

THE MAKING OF A PRESIDENT

FROM SUCH SLENDER THREADS
MAGNIFICENT TAPESTRIES
ARE WOVEN

PAUL BOLTON: This is August 19, 1968; and I'm talking with Dr. R. H. Montgomery. Dr. Montgomery has had a long and varied career. He has held a professorship in economics at the University of Texas for almost exactly a half century. Doctor, I wouldn't attempt to recapitulate everything you've done. I know you've been a lecturer, a writer, an aviator in two world wars, a professor and a government advisor. Can you fill us in briefly here?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Well first I want to thank you very much, Paul, for not attempting to tell the entire story of my checkered career!

I have, as basic job of course, for most of that time been teaching at the University of Texas; and for brief periods at half a dozen other major universities in the United States. I have been away from my comfortable academic chair about half of that time. I usually tell my popular audiences that whenever we have a world war [I have been involved in two of those in my adult life], or a world shaking depression [I have also been through two of those!], or a Republican Administration -- or any other National disaster I leave my simple, quiet, peaceful academic life -- buckle on my good old Scotch shillelagh and take my proper place in the hard, cruel world of action! That, I have done five times since I've been at the University of Texas -- for periods varying from six months to six years.

PAUL BOLTON: What we are interested in of course, are your contacts with and your influence on Mr. Johnson, the present President of the United States. Where did you first get to know Mr. Johnson?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: I first met President Johnson while he was a student at Southwest Texas State College in San Marcos, where I had been graduated exactly twenty years before. He was a college debater -- as I had been in my day at Alma Mater. My relations with him there were only of the most

casual.

Two or three years later in Kingsville, Texas, when I was there at the Texas College of Arts and Industries, giving a series of lectures at their Summer Short Course; he was teaching in a small public school near by. He was a member of my audience at one of those sessions; and, I still remember, during the question period he asked me two or three quite pertinent questions.

This was during the early days of the Great Depression of the Thirties. After one of those sessions he was introduced to me by one of my most valued friends of those days -- Mr. Richard Kleberg, of the world-famous King Ranch. Mr. Kleberg and his family had been extraordinarily kind to me during my Summer Sessions at the college.

I still remember one luncheon party with Mr. Richard Kleberg at which we had a long and exciting discussion of the painful problems our world was facing. The future President was a member of our small group on that occasion. That was the first time I had ever had a real conversation with the future President; and, quite frankly I was a bit surprised at the young man's depth of understanding of the problems we were discussing, and also at his extraordinary facility in expressing his own ideas. Remember, Paul, I had been barnstorming for the United States Department of Agriculture -- across the nation -- for some years, meeting mature and deeply concerned groups of farmers. I had visited most of the states of the Union for these sessions. Our farmers were suffering probably more than any other major economic group in the United States -- at least during those first three or four years of the Great Depression. Certainly it was the most disastrous period in the experiences of American agriculture -- since the Civil War!

I am not saying that my young country school teacher understood the scope and depth of the disaster American farm-

ers were facing; nor that he foresaw the many more bitter years they would suffer -- before they were finally, after more than ten years of ever-deepening tragedy, to be rescued by the even greater tragedy of World War II!

But I am saying (if my memory is at all trustworthy) that the young man was carrying a full, man-sized, part in that first extended conversation I ever had with him.

And remember, Paul, there was one man in that small group who spoke from the vantage-point of the owners of one of the richest and most extensive agricultural complexes of the nation (The King Ranch); and another one who was in the middle of a many-year stint of speaking, for the U. S. Department of Agriculture, to farmers -- across the Nation [a relationship that was to continue sporadically down to January 18, in the year of Our Lord, 1969!]; and, who considered himself possessed of considerable expertise, in his own right! [Hadn't he, some ten years before, won his spurs -- and his Ph.D. -- with a considerable tome, on the problems of the American cotton farmer!]

In such a company young Lyndon Johnson spoke quietly, but confidently, to the problems -- and the proposals -- and the people -- under discussion. The impressions I got from that two to three hour conversation persisted for the next two or three years, during which time I had no further contact whatever with the future President.

PAUL BOLTON: Well, Dr. Bob, when did you next make contact with the President? What was the occasion?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: The next time I met President Johnson he was serving as secretary to Congressman Richard Kleberg. Mr. Kleberg had been elected to Congress in 1931. He brought Lyndon Johnson with him, as his secretary, when he came to Washington. (By the way, may I say parenthetically, that I have heard -- and read -- a number of stories as to how that

appointment, as secretary to Congressman Kleberg, was arranged -- or "influenced." Of course, I should like to claim full responsibility for it, myself! As a matter of fact, I had absolutely nothing to do with it! I never saw the future President -- even once -- between the time of that conversation in Kingsville, Texas, described a few moments ago, and his appearance as Mr. Kleberg's secretary, a year or two later.)

PAUL BOLTON: But you did have contacts with him while he was Mr. Kleberg's secretary?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Oh, I certainly did!

During those years while he was Mr. Kleberg's secretary, and for many years before, I was turning out a constant stream of my youngsters from the Economics Department at the University of Texas; youngsters who were graduating from college during the early days of the Great Depression, youngsters who desperately needed jobs! In that situation I was appealing to every man I knew in Washington -- a few Congressmen, and Government Bureaucrats -- for help for those youngsters. With that in mind, I visited Congressman Kleberg's office whenever time permitted. In fact immediately after his election I went to his office to see him -- and there was that brilliant young school teacher who had so impressed me at Kingsville -- Lyndon Johnson, now Congressman Kleberg's secretary!

During that first summer of Mr. Kleberg's first Congressional term, and during the succeeding two or three years, when I was working for the U. S. Department of Agriculture, on leave from my University of Texas professorship, the major part of my leisure time -- as I said a few moments ago -- was spent in finding those jobs for my university youngsters; and Mr. Kleberg's office was my most efficient, and most productive single source. Wherever I made an appeal to Congressman Kleberg, his secretary would write a letter to some Government Department -- usually the Department of Agriculture -- the Congressman would sign it -- and there would be another Texas youngster in

Federal Service. So it was done, if my information be reliable, in the days of The Caesars!

And right at this point, Paul, if your patience and your editorial responsibilities permit, may I inject one quite personal note into my narrative. Of course you may delete this entirely from your document -- if you think that desirable.

PAUL BOLTON: Go right ahead, Dr. Bob: This is your story; you shall have whatever opportunity you may want to revise -- or delete -- as you wish when we have completed our job here.

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Very well, then: From that strange jumble of memories that my life has accumulated during almost exactly forty years since I first met the future President, here is my report:

For this adventure into a world of communication, rather new, and quite strange to me, I must ask you, Paul, to provide a lot of careful guidance to me -- and a reasonable modicum of deletion from the finished product -- lest this become a biographical sketch of a University Professor, rather than of a President of the United States!

Now, back to the strategy session in the office of Congressman Richard Kleberg: Mrs. Montgomery accompanied me on that occasion and we must have been in that conference with the Congressman and his young secretary for two or three hours; ranging far in our conversation concerning the terrible tragedy of the ever-deepening depression that was shaking the very foundation stones of Western Civilization.

Mrs. Montgomery and I continued our own private discussion of that conference far into the night. She was more serious than I had ever known her to be -- during all our years together. We had, for a long time, been accustomed to extensive, serious sessions with small groups of my own favorite university students. The depression had somewhat enlarged that group; and had provided limitless subject matter for our sometime-fierce

Economic-Political discussions. Long ago Mrs. Montgomery and

I had borrowed a phrase from one of our favorite poets: we referred to our own little group as "Our Golden Lads!" I shall use that title hereafter.

At some point in our own private political caucus that night, Mrs. Montgomery said, in effect: [after almost exactly thirty-five years it is quite impossible for me to reproduce the exact words of our conversation: but the following is, at least, a close approximation]

"You have just introduced into our lives, such a youngster as neither of us has ever known before. He is not like any one of Our Golden Lads: I believe he is what your friends in Mathematics would call an electronic computer; he calculates the chances and, he won't make mistakes!

"Notice that he was continually pointing out to us this afternoon the probabilities in relation to every political proposal we considered.

"In precisely the same fashion, he would consider the future development -- and possible political advancement -- of individual politicians whom we discussed, in our long conversation with Congressman Kleberg. He simply did not permit his own personal likes or dislikes of an individual to color his evaluations as to what we might expect that individual to do, in a given situation.

"Remember, this afternoon, we discussed several specific agricultural bills that are, at present, before Congress. Several times, in reference to where we would expect to find strong support for -- or strong opposition to -- a particular measure which we were discussing Mr. Johnson would, with quiet assurance, say, 'Congressman X will be for us; or, Congressman Y will be against us.'

"Note two things concerning his quiet assurance in almost every case: (1) You and Mr. Kleberg usually nodded immediate assent; and (2) neither of you asked why he was so confident

in his answers!

"You could have asked him why he was so sure in his prediction. He probably could not have told you -- had you asked! Certainly, he had not read some ancient tome on Political Philosophy by Plato, or Lao Tzu -- nor even the morning's contribution of some political pundit -- for his conclusion. He just knew, that answer! Maybe, he knew that Mr. X represented the First Congressional District of Kansas (11 agricultural counties!); and the Honorable Mr. Y represented the First Illinois District -- the southern one-tenth of the City of Chicago! He just knew.

"He knows people: He will know more people; he will know them better -- every day that passes. He is the modern version of Plato's famous definition of man: 'The Political Animal!'"

That conversation, Paul, if we may safely forget the tricks memory plays on us poor time-bound mortals, occurred a full thirty-five years ago. And those thirty-five years -- in respect to confused, and confusing, historical episode -- have no fellow in the long roll of History of Earth-bound Man. But my wife's basic evaluation of Lyndon Baines Johnson (and consequently my own!) has not materially changed -- to this day.

In short may I point-up two strange things about that most extraordinary conversation between the two of us so long ago: 1) It did not occur to me, at the time, to protest either her conclusion, or the logic behind it; and 2) I have not found it expedient even once, in the intervening years, to exercise my proper husbandly prerogative -- and reopen the case for consideration of later evidence!

PAUL BOLTON: Well, Dr. Bob, that is quite a story. Whether you want to submit it as a part of your contribution to your personal history of President Johnson, we can determine later.

For the moment, suppose we go back to the story you were beginning to record for us -- the story of the Making of a President -- shall we say, by one of the Makers?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: If you dilute that "one of" by a function of

approximately 150,000,000 Paul. I shall interpose no further objection to your using it!

PAUL BOLTON: Very well, then: After you and Mrs. Montgomery had agreed that you had found the paragon of all instinctive politicians, what next?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Next, the young paragon became the State Administrator of the National Youth Administration which was in the process of being established in each of the forty-eight states. Just how that appointment occurred I shall recount in a few moments: for the moment may we center attention on how he conducted that office for the next three or four years.

PAUL BOLTON: Very well; now, after Mr. Johnson was appointed Administrator of the National Youth Administration -- did he come to you seeking direction or advice?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Help in his new job? Yes, and in fact our first session with the new N. Y. A. Administrator for Texas produced one of the most interesting little episodes of my life -- as I look back on it now. Then, he was just a young man walking into as complex a job as a man could have had at that time; and he and Mrs. Johnson came to see us when they reached Austin. As I remember that occasion the first thing the President said was, "Now look -- I need two things from you two. One thing I need is a plan of organization to salvage what we can of the younger generation of Texas."

Then he turned to Mrs. Montgomery and said, "What I need now is specific jobs that those youngsters can do; what sort of training they should have; what sorts of living arrangements we should provide for them. In short we've got to train them for their future lives and jobs in this tragic world we live in: Mrs. Montgomery, that is your job."

Then he turned to me and said, "I need one other thing -- I need a 'No-Man!' And Bob that is your job."

I said, "What's that? I have never heard of such a man."

"You have heard of 'Yes-Men?' -- They're a dime a dozen, and everybody knows that is exactly what they're worth! But I need a man who will stand up to me and say 'NO!' 'You can't do it;' then he shows me why he believes that I shouldn't try to do that specific thing -- or try to do it in that specific time, or place. But after we have thrashed that out, I either decide to accept his advice and ignore what I had first intended to do, or go ahead and do it exactly as I had intended in the first place; and thereafter he will be loyal to me with every breath he takes. That's what I mean by a 'No-Man.'"

And I said, "It just happens that I have one in my vest pocket: precisely what the doctor ordered. I have known him since he was a child. He proved his mettle to me the very first year I taught in high school, in San Marcos -- twenty years ago. He was in my Math class there. After I had been teaching for a year or two he came to me and said: 'Look Prof -- you're a good teacher. Everybody here says you're the best teacher that we've got in High School.' But you could be so much better if you'd do just one thing."

Of course, I said, 'And just what would that one thing be?' [A young high school kid coming up to tell a professor, all of twenty-two years of age, how he should teach his courses!]

He said, 'You ought to organize 'em. We can't. You just come in there and fire away! Of course everybody listens; and we're learning more than we ever did in any other course, but you ought to organize that course so we will know exactly where we are going next!' [Incidentally, Paul, I've been trying ever since to organize university courses precisely as the youngster suggested so long ago; with very little success!]

"Now I have watched that young man quite closely for over twenty years. Mr. Johnson, here is your 'No-Man!' Here is Jesse Kellam. He is a man who will say to you, 'You can't do that,' or 'you can't do that now,' or 'you can't do that here; why don't you try it at Piney Woods or Prairie Land?'"

But after you have discussed the matter thoroughly, and the

two of you have decided -- possibly -- it can be done, and it can be done now, and right here -- he will back you in what you want to do with every bit of intelligence, with every ounce of strength and every trick of the trade at his command; and I assure you he has considerable amounts of each! Mr. Johnson here is your 'No-Man:' Here's Jesse Kellam!"

PAUL BOLTON: For purposes of identification, the Jesse Kellam is the same J. C. Kellam who is now President of the Texas Broadcasting Company?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: The same, the very same. Note that he has stayed with President Johnson since the day he joined his N. Y. A. staff; first as Mr. Johnson's Assistant Director, then when Mr. Johnson was elected to Congress in 1937, Mr. Kellam became his successor at N. Y. A.

PAUL BOLTON: Now when Mr. Johnson was N. Y. A. Director do you recall any of the work that was done by the administration in Texas, during his tenure?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Oh yes. In that very first session that I mentioned a moment ago between the future President and Mrs. Johnson, with Mrs. Montgomery and me, we discussed five or six specific jobs that we thought might be desirable work for the young people in the N. Y. A. Some of those have been most important and most valuable to the people of Texas; and equally as valuable, as I shall explain in a few moments, to the N. Y. A. Directors and to the people -- and especially to the youngsters -- of the other forty-seven States.

One of those projects we agreed upon at that very first strategy session was the construction of roadside parks along the main highways of the state. Quite recently (at that time) Mrs. Montgomery and I had seen a very serious wreck on one of those highways. This one has occurred late at night, when an ancient Model T Ford carrying a Mexican family of a father, mother, and six or seven youngsters, moving north looking for

jobs, had stopped for the night. The entire family was sleeping on the ground underneath and behind their car -- on the edge of the pavement! Another car also heading north turned out of its lane -- on a two-lane highway, you understand -- to go around the sleeping family. A southbound car with no headlights plowed into it, and of course, both of them piled on top of the parked car -- and its occupants! Those occupants were scattered across the roadside in a frightful shambles! Mrs. Montgomery and I had talked of that disaster many times quite recently; and of course we knew that the same sort of tragedy was occurring on highways -- across the Nation.

Consequently, to revert to our session with the new State Director and his wife, Mrs. Montgomery suggested that one thing his youngsters in the N. Y. A. might do, was to build small roadside parks, up and down our highways, where people might have a safe place to work on the car -- to take a Siesta -- to change a tire -- or to spend a night!

PAUL BOLTON: In other words the Mexican family was parked on the road?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: That is correct.

From that one small personal experience came a suggestion that provided serious and valuable work for hundreds of Mr. Johnson's youngsters; and of even greater significance has been of incalculable value -- and pleasure -- to tens of thousands of automobile travelers on the highways of Texas!

We still have those lovely wayside parks on all major highways; they are a thing of great beauty and of great practical value to the people who drive those highways. By the way, most of the land for those parks was donated by the owners along the highways: their compensation being that the parks were named for some distinguished ancestor of Civil War -- or Colonial -- days; and a proper marker was designed, and placed in each park!

En route to Austin early this very morning we saw three or four of them; and we stopped at one "double park," in prospect

of my describing it to you at this present moment! That was a "double park:" that is, two identical clusters of buildings, vis-a-vis across the major north-south highway through Central Texas; built in that fashion to provide more efficient use of water supply, toilet facilities, and other buildings. I counted thirty-odd cars, trucks, and motorcycles that had obviously spent the night there. That one -- and the other two or three -- we saw in our thirty mile drive this morning were all loaded with people going to the Henisfair in San Antonio, spending the night at those lovely parks using and enjoying the facilities, conceived, located and partially built over thirty years ago by Mr. Johnson's N. Y. A. youngsters.

Just one more illustration of the sort of things the N. Y. A. did in, and for, Texas during Mr. Johnson's years of service as State N. Y. A. Director. That second one I should like to describe to you was designed and operated as follows: The N. Y. A. began to secure -- either by outright gifts, or purchase for nominal sums large abandoned houses -- of which there were many around every city in the United States in the mid-Thirties! In each of those houses the N. Y. A. outfitted the house -- rehabilitated it somewhat and placed in it young girls, young Negro girls, or Mexican girls, or Anglos [if my memory is accurate they were segregated at that time] who were completely unemployed, and who would at that time probably be looking forward to work as house servants.

Each house would have twenty or thirty of them living together -- with a house mother [who was probably herself a retired -- or unemployed schoolteacher!] where they did their own cooking, took care of their own beds, took care of the house and its surroundings, made their own clothing -- and prepared themselves for lives with some meaning -- and some hope!

Some of those girls were getting little pensions from the Federal Government. Very shortly a few of them began to get small jobs in nearby villages or small towns, and even in the factories of the larger cities where relatively unskilled labor

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could be used. Those are only two, of a dozen or so, specific plans discussed -- and some of them actually designed -- in that very first conference we had with the new Director and his wife.

Within one year Mr. Aubrey Williams, the National Director of N. Y. A. told me that he was suggesting to his other State Directors that they "go to Texas and see what Lyndon Johnson is doing." Within another two years or so, Aubrey Williams was requiring them to do that!

PAUL BOLTON: After the N. Y. A. days we come to the first race for Congress in 1937. What do you recall about that?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: I remember quite a lot about that race, Paul; one thing I wish I might forget!

It was my own very first active participation in that exciting world of politics! You know, Paul, at that time -- in Texas at least -- college professors did not participate in such mundane, grubby affairs!

I recall that at the time Mr. Johnson announced for Congress there were two men already in the race. Both of them I should characterize as quite conservative -- certainly not "New Dealers" by anybody's computations; and Mr. Ray Lee -- I believe at that time he was Editor of the Austin American Statesman -- was he not?

PAUL BOLTON: I think he had just left.

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Left? Well in any case Mr. Johnson had selected him as his campaign manager in the Congressional race. In fact, they announced Mr. Johnson as the candidate of the "Roosevelt people" in his district, and our fireplace at 2808 San Pedro Street, in Austin; where he and Mrs. Johnson were to live for the next two or three years while Mrs. Montgomery and I were in Washington where I had a job with the United States Department of Agriculture. With no other liberals, by anybody's calculations, in the race he won handily in that very first political contest he had ever entered -- and went to Congress.

[By the way, Paul, if you follow the script for this interview, which you provided me a few days ago, there will be considerably more testimony from me in re that particular campaign.]

PAUL BOLTON: Dr. Bob, to go back just a little bit -- it is my observation that people who did not live during the days of the Great Depression -- who have been born since that time -- do not understand just what the conditions were then, and why you were so desperately anxious to get jobs for those young people of whom you spoke a few moments ago. Can you expound a little bit upon those depression days?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Paul, it would take a more fluent witness than I am -- and one who could reach far beyond the confines of even our fantastically rich English language -- to explain to a people who have never been through it what such a depression as that means! I have been through two of them in my lifetime though the first one was mild, of relatively short duration (two or three years in the Ninety's), and I was so young, it was meaningless to me. But the one in the Thirties was vastly longer, more desperate, bitter beyond anything that can be imagined by anyone who has not experienced it! Simply thousands and thousands, and tens of thousands of people, starved to death literally -- physically!

One of the dearest friends I have had in my lifetime died because he didn't have food; and he did not have a job, and he could not get a job: there were no jobs -- the jobs simply were not there!

That young man had been a relatively well-to-do, small-town banker, with a wife and two youngsters. His bank folded; he lost his last available dollar trying desperately to salvage what he could for his stockholders and depositors. He lost his home and his car, in that last desperate endeavor.

Then, he began the endless rounds -- looking for a job. Ultimately he found a small one -- part time -- with a local utility company. The depression deepened -- month by month.

was applied: he was in the bread line once more!

His family were hungry. They ate their furniture -- their surplus clothing -- his lovely fishing tackle. Ultimately they ate his wife's beautiful diamond engagement ring -- then her wedding ring. Then -- he died!

Multiply that, by scores -- by hundreds -- thousands -- tens of thousands: That was The Depression, Paul!

PAUL BOLTON: For just a word there, Dr. Bob: Don't you think that a Nation that survived that Depression is capable of surviving what so many people talk about as our "desperate situation" today?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Desperate situation? Hell! The American people of today are living better than any people have ever lived in the history of our world -- in anybody's country! And anyone who tries to talk to anyone of my age and yours about "hard times" -- well, I think he should be sent back -- say about forty years -- and given a year or so of that!

People flocked to Texas in those days. They flocked into cities like San Antonio, Corpus Christi and Brownsville by the tens of thousands, in old Model T Fords; walking; pushing carts ahead of them. They lived under the bridges, all over the San Antonio region, because of the wonderful winter climate there, of course! They could live through the winter -- on a few pennies a day. They came from all over the Nation to some place -- just anyplace -- where they could live. That was all they asked: Enough food to keep them alive!

And never forget, Paul; that was the world into which a young man -- a young man who would one day be President of the United States -- came home to Texas as Director of the National Youth Administration, to do what could be done to save our Human "Seed-Corn" -- our youngsters! And those were the very youngsters, Paul, who thirty years later would elect that young man to the highest office of our Nation -- by the most resounding majority vote of modern times!

PAUL BOLTON: Well, now, to get back to the subject of our essay here -- during the Congressional years, during some of those years you were living in Washington I believe. You are familiar then with the time when Mr. Johnson was in the Navy?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Yes, I remember when Congressman Johnson was in the South Pacific, in the Naval Air Force -- trying so desperately to stop the Japanese sweep around our left flank.

By chance Mrs. Montgomery and I, at the time, were living in the same apartment building as Congressman and Mrs. Johnson. Of course, we were in contact with Mrs. Johnson every time we had an opportunity; but opportunities were scarce! She was working at the office from daybreak, or before, until I don't know what time of the night! Every day! In fact, I remember one time in a political campaign in our state, I wisecracked (but I was deadly serious about it!) that I think she ran that office so efficiently that nobody in the Tenth Congressional District of Texas, ever did discover that the Congressman was out of the country!

PAUL BOLTON: Did you ever take part in any of those political campaigns? I mean, did you take an active part in them, making political speeches and things of that sort?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: No. I have never made political speeches, in the sense in which you are using the term, at any time in my life. Oh, of course, all the speeches I have ever made are "political" in a more fundamental sense: not to influence how people vote; but how they live.

PAUL BOLTON: But you don't make speeches on behalf of the candidates?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: That is precisely what I am saying: not how the people should vote; but why they should vote for -- or against -- some particular proposal, or Party Platform.

PAUL BOLTON: During those Congressional years I take it that you felt free to advise Congressman Johnson whenever you were given the opportunity?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Precisely that last: "Whenever he gave me an opportunity!" When there was something on which he thought I could make some contribution -- he would ask me. And of course, I would do the best I could to explain what -- and why -- I thought he should do this -- or not do it.

PAUL BOLTON: Dr. Montgomery, you have been associated with the President for a good many years now, ever since he started his political career. Can you look at this record and summarize for us what there is in his background that made him the type of man he is today?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: In my personal opinion his experience during the Great Depression and notably during his years as National Youth Administrator in the state gave him a set of both mind and spirit that has lasted to this day.

In fact, when any new program is started by the Federal Government today -- a Head Start Program -- or a Food Stamp Plan -- or what have you, my wife says, "Oh, that is just some more of Lyndon Johnson's Unfinished Business: he is still N. Y. A. Director, you know!" And, as I may have said a few times before, in this interview, I think she is eminently correct! To Lyndon Johnson that is simply some more of his "Unfinished Business." All of that is what he would have done during the Depression if he had only had the money!

If the Nation had been rich enough, when he was N. Y. A. Director in Texas, to provide a decent chance for every child born in America -- decent food, health, a good education for every one of those children -- that is what he would have tried to provide them. Now, he is simply engaged in the most magnificent consummation of "Unfinished Business" in the history of the United States, or of any great nation in the world, as far as my knowledge of History runs. He is still -- in purpose, intention, desire, hope -- right where he was in '33-4-5-6!

He is trying to give us as a people, a system in which every child has a chance for adequate food, good health, a chance

to make a decent living, and to live a good life. He is simply projecting that program now into utterly unbelievable degrees of excellence, because we are a rich nation today: in the Thirties we were slowly starving to death!

At that time he was simply dividing up the pittance that we had to divide. For the past six or seven years he has been dividing up such wealth as no nation on earth has ever had before, and with the same fundamental attitude of justice to the human being, simply because he is a human being, that he had in N. Y. A. days. And his work in those former days made him the darling of Aubrey Williams and all his sort in the New Deal fraternity. And, I think that is a fair evaluation of the man: he is still working in his own way with such skill as no man has shown, if I can read history, in the United States.

During the Great Depression he was trying to build a decent world -- with inadequate brick -- "and no straw." He can now build that world of marble! And I think he is doing it to a degree that the great majority of people in the United States, scarcely understand today.

There is today such a surge in the standards of life, for vast multitudes of impoverished people in this country as nobody could possibly have predicted fifteen short years ago. Note -- for the moment I am not talking of the situation during the Great Depression but in our good, rich days after World War II -- quiet days of peace. Certainly no one at that time could have predicted that we would move so far in the direction he saw ahead -- saw, even in those tragic days when he was N. Y. A. Director in Texas!

Therefore, of course I approve of what he is doing -- and what he is! He is not only the shrewdest, cleverest, most efficient politician per se -- as even his political opponents and bitterest enemies sometime admit; but back of all that, and overlooked even by a great many of my own -- and of his own -- very best friends, lies a gentle spirit that was born in the man, I think.

I don't know from whence such things come; but I have seen him working with poor people, uneducated people, people in deep distress. I have seen him work during his Presidency, and a bit before even, with a people enjoying fantastic wealth -- beyond anything any other earth people have known in the long count of years. In both situations, in the lingo of my modern youngsters, "He measures up!"

PAUL BOLTON: Now, Dr. Bob, you have given us a reasonably clear, and I must say a rather careful and properly restrained sketch of the President's character, and a brief story of his early development.

Now, what I should like from you is a bit more personal review of the specific contributions you made to that development -- in short why don't you tell us about your own contributions to "The Making of a President!"

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: As you very well know, Paul, my most perceptive critic has never accused me of being an immoderately modest man! But I am profoundly skeptical of the logic implied in the concept "I did this: thereafter, that occurred: thereafter I caused 'that' to happen!" No Mathematics I have ever taught -- or studied -- or even heard about, has convinced me of the validity of that almost universally accepted bit of logic!

Never-the-less, that very chain of logic is implicit in the questions you have posed to me, in respect to my relations with the President during the past forty years. As one of the great political philosophers of our times, Al Smith, was wont to suggest: "Suppose we look at the record!"

Almost precisely forty years ago a good friend of mine, one Dick Kleberg of the world-famous King Ranch, and I -- and a few close friends -- were at a luncheon, in Kingsville, Texas. [For the moment, we will ignore a considerable spate of unrelated, and confused events, which lay -- all but forgotten in the shadows -- behind the stage on which that play was developing.]

At that luncheon a young teacher; from a near-by Mexican school, made one of our party. We discussed, at length, the deepening shadows that were enveloping our thereto-fore burgeoning world of American Agriculture. At least some of us were profoundly disturbed at the ominous prospects!

That young school master, at least in the fast-dimming memories of another of the members at that luncheon party, displayed a most astonishing depth of understanding of the problem before us; and an equally surprising facility in formulating -- and defending -- proposals for solving it.

Inexorable time passes. One member of that luncheon party has become a United States Congressman of considerable distinction in respect to that very specific problem. Another, has developed a bit of expertise as a student of -- and also a vigorous practitioner in -- the solution of such problems.

The young school master has become Secretary to the Congressman. The Recontieur has become a Government bureaucrat -- with specific responsibility for making Department of Agriculture's nostrums understandable to the farmers themselves -- and acceptable to the political community.

From a quite discrete world, the most fantastic political leader of American history, one Franklin Delano Roosevelt, has become President of the United States. With bewildering speed he began prescribing new and novel nostrums for our ever-increasing ills.

By Fate or Chance -- "who knoweth which" -- the great leader creates -- accepts -- promotes a new governmental function -- and an agency for the specific job of doing whatever could be done to save our visibly deteriorating "Seed-Corn" -- our youngsters! The newborn brainshild was christened the National Youth Administration.

The new agency must have a National Administrator; and he must recruit a state administrator for each of the forty-eight states. The first National Administrator was the Honorable Aubrey Williams. Aubrey Williams was one of my most highly-

valued friends of all the New Deal Congeries.

Now, Paul, may we step back for a complete nonsequitur -- maybe, but possibly not: "quien sabe!" Aubrey Williams was known as a before-daybreak, early riser -- to all that sleepy-headed, New Deal crowd! This raconteur claims first rank in that fellowship -- ever since that first twenty years, very close to the last of Frontier America, where a daybreak riser was considered a sleepy-head!

At a certain moment I was in Washington reporting to my U. S. D. A. superiors, after months in the field trying to explain the A. A. A. to farmers. I was staying at the Willard Hotel, at Pennsylvania Avenue and Fourteenth Street.

Aren't there enough "ifs" recounted above, Paul, to confuse an Einstein? Well, let me add a few more -- as emphasis!

Aubrey Williams was searching diligently for precisely the right young man to appoint as N. Y. A. Director in Texas -- his largest state problem, for reasons that do not require explanation to any Texan!

That is the stage. Now for the script of the play: That morning -- early -- my pre-breakfast pasear, from the Willard Hotel took me south-east down the Avenue. At Thirteenth Street I met Aubrey Williams. We sat on a small concrete bench, in the tiny park at Thirteenth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue.

Aubrey was in unusually high spirits: he had found exactly the young man he wanted for N. Y. A. Director in Texas! He counted off, on his fingers I remember: "He is young, handsome, quickwitted, out-going extrovert, agricultural background, life-long political bent ['What young man in Texas hasn't that?' asked Aubrey!], graduate of the University of Texas . . . and one of your own Golden lads!"

Then he gave me the name!

Rarely, in a very long life-time -- long past the allotted "three score and ten" . . . pressing hard on the "Four Score" . . . rarely, if ever, have I been so surprised -- so shocked -- so horrified! Had I recounted every name I could remember, of all the young Texans I knew at that time, in the order of their

acceptability (to me!) as N. Y. A. Director for Texas -- his
name would have been last on my list!

You know me well, Paul; you have known me for quite a
spell: you know I speak hesitantly -- cautiously -- in low key.
That is, unless my Irish blood starts a drum-beat that quite
over-powers my canny Scot lingo! After almost forty years I
can still reconstruct in memory a few of the choice phrases I
coined for that special occasion: Some of them are still clas-
sics, in my rough world of West Texas!

After a very long time, Aubrey said: "Okeh -- OKAY! You've
made your point. He is out! Now what shall I do? I've already
dictated a release -- for the Texas papers!"

"Obviously, first you kill that release."

"Then what? Look, you know Texas -- who do I appoint
N. Y. A. Director?"

"There's Lyndon Johnson." Simple as that, Paul. [Now,
don't ever try to convince me that there is no place for extra-
sensory perception, in a rational world, or, that luck isn't
just as important as skill in draw poker!]

So, Lyndon Johnson was appointed N. Y. A. Director for Texas.

Now, tell me, Paul: Shall I claim credit for a very
strong -- and timely -- possibly vital "hand up," that was
essential to our tale of "The Making of a President?"

"Yes?"

Nonsense! One does this: that happens; ergo, this caused
that. What complete nonsense! There are many trails -- that run
from Here to There: at every crossroad one must make a choice;
and every choice adds another factor -- to an already incredibly
complex equation!

Back to the question that started all these esoteric
computations: "Did I -- once upon a time -- play one hand in
the Great Game we are calling "The Making of a President?"
Who can say?

Of course, I should -- with great pride -- love to answer
with a resounding affirmative! All I can honestly do is --

shrug my shoulders -- lift my hands, palms up -- and intone the ancient Spanish dicho: "Quien Sabe!"

[Paul: One small private whisper to you -- off the record, please: I do not think the President has ever heard this story. In fact, so far as I know, only one other human being has known the story (of course she heard it -- immediately after the incident occurred); and she thinks it should not be told now. If you agree with her, please cut it.]

At another vital point in the careful, beautifully designed, steady -- and in retrospect quite bold -- climb to the Presidency -- my own lifeline crossed that of President Johnson -- in a most esoteric fashion. During the late summer of 1937, when N. Y. A. Administrator Lyndon B. Johnson had built his agency into one of the most useful -- and certainly by far the most popular -- of the entire congeries of New Deal Operations in Texas, the long-time Congressman of the Tenth Congressional District, the Honorable James P. Buchanan, died. For the second time -- by some incredible concatenation of circumstance -- I had an opportunity to make some sort of a contribution to the political ambitions of the future President.

Immediately after Congressman Buchanan died my own Golden Lads -- wholly on their own initiative -- not only without my direction or advice, but in fact, without my knowledge -- did a bit of political research that I have rarely seen excelled -- to this day.

Remember, those were depression days -- the very bottom of the Great Depression in Texas. Almost every one of those youngsters was in the University on some sort of Federal aid. A number of them were on N. Y. A. jobs. Even more of them were getting other forms of Federal, or State, or private grants. Some of them were my graders or research assistants at the University. Most of them were not eating -- with any tolerable regularity! A few -- tragically few -- had resources of their own -- or wealthy parents.

In an astonishingly short time that group did their own political survey of the Tenth Congressional District. I have not seen that political performance surpassed -- or even equalled -- in my full half-century of voting -- and "politicizing" -- in the Tenth Congressional District of Texas -- or anywhere else!

They had accumulated a complete list of all Federal employees in the District, their jobs, their salaries, their bosses, their uncles -- and aunts -- and cousins; of all employees of State, County and minor political entities; of all individuals receiving any sort of grants-in-aid, pensions, salaries, gifts, incomes of all sorts, from any governmental agency whatever!

They knew how much each recipient was getting; what salary or wages he earned if he was not entirely on relief; with what political party he customarily voted; what church -- and lodge -- and fishing club he belonged to -- and who his Aunt Mary had married! As I said, a while ago -- they knew everything -- about everyone -- in the Tenth Congressional District!

A few nights before the deadline date of filing for that vacant Congressional seat, my Golden Lads spread all that mass of data on our living room floor, at 2808 San Pedro Street.

Furthermore, they had drawn up my political platform, my announcement, and a story for the Press; and they had outlined my acceptance speech!

As I may have told you, this was Texas: these were young Texas lads: this was 1937: I was "Dr. Bob" -- and we were going to build a New World: By all the Gods of Mighty Olympus we would do it ourselves!

For many hours -- an entire night -- the excited youngsters sang the ancient war-hymns; they swung through all the war dances of Texas Politics: they exulted; they shouted the timeless challenges of Young Braves -- in their first war paint!

Three -- or was it four -- nights later another ancient ritual was performed on that same stage. Mr. Ray Lee, of the

Tenth Congressional District, recent Editor of the most potent newspaper in the District, stood before the fireplace at 2808 San Pedro Street. By his side stood a tall, slender, dark-haired man, still in his twenties, who in a period of less than four years had become known in every village, town and country school house in the District; known as the strongest and most persuasive representative of the New Deal, in Central Texas: Mr. Lyndon Baines Johnson -- Administrator of the N. Y. A. in Texas.

Mr. Lee produced documents. Those documents were designed to project young Mr. Johnson into the impending congressional race. He read from the documents. He commented, at many points, with mounting excitement. He was a most persuasive young man.

Mr. Johnson, himself, commented a few times, quietly and carefully -- reminding Mrs. Montgomery and me of certain things we had not forgotten!

Then I did a thing, Paul, for which I have found no adequate explanation -- or atonement -- to this day! May I be allowed a belated and most inadequate attempt at defense -- or an abject apology -- for such a stupid, mean, petty, and utterly heartless exhibition of primitive cruelty: Surely some ancient, mad, Irish ancestor of mine must have spoken by my tongue -- that night: I calmly stated, "But my own announcement will be in the morning newspapers!"

Of course my statement was greeted with a palpable, breathless, shattering silence -- even (especially!) from my wife!

Explanation -- lame apology -- childish prayers for forgiveness -- followed. Much merriment followed, also shouts of laughter -- even at the time I thought the last, a bit forced -- and quite unnecessary!

Now, Paul, one more swift peep under that strange curtain which carries the legend "It might have been:" If I had entered that Congressional race against Lyndon Johnson -- and the two vigorous anti-New Deal candidates, what do you think would have happened?

Very well, I will admit that (it being my firm opinion at the time!) Lyndon Johnson would surely have out-run Bob Montgomery! But what of those two strong, anti-New Deal candidates, in a District that was borderline range, for ultra-liberal Democrats?

So -- we are back to the question you have posed several times during this interview: "Have you ever contributed materially to the phenomenal rise of Lyndon Johnson, to the highest office of our Nation?" Did I make a contribution by refusing to run against him for Congress, in 1937?

I think not. True; if I had announced, it could probably have eventuated in his defeat for Congress. So, was not my refusal to enter that race a considerable "hand up" for the young N. Y. A. Director?

Again, I think not. As I argued some time ago, in describing another comparable: In the semi-arid West of my childhood, I learned early, that there are many trails leading to the water-hole. Who but the Fates, or the Old Blind Witch called Chance, can point the best trail to the thirsty traveler? Had Lyndon Johnson been defeated in his race for Congress in the Texas Tenth -- were there not other trails -- leading toward that same ultimate goal!

The trails which I may have made a bit more inviting -- at the start -- became long, and hard, and tortuous, running for twenty-six long and often bitter years before it ended at the White House! Who am I to say he might not have found a shorter, straighter, better one: "Quien Sabe?"

Of course -- once more -- I did look down that particular trail, as far as my untutored eye could see: and I did refuse to attempt to block that particular trail, to the embryonic President. Should that give me some sort of claim to a place in that Great Fellowship of "King Makers?"

Nonsense -- once more! The President has never -- once, in all the years between, offered any proper recompense for my invaluable service in his great adventure. He has not, for two completely adequate reasons: first, he is not quite the sort of

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man who would do that (unless I have been quite wrong in my evaluation of him, all these years); or, quite simply, because he knew I would not accept such a compensation.

And that last remark above, brings me to a consideration of the very last question you asked me, Paul, in our first session in this interview: To that question I shall now address myself; and, for once, I know my answer is correct: it has served me well, for just over forty years, with no single case of failure of purpose, and no regrets!

Your question, as I now read it from our first interview was,

"Dr. Montgomery, a final question: How do you keep the lines clear with the people you work with in the political field?"

My answer, when you first asked the question was given "off the cuff." I will now make it quite formal, precise and complete.

PAUL BOLTON: Dr. Montgomery, a final question: How do you manage to keep your lines clear with the people that you work with in the political field?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Well, Mr. Bolton, I have a letter that will probably give you your answer in a few words; it should tell you how I have kept those lines clear, for almost exactly forty years; at least since well before I first met the President.

When any one of my own students decides to enter elective politics, at the Federal -- or even the state or local -- level, and if I have influenced in any way his decision on that matter, or the ultimate outcome of his race, I have sent him a version of this letter. The reasons I do this are explained in the letter.

In at least a half dozen cases I have sent it to successful candidates who were never students of mine. That, of course, was the situation when the President ran for Congress in 1937, from my district. [There is a copy of it in his files, as of September, 1937!] The present Congressman from the Fifth

District -- Congressman Jake Pickle -- was never a student of mine either -- poor fellow! But I did work hard in his successful race in the District. I am enclosing with this document the last version of my letter as answer to your question as to how I keep my Sacred Academic Robes spotless, while enjoying the exciting hurly-burly that is Texas politics.

Dear Congressman Pickle:

This letter should have been in your hands exactly six months ago. Its contents were submitted orally to you and to certain members of your staff during your campaign for Congress last Fall. The reason for that original verbal submission were two:

First, I thought I sensed that some members of your staff had serious question as to why I was trying so hard to contribute what I could to insure your election. In short, what was there in it for me? You doubtless already know -- or will shortly learn -- that a freshman Congressman has very few luscious Federal appointments available -- to repay his campaign staff, for their onerous campaign services in his behalf!

And second -- it has been my invariable custom, for a full half century now, to submit this same assurance in every case where I have intervened actively in a political campaign at any level from precinct to Presidency inclusive.

Now, will you give me a half hour of your valuable time for a simple, clear, unequivocal, formal statement of my political position?

More than a half century ago, I read a statement by one of the ancient Greek philosophers which has influenced all of my political activities.

The old Greek Solon over 2,000 years ago said, "One may do much if he does not care who gets the credit for it." For reasons never analysed or clearly understood -- that question of who may get the credit has never seemed important to me. Many times during this half century

of adult life I have intervened in political contests, thinking to influence the selection of certain individuals for positions of public trust and responsibility at National, state and local levels.

Occasionally this intervention may have been of some value in determining the outcome; and in all cases my contribution has been accompanied with this simple, explicit assurance, "I will never ask you for anything, a job, a public contract, bail, or the fixing of a traffic ticket -- for myself."

For many years now the following pledge has been added: "I will never accept at your hand any special favor." The reasons for this assurance, are two.

First this will leave me absolutely free to offer advice and counsel in respect to any matter of public interest which may arise in your jurisdiction without subjecting you to any suspicion concerning my reason for giving that advice.

Second: This leaves me free to ask your assistance in finding jobs in public service for some of these wonderful, and of course, well trained youngsters, who come to me every semester in ever-increasing numbers for advice and help in finding their proper places in our complex world!

In respect to this second pledge to you is added the assurance given to everyone to whom I have made such recommendations: "I do not recommend one of my youngsters unless I know him quite well personally; unless I believe he can and will render satisfactory service in the job for which I am recommending him; and unless I consider him the best man I know for the specific job, who is presently available."

And, finally, if any youngster of mine has, within my knowledge any attitude, characteristic, training or background which could adversely affect his competence

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in the job, that will be made explicit to you.

The above code is curiously puritanical; but in my experience it has proved very valuable from a practical standpoint. Further, let me make it entirely clear to you that on occasion, unless you wish to avoid all such unsolicited counsel and recommendations, you will get them from me! Some will be forthcoming shortly -- more as your tolerance permits: and if you decide that my advise is desirable or my youngsters acceptable public servants, you will ask for more -- of both! I await your decision on both counts. "Say when!"

And that I sent to Congressman Jake Pickle, having sent almost word for word the same letter to some fifty-odd public servants. Most of them in -- or from -- the State of Texas; a dozen or possibly a score by now, at the national level. The President of the United States has one of those in his files from September, 1937. And that was by no means the first: I had already sent it to two Governors of Texas; and a spate of State Legislators, and a few Congressmen.

PAUL BOLTON: Well, Dr. Bob, I must admit that is a unique trick -- and about the most ingenious I have ever discovered! It certainly ought to be effective in doing the thing which you designed it for.

It is most extraordinary to find a man who is so vitally interested in politics, as you obviously have been all your life; but who not only does not want anything for himself from the politicians with whom he works, but who will not take anything from them -- under any circumstances. At least I can now understand why so many of them have come to you for help; and maybe that is exactly what you have wanted, all the time!

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Careful, Paul: I think you may have discovered a deep secret of mine. At any rate it is my opinion that I have enjoyed my half-century of political dabbling more than any politician I may possibly have helped -- even a President of the United States!

PART BOLTON: No wonder a lot of people think you are just a
nice encephaloid -- so do I!

Now is there anything else you would like to add before we
conclude this long -- and quite revealing -- interview?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY: Yes, there is one more small comment I should
like to put on the record, before you shout "Cut."

At several points you have asked me, in effect, what I
personally contributed to the election of the President. At
each recurrence of that question I tried honestly -- if a wee
bit stuffily -- to repudiate any implication that my contribu-
tions, if any, had been vital or even measurably valuable.

That was not done from any long-overdue expression of
modesty on my part. Rather, it stems from my strong conviction,
after a long lifetime of observing -- and on occasion of practic-
ing -- the Political Arts, that no one incident or action is
absolutely vital in relation to some specific, future outcome.

All ultimates rest uncertainly on a vast congeries of inci-
dents. No single incident can be measured precisely as essential --
or even valuable -- to a specific outcome. No man can say, with
any clear validity, that this act of mine led unerringly to that
End. All any honest man can say is "I did this -- and this --
and this: Other things were done -- by other men -- at other
times, and places. And, Lyndon Baines Johnson became President
of the United States of America."

From such slender threads magnificent tapestries are woven!

Defense -- and Defendant -- rest.

Robert H. Montgomery

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Gift of Personal Statement

By Dr. R. H. Montgomery

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, R. H. Montgomery, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

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