



Penn History Review

Volume 24
Issue 1 *Spring 2017*

Article 8

3-21-2018

"We of the South": President Lyndon Johnson, Jonathan Worth Daniels, and the Re-Southernization of the White House

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“WE OF THE SOUTH”:
PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON,
JONATHAN WORTH DANIELS, AND THE
RE-SOUTHERNIZATION OF THE WHITE HOUSE

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INTRODUCTION

At 12:30 p.m. on Friday, November 22, 1963, President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Two hours later, the Texan Lyndon Baines Johnson was sworn in as the thirty-sixth president of the United States aboard Air Force One. Kennedy’s assassination stunned the world. As with momentous events such as Pearl Harbor before, and 9/11 after, the great majority of Americans remember exactly where they were and what they were doing at the moment Kennedy was shot. Despite being floored by a profound sense of loss, however, the American people also recognized the symbolic importance of President Johnson’s ascension to the highest office in the nation. As soon as Johnson entered the White House, commentators stressed that he was the first resident of a southern state in a century to get there.¹ Although President Woodrow Wilson was born in Virginia, another former Confederate state, he was considered to have voided his southern credentials by establishing residency in New Jersey. Many thought a *true* southerner would never reach the Oval Office, and southern elites were among the principal doubters. As historian William Leuchtenburg stated in his book, *The White House Looks South*, prior to the culmination of Johnson’s political ascent, “[a]mong Southerners on Capitol Hill it was an article of faith—bitter faith—that no Southerner would ever be President of the United States.”² As Johnson

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assumed the presidency and prepared to run for election in his own right, this “southern-ness” quickly became a critical issue.

This paper examines the story of Johnson’s rise and his victory in the 1964 presidential election. It traces the arc of Johnson’s ambitious political career, paying specific attention to the 1964 election and the way in which the Texan won North Carolina. This paper argues that Johnson calculated and shaped a specific path to the White House by leaning heavily on figures such as Jonathan Worth Daniels, the North Carolinian editor of the *Raleigh News & Observer* (*N&O*). Daniels and Johnson’s relationship was more than simply a strategic bond; it offers a case study of southern identity and the evolution of southern liberalism in the twentieth century. The give and take between Daniels and Johnson yields interesting takeaways with regard to the press, the populace, and the president. Their interactions reveal that Jonathan Daniels was a pivotally important figure in Lyndon Johnson’s presidential campaign. Johnson’s relationship with Daniels afforded the Texan a window into the minds of North Carolinians; it allowed him to truly grasp these citizens’ feelings, especially on divisive issues such as race. This nuanced understanding of North Carolinian politics ultimately proved decisive in carrying the state.

Although Daniels was clearly among the elite of society—his family was one of the wealthiest in the southeastern United States—his correspondences reflected interactions with all elements of society. For every letter addressed to President Johnson or Governor Terry Sanford, there is one postmarked to a farmer in eastern North Carolina, or a thoughtful piece authored in response to an angry “letter to the editor.” These letters provide a fascinating window into North Carolinian politics, where race was a contentious, highly partisan topic in the 1960s due to polarizing events such as the Greensboro sit-ins and ongoing debates regarding segregation.

Throughout his tenure in national politics, Lyndon Johnson maintained a close relationship with Jonathan Daniels,

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a bond held together by a mutual commitment to bring the South back to the forefront of American politics. While several biographers—most notably Robert Caro, Robert Dallek and William Leuchtenberg—have written on the issue of Johnson’s southern identity, none have done so by examining his relationship with the press, or more specifically with Daniels. The correspondence between Lyndon B. Johnson and Jonathan Worth Daniels raises important questions about the nature of relations between press and president in the twentieth-century election cycle. It also exposes questions about the concept of “southern-ness” in early twentieth-century America and sheds light on the intense feelings of alienation many southerners such as Daniels and Johnson felt.

Ultimately, this paper concludes that Lyndon Johnson and Jonathan Daniels formed a mutually beneficial relationship, which allowed the Texan to gain a more nuanced understanding of North Carolinian feelings on issues such as sectionalism and race. Despite their vastly different professional and personal backgrounds, Daniels and Johnson bonded over their shared southern identity and desire to mend regional tensions. Moreover, the two men possessed the foresight and determination to realize that providing a solution to the South’s racial issue would be the best way forward. Johnson and Daniels’s symbiotic relationship was built upon a bedrock of mutual southern understanding and borne out of a shared desire to correct the historical record as it pertained to the South’s post-Civil War reputation.

JONATHAN DANIELS FINDS HIS VOICE

During World War I, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels posed for his picture at the entrance to the White House with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, his assistant secretary. Later, while reflecting on the photograph, Daniels said to FDR, “We are both looking down on the White House, and you are saying to yourself, being a New Yorker—“Some day I will be living in

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that house’—while I, being from the South, know I must be satisfied with no such ambition.”³ Josephus would not live to be proven wrong. Nor would the senior Daniels live long enough to watch his son Jonathan become an integral part in the rise of the southerner he could not foresee.

Jonathan Worth Daniels was born on April 26, 1902, in Raleigh, North Carolina. Daniels enjoyed an unconventional childhood, yet he did so within the mainstream of southern society. Though Daniels was encouraged to adopt traditional southern liberal attitudes towards race—his father taught him to condemn the Ku Klux Klan, but favor segregation—Jonathan’s unique childhood experiences led him to eventually reconsider such norms. The Danielses’ house sat directly across the street from Shaw University, a historically black college in Raleigh. According to his biographer, Charles Eagles, Daniels’s proximity to Shaw likely led him to believe that black and white differed less than most whites thought, since Daniels saw young black students working and studying at Shaw just as whites did at nearby schools like North Carolina State.⁴ Daniels also enjoyed the company of a black housekeeper and playmate during his youth. These relationships in Raleigh proved vital to the formation of Daniels’s inquisitive nature and atypically liberal attitude towards race. The experiences of his childhood echoed in Jonathan Daniels’s mind for his entire life and undoubtedly shaped his attitude regarding civil rights.

Daniels’s father, Josephus, was a prominent southern liberal who served as secretary of the navy during World War I and as United States ambassador to Mexico. These jobs forced the Daniels family to move to the nation’s capital when Jonathan was ten, but they also afforded him an exciting change in lifestyle. Jonathan Daniels benefited from his parents’ intellectually stimulating lives. Their position in society provided Jonathan with an abundance of good books to read, interesting people to meet, and serious conversation in which to engage.⁵ Josephus’s work also provided Jonathan with the opportunity to travel

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and expand his worldview. Among his various jobs, Josephus's true love was journalism. This passion led the elder Daniels to purchase a controlling interest in the *Raleigh News & Observer*, a once proud regional publication, at a foreclosure sale in 1893. At the conclusion of his tenure on Capitol Hill, Josephus and his family returned to the Tar Heel State to run the *N&O* as a family enterprise.

Jonathan Daniels was similar to, and shaped by, Josephus. Both father and son graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Both father and son served time on Capitol Hill. And both of them possessed a natural curiosity, which begat a love for journalism. The *Raleigh News and Observer* would become the channel for this passion and a vessel for father-son bonding. Like his father, Jonathan Daniels worked closely with Franklin Roosevelt in Washington. Whereas Josephus served above FDR as secretary of the navy during World War I, Jonathan served under Roosevelt as his press secretary prior to the president's death in 1945. In late 1944, Josephus became sick like FDR himself.

After remaining on board long enough for President Harry S. Truman to choose his replacement, Jonathan Daniels returned home to assume control of the *News & Observer*. He presided over the paper during a period of immense growth, as the *News & Observer* bought out the *Raleigh Times*, opened a new downtown office, and rapidly built upon its base readership throughout North Carolina. All the while, Daniels made sure the paper maintained its liberal bent. Personally responsible for the bulk of the editorial board, Jonathan ensured that the *News & Observer* actively promoted stances in keeping with those of his father and the Democratic Party. It is critically important to qualify, however, that the *News & Observer*'s positions were typical of North Carolinian Democrats and not the national party. Like Josephus Daniels, the paper often supported positions such as segregation in schools that were antithetical to the national Democratic Party. This began to change as Jonathan assumed

control.

As Jonathan took over the *News & Observer*, he sought to uphold his father’s vision of the role the paper should play in North Carolinian life. As Cleves Daniels wrote in a letter to his family concerning the future of the *Ne&O* in October 1964, “[Josephus] believed that it was important to both give people the news and to educate them at the same time.”⁶ The younger Daniels worked steadfastly to ensure that his family’s newspaper did just this. The *News & Observer* did not simply present stories for its readership to digest. “Old Reliable,” as it was known, brought its readers—who hailed primarily from the rural, otherwise isolated parts of North Carolina—into the mainstream by shaping their understanding of how to think about certain issues. A September 1963 letter to the editor from a seemingly typical reader named C. Stanton Coates demonstrates the degree to which Daniels was successful. Coates detailed in gushing terms the way the *Ne&O* had served as a father figure and educator in his life. As a boy, Coates “always looked forward to the Sunday issue, which came to [him] in rural Johnston a day late via R.F.D.”⁷ The *Ne&O* was not simply a source of entertainment for Coates as a child, however. Coates grew with the paper, and in turn “Old Reliable” educated him on the affairs of the world and how to feel about such developments: “Growing into manhood I put away the comics for the more noble and glorious sections.”⁸ Despite expressing concerns over the veracity of some stories in the *Ne&O*’s recent past, Coates’s account reveals the degree to which the *News and Observer* was more than just a paper. The Danielses’ family paper was not only a fixture in the community and an educating force—it constituted a powerful political weapon.

Jonathan Worth Daniels reached his prominent, publicly visible position largely due to the influence of his father. Josephus Daniels paved the way for his son financially and professionally. Moreover, Josephus taught Jonathan to think critically, develop his passions, and view education as an essential, never-ending pursuit. While Daniels owed his father a great deal for helping

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him grow, Jonathan had to split from Josephus in order to further his growth and cultivate his own voice. This meant adopting more progressive stances in his daily editorials. As Charles Eagles wrote, Josephus Daniels saw no need to discuss racial affairs; he simply accepted that segregation and subordination of Negroes was the best solution for the matter.⁹ On this issue specifically, and many others, Jonathan Daniels refused to accept the status quo or simply take traditionally accepted beliefs at face value. Jonathan was somewhat apologetic for his racial editorials at first.¹⁰ He knew that he had his father’s confidence and trust, however, which overcame their differences in opinion.¹¹ Not only did Josephus accept his son’s stances, he even encouraged them. In a personal correspondence between father and son, Josephus agreed to set aside his private ideological differences with Jonathan for the good of the *N&O*. He told Jonathan, “In the meantime you must go ahead doing your duty as you see it.”¹²

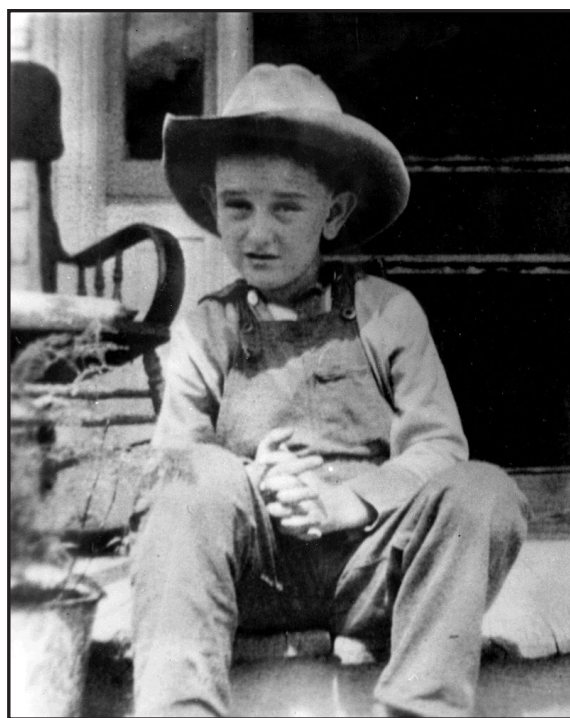
LBJ FINDS HIS PASSION

Despite the fact that they were born over 1,300 miles apart and into entirely different socioeconomic backgrounds, Lyndon Johnson and Jonathan Daniels enjoyed similar upbringings in several critical respects. Although he was not a national figure like Josephus Daniels, Lyndon’s father, Sam Ealy Johnson Jr., was a prominent regional figure who served in the Texas House of Representatives for a decade. Sam Johnson and his wife, Rebekah, encouraged their eldest son to read newspapers and interact with his fellow schoolchildren so as to nurture his curiosity and broaden his worldview. Johnson’s parents also emphasized achievement, ambition, and public service. According to his primary biographer, Robert Caro, Johnson’s parents instilled in him a civic ethic from a young age.¹³ Sam Johnson would also encourage his children to think critically; he would spur talk of “serious issues” and stage debates on a myriad of topics at the dinner table on a regular basis. Like Daniels, Johnson was said to

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have had a “highly inquisitive mind” from his earliest days. Well aware of this fact, Sam Johnson consciously worked to nurture his son’s curiosity.

Much like Jonathan Daniels, Lyndon Johnson was the beneficiary of an unconventional racial education. Although he grew up in a nearly exclusively white section of Blanco County, Texas, Johnson witnessed the worst excesses of southern segregation and racial prejudice while teaching at the Welhausen School in Cotulla, Texas, as a young man.¹⁴ In 1927, Johnson moved to Cotulla, in the state’s southwestern corner, in order to earn enough money to complete his undergraduate degree. Upon reaching Cotulla, he found it to be a destitute town with an overwhelmingly Mexican population. This experience, however, did not reaffirm Johnson’s preexisting racial biases. Instead, Johnson’s time in Cotulla became a watershed event in the formation of one of his guiding political ideologies, as he came to view education as the key to realizing the American dream.



Lyndon Johnson as a young boy in 1915.

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Johnson felt that his students were hampered not by inherent racial inadequacies, but by poor education and the unfortunate circumstances of their birth.¹⁵ Thus, Johnson’s spell in Cotulla led him to second-guess his innate racial biases.

Whereas Josephus Daniels nurtured his son to love journalism, Sam Johnson raised Lyndon to take an interest in politics. Much as Jonathan revered Josephus, Lyndon adored his father from a young age; he could usually be found sticking to Sam like a shadow and imitating his mannerisms.¹⁶ As Lyndon Johnson grew, so too did his ambition. When Sam Johnson was elected to the legislature in Austin, it only seemed natural to bring Lyndon with him. Sam brought his son into Austin’s legislative chamber so frequently that many legislators believed Lyndon was one of the page boys.¹⁷ While Johnson certainly learned a great deal with his father in the state capital, his experience in Austin paled in comparison to the wisdom Sam imparted to him on the campaign trail. Lyndon relished the opportunity to campaign with his father and interact with people across Blanco County. Prior to one particularly important campaign stretch, Sam told Lyndon, “If you can’t come into a room and tell right away who is for you and who is against you, you have no business in politics.”¹⁸ This piece of advice stuck with Johnson his entire life and permanently shaped his approach to politics.

Lyndon Johnson’s father was integral to his son’s political rise and to the development of his political ethic. Sam Johnson paved the way for Lyndon’s professional future by introducing him to the world of politics. He also encouraged his son to think critically, develop his passions, and treat education as essential. Like Daniels, Johnson inevitably had to split from his role model in order to realize his true potential. While Jonathan Daniels looked past his father’s ideals, Lyndon Johnson set his career sights significantly higher than his father had. Although Lyndon idolized his father in his youth, the two Johnsons strove to fulfill starkly different dreams. The elder Johnson never harbored ambitions of making it to Washington. As fellow Congressman

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Wright Patman once said of Lyndon’s father, “Sam’s political ambitions were limited. He didn’t have any aspirations to run for Congress. He wanted only local prestige and power, and the Texas House was fine for him as his limit.”¹⁹ For Sam’s son, Blanco County—and even all of Texas—would never be enough. Legend has it that on the day of Lyndon’s birth, the Johnson family patriarch rode around town on horseback shouting that a United States senator—his grandson—had been born that day.²⁰ Lyndon did not shy away from such rhetoric; rather, it imbued in him a strong sense of belief. Johnson truly believed he would one day become president.

The difference in political aspirations between father and son is encapsulated perfectly in the account of a Johnson City, Texas, resident who told Robert Caro, “Sam liked to argue; Sam’s son liked to win arguments—had to win arguments. Sam wanted to discuss; Lyndon wanted to dominate.”²¹ Lyndon Johnson sought to dominate every discussion, win every argument, and triumph in each election. This ceaseless ambition would ultimately lead LBJ to Washington and later to the highest office in all the land. It was there on Capitol Hill that he would become acquainted with Jonathan Worth Daniels.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF ACQUAINTANCE

Lyndon B. Johnson relied on a savvy use of the press as a political weapon to take the pulse of his constituency and to widen his sphere of influence. Jonathan Daniels proved to be a particularly important figure in helping Johnson realize these aims. Although the precise first point of contact between the two men is unclear, correspondence between them dates back to the mid-1940s. Johnson and Daniels continued a steady, if not robust, rapport over the years as Johnson accrued power on Capitol Hill. Naturally, as Johnson’s power and reach widened, so too did his level of interaction with the press across the nation. From the early days of his youth, Johnson recognized the power

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of the newspaper. Throughout his childhood, he could be found reading a copy of whatever he could get his hands on. Johnson would read any paper cover to cover; it did not matter if the publication was from a local outlet or a national titan. When he ventured into the world of regional politics, he maintained this habit and began to interact strategically with the major players. He made a concerted effort to make friends with the most important people across his district. Johnson canvassed far and wide to court the right people in the right places all across Texas, leading many to believe that he had statewide ambitions from the day he arrived in the legislature.²²

Johnson made and used friends in the press to solidify his support within his district, specifically by allying himself closely with George Marsh and his influential Austin newspaper, the *Austin News-Tribune and Herald*.²³ Lyndon Johnson could work his constituency directly when he was simply a congressman. As former Texas State Representative Welly Hopkins attested, “Lyndon knows every man woman and child in Blanco County.”²⁴ By all accounts, Johnson possessed an unusual gift for meeting and interacting with the public. As Johnson’s ambitions and reach shifted, however, so too did his contacts, as his ability to reach the people directly diminished. Upon moving to Capitol Hill, he kept on reading, yet Johnson began to favor more nationally influential publications such as the New York and Washington newspapers, as well as the *Congressional Record*.²⁵ During his rise, Johnson never forgot his father’s advice. He possessed an incredible ability to find and identify the pulse of his constituents, and the press played a pivotal role in his ability to do so. This luxury allowed Johnson, as his father instructed, to always know who was for him and who was against him as he walked into any given room. Johnson sought to retain this advantage as his influence expanded from the fourteenth district to the entire state of Texas. In the nation’s capital, this task became exponentially more difficult as Johnson’s influence magnified. As his ambitions outgrew even the Lone Star State, regional mouthpieces such

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as Jonathan Daniels became necessary contacts for Johnson’s Rolodex.

DANIELS AND JOHNSON’S SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP FORMS

Jonathan Daniels and Lyndon Johnson would eventually strike up a mutually beneficial relationship based on a shared southern understanding, which existed in the hopes of delivering North Carolina to Johnson in the 1964 election. In exchange for his political support, Daniels received a host of benefits. This relationship began to form in the period between Kennedy’s assassination and the 1964 presidential election, as Daniels and Johnson’s correspondence intensified. During this period, the two men discussed a wide-ranging set of issues in a consistently cordial and friendly tone. They spoke about everything from issues of minor importance to matters with serious national implications. Ultimately, however, their conversations centered on the two men’s visions of a better America. Johnson and Daniels bonded over discussions of civil rights and their progressive, evolving ideas regarding the matter. They also bonded over their shared southern identity.

Lyndon Johnson and Jonathan Daniels asked and received a great deal from each other. From Daniels, Johnson asked for public support—in editorial form—on several key issues, which would shape popular opinion and ultimately help sway the 1964 election in North Carolina. Johnson understood just how much Daniels’s word—and the paper’s word by extension—meant to the readers of the *News & Observer*. Kennedy had added Johnson to the Democratic ticket in 1960 almost exclusively to win states in the solid south, such as North Carolina. Johnson’s increasingly progressive stance on racial equality, however—in tandem with Goldwater’s pandering to segregationists—meant these southern states would be in play in 1964. Keeping his father’s advice in mind, Johnson recognized that he would have to campaign aggressively and work collaboratively with major

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figures of the press like Daniels in order to retain traditionally Democratic strongholds such as eastern North Carolina, where the *N&O* circulated heavily.

Johnson and his advisers would repeat a simple process when reaching out to Jonathan Daniels. President Johnson would write Daniels, asking for an editorial on issue X, written with slant Y. Daniels would comply immediately. Shortly thereafter, he would receive a letter from Johnson thanking him graciously for his support. Daniels would then write back to the president, thanking him for his letter and pledging unlimited support in the future. Typically, such letters would close with a bonding remark relating to southern pride, or with Daniels mentioning how thankful he was for Johnson’s friendship. One example of many concludes with a note from Jonathan Daniels postmarked September 28, 1964. In this letter, Daniels wrote, “Dear Mr. President: I am grateful for your note about my editorial based on my understanding and appreciation of your fighting qualities back in the days of our first associations.”²⁶ This remark was in response to Johnson’s earlier request for Daniels to write an editorial acknowledging the pair’s longstanding relationship. By “the days of our first associations,” Daniels alludes to the early days of the pair’s friendship, dating back to the mid-1940s, when Johnson was a little known member of the House hailing from Texas’s tenth district. This editorial served as an “I knew him when” piece. It was likely effective in fostering a positive perception of Johnson in the eyes of working class eastern North Carolinians.

Such an editorial aimed to make the readers of the *N&O* understand Johnson as a relatable character—a hard worker of modest origins. In reality, Johnson likely understood these citizens, as he had developed sympathy for the poor and oppressed during his childhood and experiences in Cotulla.²⁷ The Texan never forgot the poverty and rural isolation of the Hill Country of his youth. Although Johnson did ask for specific editorials to portray himself and his candidacy in a

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calculated manner, Daniels’s personal notes indicate that the North Carolinian wrote in good faith while doing so. The two operated with a mutual understanding that Daniels’s work was of vital importance; though never explicitly stated, it is clear that Daniels and Johnson believed a series of strategically planned, well-written editorials would help the Texan carry the eastern portion of North Carolina and win the state.

While Johnson asked a considerable amount of his North Carolinian friend, Jonathan Daniels also requested his fair share of favors in return. Daniels’s correspondence with Johnson reveals a bevy of requests for the Texan. On January 18, 1964, Daniels wrote President Johnson at Governor Sanford’s suggestion in order to notify the president of the excitement in North Carolina relating to “the establishment of the proposed Environmental Health Center of the United States Public Health service.”²⁸ Daniels hoped that the president could turn the proposed center into a reality. While Daniels’s request, like all from his camp, was submitted humbly, it also not so subtly listed reasons why it would be in Johnson’s best interests to comply. Knowing that the president was eyeing the 1964 election, Daniels pleaded a case for Johnson having the *NeO* on his side: “We have had three tough goes in Presidential elections in the years just behind us. I’m proud that we carried the State all three times, and thought it may sound like boasting, we carried it in the area dominated by the circulation of the *News and Observer*.”²⁹

Moreover, in asking for the realization of a North Carolinian dream, Daniels crafted an appeal that detailed the ways in which the *NeO* could prove pivotal in the realization of some of Johnson’s own political aspirations: “[The *NeO*’s area of circulation] roughly is our ‘black belt’ where feeling has been highest on civil rights and could be intense again.”³⁰ Here, Daniels craftily hinted at the merits of forming a reciprocally beneficial relationship and appealed to Johnson on an issue in which he knew they both had a vested, common interest. Thus, Daniels subtly indicated to Johnson that he could not only help

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him win North Carolina, but also shape the state after winning it.

Jonathan Daniels submitted a variety of other requests for Johnson’s consideration, such as one in March 1964 to issue a “stern rebuke to extremists on city streets as well as political platforms.”³¹ All evidence suggests that the president was receptive to such requests. The Environmental Health Center in the aforementioned correspondence was erected in Durham in 1966, two years after Daniels helped provide Johnson with the east North Carolinian firewall the Texan needed to win the Tar Heel State.

Daniels’s support proved immensely important for Johnson as he carried every North Carolinian county east of Randolph. Johnson ran up particularly large margins in winning rural eastern counties where the *N&O* reigned supreme, despite the expectation that such counties would be hotly contested. As Daniels noted in a post-election letter to Johnson, “We’re proud of you! We’re proud of North Carolina! And we are happy about the fact that Eastern North Carolina, where the *News and Observer* circulates went strong for Johnson despite dire predictions that that was the area where Goldwater would break through to victory in this state.”³² Daniels and Johnson’s correspondence continued well after the Texan had secured victory in 1964. Despite the importance and maintenance of their relationship, however, Daniels’s post-election communications were outsourced to the president’s staff. Nonetheless, Daniels sent requests for Johnson to consider certain proposals and attend events in North Carolina, such as the Shaw University centennial celebration of 1965, which he saw as relevant to the promotion of the Great Society.

Daniels, moreover, remained happy to publish editorials essentially on demand when they would promote positions he already supported. He penned one typical editorial in October 1965, advocating the adoption of the highway beautification bill. He wrote to the president’s wife, Claudia “Lady Bird” Johnson, “Your Gal Friday Liz Carpenter called me yesterday morning

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about an editorial on the highway beautification bill and I was happy to oblige.”³³ On this occasion, and many others, Daniels immediately and obediently served Johnson and his administration when called upon. Later in the same letter, Daniels voiced his appreciation to the Johnson administration, writing that he had been “beating the drum” for the cause of highway beautification for many years, adding that he did so “without much hope before you came along.”³⁴ This remark reflects Daniels’s feelings for President Johnson. Despite Daniels’s obvious strategic interest in forming a relationship with the president, the North Carolinian also revered and believed in the man.

Although he was called upon to write on a wide variety of subjects, Daniels’s correspondence with President Johnson’s office indicates that the North Carolinian was always ready to serve on command. On May 14, 1965, for example, one of Johnson’s special assistants wrote to “express [President Johnson’s] sincere appreciation for [Daniels’s] editorial of May 5th concerning the nature of America’s actions in the Dominican Republic.”³⁵ This aide went on to detail why President Johnson felt Daniels’s literary contribution was so crucial:

The situation in the Dominican Republic is most troubled and complex. The reasons for the United States’ actions could easily be misinterpreted to America and to the World. Because of this, the President was so pleased to see the informative explanation which you gave to this manner.³⁶

Johnson and his advisers recognized Daniels’s reach and role in shaping public opinion in North Carolina. The Johnson administration viewed Jonathan Daniels as a valuable asset in securing re-election and in promoting stances on a variety of issues such as foreign policy, mental health, and specific proposals such as the highway beautification bill once re-election had been secured. Johnson viewed Daniels as having the power

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to correct the historical record in North Carolina on complex issues such as U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic in the 1960s. Daniels held a reciprocal belief in the ability of a Johnson presidency to correct the historical record on a major issue near and dear to both men.

WHAT LBJ’S PRESIDENCY MEANT FOR THE SOUTH

Daniels’s relationship with the president suggests that they both felt a shared duty to restore the South’s reputation and return the region to national prominence. Although Daniels’s primary job was editor of the *Raleigh News & Observer*, the North Carolinian concurrently worked in several auxiliary capacities. Daniels represented North Carolina as a delegate at a handful of Democratic National Conventions. Additionally, he published a number of books and poems. Interestingly, Daniels also accepted invitations to write forewords on a wide variety of subjects, frequently using these forewords as a platform to correct the historical record as it related to southern attitudes towards race and the South more generally. In his 1957 foreword for Dr. Thomas J. Woofter’s *Southern Race Progress: The Wavering Color Line*, Daniels wrote:

Sometimes in the South today [the segregation problem] is treated like something that fell off the moon or was dropped almost as fortuitously by a fumbling supreme court. And in the North the impression is sometimes given that the South itself is one furious posse pursuing every colored man who asserts its rights.³⁷

Daniels believed that racial issues such as segregation were too often portrayed in a fundamentally incorrect, incomplete, and harmful manner. He refuted the notion that racism and racial issues were problems that were simply dropped in the South’s

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lap. As a southerner, Daniels was deeply aware of the region’s long, complex racial history. He believed that discounting that history, and looking solely at recent developments, was reductionist. In his foreword for Dr. Woofter’s book, Daniels also addressed what he deemed to be an unhealthy relationship between the North and the South as it related to race. Daniels was very well-educated and progressive; he clearly acknowledged that the South had room to improve inter-racial tensions. Yet he also recognized and hoped to debunk two myths: Daniels hoped to prove that racial issues were not exclusive to the South and that the region was not composed solely of racists.



President Johnson’s official White House portrait.

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Another foreword for a revised edition of George Nichols's *The Story of the Great March* illustrates the ways in which Daniels believed the Civil War was the genesis of the two aforementioned myths and the reason for a southern sense of profound collective guilt. Daniels was highly critical of Nichols, a former Union soldier and journalist who served under General William Tecumseh Sherman prior to publishing his account in 1865. Daniels pointed to inconsistencies in Nichols's work and the way they created a “devil's brew.” Nichols wrote that seeing “the spectacle of burning homes aroused in him only feelings about a south paying its long overdue debt to justice and humanity.”³⁸ Daniels believed that Nichols's factually incorrect, biased, toxic narrative, and thousands like it, led Americans to view the South as fully culpable for the Civil War without acknowledging the sins of the North. Daniels eloquently pointed to the hypocrisy of this statement and highlighted the ways in which Sherman's march “wasn't simply a march of disciplined military destruction.”³⁹ Nichols noted that “men and officers, too, took everything from silver cups to carriages, gold watches, chains and rings.”⁴⁰ Daniels did not seek to excuse the wrongs of the South; he simply aimed to prove that the South was not “occupied only by extremists on both sides,” in the hope of debunking the idea that the South had a long overdue debt to pay.⁴¹ Moreover, Daniels hoped to highlight the fact that the South and North could work together, as the two were neither diametrically opposed nor free of guilt. He believed that Lyndon Baines Johnson could be the man to foster this reunification of a splintered nation and correct the South's historical record.

Lyndon Johnson was acutely aware of his southern identity and of the potential he held to mend daunting regional tensions. As a president born in a former Confederate state, Johnson felt he carried a personal burden in representing the South and dispelling the myths surrounding the region. When he became president, Johnson determined, “I've got to show southerners are not dumb, I'm going to defend the south by

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showing every time how much I know. I’m not going to use metaphors. I’m not going to be folksy.”⁴² He felt a personal duty to prove that southerners belonged in the executive branch. Johnson and Daniels both recognized that a successful LBJ presidency could help bring the South back into the Union and the mainstream of American politics. From his first moments in office, Johnson offered the hope of reconciliation and the prospect of a future in which the South could be an integrated part of the United States rather than a separate region that stood against the rest of the nation.⁴³

Johnson was uniquely well equipped to appeal to the South. As a southerner himself, he understood both the history and feelings of southern people.⁴⁴ He truly understood what it meant to come from the South in twentieth-century America. Johnson empathized with the southern pride the Sons of Dixie felt, and he understood the shame of being discriminated against solely due to his place of birth. The president understood these concepts because he had lived and breathed them. Lyndon Johnson and figures like Daniels were also prescient in recognizing that promoting civil rights would unblock the quickest route to reclaiming southern pride and correcting the South’s historical record. In the words of political journalist Theodore White, LBJ spoke “in the presence of other southerners as a southerner who had come to wisdom.”⁴⁵ This wisdom led Johnson to provide his southern compatriots with an ultimatum disguised as a choice. On the campaign trail in 1964, he issued one of the signature speeches of his political career, declaring:

Today the south like the rest of the nation is at a crossroads...between a glory of what can be—and a glory that was. A choice has been forced upon us. It is the choice between a new progress—and a new nullification. Here in Charleston, once the hub of the Old South, you have to make that choice.⁴⁶

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DANIELS, JOHNSON, AND JIM CROW:
RACE AS THE KEY TO SOUTHERN REINTEGRATION

Daniels and Johnson eventually came to see race not as an issue, but as *the* issue that prevented the South from reentering the American political mainstream. This was not always the case, however, despite the prognostication of another Texan, sociologist V.O. Key. In the 1940s, Key identified the bulk of literature on southern politics as conforming to one of two caricatures:

In both caricatures there is a grain of truth; yet each is false. The south, to be sure, has its share of scoundrels, but saints do not appeal markedly less numerous there than on the other side of Mason and Dixon's line. Rather, politics of the south is incredibly complex.⁴⁷

Key asserted that a variety of issues set the South “against the rest of the country.”⁴⁸ Despite all of its issues he believed that one towered above all the rest: “The race issue broadly defined thus must be considered as the number one problem on the southern agenda. Lacking a solution for it, all else fails.”⁴⁹ While it is difficult to pinpoint an exact date, it is clear that Daniels and Johnson came to the same conclusion as Key by 1964; they believed that abandoning Jim Crow once and for all was the only way the South could truly merge with the rest of the nation.

Neither of these men, however, came to such a conclusion in a linear manner. According to Charles Eagles, Daniels's challenge to attitudes towards race emerged tentatively over the span of several decades.⁵⁰ Daily editorials forced Daniels to constantly grapple with his personal stances, as well as the moral and political ramifications of such statements. Johnson also took many years to see the light and incorporate civil rights into his own political imperative. Reflecting on his career after

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the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, LBJ observed, “I do not want to say that I have always seen this matter, in terms of the special plight of the black man, as clearly as I came to see it in the course of my life and experience and responsibility.”⁵¹ Daniels and Johnson also shaped each other’s understanding and views regarding racial equality during their two decades-long correspondence. Upon reaching this understanding, the two men were uniquely qualified to enact the changes they deemed necessary.

Daniels used his pen to educate and shape the minds of his readership. Week after week, he sold the men, women, and children of rural, eastern North Carolina on the idea of a new, post-Jim Crow South, while Johnson attempted to make that new South a reality. Lyndon B. Johnson had the sensitivity, personal experience, political acumen, and southern credentials to connect with southerners and work the political establishment to inspire a shift in attitudes towards racial issues. He was able to connect with people in places such as rural, eastern North Carolina partially because of contacts like Daniels, but also because he



President Johnson signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

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knew how the denizens of such areas felt. Johnson knew that citizens of poor, rural southern states were not just poor. He understood that they *felt* poor. The president empathized with these men and women who felt “back in the woods” because as a southerner in Washington, he felt the same way.⁵²

Johnson was able to tap into an intangible feeling and rally enough support in key areas of the South to carry the torch for an evolving southern liberalism in Washington. His alliance with Daniels was integral in rallying the base of support that was necessary to carry North Carolina in 1964. Johnson had to internalize and set aside both his southern pride and his southern shame in order to lead. Rather than serving as purely a southern leader, Johnson served as a national leader. The president certainly felt the sting of northern elitism and name calling; he battled crippling insecurity and constantly wondered if he could ever fit in amongst the Washington elite, whom he referred to as “Harvards.” Yet Johnson overcame these feelings of insecurity in an attempt to lead the South back into the political mainstream.

As much as he tried, however, Johnson could never entirely separate himself from his southern pride. He toiled ceaselessly to ensure that future generations of southerners would not have to feel the sting of “discrimination for the geography of their birth” or grow up in a dichotomy of two regions in which it was simply unthinkable that a southerner could become president.⁵³ Johnson’s southern identity served as the catalyst for his fight against racial injustice and his struggle to correct the South’s historical record as Daniels had hoped. He once said, “I know the burdens the south has borne... And I want to see those burdens lifted off the south. I want the ordeals to end and the south to stand where it should stand as the full and honored part of a proud and united land.”⁵⁴ Even some of Johnson’s fiercest opponents—many of them southern—conceded that the Texan was integral in leading the region from the fringes of politics into the core of the nation. One of these opponents, Virginia Durr, stated, “Lyndon brought the south back into the

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mainstream politics of the United States. That is my belief, that he really struck the shackles. I mean, Lincoln struck the shackles off the slaves, but Lyndon struck the shackles off the south. He freed us from the burden of segregation.”⁵⁵ Johnson could never have done so without the help of men like Jonathan Worth Daniels.

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NOTES

- ¹ William Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 323.
- ² Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 535.
- ³ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, quoted in Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 402.
- ⁴ Charles W. Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 15.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ⁶ Cleves Daniels, Letter to *Raleigh News & Observer* Board Meeting, October 19, 1964, Letter. From Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *The Southern Historical Collection*.
- ⁷ C. Stanton Coates, Letter to the Editor, Jonathan W. Daniels, August 4, 1962, Letter. From Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *The Southern Historical Collection*.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations*, xiv.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ¹² Josephus Daniels, quoted in Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations*, 6.
- ¹³ Sylvia Ellis, *Freedom's Pragmatist: Lyndon Johnson and Civil Rights* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 14.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.
- ¹⁶ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 98.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 114
- ¹⁸ Sam Ealy Johnson, quoted in Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 75.
- ¹⁹ Wright Patman, quoted in Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 178.
- ²⁰ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 89
- ²¹ Anonymous Johnson City Resident, quoted in Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 78.
- ²² Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 534.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ²⁴ Welly Hopkins, quoted in Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 203.
- ²⁵ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 80.

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²⁶ Jonathan Daniels, Letter to President Lyndon Johnson, September 28, 1964. From Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *The Southern Historical Collection*.

²⁷ Ellis, *Freedom's Pragmatist*, 14.

²⁸ Jonathan Daniels, Letter to President Lyndon Johnson, February 18, 1964, Letter. From Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *The Southern Historical Collection*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Jonathan Daniels, Letter to President Lyndon Johnson, January 14, 1964, Letter. From Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *The Southern Historical Collection*.

³² Jonathan Daniels, Letter to President Lyndon Johnson, November 14, 1964, Letter. From Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *The Southern Historical Collection*.

³³ Jonathan Daniels, Letter to Lady Bird Johnson October 5, 1965, Letter. From Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *The Southern Historical Collection*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Jonathan Daniels, Letter to President Lyndon Johnson, May 14, 1965, Letter. From Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *The Southern Historical Collection*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Jonathan Daniels, Foreword to *Southern Race Progress*, 1957. From Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *The Southern Historical Collection*.

³⁸ Jonathan Daniels, Foreword to *The Story of the Great March*, 1958. From Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *The Southern Historical Collection*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Lyndon Johnson, quoted in Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 392.

⁴³ Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 377.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁴⁵ Theodore White, quoted in Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 322.

⁴⁶ Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 319.

⁴⁷ V.O. Key Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (Knoxville: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1949), 1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

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⁴⁹ Ibid, 675.

⁵⁰ Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations*, 16.

⁵¹ Lyndon Johnson, quoted in Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 127.

⁵² Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, 118.

⁵³ Ibid, 340.

⁵⁴ Lyndon Johnson, quoted in Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 377.

⁵⁵ Virginia Durr, quoted in Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 380.

Images

Page 136: “A picture of Lyndon Johnson in 1915 at his family home in the Texas hill country near Stonewall, Texas and Johnson City,” 1915, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lyndon_B._Johnson_-_15-13-2_-_ca._1915.jpg (accessed May 5, 2017).

Page 146: “Official Presidential portrait of Lyndon Baines Johnson,” Elizabeth Shoumatoff, 1968, via Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ljohnson.jpeg> (accessed May 5, 2017).

Page 150: “Lyndon Johnson signing Civil Rights Act,” Cecil Stoughton, July 2, 1964, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lyndon_Johnson_signing_Civil_Rights_Act,_July_2,_1964.jpg (accessed May 5, 2017).