

Jesse Winchester's Studio

Gallery



Coke Stevenson

I've been reading Robert Caro's biography of Lyndon Johnson. Mr. Caro has devoted years of his life to this project - there are three volumes so far, he's currently working on the fourth. This might sound like a lot more than you want to know about LBJ, but they are great books, ranking with David McCullough's "Truman", William Manchester's and Martin Gilbert's biographies of Winston Churchill, and Edmund Morris's two volumes about Teddy Roosevelt. The picture Caro paints of LBJ is not pretty - the man was an unprincipled, power-mad liar. The second volume, "Means of Ascent", focuses on Johnson's first successful race for the U. S. Senate, which he won by outright fraud, defeating a former governor of Texas named Coke Stevenson by 87 votes, and earning himself the ironic nickname "Landslide Lyndon".

It's the character of Coke Stevenson that kept the book from weakening my faith in humanity in general, and democracy in particular. Caro, probably relieved to be writing about someone with a conscience for a change, depicts him as a true conservative - a preserver of what's good in life, the ideals and values that will never change: honesty, courage and self-reliance. Johnson's campaign relied on money, hoopla and lies, while Stevenson refused to respond to LBJ's attacks, and ran a modest, dignified race - a modern-day Cincinnatus. At this time in our history I think it's important to be reminded that genuine conservatism is a necessary, even a beautiful philosophy, which must be represented by sincere and eloquent proponents if we are to follow the light. It's easy to forget this when we are confronted every day with phony conservatives, who offer only greed, ignorance and arrogance. Here's what Coke Stevenson had to say on the subject:

"A conservative - he's the one who holds things together. He shouldn't fight all progressive movements, but he should be the balance wheel to hold the movement to where it won't get out of hand."

If Lyndon Johnson had lost that race, if the Supreme Court - skillfully and shamelessly manipulated by his friend, Abe Fortas - hadn't let him get away with an outrageous, criminal subversion of democracy, he would have been politically finished, he would not have become president, and we would probably have escaped the wrenching tragedy of Vietnam. Is this ringing a bell with you?



David Nobbs

For over forty years David Nobbs has written for some of the greatest names in British comedy: John Cleese, Leonard Rossiter, Billy Connolly, Frankie Howerd, Eric Idle, and many others. He has also given us some of the funniest novels I've ever read. I love to hear you laughing, dear reader, and I'm afraid you may be worrying too much about the world's troubles. Take a little time off from your grave concerns and read "The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin," "Fair Do's", or "A Bit of a Do." Then, with your cheery optimism restored, you can go back to sowing death and destruction amongst the Philistines with a smile on your lips and a song in your heart.

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