was never at rest; he was a man of constant motion and action. He was never complacent nor would he allow himself to “settle” for something less than he had expected. This attitude is what drove Johnson to become one of the best politicians the country has ever seen. But despite his great talents, the higher Johnson climbed the harder he was bound to fall in due time.

After Johnson had completed his education at San Marcos, he only had one place in mind: Washington, D.C. Since childhood, Johnson’s passion for the game of

⁶⁰ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 5

politics ran wild. After college, his hunger to be part of the political world grew even larger. Johnson arrived in Washington during the winter of 1931. It was the third year of the Great Depression and Herbert Hoover was struggling to keep the economy afloat. After three years of struggles, many people began to lose hope that Washington may be able to help the economy. But Johnson thought differently. Though Lyndon Johnson had left his home in Texas, he was traveling to the one place on earth where he was truly meant to be. He began to carve out his place in Washington politics from the second he placed his suitcase down on the floor of the Dodge Hotel.⁶¹

Johnson's interpersonal skills were beyond excellent. His ability to communicate and to connect with people was perhaps one of his best qualities. During his time as San Marcos, he realized that by analyzing power structures and understanding the people behind them he could essentially change the landscape of influence. This was a skill that Johnson carried with him throughout his political career. He was able to analyze the personal qualities of his colleagues and his staff. Though this practice Johnson knew exactly how to make each individual bend to his will, which perhaps attributed to his great success as Majority Leader.⁶² Not long after Johnson arrived in Washington he began to befriend several members of Congress. He would speak to as many people as possible, gathering information and learning from their stories.

⁶¹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 72

⁶² *The Presidents: Lyndon Johnson*. PBS, 2009.

Given that Johnson had arrived in Washington at such a critical time, he was determined to understand the different proposals for politics in order to help mitigate the damage from the depression. In order to do so, Johnson asked a great deal of questions. He wanted to expand his knowledge of Washingtonian politics and believed that each person he met had the potential to be a “teacher”. In the mornings Johnson would plan bathroom breaks at ten-minute intervals so that he could speak to as many “teachers” as possible while washing his hands. He also would be sure to eat his lunch as quickly as possible so that he would be free to discuss the day’s political happenings with whomever he was sitting with. Each second of his day was devoted to learning and soaking up information about different policies. At night, Johnson set aside a stack of reading which included the *Congressional Record*, pending bills, committee reports, and other pamphlets and documents he felt would be useful to him.⁶³

As most people were winding down their day, Johnson was just beginning to plan for the next one. He sat in his bed each night enveloped by political jargon and budgetary numbers, trying to understand how to solve the problems of the depression. Millions of Americans stayed up all night trying to figure how they are going to provide for their families. Johnson did the same; tried to help fix a failing economy so that Americans could provide for their loved ones once again. His path to creating one of the greatest social reform policies in the history of the United States began at the age of 23 in a hotel room in Washington. Years later, Johnson’s Great Society would be modeled after the New Deal reforms he saw come to fruition

⁶³ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 73

before his eyes as he continued to learn and understand the realm of politics from the inside out.

Johnson's first political experiences

Johnson's first job in Washington was working for Congressman Richard Kleberg. Luckily for Johnson, Kleberg was a man who admired the social aspect of Washington more than the political one, and he was often absent from his own office. Johnson saw that Kleberg was struggling and took matters into his own hands. Almost from the day he arrived, Johnson had complete control of the office. He recruited two friends from San Marcos to join the staff and the office became an operation ran by three young men; Gene Latimer, Luther Jones, and Johnson. Though Johnson had great control over Kleberg's office, he needed to find ways to know what was happening in *other* offices across the Congress. In order to accomplish this, he took a job as a doorkeeper on the Democratic side. This post allowed to meet numerous people, allowing him to observed the interactions and relations between visitors and members.

Though many would find this job to be incredibly dull, Johnson believed that it put him in the perfect position to learn the "unwritten rules" of Congress. After weeks of observations, he soon understood the code of authority and privilege that was based on seniority and power. In college, Johnson took the most mundane jobs incredibly seriously. He understood the principle of hard work; he knew that he would be a standout employee if he dedicated himself to his tasks. While at San Marcos, Johnson was able to eventually obtain one of the most coveted jobs at the

college after illustrating his persistence to his superiors. Johnson eventually became the assistant to the President's secretary, which put him in the perfect position to gain inside information about San Marcos.⁶⁴ Johnson again found ways to gain precious insider information while in D.C., this time as a congressional messenger. A messenger position put Johnson in a position to befriend more senior members of congress. Soon, the most powerful members of congress were paying attention to Johnson; once again, he was able to capture the friendship of all the right players. Johnson was on his way to establishing a name for himself in Washington.⁶⁵

From Johnson's early experiences in politics we can analyze a number of important qualities, which are showcased by his actions. First and foremost there is a clear commonalty between the ways in which Johnson formulates friendships. As a child, Johnson often befriended children that were much older than him.⁶⁶ He ability to seek out power by befriendng the people who are older, more experienced, or who have a great amount of power is key. This is perhaps the seed of manipulation for Johnson. In many ways, each time he was able to capture the attention of the "right people" he was using them to get ahead in his own career. At San Marcos he caught the attention of President Cecil Evans, as soon as he got to Washington he attempted to create ties to the more senior members of congress, and when he was elected to Congress he became close with Sam Rayburn, the Speaker of the House at the time. Despite the fact that Johnson's friendships often played a critical role in his rise of power, he had a genuine love for many of his friends, especially Sam Rayburn.

⁶⁴ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 58

⁶⁵ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 77

⁶⁶ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 71

That is the essential paradox of Lyndon Johnson; he could be cruel and use people, but at the same time he would hold them in high regard. The ways in which he could manipulate people were so effective that many times his colleagues did not realize they were being used in such a way.

Johnson's desire to manipulate people stems directly from his insecurities. From a young age we can see that it is imperative that Johnson seek out success. Whether he was trying to perform to his own mother's standards to attempting to find self-approval through achievement, Johnson was constantly working towards a goal. Afraid of failure, Johnson found it necessary to do whatever possible in order to avoid falling short of his objectives. Doris Kearns described Johnson's ability to befriend people perfectly when she said, "He wanted to be liked by everyone he met, but defined a friendship in terms of a willingness to accommodate his ends."⁶⁷ Friendship, it seemed, was Johnson's way of working towards his own personal ambitions. But Johnson also realized that the capacity to garner attention from others alone would not help to rise to power. He knew that action along with the respect from others would bring him steps closer to being a major player in the epicenter of the political world.

Johnson was a man of motion. He was constantly working; reading, speaking to constituents, trying to find out information about bills and policies. He slept just four or five hours a night. Every chance he got he would find someone to talk about politics with. Johnson essentially had no other interests or hobbies aside from politics. He hated attending plays or movies because the thought of sitting still and

⁶⁷ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 79

keeping quite for three hours at a time was pure agony for Johnson. Johnson's constant need to work was an obsession; he had to be working towards a goal at all times in order to feel satisfied. He never wasted time, and as he worked up the ranks of political power he expected that his staff was never to waste time as well.⁶⁸ This type of workhorse personality led Johnson to drop incredible amounts of weight during periods of great stress, especially when he was running for office.

There are very few men as obsessive about politics as Lyndon Johnson. The type of fixation that he had towards all things political was perhaps unnatural and unprecedented. However, given the psychological experiences Johnson endured as a child, an obsession with politics was a means of protecting himself from the familiar negative, self-loathing feelings he felt growing up. The accomplishments he achieved while working in politics helped Johnson to bring a sense of love and acceptance to himself. In many ways, Johnson first became obsessed with politics and then addicted to the success that politics brought him. He understood that the skills he possessed were the tools he needed in order to get ahead, so with each success came the strengthening of his skills.⁶⁹ Mastery of politics brought even more manipulation, even more late nights, and even less sleep. Johnson used his work life to essentially erase the insecurities brought on by his mother as a child. His mother, as illustrated by the cycle of oppression, severely damaged his self-acceptance. Accumulation of power was the sole way Johnson could create feelings of love. Johnson's perseverance and ability to never tire are perhaps his best qualities, but

⁶⁸ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 78

⁶⁹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 79

because the underlying trait for both these qualities in his insecurity, negative consequences eventually surface.

The National Youth Administration: A window of opportunity for Johnson:

After working in Washington for a short period of time, a life-changing opportunity opened up for Johnson. It was June of 1935 and Franklin Roosevelt was well into his administration. In order to help further his plans for the New Deal, FDR established the National Youth Administration by executive order. The NYA was designed to help young people who had lost their jobs or were forced out of school to find new means of employment.⁷⁰ Johnson saw the NYA as an essentially stepping-stone to move him closer to his goal of election to public office. As soon as he heard of the executive order Johnson quickly called Sam Rayburn and explained why he would be the perfect person to become the Director of the Texas NYA. Because Johnson was no stranger to action, he quickly jumped when he saw the door of opportunity open. His energy and quickness often put him in the most opportune of positions; by not wasting time he would often seized opportunities before anyone else had even heard of them. Johnson will prove time and time again that his quick-handedness gave him a great advantage when it came to politics.

While working for Kleberg, Johnson understood that a connection with constituents was vital in order to experience continued political success. He viewed the NYA as a means of establishing his own constituent base. Because it was a position that was based out of Texas, he could win Texans over while working for a

⁷⁰ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 84

national organization.⁷¹ Though the NYA he could be in his home state while building allies and sustaining the friendships he made in Washington- it was the perfect balance that Johnson needed in order to get elected. Johnson campaigned up and down Texas, meeting young people and establishing projects and housing at each work site. The NYA in Texas had established a number of different projects in order to get young Texans back on their feet.⁷² Most of the success of the NYA was due to Johnson's inability to stop working. He worked day and night, becoming obsessive about his duties. He wanted to make the NYA the best it could be, that way when he ran for office his "constituents" would remember what a fantastic job he did.

A political break for Johnson:

Johnson's experience with the NYA proved to be exactly the opportunity he thought it would be. There is no doubt that his work on public projects helped him to stand out in the minds of not only the people of Texas but in the minds of prominent politicians back in Washington. In February 1937, Johnson's quickness proved to be in his favor once again. The death of Congressman James P. Buchanan left an opening for a special election in Texas.⁷³ In true Johnson fashion, he jumped on the opportunity to run for office as soon as he could. Just a few days after Buchanan's funeral, Johnson announced his candidacy for the open seat. Lady Bird

⁷¹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 85

⁷² Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 85

⁷³ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 385

offered her inheritance to Johnson in order to fund his campaign. With \$10,000 in his bank account, Johnson began his first campaign.⁷⁴

As discussed earlier, Johnson's greatest strength proved to be his endurance. He was a machine when it came to campaigning. Like with past jobs, Johnson became dedicated to his work. He seldom slept or ate and drove himself to loose weight in short periods of time.⁷⁵ Johnson had a fierce desire to win, to grasp hold of power and to never allow himself to let go. It is possible that Johnson was born with this great passion for politics; that his natural abilities were designed for him to excel in such a field. But one can also assume that because Johnson found that politics was a game he could play and win at, he used it as a means for rectifying the image he could not live up to as a child. Johnson saw this special election as his "golden ticket" in to the nation's most exclusive club.

At this point in Johnson's life, he seldom spoke of running for President. Though he mentioned his aspirations to some of his close friends, Johnson was never a man to reveal all his cards. Johnson's paranoia forced him to keep his greatest desire to himself; he feared that someone would attempt to take away what he wanted most in life. But despite his mistrust, Johnson had a plan to rise to the top. Johnson had a vision of a ladder; a ladder of elective offices that he had to climb. However, he needed a stepping stool to reach the first rung. Buchanan's death would serve as the springboard Johnson had been waiting for; by running for the open seat he could now begin to scale the ladder.⁷⁶ At this point in Johnson's life he

⁷⁴ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 87

⁷⁵ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 350

⁷⁶ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 389

was only 28; his age would be a clear obstacle for him in the open seat election. Though his experience and political knowledge was impressive for a young man of his age, there were other candidates with more experience and more popularity among Texans than Lyndon Johnson. Buchanan's wife and his campaign manager were both possible candidates for the seat.

But age and lack of reputation were not Johnson's only setbacks. His time working tirelessly for the NYA was spent in the Fourteenth District of Texas. The open seat would be for the Tenth District. Despite the fact that Johnson had built wonderful relationships with voters in Texas, they were acquaintances that could not help him win this special election.⁷⁷ Johnson weighed his chances of winning and though they did not look promising he decided to run for the seat, nonetheless. His time spent in Washington proved to be invaluable during this election. The Tenth District of Texas was home to a number of influential politicians. Johnson knew none of them except for one; Senator Alvin Wirtz. Johnson became friendly with Wirtz while working for Congressman Kleberg in Washington. Wirtz understood that Kleberg was rather disenchanted with politics and would often forget to return his calls. Johnson often corresponded with Wirtz and from their professional relationship grew a great mentorship. When Johnson was appointed Director of the NYA, he made sure to call Wirtz and report the good news. Johnson even named Wirtz the Chairman of the State Advisory Board for the NYA. Their relationship was more like father and son rather than mentor and apprentice.

⁷⁷ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 390

Wirtz and Johnson both a sense of respect for each other. Their relationship was unusual, as many observed. Wirtz's secretary commented that they Wirtz treated Johnson as if he were his own son.⁷⁸ This type of relationship with his superiors, the kind that mirrors a father-son relationship, was not uncommon to Johnson. The importance of Johnson's friendships with older men is pivotal. Throughout his childhood, Johnson befriended the oldest children in his class and despite the fact that he was much smaller and much younger, Johnson insisted on being their "leader". Johnson's relationship with Wirtz is quite similar to the way in which he acted as a child. Johnson truly did have a genuine respect for Wirtz and appreciated his friendship. However, though Wirtz was more senior, Johnson still had a sense of superiority because he was able to name him to a Chairmanship. It can be suggested that because Johnson had the "upper hand" in their friendship, he was able to bring Wirtz into his life without the hesitation or paranoia. But what is even more interesting than the parallels to Johnson's behavior as a child is the parallel one can spot between Johnson's relationship with his father and his relationship to his mentors.

The three men that Johnson was perhaps closest to throughout his college and political life were Cecil Evans, Alvin Wirtz, and Sam Rayburn. Not coincidentally, all three men did not have children of their own.⁷⁹ They treated Johnson as if he were a son, guiding him and providing a sense of encouragement. Given the types of relationships Johnson had with "father-like figures" in his adult life, one may suggest that Johnson was attempting to replace his own father, but that explanation is

⁷⁸ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 392

⁷⁹ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 392

simply too minimal. Johnson's relationship with his father was strained however, though Johnson resented Sam he also wanted to be Sam. He wanted to live up to the reputation his father once had among Texans; a competent man who fought for the people and was able to get the job done. Johnson wanted that reputation for himself, and in many ways was able to achieve a similar image through working for the NYA. He was a local hero, much like his father. But Johnson aspired to be more than just a local politician. He wanted to climb that political ladder he imagined; he wanted to be better than Sam. Johnson wanted to surpass his father's accomplishments because while he wanted to be like Sam, he also wanted to be better than Sam.

In order to exceed Sam's accomplishments, Johnson needed to make connections. His friendships between Evans, Wirtz, and Rayburn began as friendships of convenience; they were men of power and could all somehow aid Johnson in a unique way. At first Johnson planned to "use" each man in order to get what he wanted but because the men he befriended saw genuine promise in Johnson, he was able to build a sincere relationship with each one. In many ways these relationships were symbiotic; these men gave Johnson a model for what he could aspire to be (and one day surpass) while Johnson gave them each a son. Though Wirtz had a family of his own (a wife and a daughter) he did not have a son. Wirtz's secretary once said, "He was ambitious for him. And he thought he had the ability. And he loves him. Senator Wirtz had a wife and daughter and he was fond of them... but he would have loved to have a son. And he loved [Lyndon] like a son."⁸⁰ The idea that Wirtz "was ambitious for Johnson" and truly did believe in him is

⁸⁰ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 393

important. Johnson's own parents did not provide encouragement and his own neighbors would mock him by saying he would never amount to much. The fact that Wirtz (as well as Evans and Rayburn) saw the potential in Johnson was exactly what drove their relationship. Johnson desperately needed people in his life to provide the love and care his parents could not.

At this point there has been much discussion about Johnson's mother having been the impetus for his insecurities. Insecurity, as it turns out, was Johnson's biggest propellant towards success. Not being able to live up to his mother's expectations was what brought Johnson down, but in contrast living up to his father's reputation is what continually drove him forward. Though it seemed as though Rebeckah's lack of unconditional love is entirely to blame, Johnson's tug-o-war type relationship with Sam is also at fault. Though he resented Sam, Johnson also had a strong desire to emulate him. Johnson wanted to showcase more than anything that he was a better man than his father could ever be.⁸¹ His relationships with the three men mentioned above were a way for Johnson to create positive relationships with father figures and in some sense allowed him to understand what a healthy parent-child relationship is like.⁸² The idea that both parents contributed to Johnson's insecurities and his successes is key; perhaps with their support Johnson would not have the same passion for accomplishment as he did.

After Wirtz agreed to throw his support to Johnson during the 1937 campaign, Johnson knew he had to get to work. The election would be difficult for

⁸¹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 39

⁸² A greater discussion of Johnson's relationship with Rayburn can be found in following chapters.

Johnson based upon the setbacks mentioned before; his age and his lack of popularity. Wirtz and Johnson understood that it was necessary to create a platform that would accomplish a number of things:

1. Johnson needed a platform that would offset the fact that he was not well known.
2. His platform needed to be clear and concise given the context of the times (the U.S. was slowly recovering from the depression and Americans watched as the Second World War was destroying Europe.)
3. Johnson needed to prove that he *knew* Washington. He needed to play up his greatest strength, which was that he was familiar with politics on a national level.

Given these three goals, Johnson and Wirtz began to shape a platform. It was not until Franklin Roosevelt announced his plan for packing the courts in February of 1937 that Wirtz truly was able to create a solid platform for Johnson to run on. Though Wirtz himself was a businessman who did not approve of the court-packing plan, he believed that Johnson should throw his support towards it. In fact, Wirtz believed that Johnson should support every piece of legislation or program that Roosevelt announced. Johnson's biggest strength would now become an association with president, giving him an instant identification.⁸³ Though the other candidates running for the open seat would be pro-Roosevelt as well, Johnson needed to be even more pro-Roosevelt. He needed to have the link to the national government in order to illustrate the fact that he knew national politics. After all, his job would not be limited to Texas politics. Unlike his father, if Johnson won this election he would be working between Washington and Texas, but nonetheless *leaving* Texas.

⁸³ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 395

Now that Johnson had a platform, he needed funding. Ladybird had contributed a total sum of \$10,000 but Johnson was soon able to earn even more. With Wirtz behind his campaign he was not only assured support but he was also guaranteed funding. Wirtz was a popular name in Texas politics and he had influence; influence he used to find Johnson money for his campaign. But Johnson's biggest supporters did more than just send money in an envelope. One of the most telling tales was one that involved former San Marcos friend Bill Deason. Deason had been a supporter of Johnson since his White Star days and saw great potential in his. Deason saw so much potential that he was willing to give up something he loved in order to help Johnson win; his brand new car.⁸⁴ He wanted Johnson to be able to campaign all around Texas and so he donated his Chevrolet to the campaign, but first took it to the bank and borrowed \$500 against it. He handed Johnson \$500 and the keys to the car; a true testament to the amount of confidence Deason had in Johnson.

Despite the tools that Johnson had collected over the span of just a week (funding, a platform, a car) there was still a major obstacle in his way: Buchanan's wife.⁸⁵ She was planning on announcing whether or not she would run for her husband's open seat just a few days after his funeral. Johnson believed that she would run and she alluded to the fact that her family wanted to finish the work of her late husband. Johnson grew nervous and he turned to the one man who he felt knew Texas politics the best; his father. It is interesting to note that Johnson goes home in order to ask his father what he should do. Despite Johnson's resentment, he

⁸⁴ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 397

⁸⁵ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 398

genuinely did care for his father and valued his advice. In many ways, he would return home in order to seek approval of his parents. This time, Sam Johnson not only approved of what Johnson was doing, but he told him how to outsmart his competition. Sam explained to Johnson that Buchanan's wife was too old for a fight (she was sixty-two at the time) and that if Johnson announced his candidacy before she did, she would surly back down. Johnson took his father's advice and the same day announced that he was in the race until the end. Buchanan's wife ultimately decided not to run⁸⁶.

Johnson would eventually go on to win his first campaign in 1937. He was 28 at the time; one of the youngest members of Congress. His dedication to the political area he now found himself in the middle of was unwavering. From the second Johnson walked through the camber doors on his first day as a freshman congressman he knew that he was home. Not long after Johnson had arrived he was invited to formally meet President Roosevelt. Roosevelt met Johnson on his yacht at a port in Galveston. Much to the surprise of the other guests on the yacht Johnson acted as though he and Roosevelt were old friends; using warm tones and creating a sense of intimacy between him and the President of the United States. Johnson was unusually gifted at making an acquaintance seem like an old friend. This talent helped him to establish a very close personal relationship with Roosevelt shortly after their meeting. By the end of their time together Roosevelt handed Johnson a piece of paper with a phone number on it, instructing him to call Thomas Corcoran

⁸⁶ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 399

to discuss a possible position regarding naval matters.⁸⁷ It turned out that Johnson's time with Roosevelt earned him a position on the House Committee on Naval Affairs; an opportunity that Johnson needed in order to gain entrance to the White House.

Johnson's new position also afforded him the opportunity to gain enough influence to make many of the promises to the 10th district come to fruition. He was able to secure WPA projects; his constituents looked up to him as an advocate for the things they needed; Johnson was truly "the people's congressman." From his experiences working in the House just three years prior to his own election, Johnson understood the system of seniority. He knew that a freshman Congressman had little power; he understood that power needed to be earned. In the past, Johnson understood how to accumulate power quickly; befriending the right people was the key to his success.⁸⁸ But in the House things were much different; climbing the ladder of power was a slow process, perhaps more like climbing through mud. There were obstacles in his way despite the tools he possessed; friendships with powerful men such as Rayburn, Roosevelt, and Carl Vinson, who was at the time Chairman of the Naval Affairs committee were simply not enough to propel him higher. After three years of subordination Johnson grew restless. When he saw an opening to run for Senate he jumped on it immediately.

Given Johnson's strong people skills, it is no surprise that he also had a great ability to captivate audiences when he spoke in public. Johnson's dream of success began to come to fruition when an unexpected opportunity appeared in 1930.

⁸⁷ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 90

⁸⁸ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 93

Johnson's first experiences with politics were at the local and state level in Texas. His allegiance to Texas politics never faltered; he continued to consider small town elections to be incredibly important, especially the campaign process.⁸⁹ From watching his father campaign and make connections with constituents, Johnson understood the significance of establishing relationships with the electorate. That is why he considered the election-year political picnic in south Texas to be one of the biggest days in local politics. The picnic served as a platform for speechmaking; each candidate was encouraged to speak about their goals for their district or town.

During this particular election cycle, former Texas governor Pat Neff was up for election as State Railroad Commissioner. When his name was called for him to give his speech Neff was nowhere to be found among the crowd. Neff was a man that Johnson had known due to his generosity; he had even Johnson's father a job working as a railway inspector just a few months prior to the picnic.⁹⁰ Fearful that Neff would jeopardize his chances at winning his election due to his absence, Johnson volunteered himself to make a speech on Neff's behalf. By the time Johnson was done discussing why Neff was a good man and why he was qualified, the audience was spellbound. Johnson's performance, despite the fact that it was unplanned and unrehearsed, received a standing ovation from the crowd. This would be the first of countless audiences that Johnson had enthralled with his oratory skills. But one man in particular at the picnic had been especially impressed with Johnson's speech. During the election cycle of 1930, Welly Hopkins was a candidate for the state senate district that included San Marcos. He listened to

⁸⁹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 69

⁹⁰ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 202

Johnson's performance and within ten minutes of meeting him knew that Johnson had extraordinary talent. Hopkins asked Johnson to manage his campaign the same day the two men had met. Months later, while still in college, Johnson was able to bring Hopkins to victory.⁹¹

From that point on, Johnson and Hopkins had built a strong relationship. Hopkins spoke highly about Johnson, once commenting on his abilities as a campaigner. Hopkins said, "He was gifted with a very unusual ability to meet and greet the public."⁹² Johnson's abilities were indeed unusual. Word spread among politician in Texas that a 21-year-old college boy was virtually running the Hopkins' campaign. Hopkins later admitted that Johnson was in fact running his entire campaign; Hopkins was simply following Johnson's lead. It was unfathomable that a young boy with little political experience knew how to win an election. Yet as unbelievable as it was, Johnson became known as the "wonder kid". After his victory Hopkins said, "[Johnson] did a magnificent job for me. I always felt that he was the real balance of difference as to whether I'd be elected."⁹³ From his early twenties people recognized the ambition and talent within Johnson. Few men had ever had such great aspirations, and even fewer men had the ability to live up to the goals they had set for themselves. Johnson later told Hopkins that one day he would be president.⁹⁴ It seemed as though Johnson's experiences with Hopkins were in many ways a "gateway drug" to his addiction to success. As we will see that there was

⁹¹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 69

⁹² Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 203

⁹³ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 204

⁹⁴ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 535

simply no breaking the habit; Johnson's path to ultimate power was one littered with very few setbacks.

Hopkins was truly forever grateful for Johnson's hard work. To repay him for the victory, Hopkins recommended Johnson to congressman Richard Kleberg as someone who would make an excellent legislative secretary. Kleberg took Hopkins' suggestion and called Johnson while he was about to start his second year of teaching at Sam Houston high.⁹⁵ Johnson accepted the position and after two weeks of hearing from Kleberg he left for Washington. His teaching career was over from that moment on but the path he was truly destined to be on had just begun. Had Pat Neff showed up to the political picnic in 1930 Johnson may have never had the opportunity to work for Kleberg. The connections he made during his short time in Washington gave Johnson the advantage he needed to continue a life in politics.

It is important to pause and note the significance of Johnson's first campaign win. Throughout Johnson's political career he demonstrates an incredible ability to campaign. Perhaps out of all of his skills, campaigning was his strongest suit essentially because it combined all of his abilities. As Hopkins pointed out, connecting with constituents was essential; Johnson learned this from his father. But Johnson's determination gave him the fuel he needed to make campaigning a twenty-four hour job. Johnson's incredible endurance will be showcased later on when he runs for Congress in 1937.

⁹⁵ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 69

Chapter Five: The Senate Years

Making a run for it: The race for the senate:

As was the case in Johnson's first campaign, death provided an opening yet again. Senator Morris Sheppard died in April of 1941, just three years into Johnson's service in the House. The prospect of winning a special election made Johnson jump at announcing his candidacy. Though his time in the House was worthwhile (he was able to provide a number of public works projects for his constituents back in the 10th district) Johnson yearned to be part of a bigger power; he wanted to be a Senator. Johnson was no stranger to campaigns; he had helped to win Hopkins' campaign while he was still in college and now he had won a campaign of his own. He was sure that this time he would be able to win a second time. Johnson funneled all of his energy and recourses into the campaign; he called upon the connections he had made in Washington and Texas thus far to support him.⁹⁶ But despite Johnson's phenomenal campaign abilities and connections he still had to find ways to overcome a number of obstacles in his way. The major obstacle that Johnson was confronted with this time was almost identical to the one he overcame in 1937; his was unknown outside of his district.⁹⁷

There were a number of Texas politicians that were household names in 1941; Lyndon Johnson was of course not among those names. However, veterans such as Governor W. Lee O'Daniel and Attorney General Gerald C. Mann were two names that were tossed around as serious contenders for the senate seat. A poll taken shortly after Sheppard's death indicated that 33% favored O'Daniel over all

⁹⁶ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 93

⁹⁷ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 675

the other possible candidates. Just a small 5% favored Johnson.⁹⁸ From the start the odds were not in Johnson's favor, but they were also not in his favor when he ran in 1937. Based upon Johnson's short history of overcoming the odd and his fierce ability to fight he believed he could win this election as well. Though his skill set was certainly honed enough to win an election, his lack of name recognition would bring him down considerably.

Johnson quickly phoned Wirtz once he decided to run and asked him to manage his campaign once again. Wirtz accepted and they began to create a platform for Johnson to run on. Similarly to the 1937 campaign, Wirtz knew that Johnson needed to create a way to overcome the handicap of lacking popularity among Texans. Once again he suggested that Johnson link his name to President Roosevelt. This time Johnson was able to not only link his name to Roosevelt but also could provide proof as to how he was a strong supporter of the New Deal. The WPA projects that Johnson secured for his district allowed him to illustrate his dedication to Texas and to Roosevelt's plan.

But Mann was also an intense supporter of the New Deal. The similarities between Mann and Johnson were more apparent than those between Johnson and O'Daniel. Mann was relatively young, his support for the New Deal was well known, and he was a small town boy just like Johnson. Knowing that a disparity between candidates would project Johnson with an edge he created a way to decrease support for Mann. In true Johnson fashion, a small amount of back-handedness was necessary in order for him to advance his position in the race. Johnson used

⁹⁸ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 676

Roosevelt's lack of knowledge about Texas politics to his advantage. He began to inform Roosevelt about Munn's lack of loyalty to the New Deal. Johnson also told the President that Mann did not possess enough statewide recognition to win the senate seat. Though other members of the Texas political community attempted to inform Roosevelt that Mann was actually quite popular and loyal to the New Deal. But Roosevelt was so fond of Johnson that he dismissed others who tried to discuss the subject with him.⁹⁹

Lyndon B and Franklin D:

When Roosevelt met with the press to discuss the special election he insinuated that although he could not "enter a primary election", Lyndon Johnson was "very old, old, friend" of his. Newspapers began to report that Roosevelt believed that Johnson would win the election. Soon the race became about one thing; President Roosevelt. Each candidate went out of their way to stress the fact that they supported Roosevelt. If O'Daniel supported Roosevelt 100% Johnson attempted to showcase that his support was 150% for Roosevelt.¹⁰⁰ Soon there were campaign posters all around Texas that read, "Franklin D and Lyndon B!" It seemed as though Roosevelt did more than just imply that he supported Johnson; he ordered his aids to help Johnson with whatever he may have needed at the time. Those who knew Roosevelt understood that his relationship with Johnson was not just professional; they have a mutual respect for one and other. Much like Johnson had with other father-like figures in his life. Roosevelt's support for Johnson seemed

⁹⁹ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 677

¹⁰⁰ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 679

to boost Johnson's popularity, but Johnson still needed even *more* to overcome O'Daniel. He needed an edge to win over the popular Governor, but what more could Johnson do? He already had the support of the highest power in government; there was little left to acquire.

Johnson's relationship with Roosevelt is interesting. Though Johnson does not spend a great deal of time with the president, they are both quite fond of one and other. Roosevelt would eventually become the measuring stick that Johnson uses to evaluate his success during his time as president. What is worthy of note is that Johnson meets a great deal of people who believe in him as he progresses throughout his adult life. From the start of his college years Johnson received great support from older men who see potential in him. This is quite a change from his childhood years; people often compared Johnson to his father and continually berated him for being "a Johnson". Remarks such as "you will never amount to anything, like your father" haunted Johnson. But perhaps without this harsh criticism Johnson may not have been as determined in his adult life. The lack of confidence Johnson received in his childhood most likely helped to propel him to push himself to succeed.

The relationship Johnson takes on as an adult are multi-dimensional. As discussed in previous chapters, relationships served as a means of ascent for Johnson. However, Johnson also uses relationships to assess loyalty. Loyalty, as a result of his mother's lack of unconditional devotion, proves to be incredibly important to Johnson as he moves forward in his career. The relationships he experiences as President depict his issues with loyalty best, but his father-son like

relationships such as the one he has with President Roosevelt also dynamic. Despite Johnson's insecurities, he lets Roosevelt into his life and career partially because Roosevelt serves a professional purpose but also because Johnson truly does admire him as a human being. When Johnson is elected president in 1964 relationships and loyalty become even more critical as he believes he cannot work with a divided administration.

With Roosevelt behind Johnson, Wirtz was able to establish a purely New Deal based platform that highlighted Johnson's support for Roosevelt's efforts and projects. But like in 1937, Roosevelt was not enough. Money was essential to winning this campaign. Money was not an issue for Johnson. He had plenty of funding for his run, as he did when he ran for Congress.¹⁰¹ But this campaign was considerably more expensive than his first one. The Congressional campaign was limited to the 10th district; running for a statewide position would inevitably cost more, as Johnson needed to campaign in all twenty-one districts this time around.¹⁰² Running a campaign in 1941 in a rural state such as Texas proved to be difficult. Many residents did not receive a daily newspaper and even more did not have radios in their households.¹⁰³ For politicians, this meant that a remarkable amount of human contact was necessary; meeting possible constituents and making an impression on them was key to winning an election.

Campaign Funds, Strategies and the Price of Losing:

¹⁰¹ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 681

¹⁰² Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 676

¹⁰³ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 681

Campaigning during the early 20th century was a true test of endurance; endurance of a candidate's will and of their bank account. Traveling around the state hosting rallies and meeting as many people as possible was a great expense. A candidate needed a vehicle, a loudspeaker, money for gas and repairs, money for long distance phone calls back to his campaign headquarters, funds for literature and advertisements- the expenses went on and on.¹⁰⁴ Johnson had the money to fund all of the necessary things in 1937. In 1941, he had even more money. His connections in Washington from his time in congress helped him to secure a great deal of monetary support. Money came from his friend Tom Corcoran, from oil companies who wanted their interests protected, from old supporters, and from companies Johnson had helped to bring profits to over the last three years.

The influence of money in 1941 was even greater than it had been three years before. This time around the statewide race called for a great deal of funds in order to increase Johnson's popularity.¹⁰⁵ Money played an important role even before the race began. Possible candidates such as congressional veteran Wright Patman had wanted to run for senate but simply could not afford it. A serious campaign for senate required a great sum of money; experience and seniority no longer mattered when it came to the race. Johnson appreciated this, seeing as though he had little experience and even less seniority in Texas politics. He could easily work his way up to the Senate without those two requirements, unlike in the House where he needed years behind him to rise up among his colleagues. Johnson believed that opportunity he saw in the special election of 1941 was fundamental to

¹⁰⁴ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 682

¹⁰⁵ Keans, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 93

moving forward in his career. Thus, he pushed himself even further than he did in 1937. His main competitor, O'Daniel, proved to be a formidable contender; his popularity was an obstacle that Johnson could not trounce. But Johnson tried anything and everything he could, regardless.

Johnson knew that with great funding came great possibility. He was able to use the money from his supports to get his name noticed in the most innovative of ways. When reporters barely mentioned Johnson in their stories, he bought advertisements in newspapers. When the advertisements he took out still did not seem sufficient, Johnson printed his own newspaper. He hired his own journalists and created a periodical that helped to further his association with Roosevelt; the paper featured both Johnson and Roosevelt's name an equal amount of times.¹⁰⁶ Johnson's paper was mailed to thousands in the state of Texas with the hope that his name would become increasingly popular among voters. But perhaps Johnson's strongest campaign strategy was his barbecues. A good portion of Johnson's campaign funds were allocated to the informal gatherings he hosted for voters. Johnson enjoyed these barbecues because they afforded him an opportunity to address voters as a whole and to meet them individually.¹⁰⁷

Not long into the race, Johnson's campaign efforts seemed to be paying off; the 1941 election looked quite similar to his 1937 race. Johnson was an underdog but he still had a viable chance at winning, until O'Daniel entered the race as a serious candidate. The crowds at O'Daniel's rallies easily topped the attendance at Johnson's barbecues. O'Daniel was a more conservative candidate who unlike many

¹⁰⁶ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 686

¹⁰⁷ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 689

of the other candidates did not associate his name with Roosevelt. The divide between voters now increased because there was a more moderate candidate in the race. Voters who did not identify with Roosevelt's plans for the New Deal now looked to O'Daniel.¹⁰⁸ The gap between Johnson and O'Daniel tightened and the campaign changed entirely. What seemed like a possible win for Johnson just weeks before now looked like a possible defeat.

When the first returns came in on election night the polls showed that Johnson was the winner by a narrow margin. The next day the polls reported that O'Daniel was the winner of the race by an even smaller margin: 1,000 votes. Though the election was so close, Johnson did not contest it. Some speculate that Johnson's complacency was in part because he had violated campaign spending laws.¹⁰⁹ Though this theory is simply speculation, it is certainly plausible given Johnson's fierce ambition and "need to win" attitude. This loss, Johnson's first and only lost election, would go on to both further Johnson's insecurities and increase his drive. Rejection was the word that Johnson associated most with this particular race. He recalled years later, "I felt terribly rejected and I began to think about leaving politics."¹¹⁰

Consequences of loss:

Denunciation was of course a familiar feeling for Johnson; his childhood was spent living in and out of periods of rejection and approval. The rejection Johnson

¹⁰⁸ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 93

¹⁰⁹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 93

¹¹⁰ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 93

felt after losing to O'Daniel was both similar and unlike the kind he experiences as a young boy. As a child, Johnson continually failed to live up to the standards his mother set for him. As a politician, Johnson believed that he did not live up to the standards a voter held for a public servant of Texas. Not being *good enough* for his standards or anyone else's was not acceptable, and so Johnson took the rejection very personally. Failure to live up to the image Johnson created in his head of himself (one that was better and more successful than that of his father's) was difficult to accept. He contemplated his abilities as a politician, despite his outstanding skill set.

The adage "what doesn't kill me makes me stronger" is incredibly applicable to Johnson's character. Rejection, defeat, negative reviews and criticism were fuel to the fire Johnson houses inside of him. With each knock to his ego Johnson was reminded of his insecurities. The lack of positive reinforcement Johnson endured as a child helped propel him forward, driving him to acquire an immense drive to achieve and over surpass his goals. Similarly, when Johnson experienced rejection as an adult he was prompted to try even harder to succeed at the next opportunity. If the "next" opportunity did not exist, Johnson would find a way to make one happen. This practice happens most often through the friendships Johnson establishes. With the help of his acquaintances, Johnson could often find ways on to congressional committees and into the hands of power. Though he was not yet a senator from Texas, Johnson was still determined to move up the rungs on the "ladder of power" he saw in his head. He understood that it was vital to win a senate

seat, so he continued to make good on his promises to the 10th district as a congressman.

This election represented an important first for Johnson. Prior to O'Daniel's official entry into the race, Johnson felt confident in his ability to win. Confidence was a feeling Johnson seldom experienced.¹¹¹ The fact that he overwhelmingly believed that he had outstanding chances at winning the race pushed Johnson to make sure that he did everything possible to not lose. He was so sure he would win that he did not want to make any mistakes to jeopardize the victory he believed was waiting. Johnson was careful, but not careful enough. Though Johnson was announced the winner on election night, the results of the election would change the next day. Johnson's campaign began celebrating after hearing the first returns; Johnson was ecstatic and believed that he was the fair victor of the race. But as we know, O'Daniel was announced the winner the follow day by a small margin.

Speculation for fraudulent voting practices was simply speculation because Johnson was not known to have been involved with such plots. But perhaps had he been more connected to the city bosses whom his campaign men recruited to "stuff ballots" and to collect votes from Mexicans living in districts, Johnson would have avoided such a large mishap.¹¹² Johnson's men had taken it upon themselves to recruit votes the best way they knew how; through the foremost political machines in Texas at the time. The practice of vote stealing was not uncommon during the 1940's. The practice was not the flawed aspect of the operation. The lack of supervision Johnson had over the process and the fact that his men did not see

¹¹¹ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 733

¹¹² Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 736

every district's vote stealing through was the downfall. In order to be sure that deceitful practices were effective one needed dedicated and loyal men to oversee them.

Stanch loyalty, a trait that Johnson demanded of his aids in years to come, was lacking among Johnson's men. The election was lost due to an insufficient number of votes (votes Johnson's camp thought existed through ballot stuffing). Johnson's initial reaction was to steal the election back by finding more fraudulent votes, but no one was willing to put their own political vitality on the line to save Johnson's. Thus, Johnson publically accepted the fact that O'Daniel won the election.¹¹³ However, ideas of loyalty and finding quality, trustworthy people to work alongside remained in Johnson's mind long after 1941. As Johnson worked his way up the political ladder, he was determined to find people who would work for him and only him. Fear of losing and abandonment as well as a great fear of being alone drove Johnson to seek out men who he believed would be loyal to him and only him. Staff members who proved to be treacherous were quickly weeded out and eliminated.

The most important results of Johnson's loss showcase Johnson's will to succeed. Loss created a springboard for Johnson to fight back even fiercer when he would run for senate a second time. Close analysis of his childhood illustrates the idea that when Johnson received criticism his desire to accomplish his objectives grew even stronger. It is possible to speculate that the psychological implications of a lack of confidence (which were reinforced by both family, friends and

¹¹³ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 740

acquaintances through disparagement) created Johnson's desire to be great. However, other outside influences played an important role in the ways in which Johnson wanted to succeed. His natural abilities and talents such as his ability to converse easily and intimately with anyone and his ability to read people helped gave him the edge he needed in order to be a great politician. His natural abilities existed independently of the psychological abuse his mother subjected him to. In part Johnson's achievements can be attributed to both his negative childhood and his positive innate aptitude.

After Johnson's loss his self-image continued to deteriorate. He wanted to be a senator from Texas, not a congressman. But congress would be his home for another six years before he would have the chance to run for a senate seat again. During that time Johnson began to question his role in politics. Though he had always been incredibly fond of politics, he was also fond of money. As a congressman he was not making nearly what he felt he needed to make in order to support his family. He considered resigning and moving back to Texas to make a decent living, but his genuine love of public service kept him in Washington. Johnson however, lost great enthusiasm and interest in his life as a congressman. The creativity and energy he had funneled into his career when he was first elected had slowly vanished. Johnson began to feel as though his position as a representative from the 10th district of Texas would as far as he would get in the world of politics. His dreams of becoming a senator seemed to be moving further and further away

and the thought of winning a presidential election seemed almost insurmountable.¹¹⁴

Money and Power:

The seven years after Johnson had lost to O'Daniel were perhaps his darkest but also most lucrative. Similarly to how Johnson lusted after power and dominance, he also was quite infatuated with money. Money, Johnson believed, was also a status symbol of power. Johnson's concerns about money seemed to plague him during this period. A lack of money was perhaps an issue for Johnson. His father was sometimes unable to provide a sufficient standard of living for his family during periods of unemployment. Seeing as though Johnson could not bare the thought of becoming a mirror image to his father, it was necessary for him to find a way to make a living for himself outside of politics. His desire to be unlike his father was so great, even his younger brother understood it. Sam Houston once said, "It was most important to Lyndon to not be like Daddy."¹¹⁵ Johnson enlisted Lady Bird's inheritance to help him reach his goal of becoming rich.¹¹⁶

The story of how the Johnson's made their millions is of interest because of the story behind the story. Essentially, Johnson used Lady Bird's money with his political connections to bypass a number of laws in order to purchase the rights to a radio station. Law required that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) approved the purchase before any sale could be made. In 1943, the future of the FCC

¹¹⁴ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, xxviii

¹¹⁵ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 401

¹¹⁶ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, xxix

was uncertain; talks about eliminating the FCC were being discussed. This worried Johnson and so he quickly plotted ways to save the FCC. Johnson did what he knew best; he befriended those with the most influence, including the Commissioner of the FCC, Clifford Durr.¹¹⁷ Eventually, Johnson was able to talk his way into making the FCC bend to his will; the Commission remained intact and Lady Bird was able to buy KTBC, the radio station that would make Johnson millions.

Though the deals that Johnson made behind the scenes are quite complex, the general idea of Johnson's will to save the FCC for his own benefit speaks to his character. The opportunity to purchase KTBC, even though he was not doing so with his own funds, meant a chance for him to make money without leaving congress. This is not the first time Johnson looks towards Lady Bird's inheritance to help his advance; when he needs funding for his very first campaign in 1937 Lady Bird graciously donates \$10,000 to his cause. The purchase of KTBC allowed for Johnson to ride of the coattails of Lady Bird's success. Marriage proved to be the best business deal for Johnson; his status as Lady Bird's spouse gave him privilege to the profits. By 1948 Johnson claimed that he was a millionaire. By the time Johnson became president in 1963 he was worth an estimated \$20 million.

The station not only brought profits but also empathized Johnson's power among congress and large companies back in Texas. He used airtime on the station to his advantage, striking deals with large companies that supported him. Companies that guaranteed their allegiance to Johnson were awarded with

¹¹⁷ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 89

advertising space.¹¹⁸ Johnson often bragged that “his” company (which was in actuality, Lady Bird’s company) was bringing in incredible profits. Exaggeration of the truth and bragging were often associated with one and other in Johnson’s mind. Whenever he told a story he often fabricated and embellished the details until the story no longer resembled the truth.¹¹⁹ Johnson fabricated stories and told them over and over, each time changing the narration. Friends caught on to Johnson’s fictitious narratives, and eventually he earned a reputation for being a “liar.” His friends in college nicknamed him “Bull” (short for bullshit) because they felt as though it was just impossible for Johnson *not* to lie.¹²⁰ Johnson was a man who simply could not tell the truth; he lied when he knew he could get caught, and continued to lie even when he did.

Johnson was perhaps psychologically “wired” to lie. His childhood had conditioned him to hide the negative things he did not like about himself, especially the fact that his family was not as well off as the others in his town. Additionally, Johnson would lie to his father about the things he did that seemed “unmanly” or the mistakes that he made, out of fear that he would be punished. Johnson always had a desire to be great, even if he only *seemed* great to others. Though he wanted power, Johnson also wanted to paint a portrait of himself that attracted people to him. He wanted to seem interesting, adventurous, and most of all capable.¹²¹ The lies that Johnson told in college awarded him a reputation as a fraud. During his years in

¹¹⁸ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 103

¹¹⁹ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 48

¹²⁰ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 50

¹²¹ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 49

Congress, especially after such an “under the table deal” such as the KTBC purchase, he was beginning to earn a similar reputation.

Congressional Successes:

During his time in Congress, Johnson was witness to some of the most catastrophic events the world has seen in the 20th century. Working in government during World War II was an experience that Johnson would not shake for the rest of his political career. Ideas of peace and war and of just causes of war would become apparent to Johnson during this period in Congress. Johnson was quoted saying, “The way to prevent war was to stop aggressors at the start.” Johnson believed that America had the power to influence the views of other countries and so it was important to him that the United States was never complacent or apathetic towards the conflicts that occur in other areas of the world.¹²² This view would be important to Johnson’s work as a congressman in the 1940’s, but would also be applied to Johnson’s leadership as president years later.

The notion that Johnson believed in quick action is sensible given his character. He was not one for wasting time and missed opportunity when he saw an opening. Johnson’s quickness when it came to moving policies along is an important aspect of his leadership style, which is directly influenced by his disposition. Quickness and an affinity to motion are traits that arise through Johnson’s need to seek out outlets of self-approval. Constant motion increases the chances that one

¹²² Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 96

will find such means (for Johnson this means seeking out ways to accumulate power or influence over others).

As a congressman, Johnson observed the origins of a number of hot political issues that were to arise after his time in the congress. The most pressing of these issues would come to be civil rights. As a congressman from Texas, Johnson voted no to each and every single civil rights bill that was brought through the house chamber. He voted against the elimination of a poll tax, legislation that was aimed to ending segregation, and even no to a bill that proposed the end of lynching. Johnson's record was flawless; 100% of the time he voted no to any legislation that would advance African Americans in society.¹²³ Johnson spent eleven years in the house, denouncing any and every type of civil rights legislation. Once he had advanced to the senate his views remained the same. His twenty-two year record in Congress would depict his unbendable belief *against* equality for black people. His time as president would tell another story entirely. Later in his life, Johnson would become an advocate for equality, acting against his longstanding record.¹²⁴

Johnson felt immovable; the idea that he would never leave the House was becoming more plausible to him with each passing year. By the mid 40's Johnson believed that he would never amount to more than a congressman. Despite Johnson's low position in government, he still had the allure of being a "White House insider" due to his friendship with Roosevelt. But Johnson's White House connection would soon escape him; the death of Roosevelt in 1945 shook him.¹²⁵ Johnson was

¹²³ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, xvii

¹²⁴ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, xx

¹²⁵ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 121

distraught; Roosevelt was not only a crucial connection, he was also a man that Johnson truly admired and respected.

Days following Roosevelt's death Johnson said, "There are plenty of us left here to block and run interference, as he had taught us, but the man who carried the ball is gone- gone." Johnson admired the New Deal and believed in the programs that Roosevelt had created, but when he disagreed with Roosevelt, there was still a sense of loyalty. Roosevelt never asked Johnson to vote a certain way, and never criticized him when he voted against one of his policies.¹²⁶ Their relationship was one that Johnson cherished, but now without Roosevelt he feared for his vivacity in government. When outsiders saw the type of relationship Johnson cultivated with the older men he admired (Roosevelt included) people often referred to him as a "professional son". The son had now lost his father, and without his guidance Johnson scrambled to find a way to keep relevant among influential actors in government.

Harry Truman was next in line for the presidency. Johnson had met Truman a number of times through Rayburn, and so they were familiar with one and other. Both men were democrats who believed in many of the same ideologies. They got along well, but when Johnson attempted to befriend Truman the way he had befriended Roosevelt and Rayburn, he quickly caught on. Truman had seen first hand the way in which Johnson had befriended Rayburn and slowly established a "father-son like" relationship with him. When Truman resisted Johnson's friendship, Johnson became even more anxious as to what his future in politics would look like.

¹²⁶ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 122

After all, Johnson had used Roosevelt's name to win one election and to advance quite far in another just a few years prior to his death. It could be suggested that Truman never truly trusted Johnson; their relationship would never grow to be strong.¹²⁷

What worried Johnson most was not necessarily his influence on Washington, but rather his influence in Texas. Without Roosevelt it would now be more difficult to win an election in Texas. The conservative beliefs of the south could be resurrected now that Roosevelt and his New Deal were no longer an influence in Washington. Conservative Texans strengthened their power by joining forces; the unity among conservatives was more apparent than ever. Johnson understood that the game had changed for him. The next election he decided to run in would be dependent upon his relationships with his colleagues in Texas, not with the president.¹²⁸ This concerned Johnson because he was seen as an unyielding New Dealer, not a conservative. However, his anti-civil rights voting record helped him to foster a new image of conservatism. In 1947, Johnson found the perfect opportunity to showcase his new beliefs. Truman had announced a new liberal plan, one that was close in flavor to the New Deal, that if passed would provide enormous social benefits to Americans.

The program, which was called "The Fair Deal", would essentially be a continuation of the social reform that Roosevelt had started. It included increase social security benefits (a program that Johnson had discussed with Roosevelt prior to his death), health insurance benefits, and created a law that deemed segregation

¹²⁷ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 124

¹²⁸ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 125

on interstate transportation illegal. Johnson sternly opposed Truman's Fair Deal, speaking out against it in congress not long after it was introduced. The next senate race would not be until 1948, but Johnson was setting himself up early as a potential candidate by denouncing the liberal policies that the new president suggested. But after Roosevelt's death Johnson now felt as though his progress in government was retrogressing. Instead of accumulating more chairmanships he seemed to be trailing behind the other members. Though Rayburn attempted to help Johnson, he continued to be discouraged.¹²⁹ His desire to be a senator grew even more during his worst years in the House. He wanted to escape.

Johnson's effortless ability to change his disposition on certain policies can be traced back to his ability to lie. For Johnson, a lie was just as easy to tell as the truth, if not easier. Johnson could construct his idea around one lie or a series of lies, even when past experiences tell a much different story. Johnson's voting record was anti-equality, as was his stance against the Fair Deal. But the social reform aspects of the Fair Deal were condemned along with the civil rights aspects, illustrating Johnson's disapproval for *both* types of social reform. However, Johnson not only supported social reform in the New Deal, but would go on to create a similar plan (which he would name the "Great Society") during his own presidency. The "flip-flop" attitude that Johnson had was acceptable to him. He agreed when his support would offer him a benefit and found ways to turn his past approval around when it was necessary for his career.

¹²⁹ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 127

Johnson began to spiral into periods of intense depression once his tenure in Congress amounted to ten years.¹³⁰ For someone who wanted to move out of the House and into the Senate from the day he entered his office as a freshman representative, ten years was purely torture. Johnson longed for a bill to be passed in congress with his name on it; he wanted a long list of accomplishments by the time he was 40. At 39, his list was quite small and he believed that by 40 if a man did not accomplish much, he was never going to.¹³¹ The 1948 election was drawing closer, and Johnson knew that this was his chance- perhaps his final chance- to finally win a senate seat. He was desperate to find a way to become more influential; though he had made money over the past decade, he was still not satisfied. The kind of power Johnson lusted after did not come in a monetary form. He wanted power over people; the power to have his voice heard throughout the Senate chamber. 1948 was his window of opportunity, and Johnson was prepared to do whatever was necessary in order to win.¹³² But on January 1st, 1948 Johnson received what might have been the most devastating news of his career; Former Governor Coke Stevenson was to enter the race for senate.¹³³

Coke Stevenson and the 1948 Election:

Coke Stevenson was the most loved governor in Texas. More loved than O'Daniel, Stevenson was the biggest vote getter in Texas history. Johnson feared that Coke's popularity would trump his name, given that Coke was well known around

¹³⁰ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 139

¹³¹ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 138

¹³² Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 100

¹³³ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 101

the entire state. The same problems that inundated Johnson in '37 and '41 would prove to be obstacles in '48. However, Johnson was now a seasoned politician and campaigner, and hoped that his skills would be enough to overcome Stevenson's popularity. Johnson and Stevenson had some similarities. Both were men from Texas who had grown up in relatively poor circumstances, and both men were incredibly ambitious. Stevenson studied hard in school in order to find ways to get ahead in life. He wanted to amount to something, to live comfortably, unlike his parents. Stevenson was also a tall lanky man who was able to command great attention when he spoke, just like Johnson. But there was one major difference between the two men; Stevenson was an extraordinarily honest man and Johnson was not. When he spoke, people believed that he was speaking the truth- and he was.¹³⁴ From the age of ten, Stevenson had worked to help his family. His jobs ranged from building fences to bookkeeper and everything in between. Stevenson had a great worth ethic and a fine moral thread; from the two came great ambition.

Johnson worried about Stevenson but his anxiety was soon eased when Georg E. Peddy announced his candidacy just days after Stevenson. He believed that Peddy, a candidate who has similar beliefs to Stevenson, would easily take votes away from the former governor. But polls and the press predicted otherwise. A Belden Poll (Texas' version of a Gallup Poll) showed that Stevenson would win the election by a landside, with more votes than Johnson, Peddy and all other candidates.¹³⁵ This of course worried Johnson, but not as much as the newspapers concerned him. The media predicted that Stevenson would be the clear winner of

¹³⁴ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 146

¹³⁵ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 179

the election and in turn suggested that they endorsed him in the senatorial election. Johnson believed that he needed to use every last trick he had up his sleeve in order to win. Once again, money proved to play a key role in Johnson's run for office. Though he had money in 1941, he had even more in 1948. And he was willing to use it at any cost.¹³⁶

Stevenson had proved that he was a fine campaigner; in the past he had won his elections without much financing. However, the types of elections he was running for did not necessarily require the vast amount of funding a senate campaign did. Stevenson was also a man who did things by the book; he never violated campaign finance laws or took money from businesses under the table. He was an honest man. Johnson was of course, not an honest man. And he began to think of money on a completely different scale. His 1941 campaign was perhaps the most expensive campaign in Texas history.¹³⁷ Johnson not only had money but also knew how to spend it effectively. Though Stevenson was a tough competitor to beat, Johnson's lack of morality would play a key role in this election.

Stevenson's refusal to use fraudulent practices left the door wide open for Johnson to find ways to steal the election. What is interesting is in 1941 Johnson had attempted to steal the election but made one very large mistake. This mistake, much like the one mistake his father had made by buying the Johnson Ranch back, would haunt him until Election Day of 1948. He wondered if he would ever be able to surmount his misstep, but more importantly he made sure he would not make the same mistake twice.

¹³⁶ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 180

¹³⁷ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 180

The election of 1948 worried Johnson for a number of reasons. The fact that he had attempted to steal the '41 election and failed worried Johnson. If Johnson lost again in '48, there would be much more serious repercussions. This senate election was not a special election; the seat was open. This meant that if Johnson ran for the seat and lost, he would also lose his seat in the House. The election in '48 put Johnson's political career completely on the line; he *had* to win at all costs. Johnson also worried about Stevenson's visibility; he was, after all, the most well received Governor in recent memory. Since Stevenson was far better known than Johnson, the logical assumption would be that Stevenson would easily win the election. This is the projection that newspapers made. In fact, most of the media in Texas believed that Stevenson would win the election. This too worried Johnson; Stevenson's name was appearing in the press much more often than his was.

The Lyndon Johnson that was running in '48 was a much different than from the Lyndon Johnson that ran in '41. In '41, Johnson was younger and more patient. He realized that he had already accomplished a great feat by the time he was 29; he managed to get himself into congress. Johnson very much still believed in populism in '41; his desire to help the people of the district still burned wild inside of him. Between the years following his loss and the '48 election Johnson grew somewhat disenchanted with the idea of being "the people's congressman". There was simply one goal on his mind; to obtain a seat in the Senate.¹³⁸ Though he gradually lost interest in his duties as a representative, Johnson never fully lost his genuine desire to help people. The desire still existed, but was often overshadowed by Johnson's

¹³⁸ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 129

bigger goals. As his goal to leave the House grew bigger, it also grew further away. His desperation to leave began to eclipse his aspiration to make good on his promises to the 10th district. Eventually Johnson would place his own agenda before the one he had for his constituents.

Though Johnson was far more desperate to win in '48 than he was in '41, he was also much wealthier this time around. The money Johnson had would prove to be one of his biggest assets, second to his innovative campaigning. Johnson's ability to spend money was incredible. As we saw in '41 he poured immense amounts of funding into his barbecues and his advertising. His first senatorial run was the most expensive election in Texas history but '48 would revolutionize campaigns completely. While purchasing votes had been a common practice in Texas politics (and a practice that Johnson was quite familiar with), Johnson was thinking of more effective ways to use his money.¹³⁹

Johnson Changes Texas Politics For Good:

The face of politics was already beginning to change. New technology helped to make campaigns more systematic. Polling, for example, had become a more popular mechanism for assessing popularity and effectiveness of advertising. Few politicians utilized polling to its full advantage but Johnson saw great potential in conducting statewide polls.¹⁴⁰ At the time, polling was one of the most expensive aspects of a campaign. The average statewide poll cost a candidate around \$6,000 each time one was conducted. Thus, most politicians only requested that polls be

¹³⁹ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 191

¹⁴⁰ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 192

conducted every month or every two months. Johnson saw the potential in the information that statewide polls could reveal. It was just as important to Johnson to understand his current status among voters as it was to predict if and how their feelings would change towards him in the coming weeks and months. In order to best assess his progress, Johnson ordered that statewide polls be conducted every week. This is completely unheard of prior of the '48 election; the cost of polls was simply too high. However, Johnson believed that polling would allow him to prevent lulls in visibility or the possibility of changes in voter approval.

The potential that Johnson saw in weekly statewide polls was endless. He believed that following the “strength of support” would allow him to make more informed decisions as to how and where to spend funding. Analyzing the week-to-week changes in the strength of support helped to project the depth of voter penchants and how those penchants might change over time. The use of polling helped Johnson to gauge which issues he should play up and which issues were less pressing in the eyes of his potential constituency.¹⁴¹ Politics was no longer a “guessing game” in that Johnson and other politicians who employed polling were able to judge which issues required more concentration and which did not.

Radio was also another technology that would change the game of politics. Though radio had been used to campaign for years prior to '48, Johnson was able to use it in a way unlike any other politician had done before. His knowledge of radio from working closely with KTBC helped him to better understand the ways in which radio could be used to his advantage. Traditionally, candidates would buy airtime

¹⁴¹ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 192

and broadcast speeches across the state sporadically. Johnson, on the other hand, created dazzling radio shows that would be broadcasted once, twice, or sometimes three times a day. Johnson included music, narratives, and professionally written speeches. He even encouraged his most notable supporters to speak on his behalf.¹⁴² The use of radio in this context proved to be quite expensive, but the results were very much worth the investment. Johnson was able to reach out to a large number of voters in a very small amount of time. But what is more important is that he had the ability to keep the voters captive; his shows were both informative *and* entertaining.

The combination of polling and radio was very powerful. Johnson understood that poll results would help dictate the material that would be included in each radio show. The issues that “touched” voters the most, that is the issues that voters could identify with, were played up in the broadcasts. Johnson made sure that he was able to connect to voters and constantly made sure to showcase hot button issues in all types of advertising, be it radio, newspaper, or mailings.¹⁴³ Johnson was using money on an unprecedented scale. In comparison, Stevenson could simply not keep up. He had been campaigning “the old way” for years and did not have the innovation or the fundraising abilities that Johnson possessed. It became apparent that Stevenson’s abilities could not match up to Johnson’s, and Johnson soon believed that he had a real chance at winning the election. But despite his talent for campaigning and the new ways he was employing polling and radio, he still believed

¹⁴² Caro, *Means of Ascent* 192

¹⁴³ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 193

he needed a bigger advantage over Stevenson. Johnson wanted to be certain that there was no way he could lose.

In 1948, a helicopter was a foreign object to most Americans, especially those living in rural Texas. Lyndon Johnson changed that. In a race that required Johnson to campaign across the entire state, it was necessary to find the most effective type of transportation. A helicopter could allow Johnson to move from city to city in record time. What's more is that no other politician had ever used a helicopter to campaign; it was truly Johnson's most innovative strategy. Not only did the helicopter allow Johnson to move quickly, it also attracted voters. Most small town Texans had never seen a helicopter, much less heard of a helicopter before Johnson began flying around in one. The idea behind the helicopter was that it was an attraction, and it soon became widely known that Lyndon Johnson was traveling around Texas in a "contraption" that looked similar to a "windmill". The helicopter soon earned the nickname "flying windmill". Voters all across the state came out to see what it was all about each time Johnson touched down in a new location.¹⁴⁴

An average day for Johnson and his team included visits to twenty-two different cities.¹⁴⁵ It truly did garner the attention that Johnson wanted, but he feared that the attention could turn to negative press. He worried that the helicopter blades would take in a bystander and the next days the press would publicize the fact that Johnson's campaign resulted in a casualty. Additionally, fuel was expensive and difficult to come by as the helicopter traveled from location to location each day. Despite the risk involved, Johnson believed that his "flying

¹⁴⁴ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 212

¹⁴⁵ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 101

windmill” would be worth the gamble.¹⁴⁶ The public response far exceeded Johnson’s expectations. Voters ran to see Johnson and his helicopter arrive; little children marveled at Johnson as if he was their hero. He was elated by the fact that voters adored him all across Texas.¹⁴⁷ Johnson soon moved out of his depression and was consistently in a positive mood. He would wake up earlier than his aids and get a head start on the days work. Johnson believed that it was possible to win and his determination drove him to work even harder.

Old Politics vs. New Politics:

It was hard for Stevenson to grasp the idea of changing politics. It was also difficult for him to truly understand who Lyndon Johnson was. Johnson was not a complacent man, not at all. He was a man of motion and a man who would stop at nothing- absolutely nothing- to get what he wanted. Johnson was unlike any other Texas politician, and his candidacy in the '48 election truly did change the way candidates ran their campaigns. At best Johnson was pioneering, creative, and hard working. At worst, he was sneaky, ruthless, and deceitful. Coke Stevenson experienced both sides of Johnson first hand. Stevenson couldn’t top Johnson’s “flying windmill” and he knew it. But he also couldn’t stop Johnson’s attacks. Day after day Johnson would issue attacks on Stevenson like no other candidate had done before. He exploited Stevenson in newspapers, on the radio, in mailings and in his speeches.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 212

¹⁴⁷ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 221

¹⁴⁸ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 227

The allegations that Johnson made against Stevenson were not true. None of the attacks was true. But when Johnson found an issue he believed was “touching” he hammered it into the minds of the voters over and over. The lies he had woven together were repeated so often that they eventually seemed believable. Some lies were so believable that even Stevenson’s most avid supporters began to question his credibility. Stevenson believed that by responding to the false claims that he would be in turn dignifying them, and so many times he was silent when Johnson attacked.¹⁴⁹ It seemed as though Stevenson had found himself in the eye of the storm; Johnson was slowly annihilating him. Stevenson had not realized the change that Johnson was bringing to Texas politics until it was far too late. Johnson was a tornado, easily knocking down everything in his path to victory.

Johnson had money and the ability to fabricate and publicize lies about Stevenson in ways that were unmatched prior to ’48. Johnson painted Stevenson in a light that was less than flattering almost every day during the campaign process. There is no doubt that this particular election was the result of lying and cheating on Johnson’s behalf. But it is important to note that Johnson did possess quite extraordinary talents, which also led him to victory. Johnson’s public speaking skills were astonishing; the same public speaking skills that afforded him an opportunity to win in ’37 would play a major role in his victory in ’48. It was well known that Johnson was an excellent speaker. His ability to hold an audience’s attention was second to none. Again, Johnson focused on polling and what each individual area of Texas might want to hear from him. For example, in pro-labor districts he was pro-

¹⁴⁹ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 228

labor and in anti-labor districts he was anti-labor. In rural towns he played up the fact that he was a country boy himself; that he knew what it was like to be a farmer's son.¹⁵⁰

The tune of Johnson's speeches continually changed depending on his location. He said what he believed each city wanted to hear; the things that were important to them, the things they hoped and wished for. He wanted to invoke enthusiasm in each of the crowds he spoke to; he wanted them out of their seats, fully enthralled in what he was telling them.¹⁵¹ The speeches were just the beginning; the meet and greets after he was done talking were even better than the speech itself. He tried to personally meet and address each voter and their own personal concerns. Johnson wanted to make that human connection that he had seen his father make when he was just a little boy. This is common to all of Johnson's campaigns. He knew that he was best at speaking to people one on one, but he also knew that the personal connections would persuade people to vote for him over Stevenson.¹⁵²

Each step of Johnson's campaign was a blanching act. For every negative quality Johnson possessed, he needed a way to overshadow it. What was most apparent about Johnson, aside from his lanky stature, was his temper. He was a living paradox in that his personality could change at the drop of a hat. He could be affable and incredibly likeable with voters one minute and unbearably rude and ruthless to an innocent hotel employee the next. Due to his high visibility in Texas,

¹⁵⁰ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 253

¹⁵¹ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 255

¹⁵² Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 256

reporters and news people often followed Johnson, and so his out outbreaks often had witnesses outside of his campaign staff. This worried Wirtz; he did not want Johnson to carry a reputation as being hotheaded. He urged Johnson to change his tone with his aids. Any bad press at this point would take away the focus Johnson had placed on the issues and put it on his bad behavior.¹⁵³

After the primary had taken place in August of '48, Johnson felt that he needed an additional edge over Stevenson. Preaching falsehoods about Stevenson to voters all across Texas was an not issue for Johnson prior to the primary. This continued well into the weeks following the primary as Election Day inched closer and closer. Johnson's entire life, everything that he had worked for up until this point- all of the days and weeks and years spent in the House- was on the line. He needed to win. And so he needed one last lie; one major lie that could serve as the final nail in Stevenson's coffin. Johnson placed Coke Stevenson in the same sentence as the word "communist".¹⁵⁴

Once again, Johnson believed that if he repeated a lie enough times people would eventually start to believe him. Rural Texas, he felt, were the key audience for his lies. He felt as though he could fool them into believing even the most unbelievable of mendacities with enough repetition.¹⁵⁵ Stevenson had heard enough of Johnson's lies. An association with communism was untrue, and Stevenson felt it necessary to defend his name and so for the first time since the start of the campaign, Stevenson spoke out against Johnson; he began to *attack*

¹⁵³ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 268

¹⁵⁴ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 287

¹⁵⁵ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 288

Johnson. Similarly to Johnson, Stevenson used repetition. He dug up Johnson's record and criticized him for his large amounts of spending.¹⁵⁶ He insinuated that Johnson could be taking money from donors who were expecting political favors in the future. Stevenson fought back hard, but his fight began far too late. With just a handful of weeks before the election his new strategy proved to be too little too late.

Winning and Losing: The weeks leading up to the election:

In the last two weeks prior to the election, Johnson was exposing himself as much as possible. The new game of politics relied on repetition. Johnson was on the radio, in the newspapers and out in cities more often than Stevenson was. This was simply because Johnson had the type of funding necessary to campaign on such a large scale so close to the election. The attacks that Stevenson issued on Johnson proved to be futile because they lacked exposure. Johnson had every possible media outlet broadcasting his platform. In the old game of politics, the game that Stevenson knew how to play, he might have been able to reverse the path of the election. However, Johnson created the new game. He knew the game inside and out. So no matter what Stevenson did, no matter how hard he tried, he simply could not overpower Johnson's abilities.¹⁵⁷ Johnson had written the rules to the game and he had the ability to change them as well. Stevenson had difficulty keeping up throughout the race, but it was in the last lap of the race where polls shows that Stevenson still had a chance at winning, despite Johnson's efforts.

¹⁵⁶ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 295

¹⁵⁷ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 296

Public polls taken in the weeks before Election Day reported that Johnson trailed behind Stevenson; 48% to 41%. Out of the voters polled, 11% were still undecided. Johnson's innovative campaigning and excessive spending brought him to a point where he had gained a considerable amount of Stevenson, but not enough. What Johnson feared was that he was going to lose, but lose by such a small margin that it would make the loss even more unpalatable. It was at this point that Johnson reverted back to the old campaigning. He and his team realized that they needed to find votes, enough votes to push Johnson over the threshold of winning.¹⁵⁸ The obvious place to look for additional votes was towards the Mexican-American population. The "ethnic vote" was at this point more valuable than the honest votes Johnson had obtained by campaigning throughout the race.

Of course, Lyndon Johnson was no stranger to fraudulent voting practices. His men had stuffed ballots in '41 in an attempt to overtake O'Daniel in his first run for Senate. This time, Johnson *had* to win; he had put all his eggs in one basket. Losing would mean losing everything he had worked for, so he pushed himself to campaign even harder during the days before the election. It is estimated that Johnson poured in almost \$50,000 to Mexican-American cities such as San Antonio to buy the ethnic vote. In San Antonio, Johnson looked towards the sheriff to round out Mexican-Americans on Election Day, transport them to the polls, and tell them to vote for Lyndon Johnson. The operation was pricey but the cost was worth the benefits Johnson believed he could obtain from it.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 304

¹⁵⁹ Caro, *Means of Ascent*, 306

The early returns on Election Day did not bring good news for Johnson; Stevenson was leading with about 20,000 votes. Many, including Stevenson himself, believed that there was no possible way for Johnson to accumulate enough votes from other precincts to catch up or surpass Stevenson. That was until the districts that had been bought reported their counts. The turn around was remarkable; Johnson managed to win enough votes to beat Stevenson, but by one of the smallest margins. Johnson led Stevenson by just 87 votes; a number that for some was simply too close.¹⁶⁰ Among those in disbelief was Stevenson, and he quickly filed to contest the election, claiming that Johnson had used deceptive voting practices in order to win.

Stevenson's claim that Johnson stole the election eventually made its way to the Supreme Court. Johnson stated his belief that the Supreme Court had no jurisdiction over matters that happened in the state of Texas. The Court backed off and refused to intervene in the state matter, leaving Johnson as the winner of the Senate seat. Stevenson was of course quite bitter, and would remain bitter for the duration of his life. Johnson had managed to do what he set out to do; he was now a Senator from Texas. But the price of winning was costly; voters and colleagues alike questioned Johnson's credibility after his close victory in '48. Despite his negative reputation, Johnson was on his way to becoming a legend. His path to power was on the fast track, and perhaps it was the connections he had made up until this point along with his raw talent that landed him in the most powerful position in the Senate just a handful of years after he took his seat in the senate chamber.

¹⁶⁰ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 101

Rise to Power: Johnson's Senate Experience:

Though Lyndon Johnson was a man who was capable of deceit, he was also a man with an innate sense of politics. His ability to understand power, to predict how it would move and where it would go, was remarkable. Johnson was a man of natural talent, although it was often overshadowed by his knack for lying. His success in the Senate could be most attributed to his ability to understand people. As discussed earlier, Johnson's capacity to read people was a skill he had perfected. An understanding of his colleagues in the Senate allowed for him to better manipulate them; knowing what they wanted, how they wanted it, and when they wanted it gave Johnson the upper hand.

There are a number of qualities and skills that Johnson possessed that allowed him to advance his power in the Senate. The following look at Johnson's character will be analyzed under the lens of "cause and effect". It will argue that the most prominent leadership qualities Johnson exhibited during his time in the Senate are a result of experiences that he endured as a child. In short, each leadership skill is born out of a "primary trait". A primary trait is a trait that can be traced back to the cycle of parental oppression, featured in chapter one. Each trait works in conjunction with the others in order to produce an entire package of leadership skills, which are dependent on one and other. It can be argued that without Johnson's ability to understand power, he may not have been able to understand the inner workings of individuals.

Perceptiveness :

Johnson's ability to read people is his biggest advantage in the Senate, especially as he rises to power. This skill, in conjunction with his ability to compromise, helps Johnson to become an effective leader. Though Johnson always possessed these skills, the Senate was an environment that was best suited for him to use them. The House has much less room for individual cajoling; Johnson's influence on people was much less because of the large number of representatives and because of his low status. The Senate, however, was a much different place. With far fewer members, Johnson was able to connect on an individual basis with most of his colleagues. From day one, he began reading his fellow Senators, trying to understand what it was that made each of them "crack". A "breaking point" was a place that Johnson wanted to reach; he believed every man has a price. So he slowly read reach Senator, trying to understand the point at which they would bend to someone else's will. Though Johnson did not know in '49 when he arrived in the Senate chamber, that one day he would make those around him bend to *his* will, he did understand that bending was part of the way power worked. He wanted flexibility from others, and knew just how to get it.

The ability to become different people, or to exhibit different personalities, was both a curse and a blessing. Johnson was often hurt by his outbursts, because it painted a negative image for himself. But he was also given a gift. Because Johnson was able to change himself, that is change is mindset, mannerisms, and behaviors, he was able to perceive others. Someone, like Johnson, who can essentially morph into whatever he chooses, has an easy time of placing themselves in someone else's

shoes. It is quite plausible that Johnson was able to understand the inner workings of other human beings because he was able to, in a sense, *become* them. His insightfulness when it came to people was truly an asset to his time in the Senate. But his ability to use this talent with his ability to compromise is what allowed him to become an outstanding leader.

In comparison to the House, the Senate was tailored to fit Johnson's character. The interactions between members were face to face, and Johnson could use his skills of persuasion on an intimate level. In the House, all interactions were long in larger groups. The fact that the Senate was less than a quarter of the House thrilled Johnson. Additionally, the longer Senatorial terms (six years as opposed to two) meant that Johnson could build up longstanding relationships with his fellow members.¹⁶¹ He now had more time to work on each Senator; essentially more time to breed members in such a way that brought them to trust Johnson. In many ways, the Senate was created for Lyndon Johnson. It was the best place for Johnson to exercise his talents and skills. And he understood this.

Johnson knew that his sense of understanding people needed to be executed in an intimate fashion. Johnson's ability to have others bend to his will was so effective, that he essentially convinced members that his beliefs were their own beliefs, and were in fact, what they had believed from the start.¹⁶² A general reliance on closeness was key for Johnson; though he had success in speaking to large groups, one on one time with individual members allowed him to *really* get his point across. Johnson needed intimacy in order to really work his "magic" on a Senator. He

¹⁶¹ Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 137

¹⁶² Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 126

would often bend in close to a member, place his hand on their shoulder and put his face so close to theirs that he was almost touching them.¹⁶³

What is most important to note is that not only could Johnson become a different man in order to better understand those around him, he could also morph into a different person in order to connect with those around him. Johnson read each of the members of the Senate and took mental notes as to how he should behave around them as individuals. Behind closed doors, Johnson changed his personality, as he did in '48 when he spoke to different towns in Texas, when he spoke to different members. For example, his close relationship with Richard Russell caused him to act more reserved when he spoke to him one on one. But with other members he could be uncouth or swear. He would make each Senator feel as though they *needed* Johnson's support on an issue; that they absolutely would not get their way unless Lyndon Johnson backed them up.¹⁶⁴

It all depended on whom he was speaking with at the time. And so Johnson was able to win the affection of any member, simply because he manipulated them into doing so. This was a technique that Johnson had perfected over time. He began with Cecile Evans and moved on to Roosevelt, Wirtz, and Rayburn. His ability to create intimate relationships with men who were essentially strangers to him was an asset; Johnson was slowly building relationships that could enhance his own power. It seems as though Johnson befriends an older, male, authority figure (who in turn becomes a father figure) at each stage in his life. During his time in the

¹⁶³ Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 589

¹⁶⁴ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 121

Senate, he looked to Richard Russell as yet another connection that would bring him great benefits.

Russell was one of the most respected members of the senate, and was on Johnson's radar long before he had become a Senator. Russell, a senior Senator from Georgia, took a strong liking to Johnson much like Rayburn and Evans did. What is interesting is that similarly to Rayburn, Russell was a longtime bachelor with no family of his own. Johnson observed the way Russell carried himself and it did not take long for Johnson to change his personality so that it mimicked Russell's so closely that it seemed as though they had been lifelong friends.¹⁶⁵ Not only did Johnson use Russell's friendship to find his way into committees and other places of power, he also used Russell to obtain information. When Johnson first arrived in Washington as an aid for Congressman Kleberg, he was hungry for information. His need to gather as much knowledge as possible never managed to die down; he was just as hungry this time around. And so his friendships provided a means of understanding the way in which the Senate worked.¹⁶⁶ Although Johnson had dreamed of becoming a Senator the entire time he was in the House, the rules and players in the Senate were still new to him. He needed a way to figure out how the system worked, so that he could make the system work for him.

Johnson's devotion to his work was something he and Russell shared. But the ways in which Johnson gathered information was unparalleled; no other Senator worked to understand issues and the people who drove them like Johnson. Each time Johnson spoke to anyone, it seemed as though it was an interview. He asked

¹⁶⁵ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 104

¹⁶⁶ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 105

questions and manipulated his “interviewee” in such a way that Johnson got the answers he wanted to hear. The more information Johnson gathered, the more he knew about the power structure and the players he was dealing with.¹⁶⁷ With his information, Johnson would eventually find a way to the top. When he began teaching at the “Mexican School” in '29, he was able to first gather how the school worked prior to his arrival so that he could change it to work the way he wanted it to. In the Senate, Johnson took note of the way power was distributed and the way it was balanced among members. Once he had a mental profile of every aspect of power, he was able to rise to the top and restructure the entire system according to his own schematic. Johnson once said, “I do understand power, whatever else may be said about me. I know where to look for it, and how to use it.” This was a man well aware of his abilities. He knew what he wanted and had the ability to stop at nothing to get it. His lack of conscience when it came to politics, along with his instinctive understanding of power made him an unstoppable force.

Manipulative Nature:

Much of Johnson’s rise to the top can be attributed to his relationship with Russell. It was Richard Russell who was respected by almost all other Senators, not Johnson. But Johnson believed that by showcasing Russell’s approval for him that others would eventually take a liking to him as well. Of course, Johnson wanted more than simply approval. He wanted the members of the Senate to trust him enough so that he would eventually be placed in a position of leadership. Similar to

¹⁶⁷ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 117

the House, the Senate worked on a basis of seniority. Those who had been serving their state for the longest amount of time would be awarded with chairmanships and increase responsibility, while younger Senators served as general committee members. Once again, the notion of seniority angered Johnson. In the House it was almost impossible for him to come over; he was over 435 members. It was difficult for him to stand out and shine brighter than his colleagues. In the Senate, his luck was changing. Due to the smaller number of Senators, Johnson was able to carve out a name for himself. He befriended his colleagues and more importantly kept a close relationship with Russell.¹⁶⁸

The election of 1950 brought great opportunity to Johnson. After just a year of making connections, Johnson's party voted him to be the Majority Whip. This would make Johnson the youngest serving Whip in his party's history. Part of his election to Whip was based upon conversations with Russell. Johnson had told him his strong desire to be placed in a leadership position at that point in his career. Russell himself did not want the position (though his popularity among Senators would have easily secured him the job). In fact, most men did not find the Whip position desirable as its responsibilities implied that there would be much more contact with Washington and less time for visits back to constituents.¹⁶⁹ But for Johnson, the Whip position was ideal. It forced him to build up even closer relationships with each member of his party; it was as though the work he had been doing all along was now what he was assigned to do.

¹⁶⁸ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 106

¹⁶⁹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 107

In 1952, Johnson's luck amplified once more. The Republicans won a majority in both the House and the Senate, making the Democrats the Minority party. However, despite his party's losses, Johnson was to win big. Barry Goldwater, a Republican from Arizona (who would eventually go on to be Johnson's presidential opponent) defeated the then Democratic Minority Leader, Earnest McFarland. With the leadership position now open, Johnson made sure that his interest was well known. Once again, Johnson confided in Russell, asking him to push for Johnson's election to Minority Leader. Russell agreed, as did Senator Earle Clements and Allen Frear. Johnson had three of the most powerful Senators in his corner and felt as though he could secure his spot as a leader once again.¹⁷⁰

With his friend's support, Johnson was elected to lead his party. But Johnson was one of the most junior Senators in the congress. Why would the democrats choose him to lead their party? Doris Kearns presents a rather convincing argument that follows suit with the idea that Johnson would stop at nothing to get what he wanted. She writes, "[Johnson] chose his goal and then focused his energies toward its achievement; resisting other roles that a Senator might strive to fulfill: spokesman for his region or state, lobbyist for particular interest groups..."¹⁷¹ Kearns argues that Johnson essentially placed all other responsibilities as a Senator on hold in order to advance his own a career. A Senator has a number of responsibilities that he or she takes on once elected. It is up to them which responsibilities they find to be pressing, which need the most attention, or which need the least. For Johnson, no issue was more important than the issue he had with

¹⁷⁰ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 107

¹⁷¹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 108

not holding a position of leadership After funneling all of his energy into security the Minority Leader position, Johnson was rewarded: the position was his. In 1954, just two short years after he was made Minority Leader, the Democrats won back control of the Senate, and he was made Majority Leader.

Johnson found his way to leadership through manipulation, and it would be through the same tactic that he would remain in power. As Senate Majority Leader, Johnson of course used his ability to read people to try to sway Senators to vote in his favor. Though he understood most of the members of his party, he sometimes could not control the way in which Republicans voted. Thus, he created other systems to help him pass the legislation he wanted. Johnson had created a set of hand signals that would tell the Senate clerks different messages. If he knew that he had enough votes to secure the passage of a bill, he would twirl his finger, signifying to the clerks that the roll call should be read at a faster speed. If aids were out looking for a member who would vote for what Johnson wanted, he would push the palm of his hand down to signal to the clerks to slow down the roll until someone could find that particular Senator.¹⁷²

In order to make sure that loyalty was present among his staffers, he would often keep them on their toes. One second he would be ruthless, give them a stern talking, and then freeze them out. The next, Johnson would present them with a gift. This was a practice he continued as President because he felt that if his staff never knew what to expect, they would always be prepared for whatever was thrown their way. The changes in relationship between him and his aids were similar to the one

¹⁷² Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 130

he shared with his mother. When Johnson did something she liked, he was rewarded. When he did something she did not, he was “frozen out”. And yet, just like his aids, Johnson continued to be loyal to his mother. The behavior that Johnson was exhibiting was natural and normal to him. After all, it had been the constant cycle of love and hate that Johnson experienced as a child that had shaped him.¹⁷³

In many ways, Johnson’s staffers were held in the palm of his hand. He was difficult to work for because of his continually changing behavior. But Johnson demanded loyalty; it was nonnegotiable. Loyalty from his staff, even though Johnson did not necessary return the loyalty, was comforting to Johnson. He wanted to guarantee that he would never be alone. When it seemed as though a staffer wanted to quit and abandon him, Johnson would shower that staffer with praise and affection to the point where they agreed to stay on staff. The continual push and pull, praise and denouncement, which Johnson placed upon his staffers, drove many to feel as though they were stuck in a cycle that could not be broken. The hold that Johnson had over some of his aids was immeasurable; no matter how frustrating the behavior was, they always remained by Johnson’s side.¹⁷⁴

Accomplishments as Majority Leader:

As a result of Johnson’s skill and experience he was able to accomplish a great deal during his time as Majority Leader. During the years that Johnson’s was serving in the Senate civil rights legislation had been brought to the forefront. Johnson saw that his leadership in the Senate could have great significance if he was

¹⁷³ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 131

¹⁷⁴ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 132

able to pass a civil rights bill; it would be the first of its kind since Reconstruction. Johnson is credited with the passage of the Civil Rights Bill of 1957, a controversial piece of legislation that was proposed by President Eisenhower.¹⁷⁵ This was a major highlight in Johnson's Senate career, though he would go on to pass a stronger, more influential civil rights bill in 1964 during his own administration. Though Johnson's personal voting record on civil rights was consistently against the passage of any radical or ground-breaking legislation, civil rights would prove to be one of the area where Johnson made the most progress in during his Senate career and his presidency.

Johnson's leadership qualities, in particular his ability to manipulate others when given the opportunity to converse with them one-on-one, helped him to achieve outstanding accomplishments in the Senate. The intimacy that the Senate offered Johnson helped to push legislation along. The Democrats accepted Johnson as their leader because they believed that he served the Senate in a way that would promote everyone's best interest. Though there was a genuine trust in Johnson's abilities, it is clear that Johnson cajoled many members of his party into believing in him. Debate in the Senate chamber has become almost extinct during Johnson's reign of the Senate floor; he was indeed a true "Master of the Senate", as Robert Caro accurately defines Johnson. Support for Johnson simply increased over time as he was able to build up longstanding relationships with the members of the Democratic party.¹⁷⁶ Johnson said about his leadership, "They tell me they want a strong leader in the Senate so they can get results. So I give them leadership and they get

¹⁷⁵ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 144

¹⁷⁶ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 139

results.”¹⁷⁷ Though Johnson had an overall lack of self-esteem, Johnson was fairly confident in his leadership abilities because he was able to perfect his skills of manipulation, bullying, and intimidation over the course of his political career. No matter the method of Johnson’s success, the final result of Johnson’s Senate career was an exceptional story of progress and accomplishment.

¹⁷⁷ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 136

Chapter Six: The Presidency Years

The Vice Presidency:

By 1960, Johnson had spent eleven years in the Senate. His time as Majority Leader brought him to a point where he had formed strong relationships with the members of his party. He felt that 1960 was his opportunity to achieve his ultimate political goal; he wanted to run for President. Johnson's popularity among Texans was at an all time high; he was indeed the states "favorite son" candidate. But despite his strong allies in the Senate, there was one man who outshone Johnson.

John F. Kennedy was serving in his second term as a Senator from Massachusetts when both he and Johnson decided to run for their party's nomination. This particular election cycle was quite interesting. It involved a number of important political players that would somehow play a role in the fate of the United States at one point or another. Johnson ran against Kennedy for the nomination but ultimately lost to the young Senator. Kennedy was the people's choice, but Johnson would have perhaps been the Senate's choice due to the relationships he had cultivated over the previous years. However, Johnson's colleague, Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey, was also running for his party's nomination during the 1960 election cycle. Humphrey was also a well-respected and powerful Senator who had been serving just as long as Johnson. Had Johnson's colleagues selected the nomination solely based on their votes Johnson may have been the party nominee due to his position of leadership. But because his relationships with those who he had worked closely with did not decide his fate, he

suffered a political loss once again.¹⁷⁸ Johnson's understanding of national politics was shortsighted; he had been concerned with the Senate for so long that he failed to realize that he needed the support of Americans across the country to win the nomination.

Johnson's defeat was difficult, but the outcome would be one that would make his advance to the Presidency slightly easier. Kennedy, an eastern politician, understood that it would be difficult to win the election without the support of the southern establishment. Similarly, Johnson also believed that if he were the nominee it would also be difficult to win because of his southern roots. When Kennedy reached out to Johnson and asked him to be his running mate, many believed that Johnson would decline the offer. It was difficult for Johnson's close friends to picture him in a "second place" position with virtually little power. Johnson could retain his position as Majority Leader if he declined Kennedy's offer; but he chose to accept.¹⁷⁹

On the surface, the decision to accept the position of Vice President seemed out of character for Johnson. In actuality, his decision was in true Johnson fashion; well thought out, calculating, and self-advancing. The main concern Johnson's close friends had was that they feared Johnson would be giving up a great amount of power. As a man who chased after power, they believed that Johnson was making a poor decision. However, Johnson was a man who was familiar with changing power structures. He had done so at San Marcos and again when he entered the Senate. By learning how a system works Johnson was able to create his own outlets of power.

¹⁷⁸ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 160

¹⁷⁹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 160

He believed that he could do the same with the Vice Presidency. When friends urged him not to accept Kennedy's offer Johnson simply responded, "Power is where power goes."

Of course, Johnson knew that he understood power. He had proved that to himself and to those around him many times before. He felt that his experience serving as a Vice President would be no different than his time as Majority Leader. He would start off slow, getting to know his new surroundings and eventually would have enough information to start an "upheaval" of power. This process was the same process he had used to go from freshman Senator to a powerful leader of his party. He truly did believe that he could change the power structure of the executive branch the way he did the legislative branch. But that was not Johnson's only reason for accepting Kennedy's offer. It was not like Johnson to only have one motive when it came to decisions such as this one.

With each election brings an unavoidable change in the structure of each party. Up until the 1960 presidential election, Johnson enjoyed being the Senate Majority Leader under a Republican President. A divided government allowed Johnson to retain much more power than he would under a Democratic President. If Kennedy won the election, Johnson would find that he was living in the shadow of a much more powerful leader. If Kennedy lost there would still be a major change in the way in which Johnson could exercise his power.¹⁸⁰ Richard Nixon was Kennedy's Republican opponent. Had Nixon won, Johnson would still have less power than he experienced in the 50's. Nixon was *not* Dwight Eisenhower; he would not have the

¹⁸⁰ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 161

same kind of relationship with Johnson as Eisenhower. It can be said that Eisenhower had a “sense of understanding” with Johnson in that he allowed Johnson to be a powerful leader and bring legislation through the Senate. Eisenhower’s leadership style was unique; he allowed Johnson to have the power he desired despite differences in party beliefs. Johnson knew that Nixon would be a much different President; one that would be happy to watch Johnson’s power slowly disappear. And so when faced with the decision to watch his own influence die over time or to stand behind the most powerful man in the country, he choose what he believed to be the “lesser of two evils”. Though neither option was quite what Johnson wanted, he did believe that the Vice Presidency offered more benefits to him than the Senate did at that particular point in his career.¹⁸¹

In comparison to the Senate, the Vice Presidency offered a higher level of visibility to Johnson. This was appealing because it allowed him to break free from his southern identity and to become noticed on a national level. Once again, Johnson reflected on the idea that it would be difficult to win a Presidential election because he was from a southern state. Even if he acquired national visibility as Kennedy’s “understudy”, it would still set him up for a run for the Presidency once Kennedy’s administration came to an end. But despite the positive aspects of Johnson agreeing to be second in command, there were also many negatives that plagued him during his years at Vice President.

The most obvious issue between Johnson and Kennedy was the idea of seniority. Johnson’s days in the House were spent agonizing over the fact that his

¹⁸¹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 162

inexperience left him without any positions of leadership or authority. To see Kennedy obtain the ultimate leadership position at such a young age was difficult for Johnson to witness. For the first time in his political career he had believed in the principle of seniority. After all, it was Johnson who had the experience and the years behind him, not Kennedy. What is even more interesting is that Kennedy's political career was spent serving *under* Johnson. He was a young Senator who had little pull when it came to introducing bills. Kennedy had few allies in the senate and many times needed Johnson's support in order to have his legislation considered by his colleagues.¹⁸² The dynamic between the two men had changed considerably once Johnson became Vice President. Kennedy had always been subordinate to Johnson, and now their roles had been reversed.

At first, Kennedy had attempted to give Johnson a number of responsibilities. He appointed him the chairman of the President's Committee on Equal Employment and Opportunity as well as the Chairman of the National Aeronautics and Space Council. Johnson was included in staff meetings and was kept well informed on what the President and his aids were discussing at any given point in time.¹⁸³ However, time would eventually show Johnson that despite his determination in wanting to change the power of the Vice President, tradition stood in his way. No President had ever given the Vice President an opportunity to work side by side with him on the tasks he was facing. It was impossible for Johnson to have the kind of power he lusted after simply because *he* was not the President- Kennedy was. Though the

¹⁸² Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 163

¹⁸³ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 162

unchanging responsibilities of the Vice Presidency stood in Johnson's way, it was also his personality that led him to dislike his position as "second best".

The underlying issue at hand was the fact that Johnson could not view himself as "an apprentice"; someone who had to watch a master tend to his work and learn from it. Johnson was older and more experienced; he did not need to take instruction from Kennedy. He wanted to be in Kennedy's shoes and he felt that way every day he served as Vice President. But despite Johnson's covetousness towards Kennedy, he retained a high level of respect for him. Johnson never disagreed with the President even if he believed he was wrong.¹⁸⁴ Johnson had an apparent sense of loyalty towards Kennedy, even though he truly did envy him. Though there were very stark personality differences between Kennedy and Johnson, no difference was as blinding as the worlds in which the two men originated from.

John Kennedy was born to the purple; into a family that was affluent and well connected. Lyndon Johnson was a man who came from modest means who had few political connections other than the ones he had made during his own career. Kennedy's father was a well-respected Washington elite while Johnson's father was considered to be the "laughing stock" of his town. The Kennedys had class and a sense of "style"; everything from their mannerisms to the way they dressed seemed to be mystic and enchanting. America had fallen in love with the idea of "Camelot", or the belief that the Kennedy's were a large, captivating and charismatic family. In comparison, Johnson was an unpolished southerner lacking a degree from an East Coast Ivy League school.

¹⁸⁴ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 163

Johnson began to feel even more insecure living behind Kennedy's shadow. He felt as though his education was not up to par with the standards the Kennedys had set for themselves. Johnson also believed that he was incredibly uncultured as compared to Kennedy and did not possess the same kind of appreciation for the arts or the same comportment as him. These differences made Johnson feel even more insecure in his position as Vice President. Because of the qualities he felt he was missing and the fact that he did not enjoy acting as an "apprentice", Johnson slowly began to pull away from his duties as Vice President. He became introverted and disinvested in his responsibilities as well as the political world. By the summer of 1963 Johnson had become a complete outsider in the White House. He had longed to be one of the elite men who experience life on the inside, and now that he finally was an "insider", he could not have been any further away from politics. The distance that Johnson felt from the Kennedy administration caused him to feel incredibly bitter; he was simply an accessory to Kennedy's presidency. Johnson served no "major purpose" and most times it seemed as though his presence among the Kennedy advisors was unnecessary.

Johnson becomes President:

In November of 1963, Johnson would once again find that death would provide an opportunity for advancement. The assassination of John Kennedy was by no means the way Johnson would have wanted to become President of the United States. However, Kennedy's sudden and unexpected death pushed Johnson into the position of leadership he had longed for. But it was bittersweet. Yes, Johnson had

obtained something he had reached for but there was no legitimacy to his Presidency. The people had elected Johnson knowing that if Kennedy were to pass it was Johnson who would become their President. However, the idea of assassination was not a topic that trailed through the minds of Americans on Election Day; this was not a conceivable notion for most. Johnson was now the people's leader but he did not necessarily pick him to lead. And so Johnson felt as though he was in many ways "out of place". He very much needed to earn the trust of the people; he needed to win them over.

Johnson described his transition from Vice President to Command-in-Chief as if he were "a naked man with no presidential covering, a pretender to the throne."¹⁸⁵ He understood that Americans held Kennedy in high esteem and that it would be difficult to live up to the "Kennedy" name. Johnson was indeed still an outsider and would continually feel that way among Kennedy's men until he made sure that they were loyal to him and only him. At first it was a difficult struggle due to the shock of the assassination, the lack of trust many Americans had for Johnson, and the fact that Kennedy had left behind a severely divided administration. The new President had much to deal with, but he believed that establishing a sense of legitimacy would be most important. Without the trust of the people Johnson had very little to stand on. He was not elected or chosen by the masses the way Kennedy was. The American people were unfamiliar with Johnson and who he was prior to the Vice Presidency. This was both a blessing and an obstacle for Johnson. Because he was somewhat anonymous to the people he could essentially morph into any version of

¹⁸⁵ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 170

himself that he wanted to. This idea will be expanded later on when a look at Johnson's ability to change his political beliefs as President is discussed. However, it is important to note now that Johnson was able to experience an advantage at this time.¹⁸⁶

With the nation in shock and the members of what was now his cabinet, Johnson understood that he needed to take control. Though it would not be easy for Americans to instantly trust Johnson it would be easy for them to see him making progress in a time of such despair. In order to help the nation cope and eventually recover from the upset of Kennedy's death it was imperative that the government continue to go about its business. If there was ever a time where Johnson needed to exert confidence it was in the winter of '63. His constituency and the world were now watching Johnson, waiting to see what kind of president he was to be. As Johnson said in his memoirs, "Any hesitation or wavering, any false step, any sign of self-doubt, could have been disastrous."¹⁸⁷ Johnson wanted to be the people's president and more than anything he wanted to find a source of authenticity in what he called this "strange and difficult time" in an address to congress.¹⁸⁸

Johnson's relationship with his advisors:

Nowhere did Johnson exercise better judgment than when dealing with the members of Kennedy's administration- now the members of *his* administration. If there was one thing Johnson knew, it was people. He had observed the Kennedy

¹⁸⁶ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 172

¹⁸⁷ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 172

¹⁸⁸ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 172

men for three years and had a fair understanding of the key players that now inhibited his cabinet. What was perhaps the most difficult issue for Johnson to overcome was the fact that these men were Kennedy's men; handpicked by the late President to serve him, not Johnson.¹⁸⁹ Their loyalties were with Kennedy and this was an issue for Johnson. Johnson believed was too early to remind his aids that it was now his administration and he never mentioned that to any of his cabinet. Instead he was kind and patient; he knew how deeply hurt each and every member of the White House Staff was by the tragedy. Johnson understood that he needed to be a compassionate president before he could be a president of authority. But loyalty would be an issue for Johnson until he had the opportunity to rid his staff of those whom he felt were disloyal after what could be considered a "grace period". Johnson afforded his men enough time to cope but wanted to be sure that a loyalty to Kennedy did not necessarily imply infidelity towards him.

The issue of loyalty is a key idea at this point in Johnson's administration and will continue to be up until Johnson leaves office. Johnson's demand for loyalty throughout every stage of his life does not change during his time as president. If anything he demanded even higher levels of loyalty and continually tested his aids to make sure that they would not stray. The establishment of allegiance is the first aspect of Johnson's administration where we see the beginnings of relationships being formed between him and his staff. Though relationships have always been a major part of his career, Johnson's relationships as president are both pivotal in his decision making process. These relationships also have a much different dynamic

¹⁸⁹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 173

than the relationships he had with his colleagues in the Senate or in the House. In the Senate, Johnson could essentially change who he was with each member in order to get what he wanted. There was much less room for intimacy in the White House than there had been in the Senate. Johnson had inherited the men that Kennedy has assembled and was able to put his truth in them, despite his paranoid nature. This is interesting and begs the question, “why does Johnson choose to trust his close advisors to the extent that he does while in office?” This question is notable because Johnson placed his trust, and in many ways his entire presidency, in the hands of just a few men. For a man who did not trust easily, it is fascinating to see how and why Johnson choose to trust the advisors that he did.

Though Johnson’s presidency was very multifaceted, this thesis will break down his actions as president into two subcategories: The Great Society and Vietnam. Examples from Johnson’s actions regarding these two categories- one domestic and one foreign- help to showcase Johnson’s character and personality during the presidency better than any other issues of the time. The Great Society illustrates a portrait of Johnson that exemplifies confidence, an understanding of power, and a desire to achieve great goals. In contrast, Vietnam represents an area in politics where Johnson fell short; he was quite insecure in his knowledge of foreign policy.¹⁹⁰ Given Johnson’s political history, it is not surprising that he lacked confidence when it came to matters abroad. Whatever time Johnson did not spend detached from his House seat, he was working to line up New Deal projects from his own district back in Texas. In the Senate, Johnson chose to put all of his resources

¹⁹⁰ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 256

towards achieving a position of leadership and retaining it. The focus of Johnson's career was essentially towards domestic issues but more to towards his own advancement. Johnson built his career upon his ability to understand power and people. Thus, he knew how to change the structure of power knowing both "the game" and "the players" that were involved.

The lack of experience Johnson had in the realm of foreign policy would prove to be one of his biggest obstacles. Though he had a great understanding of manipulation in intimate settings, Johnson found that he could not use such a tactic in international affairs. With his greatest strength of no use to him, Johnson was stripped of his abilities. As a result, he needed to call on his advisors for help. He leaned on them and trusted them as if his life depended on it because for Johnson, his vitality as president truly did. One wrong move in Vietnam, Johnson believed, could ruin his name and his presidency. Johnson was correct to assume this; a wrong move could cost him the war. But it was not necessarily one wrong move (as we will see later one) that caused Johnson to lose his credibility among Americans; it was a series of decisions and consequences that surfaced as a result of his specific character type that caused such a disastrous outcome.

On the other hand, The Great Society is an example of Johnson at his finest hour. His plan for national social reform was one he wholeheartedly believed in. His father and grandfather's populist beliefs and Roosevelt's New Deal heavily influenced Johnson's decision to create various reforms for the American people. Domestic affairs was where Johnson could truly shine. His years working in Congress helped him to understand the people- what they wanted and how they

wanted it. His time in the Senate helped him to learn how each member worked, and thus he knew how to cajole his friends on Capitol Hill into voting for his plan. Just four months after Johnson had won reelection in 1964 did he introduce his plan for a “great society”; a plan that he felt responded to the changing times and the need for a revival of society.¹⁹¹ From then on, Johnson fought ruthlessly to push his legislation through congress. The Great Society was full of promise and those promises were some of the promises that Lyndon Johnson intended to keep. His dream of a “New Deal” type plan was beginning to come together by the middle of 1964 but Vietnam continually threatened the success of his domestic policies. Vietnam also threatened the success of Johnson’s presidency; it created an issue for Johnson. He believed no matter which way he went, there was no clear-cut solution to Vietnam.¹⁹²

The struggle between domestic and foreign affairs plagued Johnson throughout his presidency. He desperately wanted to mimic the success that Roosevelt had during his presidency; passing through social reform and winning a war overseas all while being loved by the American people. One of Johnson’s worst qualities was that he had a need to be loved by everyone. This is seemingly outrageous given the fact that Johnson would outsmart and deceive anyone he knew in order to get ahead. However, if that same person did not like Johnson for one reason or another, he was deeply saddened. Johnson’s need to be loved stems from the same lack of unconditional love his mother refused to show him in his childhood years. The same lack of love also caused Johnson’s insecurities, and so in the case of

¹⁹¹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 211

¹⁹² Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 252

Vietnam we see Johnson scrambling to find a proper solution in order to prevent Americans from disliking him.

Once again, we find that Johnson is being pulled in a number of directions. Firstly, Johnson finds that his attention is being pulled between his Great Society and Vietnam. Vietnam had been an issue that Johnson needed to face from the first day he became President after Kennedy's death. The issues in the East had been plaguing the United States even during the Kennedy Administration. In the months before Kennedy's assassination his administration had been torn about how to handle the issues arising in Vietnam. Johnson inherited the torn administration and understood that there were decisions had to be made. But in the winter of 1963, no decision was more important than the decision Americans would make in the following November. Upon entering office, Johnson wanted to make sure that he would be elected in his own right in 1964.¹⁹³ That meant that Johnson set aside all other issues pertaining to Vietnam and focused on what he knew best: campaigning. Johnson campaigned and eventually brought himself to win the 1964 election against Barry Goldwater by one of the biggest landslides in United States history. But while Johnson was enjoying his victory, the issue of Vietnam was only growing. Instead of choosing to deal with the foreign matter as soon as his campaign had come to a close, Johnson because to discuss domestic affairs, pushing Vietnam even further off into the future.

The Great Society:

¹⁹³ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 213

“Lyndon Johnson was not a man who looked upon the acquisition of power and position as an end in itself. The reality and scale of power were defined by the extent to which it influenced or dominated behavior and conditions external to the man of authority.”¹⁹⁴

Lyndon Johnson was a man who enjoyed the accumulation of power. But as Doris Kearns points out, no matter how much power Johnson had accrued it would never be *enough*. Johnson thrived on his ability to use power to his advantage. In the Senate he had overthrown all unwritten rules concerning seniority and worked his way to the top of his party through an intricate web of relationships, manipulation, and knowledge. The relationships Johnson had spent building in the Senate did not fade away once he accepted the Vice Presidency. In fact, the relationships that Johnson had fostered would prove to be helpful after he had won election in his own right in '64. His plans for the Great Society and the passage of each bill within the plan would be dependent upon the Senate. He needed the votes of the people he had spent years manipulating and conditioning now more than ever.¹⁹⁵

Not only did Johnson understand power, he also understood fear. Fear, he believed, could be the single more detrimental thing to a piece of legislation. Fear could deter a member of the congress to vote against legislation. However, fear could also bring a member to vote yes. Johnson wanted to eliminate the type of fear that would bring his former colleagues to vote no to any part of his Great Society. The best way Johnson knew how to mitigate fear was to increase desire and the possibility of recognition. If a Senator were to vote yes, Johnson wanted to make

¹⁹⁴ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 214

¹⁹⁵ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 221

sure that he or she understood that they would be considered a positive influence on the future of the United States and its people.

In the past, Presidents had found ways to influence the Congress. However, Johnson's involvement in the passage of Great Society legislation was unlike that of any other President. Johnson's relationships with members of the Senate as well as his extensive knowledge of the structure of power within the Congress helped to promote his involvement during this period.¹⁹⁶ It was Johnson's plan to put as much attention as possible on to the Great Society in a small amount of time. He felt as though the pressure would help congress to push each bill through at an unusually fast rate. The constant attention that Johnson gave the congress and the Great Society did help to move the passage of bills along. Johnson proposed legislation in all different areas of social reform. Johnson managed to successfully push for a tax cut, Medicare and Medicaid, funding for schools in low-income areas throughout the United States, housing for the poor and homeless, as well as legislation pertaining to civil rights. The major programs that Johnson was able to pass are still in place today and have highly affected the course of history. Medicare and Medicaid continue to offer medical care to the elderly and the poor. Education and school funding continues to play a major role in government spending today. However, Johnson's greatest and perhaps proudest accomplishments are in the area of equality and civil rights.

The signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was perhaps one of the greatest highlights of Johnson's presidency. The bill had helped to free America of the chains

¹⁹⁶ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 225

of inequality. With the passage of the act, Johnson opened up all public accommodations to both all Americans, regardless of race or sex.¹⁹⁷ The bill was quite personal for Johnson, as he fought endlessly for its passage. Johnson's vision of a "great society" was one without the oppression that had existed within the United States for years. Segregation and discrimination were not part of the ideal American that Johnson had truly believed in. Eliminating discrimination was part of Johnson's greater plan. However, recall Johnson's voting record while serving in Congress. For twenty straight years, Johnson repeatedly votes against any type of positive civil rights legislation. As President, his beliefs seemed to change entirely. Though a strong anti-civil rights voting record did exist, Johnson was able to essentially "morph" into a different politician as president due to his anonymity prior to his 1964 win. To most, Lyndon Johnson was simply a Senator from Texas whom Kennedy had picked to act as a "figurehead". Now, Johnson was President of the United States and he could change his image because he knew fairly unknown to his greater constituency prior to his administration.

The years that Johnson spent in the White House were a combination of positive and negative outcomes. The internal battle that Johnson felt towards the decision between "guns" or "butter" was one that made his administration suffer. In addition, Johnson's desperate need for loyalty to quell his insecurities also brought his staff to falsify reports. Though it was unusual for Johnson to place immense amount of trust in others, when he weighed the cost of not doing do (the cost being

¹⁹⁷ "Lyndon Johnson's Fight for Civil Rights : NPR." *NPR : National Public Radio : News & Analysis, World, US, Music & Arts : NPR*. 2 July 2004. Web. 28 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=3087021>>.

his success and legacy as Presidency), he believed it was the best decision. Once again, it is clear that Johnson's insecurities played a significant role in his leadership qualities as well as his relationship with others.

Johnson's ability to change his position on civil rights as President:

One of the major paradoxes of Johnson's political career was his civil rights voting record. Over the twenty years that he spent in Congress, Johnson consistently voted against any positive civil rights reforms. As President, one of the most championed pieces of Johnson's Great Society was the numerous advancements he made in the area of civil rights. The Civil Rights Bill of 1964 was indeed one of Johnson's most prized bills; he had fought tirelessly for the bill to be push through congress. However, he did not always fight for the cause of civil rights. For years Johnson was viciously anti-civil rights. However, when Johnson became President his attitudes changed completely. It is not a question of *how* Johnson was able to easily turn his beliefs around; we already know that changes in beliefs were easy for Johnson due to his character. For example, Johnson altered his personality depending on the towns that he campaigned in during his '48 Senatorial run.

Essentially, Johnson assessed the different constituencies of each area of Texas and played up certain aspects of who he was based upon what he thought each town wanted to hear. For Johnson, changing beliefs based upon the people whom he was speaking to at any given point in time was a common practice that he continued throughout his time as Majority Leader. As President, Johnson essentially changed the type of politician that he was because his constituency had changed once again. Instead of catering exclusively to Texas, Johnson now was representing

the entire United States. The number of people had changed but so had the beliefs of the majority of the people he was speaking to.

By the time Johnson was elected in his own right it was the mid 60's. Times had changed considerably since Johnson was first elected in '37; the civil rights movement was now in full effect across the United States. The Great Society represented ideas of "change" and "rebirth" for Johnson because that is what he felt American needed. Indeed Johnson was right; not only did Americans need change, it is what they wanted. Johnson believed that it was necessary to change his attitudes towards African Americans and civil rights in order to retain high levels of approval. Since it was crucial that people adored Johnson, he quickly distanced himself from his Congressional voting records and began to adopt traditional African American phrases such as "We shall overcome" as his own in order to connect with the people he had helped to disenfranchise for so long.

Though Johnson's voting record was public, Americans easily forgot how Johnson had voted in the past. Most Americans took to Johnson's new attitude because they had never experience his old one; they were not his constituents prior to his Presidency and therefore did not know Johnson as a politician prior to 1963. Johnson was able to create a new "image" for himself that was widely accepted because he did not represent all Americans in the Senate or the House. The larger, more diverse constituency gave Johnson a chance to "recreate" himself and to once again "morph" into a different personality. Though Johnson may have retained his own personal beliefs he did not allow them to interfere with his political beliefs as President. The new environment that Johnson was now experiencing allowed for

him to change in such a way that it seemed as though his beliefs has been consistent throughout his entire political career. This example proves once again that basic character traits do not change. Johnson continued to be deceitful and manipulative even though these traits were expressed in a different way. Johnson's personality may have changed but his character stayed the same in this example.

The Struggle with Vietnam:

"Well are we in or are we out?"

This was the question that Lyndon Johnson posed to reporter and friend John Knight when he asked him for advice on Vietnam. In his conversation with Knight, Johnson stated that he believed he had three options; one was to get out, another was to fight, and the third was to neutralize North Vietnam. After eliminating neutralization as a viable option, Johnson struggled between staying in and pulling out; a question that he would ponder for quite some time. Due to Johnson's plans for his Great Society, he was hesitant about committing to fighting. He believed that there was no way his social legislation would be passed if a war were also on the table. On the one hand, Johnson wanted nothing more than to be a champion for the sick, poor, and disenfranchised. On the other, he also wanted to be able to prove U.S. supremacy and live up to the expectations of both the American people and the international community.¹⁹⁸ Johnson's insecurities and fear of failing plagued his decision making process; though he did not want to seem weak, he also did not want to risk his chances of success. In an effort to avoid being seen as a "failure", Johnson

¹⁹⁸ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 268

ultimately decided to remain engaged in Vietnamese affairs, but this decision did not come without much thought or consequences.

Johnson made a great deal of phone calls to trusted friends and advisers to discuss his options for Vietnam in the earlier years of his presidency. In addition to Knight, Johnson also spoke regularly with Robert McNamara, his Secretary of Defense, whom Johnson would eventually place an immense amount of trust in. In a number of conversations, Johnson expressed his desire to prevent the “dominos from falling” and believed that pulling out of Vietnam before the North was defeated would lead to the demise of a number of other countries.¹⁹⁹ “Domino Theory”, or the idea that if one country fell to communism countries around it would follow suit, was a philosophy that many politicians truly believed in, including Lyndon Johnson. Johnson knew that if the U.S. did not stop the loss of South Vietnam it could potentially result in the take over of other counties by communist regimes.

Johnson understood just how crucial a victory in Vietnam was; his conversations with numerous cabinet and congress members reflect this idea. However, Johnson underestimated the power of the North Vietnamese. Both he and McNamara believed that Vietnam was an inconsequential country, often referring to it as a “pissant”.²⁰⁰ Johnson thought that winning a war in a newly industrialized country such as Vietnam would be fairly easy for the well-trained U.S. military. He alleged that after destroying large centers of business, the North Vietnamese would eventually realize that South Vietnam was not worth sacrificing their economy.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ *Bill Moyers Journal: Path to War*. Perf. Bill Moyers. PBS, 2009. DVD.

²⁰⁰ PBS, “The Presidents: Johnson, Foreign Affairs”

²⁰¹ Tilford, Edward H. *Crosswinds The Air Force's Setup in Vietnam*. (Texas A & M

This assumption of course was incorrect; what Johnson failed to take into account was history of the Vietnamese. After fighting for its freedom from a number of different countries, Vietnam had fervor for independence and would not back down, no matter the price. Johnson's general belief that the projected "weakness" of Vietnam would lead to U.S. victory played a large role in the deciding of what initial action the U.S. should take.

Fearful of suffering the same fate as past presidents, Johnson was careful not to repeat the same mistakes as his predecessors. He believed that Truman lost his effectiveness when he "lost China" to the communists in the mid 1940's.²⁰² After a year of negotiation in the country, Truman and his administration were unable to make progress and eventually the entire country fell into the hands of communist leadership. Johnson worried that he would suffer the same fate and be criticized for his inability to make progress against communist forces.²⁰³ Johnson's own personal fear of failing or disappointing the American people had much to do with his final decision to enter Vietnam. Though he was concerned with Vietnam, Johnson wanted to continue to implement his social reforms and worried that he would not be able to do so if he lost the confidence of the people.

The more Johnson contemplated what to do, the more negative news he received. The corrupt government in South Vietnam proved to create difficult obstacles in Vietnam for U.S. forces. In March of 1964 McNamara traveled to Vietnam to assess the progress. When he returned, he reported a general lack of

Univ Pr, 2009) 92.

²⁰² 1950, November. "Truman Biography - Trouble In China." Web. 08 June 2010.

²⁰³ VanDeMark, Brian. *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1995) 25.

progress. McNamara said that the South Vietnamese government was falling quickly and that it was necessary to escalate force in the region in order to stop a complete communist takeover.²⁰⁴ As a result, the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared a finalized list of options that Johnson could choose from. This list differed from the first three options that Johnson laid out to Knight in early 1964 because it did not include an option to pull out entirely. Instead, Johnson's top military advisers presented him with the option to continue giving aid, to engage in escalated, immediate heavy bombing or to pursue a policy of gradually escalated bombing.²⁰⁵ The third option came with the least amount of risk. Many including Johnson's mentor, Richard Russell, believed that the third option was a "middle of the road solution"- one that would allow the government to take action but without upsetting the public or other nations in the region.²⁰⁶ A "middle of the road" decision is one that Johnson was fairly familiar with. As mentioned in past chapters, Johnson's inability to choose between his two parents often resulted in compromise.

Johnson feared that the GOP would make him seem weak because of his indecision concerning Vietnam. Johnson told McGeorge Bundy in a 1964 phone call that Vietnam was perhaps not worth fighting for but at this point in time it was "impossible to leave".²⁰⁷ In the months following Johnson's 1964 win, his administration seemed fairly divided. There were a number of unbendable supporters of the war, but there were also members of Johnson's staff who felt strongly about avoiding conflict with the country. Johnson's lack of experience with

²⁰⁴ *Bill Moyers Journal: Path to War.*

²⁰⁵ VanDeMark, 28

²⁰⁶ *Bill Moyers Journal: Path to War.*

²⁰⁷ *Bill Moyers Journal: Path to War.*

foreign affairs made the decision to wage a full-scale war with Vietnam difficult. Though he genuinely feared that the consequence of not going in to Vietnam would be to watch other counties fall, he also worried about the health of his domestic policies. In many ways Johnson felt strongly about preventing the fall of South Vietnam because he wanted to seem like a “hero”, much like Roosevelt was considered to be a hero. Johnson also wanted to live up to the standards the American people expected of him; he did not want to loose the trust of the people he had just won over in his landslide victory months before. It was important for Johnson to succeed but being well liked was just as imperative. Perhaps without “adoring fans” Johnson felt he had little to show for his work.

The varying beliefs among Johnson’s cabinet members made it difficult for him to create a set agenda. He had always believed in the idea of consensus, meaning that everyone had to be passionately on board with a plan, whether or not the plan was a good one or not. Johnson’s demand for loyalty would ease his insecurities but would not doubt continually generate a number of issues. Firstly, because Johnson wanted every staff member to follow his plans for intervention he believed it was necessary to weed out any dissenters.²⁰⁸ The idea of eliminating any disagreements would provide a comforting feeling for Johnson. He did not have to worry about any of his aids attempting to betray him or paint in his a negative light for all of the United States to see. Instead, Johnson believed that with absolute loyalty the operations for Vietnam would run smoothly and effectively.²⁰⁹ Johnson sought out the biggest dissenters on his staff and eliminated them one by one.

²⁰⁸ Halberstam, 362

²⁰⁹ Halberstam, 362

Among the most well known of dissenters were Averell Harriman, Roger Hilsman, James Forrestal, and Charles Trueheart.

The need for loyalty that Johnson felt so strongly about was a means of providing security where he felt great uncertainty. Johnson knew that his knowledge of foreign policy was shallow and did not want to make important decisions in Vietnam without consulting his staff. Robert McNamara was perhaps the staff member that Johnson placed the most trust in. McNamara was quite an outstanding individual. Johnson felt as though McNamara was incredibly capable and driven.²¹⁰ McNamara, like the other men in Johnson's staff, was a Kennedy man. In many ways, Kennedy had assembled a "dream team" of advisors, McNamara being perhaps the brightest star. Johnson believed that he truly needed to keep the majority of Kennedy's men (the men who agreed with his position in Vietnam) in his cabinet because it kept his link to John Kennedy alive. These men allowed Johnson to garner support from the people he couldn't gain support from on his own; the Eastern establishment, strong Kennedy supporters, the media, and intellectuals.²¹¹ McNamara was indeed a bright star in Johnson's eyes. Johnson was in awe of his capabilities and intelligence and knew felt as though he would be an asset to his administration.

Johnson especially liked McNamara because they shared similar qualities. Like Johnson, McNamara was a "doer". He was a hard worker and was constantly in motion, trying to achieve a goal.²¹² Johnson had little experience on the "inside" of

²¹⁰ Halberstam, 347

²¹¹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 178

²¹² Halberstam, 348

the Kennedy administration, while McNamara had been in the center of all the Kennedy issues up until his death. Johnson was convinced that McNamara was a tested and strong individual who could deliver results for him the same way he had helped to deliver results to Kennedy. The dependency upon McNamara increased as the commitment to Vietnam grew. But as the commitment to Vietnam grew, so did the secrecy that surrounded the war. Johnson firmly believed that he could engage in a war *and* push the Great Society through congress while retaining the support of the people.²¹³ Unfortunately, what Johnson believed to be true simply was not possible.

The trust that Johnson placed in his advisors is perhaps the most interesting and compelling aspect of his presidency. As discussed, it was the innate sense of incompetency and insecurity that Johnson felt with regards to matters of international affairs that drove him to seek out men he could rely on. Johnson's relationship with McNamara was built upon his admiration and belief in McNamara's abilities. There was a true sense of mutual respect between both men and although McNamara was loyal to the Kennedy's he also was quite loyal to Johnson as well. However, on the surface it is seemingly easy to assert that McNamara led Johnson down a negative path when he advised him about Vietnam. The principles that caused the Johnson administration to enter Vietnam were the true beliefs of both McNamara and Johnson. The belief in "domino theory" was a genuine apprehension for Americans during the time Vietnam was of concern.

²¹³ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 283

McNamara firmly believed in eliminating a communist threat and advised Johnson to take a course of action rather than to be sedentary.

The trust that Johnson placed in McNamara was genuine throughout the entire course of his presidency. The loyalty that he demanded from his staff members was also impressed into the minds of his advisors throughout his presidency as well. Johnson's insistence that absolute loyalty existed among his staff may have offered a temporary solution to his feelings of insecurity, but it created far more problems for his administration than he could have imagined. The constant need to loyalty drove the remaining members of Johnson's staff to fabricate the truth and the actualities of Vietnam rather than to report real details to Johnson. Such actions were the result of staff member's fears; they feared that Johnson would weed them out the way in which he had eliminated dissenters who disagreed with him in the past. Thus, Johnson continually received progress reports from his staff that were falsified in order to make the United States seem as if it were winning.²¹⁴

The results of Johnson's need for loyalty are truly disastrous. Johnson believed that the reports he was receiving were factual, as did McNamara. Eventually, when false reports did not add up with the actual progress in Vietnam Johnson learned the truth but by the time he realized the caliber of damage that had been done it was too late to eradicate it. However, the trust and respect that Johnson had for McNamara still persisted. When things began to fall apart for Johnson in Vietnam they also began to unravel on the domestic front. The Great Society,

²¹⁴ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 281

Johnson's plan for a better America, also began to suffer the consequences of the poor decisions made overseas.

Though the demand for loyalty does play an important and pivotal role in the demise of Johnson's presidency, his inability to choose between two options was also detrimental. As previously discussed, Johnson had extreme issues of indecisiveness as a result of continually having to choose between his the demands of his father and the demands of his mother as a young boy. As an adult, Johnson almost always found a way to "compromise" in order to meet the demands of a number of sources at the same time. This is perhaps why Johnson was best suited for the role of Majority Leader as opposed to President; there are far more opportunities to compromise in the Senate than there were in the White House. In the Senate, there was much more intimacy and less "group think." The decisions concerning Vietnam were often discussed as a group instead of through one-on-one meetings between Johnson and each of his individual advisors. Thus, there was far less cajoling and back room deals.

The fate of the Great Society would seem much brighter than the fate of Vietnam because Johnson had the ability to deal with a familiar body; the Senate. He understood how to control the Senate because he had done so in the past. International affairs were not Johnson's forte but despite his lack of confidence, Johnson understood that he had to take action when it came to Vietnam. However, Johnson wanted to continue to pass Great Society legislation through congress and to continue to build his dream, bill by bill. Johnson did not want to choose Vietnam over the Great Society but simply could not avoid the communist threat he was

facing. The decision between “guns” (Vietnam) and “butter” (The Great Society) became a major issue for Johnson. Due to his inability to choose between the two, Johnson created policies for both domestic and international issues and alleged that he could effectively pursue both at the same time.²¹⁵

Johnson’s inability to choose and his reliance on compromise proved to be a negative quality during his administration. An effective leader has the ability to make clear, resolute decisions. In the months prior to the 1964 election, Dwight D. Eisenhower expressed his views on what qualities would make for a good candidate for his party. Eisenhower articulated that an effective leader would have “strength of decision”.²¹⁶ Johnson certainly did not possess such a quality. Though his interpersonal skills and his ability to compromise brought him to unprecedented success in the Senate, the same qualities that helped him to achieve power as Majority Leader did not help him during his presidency years. The Executive Branch did not present a proper outlet for Johnson to express such qualities. Thus, he could not flourish the same way he had flourished as a party leader. However, that is not to say Lyndon Johnson was a “failure” president. Though Johnson’s qualities were not best suited for the Presidency, Johnson still managed to succeed in certain areas. The Great Society was comparable to the New Deal in its level of success. Americans saw Johnson’s plan as a means of revival. Few people claimed that the Great Society was lacking sincerity. In fact, many believed that Johnson’s promises were promises

²¹⁵ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 212

²¹⁶ "Nation: SIX QUALITIES THAT MAKE A PRESIDENT - TIME." *Breaking News, Analysis, Politics, Blogs, News Photos, Video, Tech Reviews - TIME.com*. 14 June 1963. Web. 06 Mar. 2011.
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,874810,00.html>>.

that he intended to keep and pursue during his time as president.²¹⁷ The Great Society would go on to be known as one of the most influential pieces of legislation in United States history. Perhaps if Johnson *had* been decisive the Great Society would have suffered the cost of Vietnam or even the same fate as Vietnam. His fervor for the program helped to bring Johnson to a high level of success during his presidency despite the failures of Vietnam.

²¹⁷ Kearns, Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream, 212

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

Childhood affects character and helps to shape individual qualities. Character does not change from childhood to adulthood.

After drawing upon the research and analysis of the previous chapters there are a number of conclusions one could surmise. The story of Lyndon Johnson is both an incredible tragedy and a tale of an extraordinarily gifted human being. As illustrated, character is the culmination of different experiences one endures as a child. These experiences occur in a certain environment; an environment that has been fostered by a child's parents. The environment that Johnson was raised in was one that cultivated feelings of self-doubt and insecurity. These insecurities grew out of Johnson's mother's inability to offer continuous and unconditional love to her child. When times occurred where Rebeckah was unsatisfied with her son's performance she would essentially "freeze" him out of her life entirely. Johnson was psychologically wounded from experiences "freeze outs" time and time again. The lack of a stable environment that offered positive reinforcement to Johnson as a young boy damaged his self-esteem.

In order to provide a means of self-approval Johnson's drive and determination to succeed grew immeasurably over time. As the Cycle of Parental Oppression (Figure 1) depicts, Johnson's drive was expressed by his desire to seek outlets of power and to increase his influence over others. Johnson could indeed be considered a "power seeker" but as the examples in the previous chapters point out, no one level of power was satisfactory for Johnson. If he had achieved a certain level of power on his "political ladder", he found it necessary to look for ways to expand

the powers of the office he had obtained. Perhaps the best example of this would be Johnson's expansion of the power of the Senate Majority Leader. His ability to have the Senate clerks work with him and either slow or speed up the roll call helped to place more power in *his* hands. The accumulation of power was a way for Johnson to increase his level of confidence by showcasing his abilities. Johnson's determined nature is a direct result of his continual need to increase his influence over others. Each time he would obtain another "rung" of power on his ladder he would almost instantly want to jump forward to the next "rung". As soon as Johnson entered the House he wanted to be able to jump to the Senate.

Johnson was never satisfied with the goals he had accomplished; there was always more to achieve and more work to be done. As a result, Johnson's entire existence could be summed up by a single word; action. No matter what project Johnson was working on (be it as a teacher in Texas or as President of the United States) he was continually in motion. Johnson would often forgo sleep to work longer hours than his colleagues. In a sense, Johnson became "obsessive" over the tasks he took on. The innate need to overachieve and to perform to the best of his ability is a direct result of the deep insecurities he felt. These insecurities were not only apparent as a young child and adolescence but they lasted into adulthood, as Johnson's actions as a leader show.

The detrimental effects Johnson's childhood had on his political career are devastating. Though insecurity did in fact lead to an unheard of level of determination, it also led to the expression of a number of negative qualities. Such qualities that were discussed in the previous chapters include Johnson's ability to

manipulate others in order to get what he wanted, his ability to fabricate the truth, as well as sense of paranoia. These three qualities helped Johnson to reach unprecedented levels of success in the Senate however; they also played significant roles in Johnson's failures as President. Johnson's most devious qualities were the most helpful during his time in the Senate. The structure of the Senate afforded Johnson a level of intimacy that allowed him to find ways to manipulate his colleagues. Additionally, Johnson's ability to alter the facts and to lie allowed him to influence others to bend to his will.

Though Johnson understood power and knew how to manipulate those around him, he worried that others would attempt to find ways to take power away from him. For that reason he was incredibly paranoid. This paranoia eventually evolved into a demand for loyalty from his staff and aids not only as President but while he was serving in Congress as well. As illustrated in the previous chapter, a demand for loyalty forced staff members to falsify information out of fear that they may lose their position in the Johnson administration. The false information that Johnson was receiving was partially to blame for his failures in Vietnam. The demand for loyalty, which was to blame for the false information, is to blame as well. In looking at the origins of all other qualities expressed by Johnson, it is clear that insecurity is the sole quality that all other qualities were born out of. That is not to say that every action that Johnson made was based out of a need to quell feelings of insecurity. In fact, Johnson was at times quite confident in his work and his abilities. However, the abilities that Johnson exhibits, though he was confident in them, are drawn from feelings of self-doubt. For example, Johnson was self-assured in his

ability to understand power. But his understanding of power grew out of his initial insecurities with himself.

Lyndon Johnson serves as a possible prototype for showcasing the ways in which the actions of parents can affect their children throughout their life. The discussion in chapter one asserts that the environment a child is raised in shapes who they are and how they view themselves as they journey into adulthood. The mannerisms, beliefs, and expression of traits that Johnson possesses do not change between childhood and adulthood. The basic primary qualities that Johnson develops as a child are still expressed during his adult life however, the ways in which they are expressed (what was called “personality” in Chapter One) varies depending on certain situations. Johnson expresses his insecurities in different ways as he progresses throughout his professional career.

Is it unusual for an individual to not grow out of his or her “childhood character”?

This study analyzes only the childhood and adult life of Lyndon Johnson. However, inferences about the nature of childhood experiences can be deduced based upon Johnson’s case alone. Johnson’s experiences as a child had a profound effect on his fundamental character. In this study, character seems to affect almost all aspects of Johnson’s being; from the way he interacts with others to the way in which he views himself, Johnson’s main character traits play an important role. How an individual acts is based off of different traits. These traits can be considered the “fundamental building blocks” of character. When each trait interacts with the others, together they create a person’s unique character. The various traits that

Johnson possessed were a result of years of conditioning, which began as a child. The first feelings of insecurity he felt began as a young boy when he realized that his mother's love was conditional upon his actions. Had unconditional love been offered to Johnson during his childhood years it might not have been the case that he was deeply insecure with himself.

However, due to a continual lack of encouragement and love that was not conditional, Johnson fell into a pattern of self-doubt and insecurity. These insecurities were reinforced by Johnson's family's lack of wealth as well as his belief that his education was subpar to that of the Washington elites that he surrounded himself with. Though Johnson's beliefs about his education did not surface until he was well into his twenties, his insecurity about his schooling is still pertinent to his childhood. After Johnson had established a sense of low self-esteem he would repeatedly bring himself down throughout different stages of his life. It is clear that the insecurities that Johnson had felt since childhood did not slowly dissipate but rather Johnson himself reinforced them.

This logic provides an answer to the question of whether or not it is unusual for an individual to not "grow out of" the character traits they establish as a child. Since these traits are established early on, there are plenty of opportunities to reinforce each quality between childhood and adulthood. However, the reinforcement of traits is not unique to just negative ones. Though Johnson's insecurity with himself was a negative quality that continually plagued him, it is also possible for positive qualities to be treated in the same sense. That is to say positive

qualities can also be reinforced between childhood and adulthood, but produce a different result.

When looking at the possible outcomes of the reinforcement of positive qualities there is one president that comes to mind. Johnson's mentor, Franklin Roosevelt, experienced a far different childhood from Johnson. Roosevelt grew up in a rather affluent family. From birth he experienced a sense of privilege; something that Lyndon Johnson never enjoyed. Roosevelt attended Harvard and graduated from the university in 1904.²¹⁸ He then went on to enroll in Columbia Law School. Around the same time Roosevelt was studying to become a lawyer his cousin, Theodore Roosevelt, began his first term as the 26th President of the United States. The conditions of Roosevelt's early life seemed to have set him up for success in the future; his education, familial ties, and wealth gave him an advantage that Johnson did not have access to.

In comparison to Johnson, Roosevelt had incredibly high self-esteem. His education had provided a great boost in self-confidence, though Roosevelt had already been quite comfortable with who he was.²¹⁹ It is interesting to note the importance of education in relation to self-esteem. Roosevelt's Ivy League education seemed to have reinforced the positive image that he had of himself, where as Johnson's public university education seemed to reinforce a negative image. It can be said that both the level of education a person has increases or lowers their self-

²¹⁸ Smith, Jean Edward. *FDR*. (New York: Random House, 2007) 33.

²¹⁹ Smith, *FDR*, 33

esteem. More importantly, it is the *type* of university that an individual attends that helps to reinforce the image he or she has of himself or herself. Roosevelt's experiences at Harvard were most likely much different than Johnson's experiences at San Marcos. Though experiences may have been different due to geographical differences and differences in what the two men choose to study, the underlying goal to obtain an education was identical at either school.

However, the reputation of different universities (in particular whether or not they are "Ivy", one step below an Ivy or third tier) was quite important to Johnson. He felt insecure because many of his colleagues attended East Coast, reputable, Ivy schools, where he had attended a public teacher's college. Johnson's aptitude or level of education was no different from the men that stood beside him in the Senate. In fact, no other man understood politics and power quite like Johnson. Despite Johnson's talents, the idea that he believed his education was subpar continually reinforced his lack of confidence. Dissimilarly, Roosevelt's Ivy League education reinforced the exact opposite. Thus, it can be concluded that education (the "type", level, etc.) plays a role in determining the level of self-esteem of an individual.

Roosevelt's upbringing most certainly played a part in his success as President. High self-esteem, as Barber points out, is an important piece of character that aids in reaching high levels of achievement. Though high self-esteem can lead to success, it is noteworthy to look at the possibility of low self-esteem contributing to success the case of Johnson even President Wilson. It was a need to prove their abilities to *themselves* that drove Johnson and Wilson to succeed. A lack of self-

confidence helped to propel these two men in ways that are very much unlike the motives that Roosevelt experienced.

For Johnson, it was the absence of encouragement that led him to seek out outlets of power. In Roosevelt's case, it was the positive image he had of himself that led him to believe he could achieve the things he wanted. The "can do" attitude that Roosevelt had was perhaps one of the reasons why he was able to bring the United States out of an economic depression. Though Johnson was able to execute a similar social reform plan to Roosevelt's New Deal, it was not necessarily a "can do" attitude that drove him to do so. In Johnson's case it was his manipulative nature as well as the desire to prove to himself and those that doubted him that he could achieve great things. The fundamental notion of high or low self-esteem did not change between childhood and adulthood for either Roosevelt or Johnson. It is clear that character traits that result from childhood experiences are static and that is it not unusual for an individual to not "grow out of" these traits over time.

Assessing Lyndon Johnson's level of success as a President:

When assessing Johnson's level of success over the course of his life it is clear that he was an incredibly successful man. Prior to Johnson, only thirty-four men had held the title of President of the United States. Few men will ever experience the kinds of success that Lyndon Johnson had throughout his life. Conversely, few men will ever experience how difficult it is to see great amounts of success essentially disappear before their very eyes. When looking at a bigger picture it is clear that Johnson had extraordinary talent and capabilities. These talents helped Johnson to

become one of the most influential Presidents in American history. The Great Society is one of the most significant and withstanding plans for social reform. The effects of Johnson's fight for all those who were disenfranchised by society prior to his Presidency can still be felt today. The outlawing of discrimination, the creation of Medicare and Medicaid, the push for education funding from the U.S. government; each of these are still in place today. Johnson's vision for a better America was truly his ultimate legacy. Unfortunately, Johnson is most remembered for his failures as opposed to his triumphs.

Often times it is said that had Vietnam not been an issue during Johnson's administration he may have been one of the greatest Presidents in history. To be the "greatest President in history" was in many ways Johnson's ultimate goal. He wanted to be as loved and as successful as his mentor, Franklin Roosevelt. Johnson's Great Society echoes the New Deal in that they both contain plans for massive social reform. When the opportunity to engage in a war appeared Johnson took advantage of the situation, believing that if he had won a war it would help his image. The combination of winning a war and creating a social revival led Johnson to believe that he could be one of the most-loved Presidents that American had ever seen. Johnson's insecurity proved to be the biggest obstacle in his way to becoming a "great" president. In many ways he was his own "worst enemy" because he continually stood in his own path to success. Though he was quite successful as a politician, Johnson was far less successful as a President due to his own personality.

There is no clear answer to whether or not Lyndon Johnson was a "good" president. At times, Johnson was an excellent President; he passed legislation that

truly changed America for years to come. His legacy lies in the benefits that he has created for thousands of Americans since his administration. However, a truly great President excels in *most* areas of his administration. Though Johnson did prove to be incredibly talented when dealing with domestic issues, it was quite apparent that he was insecure in his knowledge of international affairs. Vietnam was handled poorly because Johnson placed trust in a number of advisors and expected loyalty from them in return. The loyalty that Johnson expected from his staff truly deteriorated the legitimacy behind the Vietnam War. Though Johnson did not intentionally mean to bring his staff to a point where they felt it necessary to lie to him, it was a consequence of his character.

The reasons behind Johnson's decision to go into Vietnam were perhaps only partially due to true fear of domino theory. As stated above, Johnson's own personal advancement and desire to be considered "great" as a result of winning a war against communism also influenced his decision to enter Vietnam. Personal ambition often affected the decisions that Johnson made throughout his political career. This often blinded Johnson's vision and he acted in ways that would allow him to get ahead. A great President would not allow personal ambition to guide his actions while he is serving the people of the United States. The actions that the President takes should be to service the people to the best of his abilities- not to simply be remembered as "great".

Though it would be unrealistic and illogical to blame all of Johnson's mishaps on his character, it can be said that his misfortunes in Vietnam are in part due to his unchanging character. Johnson's insecurities caused many issues for him and his

staff through his administration. Had Johnson be raised in a different environment where there was unlimited unconditional care and love he may not have been as paranoid or self-doubting. In the same respect, had Johnson been raised different he may not have been as driven and may have not been able to reach such great heights in his career. The prospect of one day becoming President may not have been a realistic goal for Johnson had he been any less determined or driven as a result of his insecurities. In many ways, Johnson simply cannot be responsible for the repercussions of his behaviors because his actions were born out of his character.

When analyzing the entirety of Johnson's presidency it can be said that Johnson was indeed a good president. He was a president who was able to *get things done*. He moved legislation through Congress and helped to change the lives of Americans in a very real and tangible way.

There are very obvious legacies that Johnson has left behind; some positive, some negative. But Lyndon Johnson was a man who wanted to do great things not only for himself but genuinely because he wanted to make a change. The genuineness behind the Great Society was never doubted; Johnson's staff always believed in the legitimacy of the social reform that he had proposed. The desire to excel and to affect the lives of Americans in a positive way drove Johnson to try to perform to the best of his abilities. Never has America seen another man quite like Lyndon Baines Johnson. His talents and accomplishments are astonishing. He is perhaps the single most complex and intriguing President America has ever elected. For these reasons, Lyndon Johnson will never be a forgotten name and his mark on history will endure so long as the United States of America endures.

Works Cited

- 1950, November. "Truman Biography - Trouble In China." *Google*. Web. 08 June 2010.
- <[http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:uOptU9AzTRwJ:www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/qq/nl9.htm truman china&cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=safari](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:uOptU9AzTRwJ:www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/qq/nl9.htm+truman+china&cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=safari)>.
- Barber, James David. *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2009. Print.
- Bill Moyers Journal: Path to War*. Perf. Bill Moyers. PBS, 2009. DVD.
- Caro, Robert A. *Master of the Senate*. New York: Vintage, 2003. Print.
- Caro, Robert A. *Means of Ascent*. New York: Vintage, 1991. Print.
- Caro, Robert A. *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*. New York: Vintage, 1990. Print.
- "C-SPAN Survey of Presidential Leadership - Home - C-SPAN." *C-SPAN / Capitol Hill, The White House and National Politics*. Jan. 2009. Web. 06 Nov. 2010.
- <<http://legacy.c-span.org/PresidentialSurvey/presidential-leadership-survey.aspx>>.
- Dallek, Robert. *Lyndon B. Johnson: Portrait of a President*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003. Print.
- Erikson, Erik H., and Robert Coles. *The Erik Erikson Reader*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001. Print.
- Halberstam, David. *The Best and the Brightest*. New York: Modern Library, 2001. Print.

- Johnson, Lyndon B. *The Vantage Point; Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971. Print.
- Kearns, Doris. *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*. New York: St. Martin's, 1991. Print.
- Kearns, Doris. "Lyndon Johnson's Political Personality." *Political Science Quarterly* 91.3 (1976): 385-409. Print.
- Kornet, Allison. "The Truth About Lying | Psychology Today." *Psychology Today: Health, Help, Happiness Find a Therapist*. Web. 06 Feb. 2011.
<<http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/199705/the-truth-about-lying?page=2>>.
- Lasswell, Harold D. *Power and Personality*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 2009. Print.
- "Lyndon Johnson's Fight for Civil Rights : NPR." *NPR : National Public Radio : News & Analysis, World, US, Music & Arts : NPR*. 2 July 2004. Web. 28 Feb. 2011.
<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=3087021>>.
- "Nation: SIX QUALITIES THAT MAKE A PRESIDENT - TIME." *Breaking News, Analysis, Politics, Blogs, News Photos, Video, Tech Reviews - TIME.com*. 14 June 1963. Web. 06 Mar. 2011.
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,874810,00.html>>.
- Nelson, Michael. *The Presidency and the Political System*. Washington, DC: CQ, 2010. Print.
- Pfiffner, James P. *The Character Factor: How We Judge America's Presidents*. College Station, TX: Texas A & M UP, 2004. Print.
- Pika, Joseph August, and John Anthony. Maltese. *The Politics of the Presidency*.

- Washington, D.C.: CQ, 2008. Print.
- "Presidential Character." *Regis University: Academic Web Server for Faculty*. Web. 12 Jan. 2011. <http://academic.regis.edu/jriley/414presidential_character.htm>.
- The Presidents: Lyndon Johnson*. PBS, 2009.
- Smith, Jean Edward. *FDR*. New York: Random House, 2007. Print.
- Smith, Peter K., Helen Cowie, and Mark Blades. *Understanding Children's Development*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2003. Print.
- Tilford, Edward H. *Crosswinds The Air Force's Setup in Vietnam*. Texas A & M Univ Pr, 2009. Print.
- VanDeMark, Brian. *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. Print.