



Bob Gibson and Stan Musial,  
Spring Training 1961, Tampa Bay

# NEBRASKA HOT STOVE LEAGUE

SEASON XXXVI



Angry no more.

## FROM THE BULLPEN

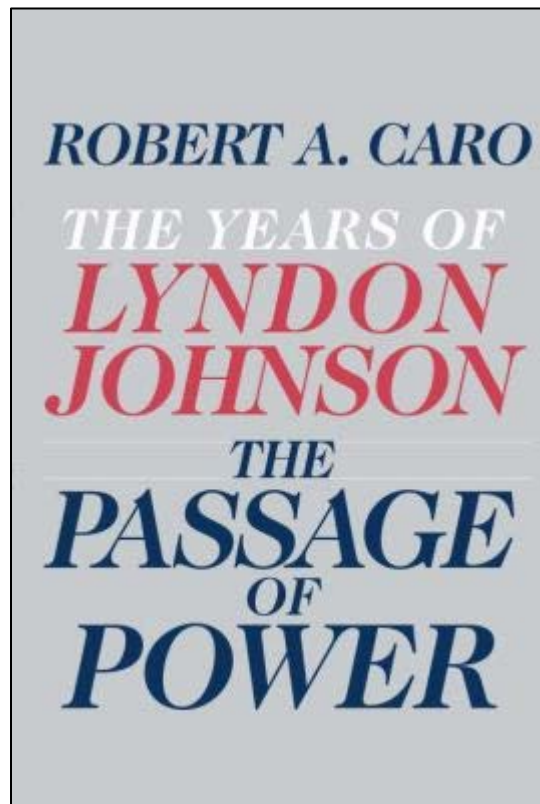
2020 Campaign

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Brethren:

I finished reading Volume 4 of Robert Caro's magnum opus on LBJ entitled *The Passage of Power*, copyrighted 2012, some ten years after publication of Volume 3, *Master of the Senate*, in 2002, and thirty years after the publication of his first volume, *The Path to Power*, in 1982. Man, does this guy work hard to put out a book, and is he good at it.



As Gary Giddins of the *Wall Street Journal* described *The Passage of Power*:

One of the crowning masterworks of our time, the most emotionally gripping volume in Caro's life of LBJ. His narrative skill never falters, and the most suspenseful pages concern events we lived through and think, or thought, we know.

Or as the *New York Times* put it, "Shakespearean . . . A breathtakingly dramatic story (told) with consummate artistry and ardor."

No faint praise, that.

*The Passage of Power* begins in late 1958, when LBJ first began actively considering a campaign for the 1960 presidential election, and concludes in 1964, when Johnson was elected to a full four-year term as President, after completing JFK's first term. It largely focuses on the transition of LBJ from Vice President to President, a country clod (they referred to him as "Rufus CornPone") taking over for a vibrant, urbane, sophisticated but now dead John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

In the early part of the book, Caro describes how Johnson went from being the master of the Senate (the second rung on the three-rung ladder to the presidency) to the vice-presidency which was, and always has been, a job without any real power. He describes how the Senate rung was one on which LBJ was very much at home.

Lyndon Johnson was, as I have written, a reader of men. He had promulgated guidelines for such reading, which he tried to teach his young staff. "Watch their hands, watch their eyes," he told them. "Read eyes. No matter what a man is saying to you, it's not as important as what you can read in their eyes." Teaching them to peruse men's weaknesses, he said that "the most important thing a man has to tell you is what he's not telling you; the most important thing he has to say is what he's trying not to say"--and therefore it was important not to let a conversation end until you learned what the man wasn't saying, until you got it out of him. Johnson read with a genius that couldn't be taught, with a gift that was so instinctive that one aide, Robert G. (Bobby) Baker, calls it a "sense." He seemed to sense each man's individual price and the commodities he preferred as coin.

One of the most interesting parts of the book is Caro's description of how LBJ became JFK's running mate for the 1960 general election. Throughout his entire life, from the time he was a very young boy, Johnson had always aspired to the highest office in the land. However, in 1958 and 1959, when he was the very powerful Senate Majority Leader, and to many the presumptive Democratic candidate for the 1960 presidential election, he sat on his thumbs and did almost nothing to advance his own cause. As Caro posits, Johnson's lifelong fear of failure—of failing like his father, Sam Ealy Johnson, had failed--made him hesitate, reluctant to announce that he wanted to be President and reluctant to embark out on the campaign trail. It seemed as if he wanted others to take care of that unseemly business for him, and essentially draft him as the Democratic nominee by acclamation. In fact, it wasn't until July

5, 1960--just six days before the Democratic convention--that Johnson finally publicly announced his candidacy.

The only problem was that Joseph Kennedy and the entire Kennedy clan had long been busy at work trying to get John Fitzgerald Kennedy the delegates that he needed for the Democratic nomination. And the Kennedys, with all of their many wealthy and Ivy League-educated friends and associates, were a formidable foe indeed. At the July convention, against tall odds, JFK on the first ballot achieved 806 votes to 409 for Johnson, with all other candidates, including Symington, Stevenson and Humphrey, totaling 306 votes. Young "Johnny," as LBJ pejoratively referred to him, was to be the Democratic nominee.

### **THE OFFER**

The Democratic National Convention in July of 1960 was held in Los Angeles, and the candidates and all of the major Democratic power brokers were lodged at the opulent downtown Biltmore Hotel. In his spellbinding, page-turning way, Caro describes how after securing the top billing for the Democratic ticket, on the following morning, Thursday, July 14, JFK paid a visit to Johnson's hotel room, precisely two floors down, to test the waters for having LBJ run as his mate.

According to Caro, to avoid the reporters who were lurking in the hallways, Kennedy snuck from his family's corner suite (933) down a back stairway, to the Johnson suite just below, Suite 723, and had a private conversation with LBJ and asked him if he "was available for the vice presidency," to which Johnson replied that he was. However, it was suggested that Johnson discuss the matter with his party intimates before making a final decision, and during the course of that day, Bobby Kennedy reportedly made three separate secret visits to LBJ's suite to try to talk him out of accepting the offer of Vice-President. The entire chapter about the ordeal, simply titled "The Back Stairs," is fascinating. The enmity between LBJ and RFK was remarkable.



### **THE ELECTION**

Once on board the party ticket, Johnson was a tenacious campaigner for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket against the Republican team of Richard Nixon and Henry Cabot Lodge. Johnson's job was to win back the South, since Eisenhower in 1956 had won five of the eleven states of the

Old Confederacy. The yeoman campaigner made a whistle-stop train tour down through the South on the thirteen-car "LBJ Special," which would pull into Southern towns while "The Yellow Rose of Texas" was blaring on the sound system. LBJ slapped more backs, kissed more babies and pressed more flesh than our own beloved Huckster, Itchie, did in his First Data heyday.

In the end, LBJ did his job for the ticket, reclaiming the South, and the Kennedy-Johnson team won a narrow victory (303-219 electoral votes, 34,220,984 to 34,108,157 in the popular vote) over Nixon and Lodge, giving rise to the three-year period which became known as Camelot.

## DALLAS

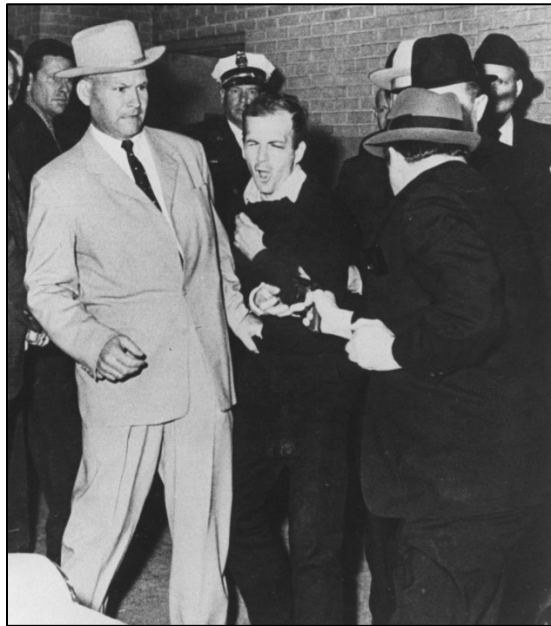
There is plenty of great stuff in the book about the first three years of Kennedy's presidency, and the effective neutering of LBJ through his post as Vice-President, but one of the most fascinating parts of the book is learning that just as Kennedy and LBJ were leaving Fort Worth and were on their way to Dallas for Kennedy's ill-fated limousine ride through the city on November 22, 1963, LBJ was in serious legal jeopardy.



That very day, prior to the sniper's shots from the Texas Book Depository, a man named Don Reynolds, with his attorney beside him, walked into Suite 312 of the Old Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill to begin his testimony before the Senate Rules Committee. The subject of the questioning was the purchase of television advertising time and an expensive stereo set, both of which were not-so-subtle bribes and kickbacks that had been demanded by LBJ. Moreover, at that very time in history, *on the very day of JFK's assassination*, there was a meeting in NYC of the *Life* magazine investigating team, with a dozen reporters and editors present, about research that was going on about the sources of "Lyndon Johnson's money," the "net worth" story that was planned to run over several issues. It seems that word had gotten out that LBJ was a multi-millionaire in 1963, a subject of great interest to many since he had spent the greater part of his adult life in public service at a public servant's salary.



The swearing-in on Air Force One.



Jack Ruby assassinates the assassin.

The course of American history was changed forever by the actions of Lee Harvey Oswald--whether acting alone or with others--when Kennedy died and LBJ became President, and all of the dirt that had been accumulating on the Vice President was--at least temporarily--swept under the rug, as a mourning nation dealt with a terrible loss and the media gave the new Commander in Chief the breathing room he needed to get his feet under him to run the country.

*The Passage of Power.* A great story, well told.

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That's it for this edition.

Next issue: *The 26th Man: One Minor League Pitcher's Pursuit of a Dream*, by Steve Fireovid and Mark Winegardner.

Be well, amigos.

Skipper