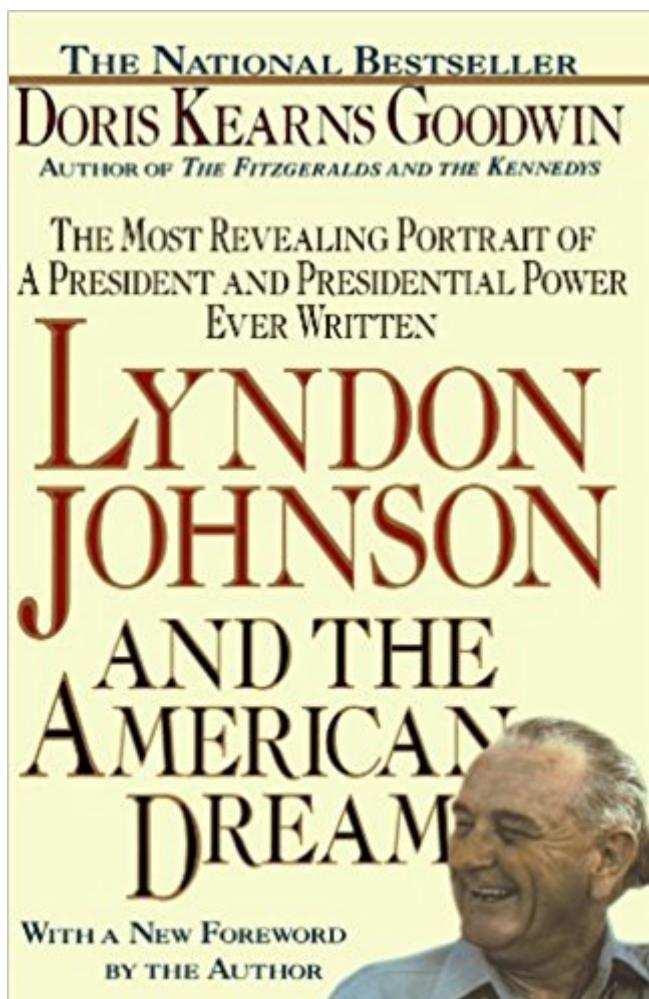


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Lyndon Johnson And The American Dream: The Most Revealing Portrait Of A President And Presidential Power Ever Written



Synopsis

Doris Kearns Goodwin's classic life of Lyndon Johnson, who presided over the Great Society, the Vietnam War, and other defining moments the tumultuous 1960s, is a monument in political biography. From the moment the author, then a young woman from Harvard, first encountered President Johnson at a White House dance in the spring of 1967, she became fascinated by the man--his character, his enormous energy and drive, and his manner of wielding these gifts in an endless pursuit of power. As a member of his White House staff, she soon became his personal confidante, and in the years before his death he revealed himself to her as he did to no other. Widely praised and enormously popular, Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream is a work of biography like few others. With uncanny insight and a richly engrossing style, the author renders LBJ in all his vibrant, conflicted humanity.

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Customer Reviews

Doris Kearns Goodwin has done a great service to history with this book. All too often members of any important person's staff take a far different approach to this type of project. Those who know their subject in ways the rest of us can never know that person often hide all of the warts and paint their former boss as a near saint. Not Goodwin. In this book the reader will get a look at the whole LBJ, good and bad. Goodwin starts with Johnson's childhood and may get a little carried away with psychoanalytical insights including a reference to Freud. Her conclusions may be right on target but as she herself admits most of her conclusions were based on Johnson's tales of his childhood and

he tended to remember his past as he wanted it to be instead of as it was. That same fault would haunt him as President as he convinced himself everything was fine when things were far from fine. We get the first real look at the LBJ who would dominate the Senate while he is in college. There he works long and hard to overthrow the old guard and make himself the most powerful student on campus. The same tactics he used in college would make him the most powerful man in the Senate and the most powerful Democrat in the country while Ike was President. It seems that Johnson assumed he could use those same tactics yet again to make him as V.P. the real power behind JFK. Instead he found that Bobby Kennedy held that position and wasn't about to move over for Johnson. Somehow it didn't sink in to Johnson that if what had worked so well in the Senate didn't work for the Vice President it wasn't likely to work for the President. In fact, as Goodwin points out, the very qualities that made him a great leader in the Senate often had the opposite effect in the White House.

For those wanting to see the tragedy which is Lyndon Baines Johnson, this book, as well as the new release by Robert Dallek ("Fallen Giant"), is a perfect buy. LBJ's Presidency was, indeed, a horrible tragedy. LBJ had the greatest of intentions in regard to civil rights, social welfare and fighting Communism. Yet, all ended up as a disaster. Civil rights, though surely the greatest aspect of his Presidency, has been regressed recently due to the fact that the action taken by Democrats and Liberals during the 1960's. The "white backlash" has resulted in a right of center national attitude on the subject. The Social Welfare policies taken by the Administration were quite successful on some parts, such as Medicare, Medicaid, federal aid to K-12 public schools and Head Start, and horrible in others, such as the welfare crisis explosions and Model Cities. Yet, the overall assessment of these programs has been, unfairly I think, negative. In regard to fighting Communism, history all too tragically tells the story. Goodwin, I think, draws a fair picture of LBJ's legacy here. She does not progress the view that he is a great President, but a would-be great President who deserves to be known as a 'good' one. He was a good one. He passed into law great programs, such as Medicare, Head Start, Minimum Wage increases, consumer protection, environmental protection and labor law reform. He pushed through 3 great and giant civil rights laws. He is THE civil rights President, in my view. He pushed through the brand of legislation which no other President could pass through. Yet, Vietnam ruined it all. This sounds rather Clintonian!

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