



The Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson

By Robert A. Caro

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WINNER OF THE NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD, THE LOS ANGELES TIMES BOOK PRIZE, THE MARK LYNTON HISTORY PRIZE, THE AMERICAN HISTORY BOOK PRIZE

NAMED BY *THE NEW YORK TIMES* ONE OF THE TEN BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR

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By the two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Power Broker*.

Book Four of Robert A. Caro's monumental *The Years of Lyndon Johnson* displays all the narrative energy and illuminating insight that led the *Times* of London to acclaim it as "one of the truly great political biographies of the modern age. A masterpiece."

The Passage of Power follows Lyndon Johnson through both the most frustrating and the most triumphant periods of his career—1958 to 1964. It is a time that would see him trade the extraordinary power he had created for himself as Senate Majority Leader for what became the wretched powerlessness of a Vice President in an administration that disdained and distrusted him. Yet it was, as well, the time in which the presidency, the goal he had always pursued, would be thrust upon him in the moment it took an assassin's bullet to reach its mark.

By 1958, as Johnson began to maneuver for the presidency, he was known as one of the most brilliant politicians of his time, the greatest Senate Leader in our history. But the 1960 nomination would go to the young senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy. Caro gives us an unparalleled account of the machinations behind both the nomination and Kennedy's decision to offer Johnson the vice presidency, revealing the extent of Robert Kennedy's efforts to force Johnson off the ticket. With the consummate skill of a master storyteller, he exposes the savage animosity between Johnson and Kennedy's younger brother,

portraying one of America's great political feuds. Yet Robert Kennedy's overt contempt for Johnson was only part of the burden of humiliation and isolation he bore as Vice President. With a singular understanding of Johnson's heart and mind, Caro describes what it was like for this mighty politician to find himself altogether powerless in a world in which power is the crucial commodity.

For the first time, in Caro's breathtakingly vivid narrative, we see the Kennedy assassination through Lyndon Johnson's eyes. We watch Johnson step into the presidency, inheriting a staff fiercely loyal to his slain predecessor; a Congress determined to retain its power over the executive branch; and a nation in shock and mourning. We see how within weeks—grasping the reins of the presidency with supreme mastery—he propels through Congress essential legislation that at the time of Kennedy's death seemed hopelessly logjammed and seizes on a dormant Kennedy program to create the revolutionary War on Poverty. Caro makes clear how the political genius with which Johnson had ruled the Senate now enabled him to make the presidency wholly his own. This was without doubt Johnson's finest hour, before his aspirations and accomplishments were overshadowed and eroded by the trap of Vietnam.

In its exploration of this pivotal period in Johnson's life—and in the life of the nation—*The Passage of Power* is not only the story of how he surmounted unprecedented obstacles in order to fulfill the highest purpose of the presidency but is, as well, a revelation of both the pragmatic potential in the presidency and what can be accomplished when the chief executive has the vision and determination to move beyond the pragmatic and initiate programs designed to transform a nation. It is an epic story told with a depth of detail possible only through the peerless research that forms the foundation of Robert Caro's work, confirming Nicholas von Hoffman's verdict that "Caro has changed the art of political biography."

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best Books of the Month, May 2012: In the fourth volume of Caro's ambitious, decades-long biographic exploration, Lyndon Johnson finally reaches the White House. At 600-plus pages, it's a brick of a book, but it reads at times like a novel, and a thriller, and a Greek tragedy. Caro's version of JFK's assassination is especially chilling, and the characters—not just LBJ, but the Kennedys and the power brokers of Washington --are downright Shakespearean. --*Neal Thompson*

From Bookforum

Lyndon Johnson was a figure of immense gifts and horrendous flaws, and I doubt any writer will ever capture the arc of his triumphant and ultimately tragic life so well again. — Michael Kazin

Review

“Brilliant . . . Important . . . Remarkable . . . In sparking detail, Caro shows Johnson's genius for getting to people—friends, foes, and everyone in between—and how he used it to achieve his goals . . . With this fascinating and meticulous account Robert Caro has once again done America a great service.”

—President Bill Clinton, *The New York Times Book Review* (front cover)

“By writing the best presidential biography the country has ever seen, Caro has forever changed the way we think, and read, American history . . . Although the amount of research Caro has done for these books is staggering, it's his immense talent as a writer that has made his biography of Johnson one of America's most amazing literary achievements . . . Caro's chronicle is as absorbing as a political thriller . . . There's not a wasted word, not a needless anecdote . . . Most impressively, Caro comes closer than any other historian could to explaining the famously complex LBJ . . . Caro's portrayal of the president is as scrupulously fair as it is passionate and deeply felt . . . The series is a masterpiece, unlike any other work of American history published in the past. It's true that there will never be another Lyndon B. Johnson, but there will never be another Robert A. Caro, either.” —Michael Schaub, NPR

“A breathtakingly dramatic story about a pivotal moment in United States history [told] with consummate artistry and ardor . . . It showcases Mr. Caro's masterly gifts as a writer: his propulsive sense of narrative, his talent for enabling readers to see and feel history in the making and his ability to situate his subjects' actions within the context of their times . . . Caro manages to lend even much-chronicled events a punch of tactile immediacy . . . Johnson emerges as both a larger-than-life, Shakespearean personage—with epic ambition and epic flaws—and a more human-scale puzzle . . . Mr. Caro uses his storytelling gifts to turn seemingly arcane legislative maneuvers into action-movie suspense, and he gives us unparalleled understanding of how Johnson used a crisis and his own political acumen to implement his agenda with stunning speed. Taken together the installments of Mr. Caro's monumental life of Johnson form a revealing prism by which to view the better part of a century in American life and politics.”

—Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

“A great work of history . . . A great biography . . . Caro has summoned Lyndon Johnson to vivid, intimate life.” —*Newsweek*

“Making ordinary politics and policymaking riveting and revealing is what makes Caro a genius. Combined with his penetrating insight and fanatical research, Caro’s Churchill-like prose elevates the life of a fairly influential president to stuff worthy of Shakespeare . . . Reading Caro’s books can feel like encountering the life of an American president for the first time . . . Caro’s judgment is solid, his prose inspiring, and his research breathtaking . . . Robert Caro stands alone as the unquestioned master of the contemporary American political biography.”

—Jordan Michael Smith, *The Boston Globe*

“A meditation on power as profound as Machiavelli’s.” —Lara Marlowe, *Irish Times*

“One of the most compelling political narratives of the past half-century . . . A vivid picture of how political power worked in the US during the middle of the 20th century at local, state and national level. . . This extraordinary work will remain essential reading for decades to come.” —Richard Lambert, *Financial Times*

“Unrivaled . . . Caro does not merely recount. He beckons. Single sentences turn into winding, brimming paragraphs, clauses upon clauses tugging at the reader, layering the scenery with character intrigue and the plot with historical import. The result is irresistible . . . *Passage* covers with all the artistry and intrigue of a great novel events that are seared in the nation’s memory. In an era defined by fragmented media markets, instantaneous communication, gadflies and chattering suits, Caro stands not merely apart, but alone.”

—William Howell, *San Francisco Chronicle*

“The greatest political biography ever written . . . The most sweeping historical tour de force since Gibbons’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* . . . Caro has imprinted himself into history. His work is now the benchmark of political biography.” —Paul Sheehan, *Sydney Morning Herald*

“Riveting . . . Masterful . . . An insightful account of what it means and what it takes to occupy the Oval Office.” —Steve Paul, *The Kansas City Star*

“Robert Caro is the essential chronicler of these times: And these times should never be forgotten.” —Joel Connelly, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

“Caro’s masterpiece of biography . . . His strength as a biographer is his ability to probe Johnson’s mind and motivations . . . Riveting . . . A roller-coaster tale.”

—*The Economist*

“The latest in what is almost without question the greatest political biography in modern times . . . Nobody goes deeper, works harder or produces more penetrating insights than [Caro].” —Patrick Beach, *Austin American-Statesman*

“The politicians’ political book of choice . . . An encyclopedia of dirty tricks that would make Machiavelli seem naïve.” —Michael Burleigh, *London Literary Review*

“Majestic . . . The reporting is copious, the writing elegant and energetic, the sentences frequently rushing forward themselves like mighty rivers. Four books, and nearly four decades, into this vast project, Caro’s commitment to excellence has not wavered or even slackened; the reader can feel the sheer force of his effort on every page.” —Ronald Brownstein, *Democracy*

“By dramatizing the capacities and limitations of the most talented politician of the postwar era, Caro aims to make readers shrewder citizens . . . As a student of power, Caro is a Machiavelli for democrats, who instead

of addressing the prince, addresses the people.” —Thomas Meaney, *The Nation*

“Astonishing and unprecedented . . . a work of real literature, among the best nonfiction works ever . . . His books . . . argue that things happen because certain people with power want them to happen . . . It is not inconceivable to think that, without the presence of LBJ and the influence on him of his character and his experiences, none [of the civil rights bills] would have won Congressional approval . . . More than operatic, Caro’s Johnson books deserve another adjective, one that matches his genius, his sensitivity and his ambition: Shakespearean.”

—Patrick T. Reardon

“The best biography I’ve ever read . . . Incredibly well-written, with the tension and drama of a compulsive thriller, and the style of an elegant novel. Caro’s books aren’t just about politics, or just about Lyndon Johnson. His books are about America, its culture, its history, and its society. Above all, Caro’s books are about power, how to achieve it and make it multiply; how to use power and how to lose it.” —Michael Crick, UK Channel 4 News

“My book of the year, by a landslide majority, was *The Passage of Power*. The adjective ‘Shakespearean’ is overused and mostly undeserved but not in this case. LBJ emerges from this biography as a fully rounded tragic hero: cowardly and brave, petty and magnificent, vindictive and noble, a man of vaunting ambition and profound insecurities. Caro marries profound psychological insight with a brilliant eye for the drama of the times.” —Robert Harris, *The Guardian* (London)

“Caro is a genius at delineating character, and not just that of the deliciously complicated LBJ. He investigates, among other larger-than-life figures, the Kennedy brothers, the powerful and unbending Harry Byrd of Virginia, and the clownlike but devoted Bobby Baker . . . Caro’s use of strong image and repetition, almost hypnotic in combination, is breathtakingly effective. Caro is a great historian, but if the purpose of art is to stimulate thought and arouse emotion, he is also a great artist.” —Rosemary Michaud, *Charleston Post and Courier*

“A portrait of executive leadership so evocative as to be tactile.”

—Robert Draper, *Wall Street Journal*

“The only superstar biographer in the world . . . Caro’s [books] transform biography into something new, a tour de force of structured political opinion writing . . . A single theme emerges: the insidious ways that clever politicians can gather and abuse power—sometimes for good, sometimes for evil—in a modern democratic society.” —Levi Asher, *Literary Kicks*

“One of the greatest biographies in the history of American letters.”

—Bob Hoover, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*

“As riveting as a thriller . . . The next book will crown an achievement in presidential biography unmatched among presidential histories.”

—David Hendricks, *Houston Chronicle*

“Every page [of *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*] is compelling. For many politicians it is the finest book on politics . . . The ultimate political story.”

—Daniel Finkelstein, *London Times*

“Long live Robert Caro . . . Truly epic political history and character study . . . Riveting . . . It elevates

Caro's tale to Shakespearean drama, as the coldhearted, Machiavellian maneuvering and hot-blooded rivalries of supremely ambitious men play out with the fate of the free world at stake."

—Dan DeLuca, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

"Brilliant . . . A masterclass in political management . . . Caro not only re-creates one of the giants of modern politics, he tells a giant tale about power and about life itself." —Andrew Adonis, *New Statesman*

"A masterly how-to manual, showing Johnson's knowledge of governing, his peerless congressional maneuvering and effective deal-making. *The Years of Lyndon Johnson* is a compact library: brilliant biography, gripping history, searing political drama and an incomparable study of power. It's also a great read . . . And, after thousands of pages spent with Lyndon Johnson, one of Caro's singular achievements is that you want more." —Peter Gianotti, *Newsday*

"*The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, when completed, will rank as America's most ambitiously conceived, assiduously researched and compulsively readable political biography . . . When Caro's fifth volume arrives, readers' gratitude will be exceeded only by their regret that there will not be a sixth." —George F. Will

"This book shows the mastery of Johnson in politics, and also the mastery of Caro in biography." —David M. Shribman, *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*

"Epic . . . A searing account of ambition derailed by personal demons . . . a triumphant drama of 'political genius in action' . . . Caro combines the skills of a historian, an investigative reporter and a novelist in this searching study of the transformative effect of power." —Wendy Smith, *Los Angeles Times*

"An addictive read, written in glorious prose that suggests the world's most diligent beat reporter channeling William Faulkner. *Passage* is an essential document of a turning point in American history. It's also an incisive portrait of one great, terrible, fascinating man suddenly given the chance to reinvent the country in his image." —Darren Franich, *Entertainment Weekly*

"Riveting . . . Shakespearean . . . It's a roller-coaster narrative as Johnson plummets from the powerful Senate majority leader post to vice-presidential irrelevance, hated and humiliated by the Kennedy brothers, then surges to presidential authority with the crack of Lee Harvey Oswald's rifle and forces a revolutionary civil rights act through a recalcitrant Congress . . . Caro's tormented, heroic Johnson makes an apt embodiment of an America struggling toward epochal change, one with a fascinating resonance in our era of gridlocked government." —*Publishers Weekly* (Boxed, Starred)

"The fourth volume of one of the most anticipated English-language biographies of the past 30 years . . . A compelling narrative . . . that will thrill those who care about American politics, the foundations of power, or both . . . Before beginning the Johnson biography, Caro published a life of Robert Moses, *The Power Broker* (1974), a book many scholars consider a watershed in contemporary biography. The Johnson project deserves equal praise." —*KirkusReviews* (Starred)

"A major event in biography, history, even publishing itself . . . Caro has once more combined prodigious research and a literary gift to mount a stage for his Shakespearean figures: LBJ, JFK, and LBJ's nemesis Robert F. Kennedy."

—*Library Journal* (Starred)

“Brilliant . . . Riveting reading from beginning to end . . . The real tour de force in this stunning mix of political and psychological analysis comes in the account of the transition between administrations, from November 23, 1963 to January 8, 1964 . . . An utterly fascinating character study, brimming with delicious insider stories . . . Political wonks, of course, will dive into this book with unbridled passion, but its focus on a larger-than-life, flawed but fascinating individual—the kind of character who drives epic fiction—should extend its reach much, much further. Unquestionably, one of the truly big books of the year.”

—*Booklist* (Starred)

Users Review

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