# By Lyndon B. Johnson: Intensifying Campaign for Equal Rights

## Discussions With Gov. Wallace Proved a Turning Point in 1964

INSTALLMENT V

*Following is the fifth of 11 installments of excerpts from Lyndon Baines Johnson's memoirs of his Presidential years, which will be published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston on Nov. 1 under the title "The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969":*

WHEN I was in the Senate, we had an extra car to take back to Texas at the close of each Congressional session. Usually my Negro employes—Zephyr Wright, our cook, Helen Williams, our maid, and Helen's husband, Gene — drove the car to the ranch for us. At that time, nearly 20 years ago, it was an ordeal to get an automobile from Washington to Texas—three full days of hard driving.

On one of those trips I asked Gene if he would take my beagle dog with them in the car. I didn't think they would mind. Little Beagle was a friendly, gentle dog.

But Gene hesitated. "Senator, do we have to take Beagle?"

"Well," I explained, "there's no other way to get him to Texas. He shouldn't give you any trouble, Gene. You know Beagle loves you."

But Gene still hesitated. I didn't understand. I looked directly at him. "Tell me what's the matter. Why don't you want to take Beagle? What aren't you telling me?"

Gene began slowly. Here is the gist of what he had to say: "Well, Senator, it's tough enough to get all the way from Washington to Texas. We drive for hours and hours. We get hungry. But there's no place on the road we can stop and go in and eat. We drive some more. It gets pretty hot. We want to wash up. But the only bathroom we're allowed in is usually miles off the main highway. We keep going till night comes—till we get so tired we can't stay awake any more. We're ready to pull in. But it takes us another hour or so to find a place to sleep. You see, what I'm saying is that a colored man's got enough trouble getting across the South on his own, without having a dog along."

Of course, I knew that such discrimination existed throughout the South. We all knew it. But somehow we had deluded ourselves into believing that the black people around us were happy and satisfied; into thinking that the bad and ugly things were going on somewhere else, happening to other people. There was nothing I could say to Gene. His problem was also mine: as a Texan, a Southerner and an American.

All these attitudes began to change in the mid-nineteen-fifties and early nineteen-sixties. The Supreme Court's epic 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of Education cast permanent doubt on the conventional wisdom of "separate but equal." This decision gave the civil-rights movement a new burst of hope and faith.

Nothing makes a man come to grips more directly with his conscience than the Presidency. Sitting in that chair involves making decisions that draw out a man's fundamental commitments. The burden of his responsibility literally open up his soul. No longer can he accept matters as given; no longer can he write off hopes and needs as impossible.

WHEN I sat in the Oval Office after President Kennedy died and reflected on civil rights, there was no question in my mind as to what I would do. I knew that, as President and as a man, I would use every ounce of strength I possessed to gain justice for the black American.

Even the strongest supporters of President Kennedy's civil-rights bill in 1963 expected parts of it to be watered down in order to avert a Senate filibuster. The most vulnerable sections were those guaranteeing equal access to public accommodations and equal employment opportunity.

I made my position unmistakably clear: We were not prepared to compromise in any way. "So far as this Administration is concerned," I told a press conference, "its position is firm." I wanted absolutely no room for bargaining. The battle would be fought with dignity and perhaps with sorrow, but not with anger or bitterness. We would win, by securing closure, or we would lose.

One man held the key to obtaining closure: the minority leader of the Senate, Everett Dirksen. Without his cooperation, we could not enlist the support of the moderate Republicans, and without Republican support we could not obtain the two-thirds vote necessary for closure.

As the debate continued through March, April and May, a new and disturbing element of public opinion came into play. Gov. George Wallace of Alabama had declared himself a candidate for President and had entered the Democratic primaries in Indiana, Maryland and Wisconsin with an emotional campaign of opposition to civil rights and a thinly veiled racist call for law and order. Most analysts predicted that he would receive 10 per cent of the vote; his actual totals more than tripled that prediction.

But the civil-rights troops on the Hill did not fall apart. Quite the opposite—the Wallace show of strength served to emphasize more than ever the essential need for national unity through a peaceful and progressive resolution of the racial issue. In this critical hour Senator Dirksen came through, as I had hoped he would. On June 10 he took the floor of the Senate to say:

"The time as come for equality of opportunity in sharing in government, in education, and in employment. It will not be stayed or denied. It is here. . . . America grows. America changes. And on the civil-rights issue we must rise with the occasion. That calls for closure and for the enactment of a civil-rights bill."

With this speech, Dirksen sounded the death knell for the Southern strategy of filibuster. For the first time in history the Senate voted closure on a civil-rights bill. With all 100 Senators present and voting, we needed 67 votes for the two-thirds rule to obtain closure. We got four more than that. Three weeks later the Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the most sweeping civil-rights measure enacted in the 29th century.

But there was no time to rest. Tensions in the South were still running high. That same summer three civil-rights workers were brutally murdered in Mississippi. Churches were bombed and lives were threatened. In the North a different set of tensions exploded—the tensions of poverty, squalor, unemployment and inadequate health care.

THE theme of "law and order" became a major thrust of Senator Goldwater's campaign for the Presidency in 1964. I shared the growing concern about violence, but I believed the real danger, far more profound than violence and far more perilous, was the increasing alienation of the black citizens from American society. Our representative system was based on the joint premise that all citizens would be responsible under the law and that the law would be responsive to the needs of all citizens. But in the field of human rights a significant number of citizens had not been fully served by our system. I feared that as long as these citizens were alienated from the *rights* of the American system, they would continue to consider themselves outside the *obligations* of that system. I tried to state this position as fully as I could in the Presidential campaign. I wanted a mandate to move forward, not simply a sanction for the status quo.

On Nov. 3, 1964, the American voters gave me that mandate. I moved to use it quickly. I directed Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach to begin the complicated task of drafting the next civil-rights bill—legislation to secure, once and for all, equal voting rights. In many ways I believed this act would be even more critical than the previous one. Once the black man's voice could be translated into ballots, many other breakthroughs would follow, and they would follow as a consequence of the black man's own legitimate power as an American citizen, not as a gift from the white man.

I would work within the Federal Government; the black leadership would take their cause directly to the people. The capstone of their campaign was a 54-mile march through Alabama from Selma to Montgomery. Two abreast, blacks and whites together, the marchers walked, singing the words of an old Baptist hymn.

The singing came to an abrupt end early in the evening of March 7, when the marchers reached the Edmund Pettus Bridge at the southern edge of Selma and were confronted by Sheriff Jim Clark and a mounted posse. The sheriff ordered the marchers to turn around. They knew their rights and refused. The Alabama state troopers took matters into their own hands. With nightsticks, bullwhips and billy clubs, they scattered the ranks of the marchers. More than 50 men and women were severely injured.

As I watched the reruns of the Selma confrontation on television, I felt a deep outrage.

The most obvious step, and the one most passionately desired by citizens in the North who supported equal rights for the Negro, was to send Federal troops to Alabama. I understood this desire and the deep concern that motivated it. But I knew that a hasty display of Federal force at this time could destroy whatever possibilities existed for the passage of voting-rights legislation. Such action would play into the hands of those looking for a states' rights martyr in Governor Wallace.

Meanwhile, there was a storm of public protest to contend with. In front of the White House scores of demonstrators marched up and down with placards. Across the nation hundreds of sympathy marches and sit-ins were mobilized.

Once again my Southern heritage was thrown in my face. I was hurt, deeply hurt. But I was determined not to be shoved into hasty action. If only there were some way to assure protection for the marchers without the drama of using Federal troops; if only the State of Alabama would exercise its state's right and assume its constitutional obligation.

Y. R. Okamoto

President Johnson with minority leader, Everett McKinley Dirksen, key to civil rights legislation

My hopes were answered on Friday, March 12, when Governor Wallace wired me requesting a special meeting to discuss the situation in Selma. I replied immediately that I would be "available at any time." An appointment was set for noon the next day. We sat together in the Oval Office. I kept my eyes directly on the Governor's face the entire time. I saw a nervous, aggressive man; a rough, shrewd politician who had managed to touch the deepest chords of pride as well as prejudice among his people.

I told him that I believed the only useful way to handle the demonstrators was to respond to their grievances.

"The Negro citizens of Alabama who have been systematically denied the right to register and vote have to be given the opportunity to direct national attention to their plight," I said.

The Governor turned then to the question of troops. In his view, the state held the responsibility to maintain law and order. I agreed with him at once and told him that was precisely my point. I told him I had 700 troops on alert. If the state and local authorities were unwilling or unable to function, I would not hesitate one moment to send in Federal troops.

The meeting with Wallace proved to be the critical turning point in the voting rights struggle. Several days later I received word from the Governor that the State of Alabama was unable to bear the financial burdens of mobilizing the National Guard. The state could not protect the marchers on its own. It needed Federal assistance. I gave such assistance immediately. I signed an executive order federalizing the Alabama National Guard.

By March 14, the Justice Department had completed most of its work on the draft of the voting-rights bill. Four months later our immediate goal was realized. On Aug. 6 I returned to the Capitol to sign the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

With the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 the barriers of freedom began tumbling down. At long last the legal rights of American citizens —the right to vote, to hold a job, to enter a public place, to go to school—were given concrete protection.

But these legislative victories served to illuminate the full dimensions of the American dilemma. No matter how hard we tried to make up for the deprivation of the past and no matter how well we thought we knew the black man, the time would come when we would be forced to realize the measure of his bitterness. And the time would come when we would realize that legislative guarantees were not enough.

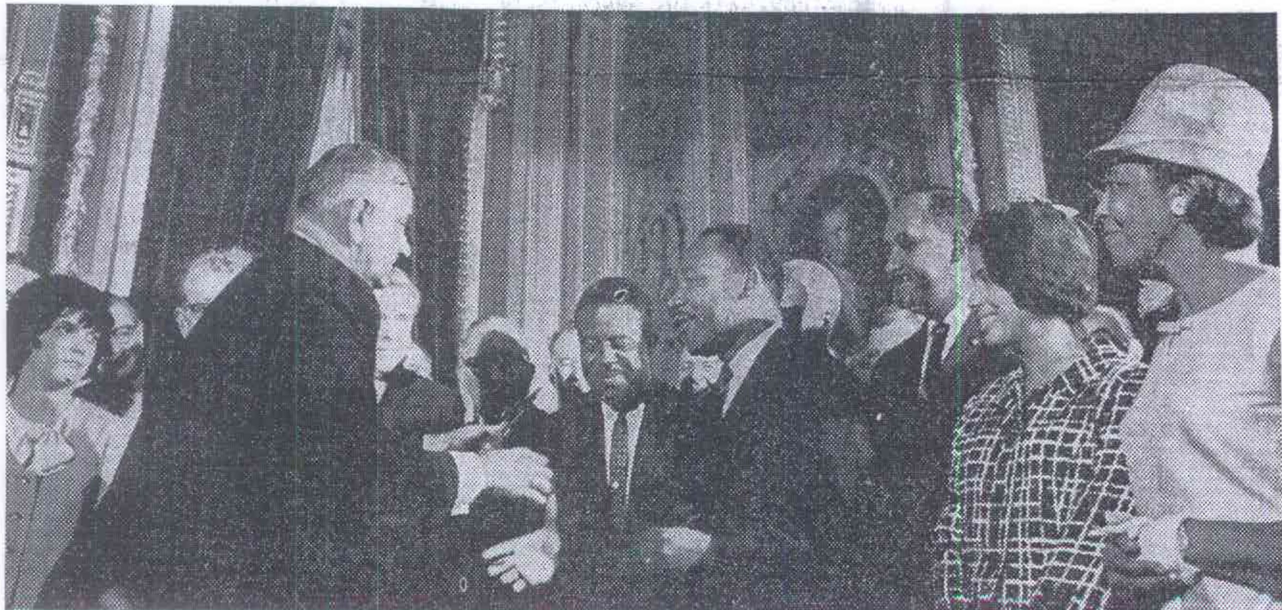
I HAD been concerned about the Dominican Republic from the day I took office, and indeed well before that time. The Dominicans had lived for 30 years under the iron-fisted rule of dictator Leonidas Trujillo. During those years, which ended with Trujillo's assassination in 1961, those who opposed Trujillo had three choices: to go into exile, to go underground or to remain quiet. Most Dominicans had chosen the third course.

We were encouraged in 1962 when the Dominican people held their first free elections in recent times. I carried the best wishes of the American people to Santo Domingo that year when I attended the inauguration of the newly elected President, Juan Bosch, as President Kennedy's personal representative.

A military junta overthrew Bosch in September, 1963. This was a major setback for our common hopes. The U.S. Government immediately cut off economic aid and withheld recognition of the new leadership in Santo Domingo until a civilian provisional government was formed and pledged itself to hold free elections within two years.

The temporary regime was headed by former Foreign Minister Donald Reid y Cabral, a moderate who had been abroad when the coup was carried out. Reid suspected, with good reason, that a number of Dominican Army officers were plotting his overthrow in the spring of 1965. He decided to move against them before their plans were completed. On April 24, 1965, he sent Army Chief of Staff Rivera Cuesta to a military camp northwest of Santo Domingo to cancel the commissions of four officers accused of conspiring against the Government. Instead of surrendering themselves, the officers made Cuesta a prisoner and seized control of the camp. Another uprising against the Government had started.

The situation was confused, and so were the first reports that came in from our embassy. Rebel elements had seized several radio stations in Santo Domingo and called on the people to go into the streets to celebrate the "overthrow" of the Reid Government. They responded by the thousands, some of them shouting support for Juan Bosch, others calling for the return of former President Joaquín Balaguer. The embassy reported one particularly ominous development. Trucks loaded with weapons, manned by junior officers and noncommissioned officers, were moving into the capital from the nearby rebel-held camps. The soldiers were passing out weapons to civilians, especially to those shouting anti-Government slogans.



Y.R. Okamoto

The President being congratulated by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, center, and other civil-rights leaders at White House after signing the Voting Rights Act on Aug 6, 1965.

From Camp David I remained in close touch by phone with Secretaries Rusk and McNamara and with McGeorge Bundy, who had gone to the White House situation room to follow developments. I decided that we must take precautions in case we had to evacuate American citizens from the Dominican Republic. At midmorning on Sunday, April 25, we ordered the Atlantic Fleet to move ships toward Santo Domingo. The ships were to remain out of sight of land but to stand by in case of need.

Conditions in Santo Domingo deteriorated. Leaders of the armed forces failed to come to Reid's support and he resigned. Pro-Bosch rebels seized the presidential palace and installed a Bosch supporter, José Rafael Molina y Ureña, as Provisional President pending Bosch's return. Many Dominican military officers opposed Bosch's return. They considered him "soft" on Communism, if not actually pro-Communist. They had decided to oppose the rebel forces. That Sunday afternoon Dominican Air Force planes attacked the presidential palace with rockets and machine guns.

The situation in the streets of the Dominican capital was alarming. Our embassy reported that guns had been passed out at random—many to Communist organizers, who were putting them into the hands of their followers; others to thugs and criminals, the so-called Tigres. Young boys of 12 and 13 were swaggering around the streets with guns over their shoulders. Stores and houses were being looted.

The embassy switchboard was clogged with calls from Americans—residents and tourists—begging to be taken out of the country. The embassy began putting evacuation plans into effect. Americans were advised to assemble the next morning at the Embajador Hotel in Santo Domingo for processing and evacuation. Both the rebels and loyalists had promised not to interfere with the movement of civilians and had agreed that a cease-fire would be put into effect during the evacuation operation.

Processing of evacuees continued through the night and the early hours of April 27 at the Embajador Hotel. All seemed quiet and orderly, or as orderly as the movement of frightened people can be. Then a disturbance broke out.

Some rioters entered the hotel and ran around the lobby and through the corridors brandishing their weapons and terrifying the women and children gathered there. Other rebels remained outside and began shooting their guns into the air and into the upper floors of the hotel, where a number of American families were staying.

The evacuation of Americans began just before noon. Buses, trucks and cars carried approximately 1,000 persons to the port of Haina, west of the capital city. I was relieved when I received the report that the evacuation had begun, but I was disturbed that the cease-fire pledge had been broken and that lives had been endangered.

I realized then that we might have to use our own forces to protect American lives in this situation. I discussed this with McNamara, and he assured me that marines were available from the task force sent to carry out the evacuation. Additional forces had been alerted in case of need.

That same day produced a critical juncture in the Dominican revolt. Regular army forces with tanks and infantry under Gen. Elias Wessin y Wessin started to move across the Duarte Bridge over the Ozama River to the east of Santo Domingo. Another force of about 1,000 men began entering the capital from the west. The two forces were converging on the rebel stronghold in the southeast part of the city. Dominican Air Force planes continued to strafe rebel positions.

When our embassy officers went out at dawn the next day to survey the situation, they found that Wessin's men had stopped moving. There had been a breakdown in leadership. Our observers reported that control of the rebel movement was increasingly in the hands of the rebel officers and three major Communist parties in the Dominican Republic—one oriented toward Moscow, another linked to Castro and a third loyal to Peking. None of these parties was extremely large but all were well armed, tightly organized and highly disciplined. Perhaps more important, they included dedicated professional revolutionaries trained to exploit the kind of situation in which they then found themselves.

Meanwhile, the shooting and the killing continued. Later, when the Red Cross made a careful study of the tragic events of April, 1965, investigators estimated that at least 1,300 Dominicans were killed in combat or in cold blood between the 24th and 29th of that month. At least another 700 were to be killed before peace was finally restored.

At midmorning on Wednesday, April 28, Radio Santo Domingo, controlled by the regular armed forces, announced that a new governing junta had been formed, headed by Col. Pedro Benoit of the Dominican Air Force. One of the new junta's first acts was to contact Ambassador W. Tapley Bennett Jr. and ask that the United States land 1,200 marines "to help restore peace to the country." Bennett gave the junta no encouragement. In his cabled report to Washington the Ambassador said: "I do not believe situation justifies such action at this time." He did advise, however, that we make plans "in case situation should break apart and deteriorate rapidly to extent we should need marines in a hurry to protect American citizens."

Within two hours, however, the Ambassador and his staff had made a new assessment. A high-priority cable—a "critic," as it is called—arrived from Santo Domingo. The Ambassador reported that the situation was "deteriorating rapidly." He warned: "American lives are in danger." He and the country team, composed of the top U. S. political, economic and information officers as well as the military attachés, had unanimously concluded that "the time has come to land the marines." Evacuation of Americans and other foreigners was continuing and protection was needed.

That afternoon I met with Rusk, McNamara, Ball, Mac Bundy and Bill Moyers. We were discussing Vietnam and Southeast Asia. We had already seen Bennett's first message advising that we hold off sending troops. As we talked, I was handed a second urgent cable from Santo Domingo saying that "the time has come." I told my advisers that I was not going to sit by and see American lives lost in this situation. If local authorities could not provide protection, we had no choice but to provide the necessary protection ourselves. They all agreed that we had to act.

I turned to Rusk.

"Mr. Secretary," I said, "I want you to get all the Latin-American Ambassadors on the phone. Get your people to touch all bases. Get in touch with the O.A.S. Tell them the decision I am making and urge them to have an immediate meeting."

I asked McNamara to alert the military forces. He said they were in position to move quickly. Moyers was to call the Congressional leaders and invite them to come to the White House as soon as possible.

I realized the importance of the decision. I knew it would attract a good deal of criticism—from Latin Americans as well as from segments of our own press. We had tried so hard, ever since the days of Franklin Roosevelt, to overcome the distrust of our neighbors in the Western Hemisphere. I did not want those days of suspicion to return, the days when "Yankee imperialism" and "the Colossus of the North" were the catch phrases of anti-American propagandists. But I could not risk the slaughter of American citizens. As their President, it was my duty to protect them with every resource available to me. I would do it again to protect American lives.

Marine forces used helicopters to move hundreds of people awaiting evacuation. They flew from the hotel to the ships waiting to take them to the United States. All reports indicated that the movement was going smoothly.

In October, 1963, President Kennedy had been deeply concerned about possible developments in the Caribbean and Central America. He had sent a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense noting that events in the Dominican Republic and other countries in the area might "require active United States military intervention." Kennedy was not sure we were adequately prepared for this. He asked, for example, how many troops we could get into the Dominican Republic. He asked the same question about several other countries that seemed headed for a crisis.

President Kennedy told McNamara that he thought this matter deserved "the highest priority." He asked for an early report. In little more than a week, on Oct. 12, 1963, the month before I became President, McNamara and the Joint Chiefs produced their report. They also informed President Kennedy that they planned to heighten our readiness by holding mobility exercises in 1964. The result of all this was that U.S. forces were ready to respond quickly when they were urgently needed.

On the evening of April 28 Ambassador Bennett reported that the situation was continuing to deteriorate. Some American citizens had warned him that they had no protection in the residential areas. They expected to be the next targets of the mobs, who were sacking Dominican homes and stores. Bennett reported that demonstrators had broken into our A.I.D. office and ransacked it. He foresaw a complete breakdown in all government authority. In light of all the circumstances, he recommended that "serious thought be given in Washington to armed intervention which would go beyond the mere protection of Americans and seek to establish order in this strife-ridden country."

He added: "All indications point to the fact that if present efforts of forces loyal to the Government fail, power will be assumed by groups clearly identified with the Communist party. If the situation described above comes to pass, my own recommendation and that of the country team is that we should intervene to prevent another Cuba from arising out of the ashes of this uncontrollable situation."

The next morning the O.A.S. Council met in Washington. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker explained the situation as we saw it and advised the Council of the landing of the marines to protect lives and to evacuate our citizens and other nationals. A long and often emotional debate followed.

I met with McNamara to go over the latest reports. I decided that the 500 - man Marine force already ashore might be too small for the many tasks we were giving it. I instructed McNamara to order the remaining 1,500 men of the Marine ready force aboard ship to join the original task force at the Embajador evacuation zone. We informed the embassy immediately. A few minutes later the State Department sent another message to Bennett asking him to provide an estimate of the situation and a considered judgment as to whether direct intervention of U.S. forces was absolutely necessary. "We cannot afford to permit the situation to deteriorate to the point where a Communist take-over occurs," the message read.

Bennett was asked what he recommended we do in the next 6 to 12 hours. He said the most important action that could be taken was "to commit sufficient troops to do the job here rapidly and effectively." He urged that we act immediately to overcome critical shortages of food, medicines and other supplies in Santo Domingo. He suggested

interposing our forces between the rebels and those of the junta, thereby effecting a cease-fire. We could then ask the O.A.S. to negotiate a political settlement between the opposing factions, he said.

This was the background against which we met that night. There was complete agreement that we must prevent a Communist take-over and act on a scale that would guarantee the earliest possible end to the fighting, destruction and killing.

A NUMBER of people, then and later, thought the Communist threat in the Dominican Republic was overestimated. I did not and do not think it was. Nor do I believe that the majority of involved governments and competent analysts believe, in retrospect, that the danger was not desperately serious. With most of the moderate leaders in hiding or asylum, the Communist leadership had the keys to what Lenin once called "the commanding heights" of power in the Dominican Republic.

We wanted other members of the O.A.S. to share responsibility for creating the conditions necessary for free elections in the Dominican Republic. We were gratified that Brazil, Honduras, Paraguay, Nicaragua and Costa Rica did send forces for this purpose, and that El Salvador sent officers. On May 29 a Brazilian general, Hugo Panasco Alvim, took command of this temporary peacekeeping force, the first ever established by the inter-American system. Our own forces had increased to about 22,000 men but were being scaled down.

A special committee of the O.A.S., made up of Ambassadors Ilmar Penna Marinho of Brazil, Ramon de Clairmont Duenas of El Salvador, and Ellsworth Bunker of the United States, arrived in Santo Domingo on June 3, 1965. On June 18 the special committee issued a declaration to the Dominican Republic. This document urged popular support for its proposal: peaceful free elections, a general amnesty and a provisional government. On Aug. 9 the committee suggested a provisional government under Garcia Godoy, a widely respected civilian who had been Foreign Minister under Bosch. Elections were to be held within nine months. This proposal, called the Act of Dominican Reconciliation, was finally accepted and the Garcia/Godoy Government was installed on Sept. 3.

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*Tomorrow: The war, 1965-67, and the search for peace*