

LBJ



Lyndon B. Johnson, the Collegian

as a student editor

His Early Journalism Offered Opportunity for Political Challenge

THE AUTHOR

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IF PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON had not found politics an outlet for his ideas and energies, he might have turned to journalism.

That's what he did in college.

Student politics apparently were attractive to the young president-to-be at Southwest Texas State College, from which he was graduated in 1930, but the evidence indicates that, for the most part, he preferred to move in the background of campus politics. For example, he engineered the election of a close friend to the presidency of the senior class.

For himself, young Lyndon Johnson chose the campus newspaper, the *College Star*, for his voice. Although he was an officer in a number of student clubs, the editorship of the *Star* was the only campuswide post Johnson held.

There probably were a number of reasons for Johnson's selecting the college newspaper as his political medium, certainly not the least of which was the fact that the editor of the *Star* was the only student leader who received a salary, and Johnson's meager funds needed all the help they could get.

But there were other reasons, too.

Tom Nichols, then faculty advisor of the *Star* and now on Southwest Texas State's business administration faculty, says that the *Star* editorship was an elective position. This offered young Johnson a political challenge. Since he served as editor during the summers of 1928 and 1929, he apparently won two campuswide elections, though some evidence suggests that he was appointed to the position one of the summers. Even an appointment would have represented a political challenge to collegian LBJ, requiring, as it would have, persuading a publications committee of his ability.

ONE OF JOHNSON'S key reasons for getting himself on the staff of his college newspaper — his byline began appearing almost as soon as he had enrolled as a freshman — unquestionably was that he saw the publication as a vehicle for expressing his ideas.

And express them he did. On every conceivable subject, though there was a heavy flavor of politics.

Much of what he said sounds fresh enough to have been uttered from the White House today. For example: "The advantages of college training are now generally recognized. That one is better equipped for the duties of life after following systematic college training, goes without saying in this age, when the value of training in every field of achievement is emphasized. . . ."

"The statement that 1,000,000 of our 'best minds' are out of work made by Prof. Pitkin of Columbia University has created quite a furore. He attributed this condition to the fact that machinery has displaced men to a great degree. This statement is challenged by many on the ground that machines, while efficient, are merely tools and cannot think or create. There is plenty of work yet for the nation's minds."

"Sectionalism is vanishing. Our nation is becoming more truly American. . . ."

"There is one thing that (Benjamin Franklin) gave to us which of itself would be of lasting, and incalculable benefit to every youth in the land, were it heeded as it

should be. It is his splendid example accompanied by his wise maxims exhorting all to thrift. . . ."

Some of it characterizes the Johnson personality:

"Duty is reputed a hard taskmaster. It drives its devotees with a relentless hand through trials that seem intolerable. No labor is too arduous for Duty to exact; no sacrifice too great for her to demand, and no service is beyond her command. . . ."

"Personality is the development of one's outstanding and highest traits of character to the greatest power. It must be distinctive. Originality has a charm and power imitation can equal. Personality is natural, spontaneous, and wholly individual. It is a combination of altruistic feelings, novel purposes, talents and individuality. . . ."

"Let us be doers not drifters . . . and attain real advancement for ourselves."

"Behind all constructive work is a vision, a dream, a plan. Without this the work would lack spirit, organization, and power. It is the great compelling force that puts forth the first effort of the worker that sustains him in discouragement and cheers him to a consummation of the task. . . ."

"ONE OF THE GREAT virtues in life is sincerity. . . . Almost invariably the men who have chiseled their names deepest into history have been themselves. Abraham Lincoln has his hold upon the American imagination not only because of the pathos of his life, but also because of his sincerity. He was a homely, ungainly figure from the backwoods, and he never tried to present himself as anything else. When he told a story to illustrate a point, it was always a story that had the flavor and feeling of his native soil. Arrived at the Presidency, the way was open to him to put on a front and to do some strutting. Instead, he remained plain Abe Lincoln. No voice had to warn him to be himself. He was himself. . . ."

"Ambition is an uncomfortable companion many times. He creates a discontent with present surroundings and achievements; he is never satisfied but always pressing forward to better things in the future. Restless, energetic, purposeful, it is ambition that makes of the creature a real man."

Much of what college editor Lyndon Johnson wrote was downright prophetic:

"Ours is the duty, the privilege, the God given task to bear on the lighted torch. Let us fail not, for 'to break faith' . . . would indeed be the deed of a craven and ignoble soul. . . ."

" . . . To youth come the great visions, the masterly conception of achievements for which the world waits, the glowing ideals of work. Let us hold the vision granted to us, and hold fast the truth it teaches, giving freely of our talents, energies and labors for the glorious realization of the vision."

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It is within reason to assume that collegian Lyndon Johnson considered newspapering as a career. He felt close enough to the profession to complain editorially about the lack of a journalism department at Southwest Texas State:

"The past year has witnessed many improvements in S.W.T.T.C. . . . A school of journalism is one of the things yet lacking. The establishment of a department of journalism in our college is a desirable goal towards

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How many observed "Father's Day" last Sunday by some special attention expressive of appreciation of father? Dad certainly deserves a day all his own. For 364 days of the year he accepts the responsibilities his family imposes, pays the bills, and is on the job. He is due a day set apart to honor his loyalty and love, his unselfish efforts and his protecting care. Let us pay to dear old Dad some of the debt of love and appreciation due him.

Humor is the salt which adds savor to the literary dish of college news. Let us have sufficient sprinkles of this desirable seasoning to render our news palatable. By humor we mean real humor, pleasing and mirth-provoking. We do not desire coarse suggestiveness or immoral jokes which some college sheets seem to regard as humorous. Our sense of humor has not in its development eclipsed our sense of decency.

A department of journalism is one of the great needs of the S. W. T. T. C. Each year finds great educational advances being made here. Will it not be a most excellent stride forward when journalism is placed in our curriculum? Ye editor hopes the day will be not far distant when the hows and whys of editorial art may be explained to those who seek to learn.

Our national holiday, Flag Day, on the 14th is in close proximity to one of Mother England's great days: On June 15th, the Magna Carta was signed just seven hundred and thirteen years ago. The Magna Carta is one of the great documents of the English speaking races. We of America bow in reverence to those who took this first step toward the liberty which finds its supremest fulfillment in our land.

College training is essential to success today. However, there are other great essentials to the winning of success in any chosen career. Chief among these are determination, energy and willingness to start at the bottom. Training, however broad and however specialized, is unavailing without constant effort and that valuable experience which comes from beginning on the ground floor and working up. This beginning at the bottom is the thing our degree man finds most difficult.

The Associated Press, the world's greatest clearing house for news, points out as the duty of every staff member from editor to reporter to see that news is clean, important and free from any tinge of propaganda. The theory is that in such liberty-loving nation as ours the citizens should be given only the facts untinged by prejudice or propaganda and allowed to form their own opinions. This is an ideal for newspaper journalism.

One of Student Editor Johnson's Columns

which our best efforts should be directed."

But more than likely his editorial work on his campus newspaper was a means to the end of his interest in politics for Lyndon Johnson.

Former *College Star* advisor Nichols recalls with a twinkle in his eyes the summer of 1928:

"All during the months before the Democratic national convention that summer in Houston, Lyndon ran great headlines about it in the *Star*. I couldn't figure Lyndon's purpose in headlines that were probably of so little interest to the student body.

"Later I saw his motive when he carried a bundle of his *College Stars* down there to the convention chairman and laid them on the table and asked for a ticket to the press box."

Twenty-year-old Lyndon Johnson got his ticket to the press section.