

INTERVIEW I

DATE: July 9, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT KLEBERG, JR.

INTERVIEWER: DAVID McCOMB

PLACE: King Ranch Offices, 2nd floor, Kleberg National Bank,
Kingsville, Texas.

Tape 1 of 1

M: Mr. Kleberg, the first thing I would like to know is when you first met Lyndon Johnson.

K: My first acquaintance with Lyndon B. Johnson was in late 1931.

The Congressman of the 14th Congressional District, Harry M. Wurzbach of San Antonio, died in office and a special election was called to fill his vacancy. Kleberg and Bexar Counties were in the same district then.

The election was called for November 24, as a session of Congress was to convene in December. My brother Dick, Richard M. Kleberg, Sr., was encouraged by his friends to run for Congress. He announced his candidacy on the evening of November 13. There was a total of ten candidates, but two dropped out before election day. The principal contender was Carl Wright Johnson of San Antonio who was pushed by the Bexar County political organization. Dick's formal announcement was published November 15.

He quickly picked up support and one of his early campaigners in the northern counties of the district was Sam Johnson, Lyndon's father, who had represented some of those counties as a member of the Texas Legislature.

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Dick's campaign was managed by his good friend, Roy Miller of Corpus Christi, and Caesar Kleberg, his cousin, who was always interested in Texas politics, with the whole-hearted support of the principal business leaders of San Antonio. Of course, I was involved, too, but these two men were in the forefront.

Well, when the ballots were all totaled on November 25, Dick had won by a plurality of some five thousand votes. The returns were quickly canvassed and Dick made plans to go to Washington for a Democratic Party caucus. The Democrats had just gained control of the House, and they were planning to return John Nance Garner to the speakership.

Dick had been managing the Laureles Division of the Ranch and it was necessary to set up a full office force to go to Washington. Roy Miller suggested Lyndon B. Johnson as Dick's congressional secretary. There was no administrative assistants then; the secretary was the office manager. Dick and Caesar agreed. Lyndon was then teaching public speaking in Sam Houston High School in Houston, having graduated from Southwest Texas State Teachers' College at San Marcos the year before. He was twenty-three at the time. His appointment to the secretarial position was announced on November 29. A few days later, all were on their way to Washington.

Lyndon did a fine job with Dick, both in handling congressional work and in assisting him with his business affairs. He stayed with Dick until 1935, when he was appointed state administrator of Texas of the National Youth Administration.

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I think it is well to make clear that in Dick's first campaign that Lyndon played no part in this campaign and, so far as I can remember, neither I nor Dick knew Lyndon Johnson. Of course he was very active in all of Dick's affairs, including the rest of his political career subsequent to Dick's first race for Congress. I think that is important because things have been said--

M: Yes, there are stories in the books that he campaigned--

K: And they're just not so, period.

M: How did your brother get Lyndon Johnson's name as a secretary?
Through Roy Miller?

K: Roy Miller knew the Johnson family, and also my cousin Caesar had known the Johnson family for some years.

M: I see. So they recommended him. They knew Lyndon and recommended him to your brother.

K: That's right. And the choice certainly seemed to have been a good one.

M: Yes, and you think that your brother did not know Lyndon Johnson before this.

K: So far as I know, he did not know him.

M: And then the appointment was made, and a few days later they went to Washington.

K: That's right.

M: Did you meet Lyndon Johnson at that point in time?

K: Yes, I did. He came down and called on all of us.

M: Did you have any impression about what kind of man he was when you first met him?

Kleberg--I--4

K: Well, I would say in the stress of a very active campaign, and one must remember this campaign only lasted nine days, he certainly made a good first impression in every way, but I recall very little of that detail.

M: Did you see much of Lyndon Johnson while he was working for your brother?

K: Yes, I visited, I saw a great deal of Lyndon both in Washington with my brother on numerous trips that I made up there, both on ranch business and, of course, to see my brother, the things that he was interested in. And Lyndon was often at the ranch after his association started with Dick, and I knew him very, very well.

M: Was he a likeable person? Did you like him at that time?

K: Yes, he was a very likeable, friendly person, and it showed at once that he attended to every detail connected with activities which he carried on for Dick. Nothing was left undone. He was very prompt and very thorough. And he had a very great personal following of his own throughout South Texas and, for that matter, in other parts of the nation.

M: Do you have any idea of why he quit working for your brother? He got that N.Y.A. post right about that time.

K: Well, I remember very well that he talked to Dick a lot about it, and I think Dick's feeling was that if he was politically ambitious and wanted to go into active government work other than as his secretary, that he was happy to see him do it and felt that he would succeed. I think he encouraged him in it.

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M: Did Lyndon Johnson and your brother have any great disagreements in politics that you might be able to tell me about?

K: So far as any open disagreement, I never heard of it. That is, with Dick.

M: Yes. The two men got along fine.

K: As far as I know, yes, and Dick trusted him and believed in him.

M: Did they remain friends then after Lyndon Johnson left?

K: Yes. Of course, my brother was one of the few people that I have ever known that I have never heard say anything against anybody; he was that kind of person. And as far as I know, he respected Lyndon and believed in him.

M: After this period of time when Lyndon Johnson worked for your brother, did you see much of him, or did he stop in to see you when he was in Corpus or Kingsville?

K: No, so far as I can recall I saw very little of him until he was in the--well, I did, after he became Senate majority leader. I went to him a number of times on matters I was interested in, for his advice. And I saw him on those occasions. But not as often or for as long periods as I did when he was actively working with Dick.

M: Was he helpful to you as a senator?

K: Yes, he was.

M: And you got along fine with him, and he would respond to your--

K: Yes. I can't remember that we ever had, what you might say, an open disagreement or anything of that kind. That doesn't imply that I agreed with him on everything he did, but we had no differences of opinion in spoken word or anything else.

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M: Yes. Did you ever campaign for Lyndon Johnson?

K: No, I did not.

M: Did he ever come through here on campaign speeches and you would meet with him and talk with him?

K: I don't recall that, but so far as I know he never asked me to do anything that I refused to do.

M: Yes.

K: But he did not call on me, no.

M: Would you care to repeat your statement or to make a statement about what you said about the development of Lyndon Johnson after he became president?

K: I feel that Lyndon showed his very best and highest qualities after he had been in the stress of being President of the United States and had all of the terrific problems that every president has. And in his case, I think he certainly had his share. And I think that prior to that time he had been one of these very easy going socially-inclined people that liked to speak up and talk a lot about every problem he had. I think that under the stress that he was under as president that he matured a great deal. I think that he did an excellent job as president from that time on. In fact I admire him more under stress, and I wrote him a letter and said so.

M: Did he respond to this letter?

K: Yes, he did. I am trying really, actually, to find the letter now, but I haven't been able to lay my hands on it. A very fine letter.

M: I would assume he thanked you for your letter.

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K: He did. I assume that if I don't find the letter that certainly he has a copy of it.

M: Yes, that should be in the Library.

K: It could be incorporated in this--

M: Well now, let me ask you sort of an open question. Is there anything that you would like to say about Lyndon Johnson that you haven't already said as part of this record?

K: Well, I think about any person that has been president of the United States you could probably talk about him all day, but I think the things I have said are the essential things. Under stress he showed his highest qualifications. And certainly when he was leader in the Senate he did a magnificent job.

M: Thank you.

K: I might add that I was asked to his Ranch on several occasions, and one of the first times I think was when he had Adenauer over here. He seated me at a table with him, and I found it very interesting. Then I went back subsequently with several of my nephews, because he said he wanted to get acquainted with some of the younger ones. And he gave the whole day up to it.

Then I was at the White House a number of times at his dinners, and prominent people which we had had some occasion to have contacts with before. One of them was the present King of Morocco, and out of that has grown a friendship with the people of Morocco, with the royal family, and actually a business enterprise.

M: Do you happen to know Mrs. Johnson?

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K: Yes, I do, very well.

M: Do you care to make a statement about Mrs. Johnson and what she is like?

K: I think she is a very able woman and she certainly was very friendly with me all the time that I knew her. And is now.

In connection with the remarks I've just made about meeting with the present King of Morocco at the White House, I would like to clear up the point that there was no business connection at that time between the President and the King or myself, of any kind. But at a subsequent date, the King did appoint one of his ministers to come and talk with me about the cattle industry in their country and asked me to go to Morocco and give them an opinion, which I have since done. I think this is probably public knowledge anyway.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview 1]

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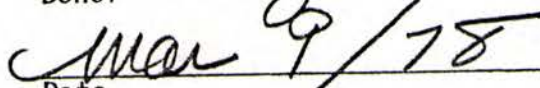
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