The Years Of Lyndon Johnson, Volume I: The Path To Power
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Summarized by Jay Lotz
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PART I: THE TRAP

Chapter 1: The Bunton Strain
This chapter covers the early history of the Johnson family. His mother was a Bunton, his father a Johnson. Both families were made up of big dreamers, but the Bunton strain had particular characteristics relevant to LBJ: physical characteristics (tall, with imposing features), and a tough practicality that enabled the Buntons to live in the tough land of the West Texas Hill Country.

Chapter 2: The People’s Party
In the late 1800’s, beaten down farmers across the South and the West banded together to form the Farmers Alliance, which eventually gave rise to the Populist’s political party, the People’s Party. They wanted to end Washington’s favorable treatment of business and industrialists, which was given, in their view, at the expense of farmers. They had some success in the 1892 and 1894 elections, but ultimately failed to become a successful and separate national party when William Jennings Bryan stole their thunder as a Democrat in 1896. He lost that campaign, but the People’s party platform would see the light of day again—when FDR became president some three decades later.

Chapter 3: The Johnson Strut
LBJ’s father was, for a few years, a popular state representative in Texas. Unfortunately, the pay was not high enough for him to remain the position, so he retired from public life to farm in the Hill Country despite his popularity. But, while he was in office, his son Lyndon followed him everywhere. Lyndon observed his father and absorbed it all—how his father used to place one hand on a man’s shoulder and the other on his lapel, how he walked and talked to other politicians, how he stood and wore his hat. It was the time of little Lyndon’s life, and by all reports he was upset by his father’s loss in position.

Chapter 4: The Father and Mother
LBJ’s mother was a smart woman, a college graduate, who was not used to and did not like farm life. She taught public speaking and dance and manners at the local school for free. His father was a farmer and businessman who loved politics. He would encourage his children to debate and argue at the dinner table to sharpen their wits.

Chapter 5: The Son
As a child, Lyndon craved attention, and he got it just about anyway he could. He was also smart, and a born leader. He would hang out with kids five or more years older than he, and he was often the one leading them. Like his father, he also loved politics. He looked like his father, and adopted his mannerisms. However, unlike his father, LBJ didn’t just like to argue, he liked to win. His ambition outstripped his father’s.

Chapter 6: “The Best Man I Ever Knew”
Sam Ealy Johnson—LBJ’s father—reentered the Texas Legislature in 1918. Again, he earned the reputation of being an effective and caring legislator. He got important bills passed for his constituents, and he never took bribes or sold out to special
interests. Unfortunately, he couldn’t live on his salary, and some ill-advised business ventures placed him deep in debt. He lost his farm, his health, and his reputation in the process. His home fell into disrepair, and he and his family were ridiculed.

Chapter 7: “The Bottom of the Heap”

As his father’s (and his family’s) reputation soured, so did Lyndon’s relationship with his father and mother. After he graduated high school, they expected him to go to college. He defied them for years, in every way he could think of. He ran away several times, notably once to California, where he worked in a law office for a few months. He then returned to Johnson City, and worked on a road gang for a time. After years of failing to stand out in his own way, he finally agreed to go to college.

PART II: ESCAPE

Chapter 8: “Bull” Johnson

At Southwest Texas State Teachers College at San Marcos—known simply as “San Marcos”—John was known as a big talker and a suck up. He ingratiated himself with the college’s president, who gave him a job as his office boy. Johnson also became the summer editor-in-chief of the school newspaper (he would be demoted when the school year started). The faculty liked him, because he was such a brown-noser. His fellow students disliked him, for the same reason. He earned the nickname “Bull”—short for “Bullshit”—Johnson because of his big talk. He bragged about and exaggerated his accomplishments and importance—in debates, in his job, about his past, about girls, about his physical prowess and fighting ability. It was all part of the same pattern—Johnson wanted attention, he wanted to stand out, to be somebody.

Chapter 9: The Rich Man’s Daughter

During college, Lyndon began dating the daughter of the richest man in town: Carol Davis. Seemingly, he did it for the money. Lyndon was continually broke, although he had some of the highest paying jobs on campus. He spent far more than other students on things like haircuts and clothes. He was continually in debt, and eventually he decided to take a year off from school to work as a teacher in the small town of Cotulla in south Texas.

Chapter 10: Cotulla

Cotulla was a Mexican town, and Lyndon’s students were predominantly Mexican. He insisted that they learn English and speak it at all times in school. He organized debate, public speaking and sporting events. His students and fellow teachers considered him to be a very good teacher. During this time, Carol Davis ended their relationship and became engaged to another man.

Chapter 11: White Stars and Black Stars

The popular “in” crowd at San Marcos—mostly made up of the athletes and the prettiest girls—formed a “secret” organization called the Black Stars. Its members typically held all the student government positions, as well as the major positions in the school newspaper. Its girls were voted as the most popular. When LBJ returned from
Cotulla, he set out to change this. He was made a member of a rival secret organization (which—thanks to Lyndon’s efforts—actually remained secret from the vast majority of the student body), the White Stars, made up of the campus’ intellectuals and the like.

LBJ used dirty tactics to win society elections, including fraud, deception, and blackmail. Because the students at San Marcos often took years off from school for work and came back, no one could be quite sure if a particular student was a sophomore or a junior or a senior. LBJ used this to his advantage: he and the other White Stars voted in every class’s election. He would take advantage of the lonely girls (Girls outnumbered boys 2 to 1 at San Marcos) by getting White Stars seniors to date freshmen and sophomore girls and pressure them to vote for White Stars. In one case, Johnson threatened to publish unflattering articles about a girl if she did not drop out of an election.

LBJ accumulated power in other ways. His closeness to the college president meant he had a great deal of influence in getting students jobs. The students at San Marcos were on the whole very poor, and this gave Johnson great power over them. LBJ gave his friends the best jobs—but only after they came to him and asked.

Patterns emerged here that came into play in LBJ’s later political life—the dirty tactics, the intensity, the viciousness, the secrecy. LBJ gained sought this power without a single conviction in mind. He wanted power for its own sake, and, unlike his father, he would go great lengths to get it.

Chapter 12: “A Very Unusual Ability”

After Johnson graduated from San Marcos, he got a job as a teacher in a high school in Houston. He taught public speaking, and coached his debate team all the way to the state championships (where they narrowly lost) in his first year. He was very popular with the faculty and students, and many more signed up for his class than he had room for. His second year was interrupted when Richard Kleberg, a newly elected Congressman from Texas’ 14th district, offered Johnson a job as his aide. Johnson accepted the offer, and left for Washington in November of 1931.

PART III: SOWING

Chapter 13: On His Way

Johnson pursued his work as a Congressional Secretary with as much energy and vigor as he did his work as a teacher in Cotulla or as a debate coach in Houston. He worked 18 hours or more a day, and so did his two assistants: L.E. Jones and George Latimer, members of his debate team from Houston. The three of them answered every letter that came into the office, always with an individualized response. Kleberg was rarely in the office, and in fact was mostly uninterested in being a Congressman. Johnson ran the office virtually by himself, and in fact would often impersonate Kleberg on the phone. In his relationship with his two subordinates, we see another pattern emerge. Johnson chose his men based on their ability to obey orders, not their brilliance or competence. Often, he would make L.E. take dictation from him while he was on the toilet, to humiliate him and demonstrate his power. He would continue this practice throughout his life, even as President.
Chapter 14: The New Deal

President Hoover largely refused to provide any sort of government assistance during the depression, and what he did provide did not go to the farmers. This caused nationwide outrage, sometimes leading to eruptions of violence. The fortunes of farmers began to change when FDR became president. In creating the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, FDR answered many of the farmers’ requests. Unfortunately, the AAA quickly became a bureaucratic nightmare, and farmers continued to lose their farms and fell further into debt. One district, though, outperformed just about all the 434 others—Texas’s Fourteenth. This was largely due to Johnson’s efforts to guide the Fourteenth’s farmers through the maze and prioritize their requests. The Fourteenth would also receive a disproportionate amount of relief from other New Deal programs—again largely because of Johnson’s efforts.

Chapter 15: The Boss of the Little Congress

The Little Congress was an organization for Congressional secretaries to practice debate and public speaking while learning about parliamentary rules. Positions were traditionally based on seniority. Seeing an opportunity, LBJ set out to change this. He organized enough staffers to have himself elected speaker, and then he revitalized the organization. Under Johnson’s direction, the Little Congress would now meet weekly rather than monthly, and LBJ succeeded in getting the press to cover their meetings by portraying their debates as previews of actual votes to come (staffers typically voted how their Congressman bosses would vote). Bringing in the press also brought in famous names that would deliver lectures to the Little Congress—and meet its speaker. LBJ thusly elevated himself above all other Congressional staffers and was able to gain entrée to new and high political circles.

And Johnson had another victory. Imminent redistricting by the Texas Legislature was causing a great deal of confusion over which Congressmen were responsible for patronage jobs in which districts. Many were afraid that Jack Garner, FDR’s vice president and former Congressman from Texas, would step into the confusion and grab more power for himself. Johnson got all the current Texas Congressmen plus its two senators to sign an agreement stating the current patronage arrangement would be maintained until the redistricting went into effect. When Garner made a move to have patronage positions cleared by him, Johnson leaked the agreement to the national press, so Garner’s move was seen as a power grab. Garner retreated. Johnson, a Congressman’s secretary, had defeated the Vice President of the United States in political battle.

Chapter 16: In Tune

Johnson had a habit of telling his older acquaintances—acquaintances he felt could help him—whatever it was they wanted to hear. He talked conservative in front of conservatives, and liberal in front of liberals. At one point, during a Congressional recess, he went to work on the campaign of Maury Maverick, a radical populist. Kleberg was a conservative, who did not care for the New Deal. Johnson was working for a very liberal politician and a very conservative politician at the same time—he worked for anyone he thought could help him.

There was yet more evidence of this. Often, Congressional offices receive letters from constituents of other districts. When this occurs, they typically refer the letter to the
relevant office. However, if Johnson received a letter from an influential person, he would go to great lengths to help him, regardless of where he lived. And, when he helped people or got them jobs, he made sure that they knew that he, not Kelberg, had provided the help.

Johnson managed to deliver favors to influential people from all over Texas. He got jobs for his friends, some of whom would end up working with him for decades. Johnson was already building up a statewide political organization, and he was only a Congressional aide, age 27.

Chapter 17: Lady Bird

Johnson courted Claudia Alta—Lady Bird—for just two months before he convinced her to marry him. She was, like some of Johnson’s other romantic interests, the daughter of the richest man in town. After their marriage, the two moved into an apartment in Washington. Johnson was very demanding of Lady Bird; making her do all the chores and act as a hostess for his guests—Congressmen or members of the press. Fortunately for Johnson, his guests liked Lady Bird, and her personal warmth would ingratiate him to someone who would become very important to him: Sam Rayburn.

Chapter 18: Rayburn

Sam Rayburn was a Texas legislator who sponsored populist legislation and was known to be a man of great integrity—no one could buy him. He had served with Lyndon’s father, Sam Johnson. After two terms in the Texas Legislature, he became its Speaker, and after a year in that post, he ran for Congress and won. In Congress, he earned the same reputation for toughness and integrity he had in Texas. He quickly became a member of a powerful committee, but his ambitions were checked in 1918 when the Democrats lost control of the House. They would not regain it until 1930. When they did, and FDR was president, Rayburn’s power would grow. He became chairman of his committee, and was an important player in the creation of the SEC as well as other significant New Deal legislation. In 1935, he used his influence to get LBJ appointed as the state director of the National Youth Administration in Texas.

Chapter 19: “Put Them To Work!”

The NYA, Eleanor Roosevelt’s idea, was designed to give jobs and skills to unemployed youth and give part time work to students so they could remain in college. Johnson drove his employees hard, and the Texas NYA program was one of the best administered in the country.

The NYA job allowed Johnson to begin creating his own political organization. He hired many of the same men he had given patronage jobs to while still a Congressional secretary. He was now able to gather all these men together in one office under his control. It also allowed him to expand his acquaintanceship with influential men in Texas—the NYA offices were located Austin, Texas’s capital, and many of the NYA secretaries were the daughters of these influential men.
Chapter 20: The Dam

As part of a New Deal infrastructure project, a dam in the Texas Hill country was approved to be built. The dam meant power, influence, and profit—for two men in particular. Alvin J. Wirtz, Texas state senator and later influential attorney, and Herman Brown, a construction contractor. But, there was a problem. The dam was being financed by the federal government, and under federal law no federal project could be built on land that was not owned by the federal government. The land suggested for the dam was owned by Texas—these men needed a change in the law. Texas Congressman James P. Buchanan, chairman of the Appropriations committee, agreed to see to it that this new law was passed and the dam would be built. But, in February 1937, Buchanan suffered a fatal heart attack.

PART IV: REAPING

Chapter 21: The First Campaign

Johnson, seizing the moment, announced his candidacy within a week of Buchanan’s death. The prospects of his candidacy were not very good. He was seen as young and inexperienced, and he was not very well known by either the district’s people or its leaders, whose support would be essential.

But Johnson had two advantages: Money, and drive. Wirtz believed only Johnson could hit the ground running and get the dam built in time—none of the other candidates knew Washington as well as he did. This fact brought in the money, and Johnson’s campaign would be one of the most expensive in Texas’s history. And not only did Johnson have more money than the other candidates, he worked harder too. Johnson crisscrossed his district more times than any other candidate. He often visited single farms, located miles away from any paved road. Johnson proved to be a good campaigner and an impressive speaker. He worked harder and longer than any other candidate—he lost 40 pounds over the course of the campaign—and it paid off. When the results came in, Johnson won with 3,000 more votes than his nearest competitor. He was the Congressman for Texas’s 10th district.

Chapter 22: From the Forks of the Creeks

Johnson’s support came largely from those isolated farmers whom he had visited but no other candidate had. After his election, Johnson made an immediate effort to befriend anyone he had made an enemy out of during the campaign—his mind was already on the next rung of the ladder.

Chapter 23: Galveston

Johnson met FDR on an FDR trip to Texas. Roosevelt was grateful for Johnson’s steadfast support of him in the middle of his court-packing fight (which was the main issue of Johnson’s campaign) and allowed Johnson to spend the entire day with him on his train. Roosevelt was very impressed with Johnson and arranged a position on the Naval Affairs committee for him, promising him more help in the future.

Johnson not only impressed FDR, but also many of his young New Dealer lieutenants. Johnson gave them information on Congress, and they helped him with the dam. Johnson quickly succeeded in getting the dam approved.
Chapter 24: Balancing The Books

Herman Brown was immune to Johnson’s flattery, but he came to appreciate and admire Johnson in his own way. Johnson worked hard for Brown’s dam, and he delivered the authorization and funding needed. Brown appreciated this, and threw his whole weight behind Johnson’s 1938 campaign, which he won handily.

Chapter 25: Longlea

Johnson was very successful in his efforts to court one of Texas’s most important newspapermen, Charles Marsh. And Johnson was just as successful in his efforts to court Marsh’s lover, Alice Glass. Glass was by all accounts an exceptionally beautiful and intelligent woman, and she and Johnson carried on an intense affair for a number of years. Johnson’s affair with Glass was one of very few times where he deviated from his habit of putting ambition above all else. He took a considerable risk by having an affair with the lover of a man who held considerable sway over his future. The relationship eventually petered out, and Glass would later come to resent Johnson for his Vietnam policy.

Chapter 26: The Tenth District

Much to the surprise of his early detractors, Johnson succeeded in getting a lot of New Deal money for his district. For the city of Austin, he got dozens of public works projects approved, and, in the Hill Country, he managed to convince farmers of the importance of the Range Conservation program, which paid farmers for brush clearance. Johnson increased the payments, and added a few brush types that were common in Hill Country to the list of plants that would be paid for. Once the Hill Country farmers began to remove cedar, which for decades had spread across their land and soaked up all the water, they saw some of the fertility of the land was begin to come back. The amount of land under cultivation in the tenth district increased by 400 percent in just a few years thanks to Johnson’s efforts.

Chapter 27: The Sad Irons

Caro devotes this chapter to a vivid description of the drudgery of life on the farm. The washing, the ironing, the cooking, the canning, the carrying of buckets of water, and the million other little tasks that had to be completed by farm men, and, more often, women. Many of these tasks could be made infinitely easier by electricity. And Lyndon Johnson was going to bring electricity to the Hill Country.

Chapter 28: “I’ll Get It For You”

By the mid-1930’s, New Deal programs had succeeded in electrifying thousands of rural homes across the country, and curtailing the power of utility companies. The Rural Electrification Administration, created in 1935, was responsible for much of the progress. However, things were not changing in the Hill Country of Texas. REA rules stated it could only provide electricity to areas with at least 3 residencies per mile, and the Hill Country did not have the density. But it did have Lyndon Johnson as its Congressman. Johnson went directly to FDR, and got the REA to approve loans to farmers so that lines could be laid. He brought the Hill Country out of the middle ages.
PART V: NEW FIELDS

Chapter 29: Mr. Johnson Goes to Washington

Johnson was not very well liked by his colleagues. Though he was very good at getting things for his own district, he was not a very active legislator in other respects. He very seldom made speeches on the floor, and introduced just a few pieces of national legislation during his time in the House. What little legislation he did propose, he didn’t fight for. And if he didn’t fight for his own bills, he certainly didn’t fight for others’. He refused to take a position on virtually any issue, and avoided reporters. Some speculated that Johnson’s silence was a matter of caution—Johnson had national ambitions, and any remark or position he took could potentially be used against him in the future.

In the House, seniority was what mattered—you had to do your time. Johnson was a junior member—he had no power, no favors to give out. His attempts to meet with the President or advance in the House in anyway were futile. He was not even allowed to ask more than one or two questions of a witness before his committee. Johnson, true to form, did not want to wait his turn, and he would not use his position as a Congressman to gain national attention through the media. So what was he going to do?

Chapter 30: A Contract and Three Telegrams

FDR’s vice president, John Nance Garner of Texas, had many misgivings about FDR’s policies. Garner disliked the New Deal; he wanted a balanced budget, government intervention in labor strikes, and a curtailment of New Deal policies. He was also against the court-packing scheme. His arguments with the President had long occurred in private, but more and more he was opening up to colleagues and the press about his misgivings.

The fight would come to a climax in advance of the 1940 presidential election. Most people believed Roosevelt would not break the two-term tradition by running for a third term. Garner decided to run in the Democratic primary, regardless of whether Roosevelt was running. But Roosevelt was going to run, and because of Garner’s strong poll numbers in 1939, FDR decided it was necessary to fight Garner in his own home state of Texas to keep him from getting the nomination. FDR needed a new man in Texas to replace Garner.

Lyndon Johnson recognized this need. Garner derived much of his power from the Texas delegation, which held spots on many influential committees. The Texas delegation met weekly to discuss strategy, and Johnson would now be the Administration’s spy in these meetings. When a union official called Garner a labor-hating drinker, Johnson refused to sign the Texas delegation’s statement refuting the insult to demonstrate his loyalty to Roosevelt. Roosevelt in fact offered Johnson the job of head of the REA, but Johnson turned it down.

By getting Brown & Root to use its influence to oppose Garner, Lyndon secured them a very lucrative contract to build the naval base in Corpus Christi. In return, Brown & Root would provide FDR the money for his fight in Texas. However, by early 1940, it was becoming evident that the fight would not be necessary. The clouds of war were gathering in Europe, bolstering FDR’s support for a third term run.

Rayburn stepped in and tried to reach a compromise that would allow Garner to leave office with dignity and prevent FDR from being slighted. He wanted the Texas delegation at the 1940 convention to give Garner a favorite son vote, and then pass a
resolution supporting the Administration’s record. Rayburn stuck to his old friend Garner’s side throughout the fight, despite his support of the President and the New Deal. Lyndon Johnson and Wirtz used this against him to gain favor with the President, so Johnson could maneuver himself into position to be FDR’s man in Texas. Roosevelt put the word out that Johnson was to be consulted on all public contracts being given out in Texas—the plan worked. Throughout this whole affair, Johnson managed to keep his role secret. Even years later, very few of the men involved in the feud would think Johnson had anything to do with it.

Chapter 31: Campaign Committee

The Democrats were in great danger of losing the House to the Republicans in the 1940 election. Even though it was considered likely Roosevelt would win reelection, a Republican house would leave him hamstrung, and would cost Rayburn his Speakership, which he had had for just a few months.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee was designed to assist the campaigns of Democratic representatives by providing funds and other types of assistance. In 1940 the entire Democratic Party was short on funds because of Roosevelt’s lack of popularity within the business community. The Democrats needed money, fast, and Lyndon Johnson knew how to get it. Ten years earlier, in 1930, a huge oil field had been discovered in East Texas. The oil in this field was largely drilled by so-called “independents” (smaller companies), who had become very rich by selling their land to the majors (the large companies). Few in Washington knew about this development, but Johnson knew.

Johnson pleaded with Rayburn and the President for a role in the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, but Rayburn, upset with Johnson because of his role in the Roosevelt-Garner fight, would not support him. It was only when the Democrats became even more desperate—in October, just a month away from the election—that Johnson was finally given the very informal role of “assisting” the Committee.

Chapter 32: The Munsey Building

Although Johnson was given only a small role in the committee, he soon became the source of most of its money. Johnson set up an office in the Munsey building, using his own staff. From then on, he started bringing in the checks. Johnson raised money from Brown & Root and other Texas oilmen, and used his connections within the Administration to solicit donations from garment workers in New York and other cities. Johnson then took these donations to the committee, which dispersed it to the people he chose in the amounts he specified. Sometimes these donations were off the books, and Johnson distributed the money to candidates through outside (illegal) methods.

In addition to providing money, Johnson arranged speaking appearances and innumerable other little favors, for instance a job or an increase in salary for an important person in a congressman’s district. He also used the congressman he was giving money to—dozens of them—for information. He had them send back poll results on both their chances and the President’s. With information very scarce in those days, this made Johnson very useful to the President.
Johnson had finally become his own man, with his own source of money (and therefore his own source of power). He had elevated himself out of the rank and file of junior congressmen. He was now owed favors by dozens of congressmen, many of them more senior than he. He changed how the Democratic Party financed elections. He approached the problem with more energy than any man before him, and he got results. Democrats were expected to lose dozens of seats in the House, possibly losing their majority altogether. Instead, they gained eight seats. And Johnson delivered for his donors, too. Brown & Root would receive contracts during the war worth hundreds of millions of dollars, and Johnson established himself as a good friend of the oil industry.

Chapter 33: Through the Back Door

After the 1940 election, Johnson developed a rapport with FDR, and visited him often. It is not known what they talked about, or how often Johnson visited. Caro notes that Johnson often went in through the “back door” of the Oval Office to see the President—the door for guests kept off of the President’s official calendar.

PART VI: DEFEAT

Chapter 34: “Pass the Biscuits, Pappy”

On April 9, 1941, Texas senator Morris Sheppard died of a stroke. Johnson set to work. He mobilized his NYA friends, secured the President’s endorsement, and began raising money. Most of his money came from Brown & Root, from either the Browns themselves or from their subcontractors. Johnson’s ability to raise money eliminated many potential competitors before they could even enter the race.

Johnson’s two main competitors were Martin Dies, the chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee, and Gerald Mann, Texas’ attorney general. It soon became obvious Dies was not a major competitor; he made the communist threat the major issue of his campaign, and likely wouldn’t attract the votes of anyone but a few die hard patriots. Mann was very popular throughout the state, and was known as a man of great integrity. He campaigned vigorously—with as much energy as Johnson did in his 1937 campaign for the House—but it wasn’t enough. Gerald Mann was drowning in Johnson’s money. His lead in the polls was quickly dissipating.

As for Johnson, he was campaigning rather poorly. He wasn’t working as hard as he had in 1937, and he wasn’t doing as well even when he was working. His impromptu speeches of 1937 were replaced by long, boring speeches, which he delivered in a condescending and contemptuous tone. Despite his money, fewer and fewer people were showing up to his rallies. His warmth towards people was replaced with an efficient coldness—he wanted simply to shake as many hands as possible and move on. Despite his poor performance, it was obvious that he was going to win. Until Governor W. Lee O’Daniel entered the race.

O’Daniel was a flour salesman and radio announcer before he became Governor in 1939. His radio show was immensely popular. He talked to the poor folk of Texas as if he understood them and was one of them. In fact, he had become a very rich businessman. His only concrete proposal during his gubernatorial campaign was a state pension plan, though he had no plans for financing it and made no effort to get it passed once in office. While he defended the little man in his speeches, his campaign was
supported by big business, and O’Daniel pushed for their interests. Despite his lack of experience he won the governorship by a wide margin.

Once O’Daniel entered the race, Johnson stepped up his campaigning. The rallies grew larger; he threatened to cut off federal funds from precincts that did not vote for him, among other dirty tactics. O’Daniel couldn’t begin his campaign until the legislature adjourned for the year, and Wirtz and Roy Miller made sure that it didn’t. O’Daniel wouldn’t be able to go out on the stump until just 10 days before Election Day.

On Election Day, all the polls pointed towards a Johnson victory. By the end of the night, he was 5,000 votes ahead of O’Daniel. But Johnson made a mistake. Johnson let the “boxes” (precincts) he controlled report their results that night, on Election day. In Texas, at that time, the rural counties often reported their results a day or two after Election Day. This gave candidates an extra few days to change the results in their favor to the degree necessary. By letting his boxes report early, Johnson let his opponents know the exact number of votes they needed to change to defeat him.

And who were these opponents? Oddly enough, they weren’t O’Daniel’s friends. They were the liquor and beer manufacturers of Texas. O’Daniel, a prohibitionist, had pledged to create dry areas around new military bases—this would cost the manufacturers a fortune. They conspired to give the election to O’Daniel to keep him out of Texas, and thereby prevent the passage of such laws. There was little Johnson could do. The election was stolen from him (and after he had put in so much effort to steal it for himself!).

Chapter 35: “I Want to See Lyndon”

After the election, IRS agents began to investigate Brown & Root for tax fraud. Campaign contributions were not allowed to be deducted, but Brown & Root had deducted thousands of dollars as “legal fees” and “bonuses” on their tax statements, which the IRS believed were disguised contributions to the Johnson campaign. Wirtz and Johnson failed to quash the investigation, which proceeded as normal.

For two years the investigation went on, and the IRS believed it was close to making a criminal case. However, in January 1943, Wirtz and Johnson met with FDR. Soon after, a senior IRS agent went to meet with the Texas investigators, and told them that the investigation had not produced enough evidence for criminal prosecution, and that only a fine would be levied. The investigation was stopped, and Brown & Root was fined $1,000,000 for unpaid taxes plus a 50% penalty: $1,500,000 in all. After some negotiations, this was cut down to just under $400,000. Roosevelt saved Johnson’s career.

Chapter 36: “Mister Speaker”

Johnson’s role in the Garner fight had cooled Rayburn’s affection for him. Rayburn refused to endorse Johnson’s senate candidacy until just a week before Election Day. Johnson was no longer being invited to the “Board of Education,” meetings held by House leadership to discuss policy and strategy.

The War would restore their relationship. Johnson had promised during his campaign that if he was going to vote to send boys to war, he would go with them. Though he lost his race for Senate, Johnson signed up for the Naval Reserve. He was placed on active duty on December 11, 1941, and given an indefinite leave of absence from Congress. Rayburn was at the station to see Johnson off, and he would visit Lady
Bird frequently while Johnson was gone. Over the next twenty years Rayburn would continue to be very important to Johnson’s career, and Johnson would treat him with the same respect and deference he had as a young Congressman from Texas’ 10th District, even after Johnson had become a senator and then Senate Majority Leader.

Chapter 37: The “Perfect Roosevelt Man”

After Roosevelt’s death, and even before to some extent, Johnson began backpedaling on his support of the New Deal. In private, and to a lesser degree in public, he began to talk about the need to decrease the size of government and eliminate some New Deal programs.