

Day One

Kennedy and Johnson

➔ Americans were surprised when JFK chose LBJ as his running mate. Read silently.

“Johnson is Nominated for Vice President; Kennedy Picks Him to Placate the South,” declared the newspaper headline in July 1960. Americans were stunned when John F. Kennedy selected Lyndon B. Johnson to be his running mate. The two politicians were viewed as striking opposites. Kennedy was youthful and charming, while Johnson was experienced and brusque. Kennedy hailed from a wealthy family in the northeast, while Johnson grew up in poverty in Texas. Kennedy attended an Ivy League university, while Johnson attended a local teaching college. However, Kennedy believed Johnson could help him sway the south.

After their victory, Kennedy did not admit Johnson into his inner circle. Tip O’Neill, a congressman at the time, said the Kennedys “had a disdain for Johnson that they didn’t even try to hide . . . They actually took pride in snubbing him.” However, President Kennedy endeavored to keep Johnson occupied, as he worried about Johnson undermining him. With decades of experience in Washington, Johnson was a force to be feared.

Upon President Kennedy’s tragic assassination, Johnson unexpectedly ascended to the presidency. Johnson proceeded to win the following election and served as president for six years. Although Johnson initiated his presidency with unusually high approval ratings, his popularity faded by 1968. Following dismal results in the early Democratic primaries, Johnson dropped out of the 1968 presidential race. The Republican candidate, Richard Nixon, would go on to win the election and succeed Johnson as president.