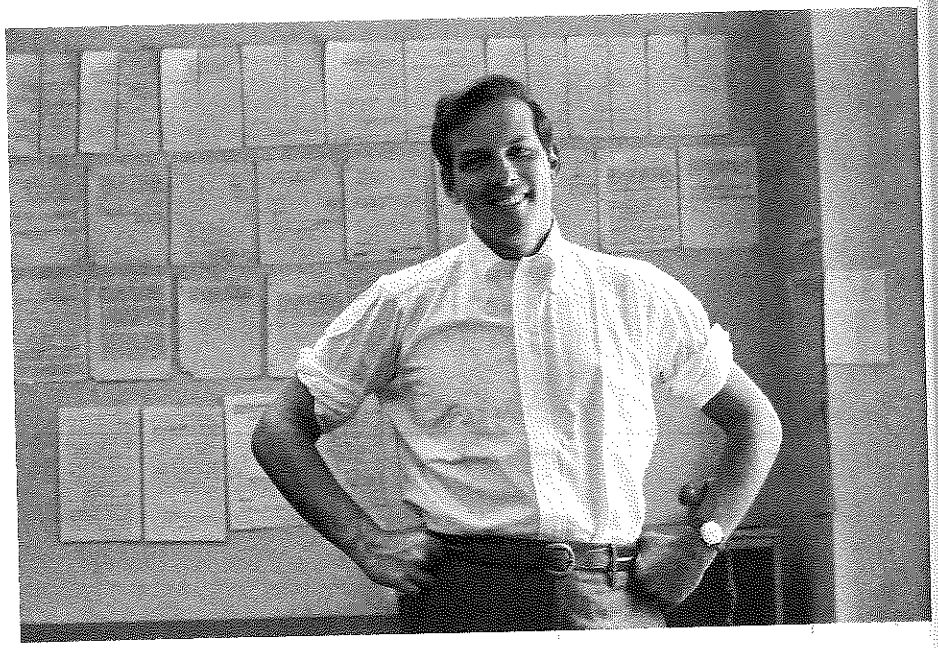

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Working

Researching, Interviewing, Writing

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A Sense of Place

The importance of a sense of place is commonly accepted in the world of fiction; I wish that were also true about biography and history, about nonfiction in general, in fact. The overall quality, the overall level, of writing is, I believe, just as important in the one as in the other.

By "a sense of place," I mean helping the reader to visualize the physical setting in which a book's action is occurring: to see it clearly enough, in sufficient detail, so that he feels as if he himself were present while the action is occurring. The action thereby becomes more vivid, more real, to him, and the point the author is trying to make about the action, the significance he wants the reader to grasp, is therefore deepened as well. Because biography should not be just a collection of facts. Its base, the base of all history, of course *is* the facts, it's always the facts, and you have to do your best to get them, and get them right. But once you have gotten as many of them as possible, it's also of real importance to enable the reader to see in his mind the places in which the book's facts are located. If a reader can visualize them for himself, then he may be able to understand things without the writer having to explain them; seeing something for yourself always makes you understand it better.

Another point. Since places evoke emotions in people, places inevitably evoked emotions in the biographer's subject, his pro-

tagonist. Therefore, if a biographer describes accurately enough the setting in which an action took place, and if he has accurately enough presented the protagonist's character, the reader will be helped to understand the emotions that the setting evoked in the protagonist, and will better understand the significance that the action held for him. If the place is important enough in the subject's life—if he was raised in it, for example, or presided over it, or maneuvered within it—if the place played a significant role in shaping his feelings, drives and motivations, his self-confidence and his insecurities, then, by making the place real to the reader, the author will have deepened the reader's understanding of the subject, will have made the reader not just understand but empathize with him, feel with him.

In the case of Lyndon Johnson, two settings played a crucial role for me in grasping him and understanding his role in history, in understanding how he came to power and how he wielded power—two settings. The place he came from—the Texas Hill Country—and the place he came to when he was still a very young man: Capitol Hill.

The first place was really hard for me to understand. I am a New Yorker. I had spent my whole life here, in the city's crowded streets, crowded halls, with theaters, concerts, lively conversation all the time; to some extent I comprehend that world. But when I started working on the Johnson book, there was a 9:30 plane to Austin every morning and some mornings I'd be in New York in that world, take the plane, at the Austin airport rent a car, and drive west into the Texas Hill Country. And on the days that I did that, I felt I was going in the same day from one end of the world to the other. The geologic name for the Hill Country is the Edwards Plateau. It's 24,000 square miles—that's enough square miles to put all of New England into it and still have some miles

left over. It starts at the western edge of Austin and stretches westward from there for more than three hundred miles. It's three hundred miles of one range of hills after another. The first settlers who came there called it the Land of Endless Horizons because every time they came to the top of one rise of hills there would be more rises stretching ahead.

Looking back on my work on Johnson, I think I realized on my very first drive into the Hill Country—or *should* have realized—that I was entering a world I really didn't understand and wasn't prepared for. I still remember: you drove west out of Austin, and about forty-one miles out you come to the top of a tall hill. And as I came to the crest of that hill, suddenly there was something in front of me that made me pull over to the side of the road and get out of the car and stand there looking down. Because what I was seeing was something I had never seen before: emptiness—a vast emptiness. I later found out that it's a valley, the valley of the Pedernales River. It's about seventy-five miles long and fifteen miles across. When I stood there looking down on it that first time, for a few minutes I didn't see a single sign of human beings in that immense space. Then something happened, the cloud moved from in front of the sun or whatever, and suddenly in the middle of this emptiness the sun was glinting off a little huddle of houses. That was Johnson City. When Lyndon Johnson was growing up in that town, there were 323 people there; when I got there, there were not that many more. As I stood on that hill, I realized that I was looking at something, was about to drive down into something, unlike anything I had ever seen before, in its emptiness, its loneliness, its isolation.

At that time Ina and I were working in the Johnson Library in Austin. We both worked from nine to five, when the library closed, and at five o'clock, I would hurry out to my car, and drive

out each evening into the Hill Country to interview one of the men or women who had grown up with Lyndon Johnson or gone to college with Lyndon Johnson or been part of his first political machine. He died so young, in 1973, at the age of sixty-four, and I was starting the book in 1976, and most of the people were still there who knew him, were still living in Johnson City, so I could talk to them. For a while I thought these interviews were just supplementary. As I said earlier, there were chapters on his youth in the seven biographies of Johnson that had already been published, so I thought I had enough material; I just needed some more color, and I'd get it through these interviews. But when I started talking to the people, I came to realize I was wrong about that. That was when we decided to move to the Hill Country—to a house west of Austin—and, as I've said, as soon as we moved out there everything changed. People started to talk to you in a very different way, and I started to get a whole different understanding of what life had been like there when Lyndon Johnson was young, and what the young Lyndon Johnson was like.

When I look back through the notebooks in which I took my notes from the interviews with these men and women, I find over and over the word "poor" written. There was a level of poverty there that a city person could hardly imagine. Some of the families who lived outside the little towns that dotted the Hill Country—Dripping Springs, Blanco, Junction, Telegraph—still lived in the log dwellings called "dog-runs," which were two separate rooms or cabins connected under a continuous roof, with an open corridor that had been left between them for ventilation. That was where the dogs slept. When Lyndon Johnson was growing up, there was very little cash in Johnson City. Very little. You could get a dime for a dozen eggs, but you had to sell them in Marble Falls, and Marble Falls was twenty-three miles away from

Johnson City. One of Lyndon Johnson's boyhood friends, Ben Crider, relates how he rode horseback the twenty-three miles between Johnson City and Marble Falls keeping the horse at a walk and carrying those dozen eggs in a box he held in front of him so that they wouldn't break, just for a dime. "Lonely" is a word that I found over and over again in my notes. (Just as in my notes on the scattered couples of East Tremont. But this was an even harsher kind of loneliness, a kind of loneliness hard to imagine—that *I* couldn't imagine, having grown up in New York City.) Lyndon Johnson didn't even grow up in Johnson City, small and isolated as it was; he grew up on the Johnson Ranch, which was fourteen miles beyond Johnson City, farther out into the hills. One corner of that ranch came down next to what they called the Austin–Fredericksburg Road, which was really not a road but only a graded, rutted path between these two places. Lyndon's little brother, Sam Houston Johnson, would tell me how he and Lyndon used to sit on the fence at that corner for hours when they were little boys hoping that a rider or carriage would come by so they'd have a new person to talk to.

Because I knew that their mother, Rebekah, was deeply unhappy due to her loneliness, and that Lyndon was affected by his mother's unhappiness, I felt that if I was going to understand him, I had to try to get a feeling for what such loneliness was like. So what I decided to do to get a taste, a tiny taste but still a taste, of such loneliness, was to spend a whole day alone in the hills, then spend the night there and wake up the next day and spend another with no one there but me. I took a sleeping bag—by that time, although I hadn't yet published a single word of my Johnson books, the Johnson family was deeply hostile to me, so I couldn't do it on the Johnson Ranch but I did it on a neighboring ranch—I spent a day there, and then I spent a night

in a sleeping bag and the next day I spent there as well, and, you know, you find out things that you could never realize unless you did something like that. How sounds in the night, small animals or rodents gnawing on tree branches or something, can be so frightening; how important small things become. It was the things I learned in those two days that helped me to understand at least a little and to write

> When Rebekah walked out the front door of that little house, there was nothing—a roadrunner streaking behind some rocks with something long and wet dangling from his beak, perhaps, or a rabbit disappearing around a bush so fast that all she really saw was the flash of a white tail—but otherwise nothing. There was no movement except for the ripple of the leaves in the scattered trees, no sound except for the constant whisper of the wind. . . . If Rebekah climbed, almost in desperation, the hill in back of the house, what she saw from its crest was more hills, an endless vista of hills, hills on which there was visible not a single house . . . hills on which nothing moved, empty hills with, above them, empty sky; a hawk circling silently overhead was an event. But most of all, there was nothing human, no one to talk to.

And what about the nights? Lyndon's father, being a state legislator, was often away in Austin. I could make a better attempt now to at least try to imagine the feelings of a woman left alone at night with her children in that empty country. "No matter in what direction Rebekah looked," I wrote, "not a light was visible. The gentle, dreamy, bookish woman would be alone, alone in the dark—sometimes, when clouds covered the moon, in pitch dark—alone in the dark when she went out on the porch to pump

water, or out to the barn to feed the horses, alone with the rustlings in the trees and the sudden splashes in the river which could be a fish jumping, or a small animal drinking—or someone coming." In trying to analyze and explain aspects of the character of the complicated man that was Lyndon Baines Johnson, you find a part of the explanation in the character of the harsh, lonely land in which he was raised.

It took me a long time to understand this—but during that time, there were moments of what were for me revelations, of insights that suddenly helped me understand.

ONE OF THESE MOMENTS had to do with his father—and with the effect on Lyndon Johnson of a mistake his father made because *he* didn't understand the land.

You can't get very deep into Johnson's life without realizing that the central fact of his life was his relationship with his father. His brother, Sam Houston, once said to me, "The most important thing for Lyndon was not to be like Daddy."

His father, Sam Ealy Johnson, looked remarkably like Lyndon. They were both over six feet tall, both had very big ears, both had that big jutting jaw and piercing dark eyes. And they both had the habit—Sam when he was in the Texas Legislature, Lyndon when he was in the House and Senate in Washington—of putting one arm around the shoulders of someone they were trying to persuade while grabbing the person's lapel with the other hand and holding him firmly and leaning into his face as they talked. And they were both master legislators. Sam, the father, was a very idealistic legislator, a legislator with a romantic streak, a legislator who felt that the purpose of government was to help people "caught in the tentacles of circumstance."

Sam was described as "a man of great optimism," and to some extent that optimism was justified in Austin: popular and skillful in the legislature, he got an impressive number of laws passed. But he also had to make a living, and he had to make it in the Hill Country. And his "optimism," his romantic, idealistic streak, kept him from looking at hard facts. In the Hill Country, that really cost him—cost him, among other things, the love, or at least the respect and admiration, of his elder son.

Generations before, during the 1870s and '80s, the era of the "Cattle Kingdom," there had been a great, sprawling Johnson Ranch along the Pedernales River from which huge herds had been driven up the Chisholm Trail to Abilene, with the original Johnson brothers returning with their saddle bags bulging with gold. But the family had ceased making money and had lost the ranch some decades before Lyndon was born in 1908 and now, when Lyndon was about ten years old, it came on the market, and Sam Johnson determined to buy it—to re-create the original "Johnson Ranch," to make the whole Pedernales Valley "Johnson Country" again.

One reason that the ranch had been lost, however, was that its soil had worn out, had washed away when cattle grazed on it, or, later, when attempts were made to grow cotton on it, and there was no longer much soil left on top of the limestone base. You couldn't do anything with the land. It still looked beautiful and fertile—when you go out to the ranch today, the grass covers those rolling hills; there are still big, majestic live oak trees with their shiny leaves. But beautiful as it was when Sam looked at it, there wasn't going to be any way of making much money out of that land. And Sam didn't realize that. Seeing how beautiful it was, he had this romantic dream of restoring the great Johnson Ranch, and so he believed he was going to make it pay, and, to

outbid other people, he overpaid for the ranch. He paid so much that the ranch couldn't possibly earn back what he paid for it. And very quickly, when Lyndon was fourteen, Sam went broke and lost the ranch. And a crucial element of Lyndon Johnson's youth is a consequence of that loss: the insecurity that followed. The family—Sam and Rebekah, the two boys and the girls, Rebekah, Josefa, and Lucia—moved to a little house in Johnson City. Every month, Lyndon had to live with the fear that the bank was going to take that house away. He lived in a house in which his father, broken by his financial failure, was constantly ill, and there was often no food, and neighbors brought covered plates. Worst of all, perhaps, his father became the laughingstock of the town, an object of ridicule ("Sam Johnson is a mighty smart man. But he's got no sense") in the speeches given at political barbecues as his son stood listening. When Lyndon Johnson was eighteen and nineteen years old, he worked for almost two years on a highway gang driving a Fresno. People in New York can't even imagine what a Fresno is. A Fresno is the device that was used to grade—to level—these unpaved highways back then. It's a big, heavy slab of iron with the front edge sharpened. Handles have been soldered on to each side. The driver of a Fresno puts a hand on each handle, and as a team of mules pulls, he pushes the sharp edge of the iron slab through the ground, a caliche soil hard to begin with and baked even harder by the sun. And because both his hands are occupied, one on each handle, he loops the reins and ties them behind his back so that, as I wrote, Lyndon Johnson was really in harness with the mules for hours every day. He lived with his father's mistake, his father's one great mistake, all his youth.

When I began *The Path to Power*, I had this romantic idea about Sam, that he was such a great legislator, fighting for people and all. Then one day Lyndon's cousin Ava, his favorite cousin, said

to me—I could tell she really didn't like it when I talked about Sam in so admiring a way—she said, "Let's drive out to the Johnson Ranch." So we drove out to the Johnson Ranch and you got there and that grass-covered landscape looks beautiful, and fertile. And she said, "Now, get out of the car." I got out of the car. Ava was an old woman but a very forceful woman. She said, "Now kneel down," and I knelt down, and she said, "Now stick your fingers into the ground." And I stuck my fingers into the soil and I couldn't even get them into the ground the length of my finger. There was hardly any soil on top of that rock. There was enough to grow the beautiful grass but not enough to grow cotton or graze cattle. Ava said to me, "Do you understand now? Sam didn't really see. He didn't want to see. It looked so beautiful." In other words, she was saying, he didn't see the reality of it. The reality—the hard unblinking facts. He deluded himself.

Now what's the relationship of this to Lyndon Johnson's political activities? Of all his political abilities—and he had so many remarkable political abilities—one of the most remarkable was his ability to count votes. To know in advance which way a congressman or a senator—and during his six years as Majority Leader, he had to know *every* senator because he was often operating with a one-vote majority, 48 Democrats, 47 Republicans and Wayne Morse, an independent—to know how every senator was going to vote on a particular motion or piece of legislation. Vote-counting—accurate vote-counting: to be right in your count, when you *have* to be right—is a very rare ability. Sometimes a senator will mislead his Leader—the Majority or Minority Leader—about how he's going to vote, or will say he's undecided himself and isn't going to decide until the last minute, or even until the roll call itself has begun, and sometimes a senator is torn between conflicting pressures or beliefs. One day he

feels he's going to vote Aye and the next day he feels he's going to vote Nay. Sometimes a senator doesn't know himself until the very last minute where he's going to come down.

And there's another reason vote-counting is difficult, which relates particularly to the place of Lyndon Johnson's youth. Vote-counting is not only a vital political art but one that's really hard to master. Very few people can master it because, as I put it in *Master of the Senate*, it is an art "peculiarly subject to the distortions of sentiment and romantic preconceptions. A person psychologically or intellectually convinced of the arguments on one side of a controversial issue feels that arguments so convincing to him must be equally convincing to others." And therefore, as one of Johnson's vote-counters put it, "Most people tend to be much more optimistic in their counts than the situation deserves. . . . True believers were always inclined to attribute more votes to their side than actually existed." But Lyndon Johnson never had that problem. His father had been the man of optimism—"great optimism." Lyndon had seen firsthand, when his father failed, the cost of optimism, of wishful thinking. Of hearing what one wants to hear. Of failing to look squarely at unpleasant facts. Because his father purchased the Johnson Ranch for a price higher than was justified by the hard financial facts, Lyndon Johnson had felt firsthand the consequences of romance and sentiment. Optimism—false optimism: for many people, it's just an unfortunate personal characteristic. For Lyndon Johnson, it was the bite of the reins into his back as he shoved, hour after hour, under that merciless Hill Country sun, pushing the Fresno through the sun-baked soil.

Of all the aspects of Lyndon Johnson that impressed people when he arrived in Washington, vote-counting came first. Over and over when I was interviewing in Washington someone would

say to me, He's the greatest vote-counter who ever lived. James H. Rowe, Jr., was a Washington insider for thirty years, the trusted, powerful adviser to Democratic presidents starting with Franklin Roosevelt. And he met Johnson when Johnson came to Washington as a congressman in 1937. He told me that even in those early days, Johnson was the very best at counting. He would figure it out—how so-and-so would vote . . . What—what exactly—would swing him." He tried to teach his staffers, as Majority Leader he would send them to talk to senators, find out which way they were going to vote, and report back to him. And the report that got him—you can't say angriest, because he was often angry, he was often flying into ferocious rages—but the report that would invariably set off one of these rages was one from a staffer who came back and said something like "I think he's going to vote this way." Johnson would say, snarl at him really, "What good is *thinking* to me? I need to *know*!" Bobby Baker, who was his chief vote-counter, said, "He never wanted to be wrong, *never*. I learned I had better *never* be wrong."

This vote-counting ability would be described to me in terms of awe, because no one quite understood where it came from. People would tell me it was almost supernatural, the way he knew how every senator would vote. In fact that's the word that was sometimes used to me in Washington: Lyndon Johnson's vote-counting ability was almost "supernatural." Yet because of my trip to the Johnson Ranch with Ava, I felt that Lyndon Johnson's genius for vote-counting was in some ways the very opposite of supernatural—that to some extent "natural" would be the best word to describe it. Rooted in nature. A product of the place, created in the place, that Lyndon Johnson was from: that Texas Hill Country. It was the Hill Country that taught him how terrible could be the consequences of a single mistake. When he was

counting votes in the Senate he used to stand in the center of the Senate cloakroom holding one of those Senate tally sheets. Aides and senators would be coming up to him and he'd be counting the votes, his thumb moving down the list of senators and pausing at the name of each senator. And, I was told, his thumb would never move until he *knew* how that senator would vote. If you want to understand what was behind him doing that, think of the land. Think of the *place*. Think of the sheer ruthlessness, the unforgivingness, of the place. The Hill Country wasn't a city where at least you have welfare and some other social services to cushion your fall if you fail. You failed in the Hill Country, on your farm or ranch, you lost the place where your family lived, you might have to pack your wife and children into your car and drive off, "sometimes," as I wrote, "with no place to go."

A senator from the state of Washington, Henry (Scoop) Jackson, served with Johnson as senator and under the presidencies of both John Kennedy and Johnson. He was asked once, "What was the difference between Kennedy and Johnson?" and Jackson said, "Well, you know Kennedy was so charming. If he needed a senator's vote he would have him down to the White House. He would explain how badly he needed the vote. But if the senator said that if he gave him this vote, it would ruin him in his state, it would ruin him with his constituency, Kennedy would understand.

"Lyndon Johnson," Scoop Jackson said, "wouldn't understand. He would refuse to understand. He would threaten you, would cajole you, bribe you or charm you, he would do whatever he had to. But he would get the vote." I felt I understood that. Because being charming, being friends, wasn't what mattered to Johnson. What mattered to him was winning, because he knew what losing could be, what its consequences could be.

Hundreds of writers—journalists and the authors of books—all agree that Lyndon Johnson was ruthless. I try to explain *why* he was ruthless—and a large part of the explanation is the place he came from.

AND HOW ABOUT the place he came *to:* Capitol Hill? He first came there in December, 1931, as a twenty-three-year-old assistant to a Texas congressman. In his whole life, he'd had only one ambition but it was going to have to start on Capitol Hill. When he was on that road gang driving the Fresno and the road gang broke for lunch and was sitting around eating, he would start telling the other men about how he was going to be President of the United States one day. Jim Rowe once said to me, "From the moment he got here, there was only one thing he wanted: to be President." But when I began talking to the people who knew Lyndon Johnson when he started out in Washington as a congressional assistant, it seemed to me as if I was again missing something, like I had missed something at first in the Hill Country: something vague, but important; that there was something crucial that I wasn't adequately describing in my writing. I wasn't fully understanding what these people were telling me about the depth of Lyndon Johnson's determination, about the frantic urgency, the desperation, to get ahead, and to get ahead fast. As if the passions, the ambitions that he brought to Washington, strong though they were, were somehow intensified by the fact that he was finally *there*, in the place where he had always wanted to be. I wanted, I guess, to show in terms of Washington, to show in terms of Capitol Hill, the contrast between what he was coming from—the poverty, the insecurity, the land of dog-run log cabins—and what he was trying for.

I first got a clue about how I might be able to do this by talking to the young woman who worked with him as the other assistant in that congressman's office, a woman named Estelle Harbin. I asked her what he had been like and she described him. It was a vivid description. She called him a real tall thin boy, he was gangling, he was skinny, he was awkward, those big ears sticking out, his clothes didn't fit him well, he had long arms and the sleeves were never long enough, and his wrists were always sticking out of the cuffs. (Alice Marsh, the sophisticated mistress who taught him to wear cuff links was still some years in the future.) He was very poor, Ms. Harbin told me. He arrived in Washington in December, 1931, with a cardboard suitcase and only one coat, a thin topcoat not adequate for Washington winters. I asked Ms. Harbin what would he say to you and she said, Well, he couldn't stop talking about his train ride to Washington. He would say, "Have you ever ridden in the Pullman [a sleeping car]? I never did until I went up." "Have you ever eaten in a dining car? I never did." When he received his first monthly paycheck he told Miss Harbin that he wanted to deposit it in a bank but that he didn't know how to open a bank account: He had never had one. She also told me how quickly Lyndon Johnson learned, how desperate he was to learn, how he became, so quickly, in her words "the best congressional assistant there ever was."

One thing that got me was her saying that when he came to work in the morning he was always out of breath because he had been running. He lived in this little hotel, the Dodge Hotel, down Capitol Hill by Union Station. His office was in the House Office Building on the opposite side of Capitol Hill, so his route to work would be to come up from that hotel, up Capitol Hill, and then to come along in front of the entire long east façade of the Capitol, before continuing down on the other side to the

House Building. Estelle Harbin lived somewhere behind the Library of Congress, and sometimes she would be coming to work and she would see Lyndon Johnson coming up Capitol Hill. And she said to me that every time he got in front of the Capitol he would start running. Well, I wanted the reader to feel all this. I wanted not just to say that he was coming from poverty, the land of little dog-run cabins, and was trying for something monumental. I wanted to make the reader *see* the contrast between what he was coming from and what he was trying for—to see the majesty and the power of what he was trying for. I wanted to make the reader see this and *feel* this as Lyndon Johnson saw and felt it. I kept thinking that the key to doing that, to showing that, was somehow on that walk along Capitol Hill. So I kept taking that walk over and over again—I don't know how many times I took it, but it was a lot of times—but I didn't see anything there. Yet obviously something on that walk had excited him and thrilled him so much that he'd break into a run every morning. And I wasn't seeing anything that would account for that.

Then something occurred to me. Although I had taken this walk a lot of times, I had never done it at the same hour that Lyndon Johnson took it, which was very early in the morning, about 5:30 in the summers, about 6:30 in winter. Since he and Estelle had been raised on ranches, they got up with the sun. I decided to try doing that to see if there was something, and there was. It was something I had never seen before because at 5:30 in the morning, the sun is just coming up over the horizon in the east. Its level rays are striking that eastern façade of the Capitol full force. It's lit up like a movie set. That whole long façade—750 feet long—is white, of course, white marble, and that white marble just *blazes* out at you as that sun hits it. And then I felt I had found a way not to lecture the reader on the contrast between what Lyndon

Johnson was coming from and what he was striving toward, and how that contrast helped explain the desperation, the frenzied, frantic urgency of his efforts—a way not to tell the reader but to *show* the reader that point instead. I don't know whether I succeeded in doing that or not, but for what it's worth here's what I wrote about when Lyndon Johnson first came to Washington.

> He lived in the basement of a shabby little hotel, in a tiny cubicle across whose ceiling ran bare steam pipes, and whose slit of a window stared out, across a narrow alley, at the weather-stained red brick wall of another hotel. Leaving his room early in the morning, he would turn left down the alley onto a street that ran between the red brick walls of other shabby hotels. But when he turned the corner at the end of that street, suddenly before him, at the top of a long, gentle hill, would be not brick but marble, a great shadowy mass of marble—marble columns and marble arches and marble parapets, and a long marble balustrade high against the sky. Veering along a path to the left, he would come up Capitol Hill and around the corner of the Capitol, and the marble of the eastern façade, already caught by the early-morning sun, would be a gleaming, brilliant, almost dazzling white. A new line of columns—towering columns, marble for magnificence and Corinthian for grace—stretched ahead of him, a line . . . of columns, so long that columns seemed to be marching endlessly before him . . . the long friezes above them crammed with heroic figures. And columns loomed not only before him but above him—there were columns atop columns, columns in the sky. For the huge dome that rose above the Capitol was circled by columns not only in its first mighty upward thrust, where it was rimmed by thirty-six great pillars (for the thirty-six states

that the Union had comprised when it was built), but also high above, three hundred feet above the ground, where, just below the statue of Freedom, a circle of thirteen smaller, more slender shafts (for the thirteen original states) . . . add[ed] a grace note to a structure as majestic and imposing as the power of the sovereign state that it had been designed to symbolize. And as Lyndon Johnson came up Capitol Hill in the morning, he would be running.

Sometimes, the woman who worked with him, coming to work in the morning, would see the gangling figure running awkwardly, arms flapping, past the long row of columns on his way to the House Office Building beyond the Capitol. At first, because it was winter and she knew that he owned only a thin topcoat and that his only suits were lightweight tropicals suitable for Houston, she thought he was running because he was cold. . . . But in Spring, the weather turned warm. And still, whenever she saw Lyndon Johnson coming up Capitol Hill, he would be running.

Well, of course he was running—from the land of dog-run cabins to this. Everything he had ever wanted, everything he had ever hoped for, was there. And that gigantic stage lit up by the brilliant sun, that façade of the Capitol—that *place*—showed him that. Showed him that, and if I could write it right, would show the reader as well.

Two Songs