

LBJ: Architect of American Ambition

by [Randall B. Woods](#)



Bio of Randall B. Woods

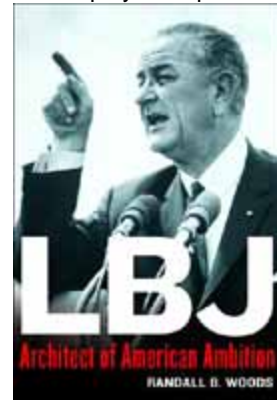
Randall B. Woods is John A. Cooper Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Arkansas, where he has taught since 1971. His *Fulbright: A Biography* won the 1996 Robert H. Ferrell Prize for the Best Book on American Foreign Relations and the Virginia Ledbetter Prize for the Best Book on Southern Studies. He lives in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Overview

For almost forty years, the verdict on Lyndon Johnson's presidency has been reduced to a handful of harsh words: tragedy, betrayal, lost opportunity. Initially, historians focused on the Vietnam War and how that conflict derailed liberalism, tarnished the nation's reputation, wasted lives, and eventually even led to

Watergate. More recently, Johnson has been excoriated in more personal terms: as a player of political hardball, as the product of machine-style corruption, as an opportunist, as a cruel husband and boss.

In LBJ, Randall B. Woods, a distinguished historian of twentieth-century America and a son of Texas, offers a wholesale reappraisal and sweeping, authoritative account of the LBJ who has been lost under this baleful gaze. Woods understands the political landscape of the American South and the differences between personal failings and political principles. Thanks to the release of thousands of hours of LBJ's White House tapes, along with the declassification of tens of thousands of documents and interviews with key aides, Woods's LBJ brings crucial new evidence to bear on many key aspects of the man and the politician. As private conversations reveal, Johnson intentionally exaggerated his stereotype in many interviews, for reasons of both tactics and contempt. It is time to set the record straight.



Woods's Johnson is a flawed but deeply sympathetic character. He was born into a family with a liberal Texas tradition of public service and a strong belief in the public good. He worked tirelessly, but not just for the sake of ambition. His approach to reform at home, and to fighting fascism and communism abroad, was motivated by the same ideals and based on a liberal Christian tradition that is often forgotten today. Vietnam turned into a tragedy, but it was part and parcel of Johnson's commitment to civil rights and antipoverty reforms. LBJ offers a fascinating new history of the political upheavals of the 1960s and a new way to understand the last great burst of liberalism in America.

Johnson was a magnetic character, and his life was filled with fascinating stories and scenes. Through insights gained from interviews with his longtime secretary, his Secret Service detail, and his closest aides and confidants, Woods brings Johnson before us in vivid and unforgettable color.

Editorial reviews

Why, after major works by Robert A. Caro and Robert Dallek, do we need another biography of Lyndon B. Johnson? The answer is that Johnson was so complex that every new biographer willing to do the tough spadework of original research discovers fresh layers of Johnsonian reality to explain, new psychological and political corridors to explore. Such is the case with this excellent new work by University of Arkansas historian Woods (*Fulbright, a Biography*). Woods finds Johnson's key motivation to be largely altruistic, emerging from righteous outrage over the poverty and racism he'd witnessed while growing up in Texas. Woods serves up a Johnson who is less cynical, less self-serving and more heroic and tragic than the man portrayed elsewhere. Woods's Johnson is a man who saw his greatest personal ambitions realized with the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1964, and the Great Society programs. Not inappropriately, Woods concludes his eloquent and riveting account by quoting Ralph Ellison, who noted that Johnson, spurned at the end of his life by both liberals and conservatives, would "have to settle for being recognized as the greatest American President for the poor and for the Negroes, but that, as I see it, is a very great honor indeed." 16 pages of b&w photos. (Aug.) Copyright 2006 Reed Business Information.

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