



Lone Star Rising: Vol. 1: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960

By Robert Dallek

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Like other great figures of 20th-century American politics, Lyndon Johnson defies easy understanding. An unrivaled master of vote swapping, back room deals, and election-day skulduggery, he was nevertheless an outspoken New Dealer with a genuine commitment to the poor and the underprivileged. With aides and colleagues he could be overbearing, crude, and vindictive, but at other times shy, sophisticated, and magnanimous. Perhaps columnist Russell Baker said it best: Johnson "was a character out of a Russian novel...a storm of warring human instincts: sinner and saint, buffoon and statesman, cynic and sentimentalist."

But Johnson was also a representative figure. His career speaks volumes about American politics, foreign policy, and business in the forty years after 1930. As Charles de Gaulle said when he came to JFK's funeral: Kennedy was America's mask, but this man Johnson is the country's real face.

In *Lone Star Rising*, Robert Dallek, winner of the prestigious Bancroft Prize for his study of Franklin D. Roosevelt, now turns to this fascinating "sinner and saint" to offer a brilliant, definitive portrait of a great American politician. Based on seven years of research in over 450 manuscript collections and oral histories, as well as numerous personal interviews, this first book in a two-volume biography follows Johnson's life from his childhood on the banks of the Pedernales to his election as vice-president under Kennedy. We see Johnson, the twenty-three-year-old aide to a pampered millionaire Representative, become a de facto Congressman, and at age twenty-eight the country's best state director of the National Youth Administration. We see Johnson, the "human dynamo," first in the House and then in the Senate, whirl his way through sixteen- and eighteen-hour days, talking, urging, demanding, reaching for influence and power, in an uncommonly successful congressional career.

Dallek pays full due to Johnson's failings--his obsession with being top dog, his willingness to cut corners, and worse, to get there-- but he also illuminates Johnson's sheer brilliance as a politician, the high regard in which key members of the New Deal, including FDR, held him, and his genuine concern for minorities and the downtrodden.

No president in American history is currently less admired than Lyndon Johnson. Bitter memories of Vietnam have sent Johnson's reputation into free fall, and

recent biographies have painted him as a scoundrel who did more harm than good. *Lone Star Rising* attempts to strike a balance. It does not neglect the tawdry side of Johnson's political career, including much that is revealed for the first time. But it also reminds us that Lyndon Johnson was a man of exceptional vision, who from early in his career worked to bring the South into the mainstream of American economic and political life, to give the disadvantaged a decent chance, and to end racial segregation for the well-being of the nation.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Dallek sums up his subject, the 36th U.S. president, in this generous and touching sentence: "If Lyndon Johnson demanded much and took much, he also gave much in return." In the initial book of this two-volume biography, Dallek (*Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945*) reconstructs Johnson's Texas childhood, his 1937 election to the House, his war experiences as a Navy officer, election to the Senate in '49, his years as "the greatest Senate majority leader in history," and finally his selection as John Kennedy's running mate in 1960. LBJ as wheeler-dealer is already a familiar figure, but Dallek, tracing the origin of the War on Poverty and the Great Society to Johnson's experiences and observations as a young man, reveals that much of the wheeling and dealing was an expression of Johnson's genuine interest in helping the disadvantaged. One of our least-admired presidents, Johnson (1908-1973) has been portrayed in recent years by Robert Caro and others as a monster of ambition, greed and cruelty. Dallek's LBJ is a somewhat more complicated, contradictory and sympathetic character, "struggling with inner demons that drove and tormented him." Photos. 50,000 first printing; \$60,000 ad/promo.

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From Library Journal

Dallek, a historian best known for his studies of American foreign policy, has taken on Robert Caro's formidable work (*The Years of Lyndon Johnson* , Vol. 1: *The Path to Power* , LJ 12/15/82; Vol. 2: *Means of Ascent* , LJ 4/15/90) with this solid biography. Like Caro's, this is a work in progress--the first of two volumes. However, Dallek offers a more focused, balanced, and traditional view of Johnson, and his work may emerge as the standard LBJ biography after the controversy over Caro's approach has waned. Dallek acknowledges and documents Johnson's darker, "self-serving impulses" but also emphasizes his deep "concern for the national well-being." From this perspective, his view of LBJ is similar to that of Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (LJ 6/1/76). Dallek, however, has had greater access to papers in the LBJ Library, supplemented by at least 100 other manuscript collections and oral histories. His work is the product of seven years of careful research, and the concluding volume will be eagerly awaited. Highly recommended for academic and most public libraries.

- Thomas A. Karel, *Franklin & Marshall Coll. Lib., Lancaster, Pa.*

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From Kirkus Reviews

Readers who find Robert A. Caro's LBJ too Manichaean can turn to this hefty study (first of a projected two volumes), which covers the life and career of the young politico-in-a-hurry through the 1960 election. UCLA historian Dallek (*Ronald Reagan* , 1984; *The American Style of Foreign Policy* , 1983) believes that Johnson's current low esteem (a 1988 Harris poll ranked him at or near the bottom of 11 categories among recent Presidents) reflects one-dimensional portraits that highlight his pettiness and slight his tremendous achievements. In Dallek's view, LBJ was a "liberal nationalist" who consistently backed laws that boosted the fortunes of America's disadvantaged, as well as "the greatest [Senate] Majority Leader in American history." This biography supplements Caro's in several crucial respects, including fuller discussions of LBJ's early, albeit halting, efforts on behalf of blacks, and of the rough-and-tumble Texas political wars, including Johnson's disputed 1948 Senate race (conservative opponent Coke Stevenson is not, in this telling, the good government pillar of *Means of Ascent*). Yet Dallek sometimes belabors the obvious in detailing Johnson's legislative wizardry (the founding of NASA, the first civil-rights act since Reconstruction, the indispensable bipartisan aid for Eisenhower's foreign policy). Solid if redundant on Johnson's sterling legislative record,

but nowhere as brilliant as Caro in depicting LBJ's almost demonic energy. For that reason, despite its balance and careful research, it may be, as Dallek hopes, ``the scholarly biography of Johnson for the foreseeable future," but certainly isn't the most readable or vivid one. (Thirty b&w photographs--not seen.) --
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Nancy Adams:

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Ernest Pettaway:

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David Perrin:

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