

# Capitol Hill in Black and White

Part three of a three-part series on the revelations of the former maitre 'd of the Senate dining room. Reprinted by permission of Dodd-Mead & Company, Inc., from "Capitol Hill in Black and White," by Robert Parker and Richard Rashke, copyright 1986.

"For the first time, colored people have a powerful leader," Johnson lectured the three northern liberals, referring to Dr. Martin Luther King. I smiled to myself, because LBJ didn't say niggers. "A religious leader. A nonviolent man of the cloth. Do you know what that means? Have you ever seen a colored Baptist preacher from the South in action? Well, let me tell you something. That's one man who controls the colored community. And I'll tell you another thing. These people are not breakin' any laws. They're demonstratin' peacefully, and the eyes of the world are on them."

Johnson continued, "You know the boycott in Alabama was successful. Very successful. J. Edgar Hoover was saying just the other day how he was hoping niggers would flock behind militant leaders like Malcolm X, 'cause then they could lock 'um all up and throw away the key. Even old Hoover admits his hands are tied. The colored are not going to give up. They're determined. They've been oppressed long enough."

Martin Luther King had a great impact on my life. I met him for the first time early in 1963, several months before his March on Washington. He came to the Hill with his colleagues Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson, Hosea Williams, and Andrew Young in the hope of seeing Senator Jacob Javits, among others. Dr. King spent three days getting the runaround from Javits's staff, who thought it would be best for the senator if he weren't seen with the controversial civil rights leader. Javits himself didn't even know Dr. King was in town.

Tired of camping out in front of Javits's office, Dr. King and his colleagues walked over to the House side to meet black congressmen, among others. When I saw him coming down the hall outside the Senate Dining Room, I introduced myself. I admired his courage and his nonviolent approach to civil rights, and I was proud of him.

"If you ever want lunch on the Hill," I told him, "let me know. I'll arrange it for you. And if there's anything else I can do, just ask."

"I sure would like to see Senator Javits," Dr. King complained. he described his problem.

"Be here tomorrow at noon," I told him. "You may have to wait a little, but I'll introduce you to the senator."

Andy Young began chuckling. They had tried every trick they knew to reach Senator Javits except asking the headwaiter for an introduction.

"I don't believe it!" Young said. "Can you do that?"

"Wait and see," I told him.

Dr. King was right on time the next day. I asked him to have a seat in the reception room near my desk, out of the way. he didn't have long to wait. In walked Senator Javits with two guests. I seated them and, when the senator had almost finished his lunch, I walked over to his table.

"Senator," I said, "there's someone who wants to meet you."

I waited for Javits to push away from the table; the I told him, "It's Dr. Martin Luther King. He saw you walking into the dining room."

Javits and King shook hands. Then the senator led the civil rights leader to his hideaway just down the hall from the Senate Dining Room. I went with them to see if they needed anything. I served Dr. King a cup of coffee. Javits asked him if he wanted lunch. Dr. King said no, and I left them. It was the beginning of a five-year relationship that proved to be useful to both leaders.

I was in the Senate Dining Room when I heard that President John F. Kennedy had been shot in Dallas. Like everyone else in the Capitol, I couldn't believe it. At first I thought it was a mistake. The Hill feeds off rumors like mosquitoes feed off blood. Then I thought he had just been wounded. Since I didn't have a radio or a television set in my office, I rushed to the press room. I found people running down the corridor, some shouting, others crying. Senators deserted the Senate floor as if the plague had struck. The elevator was packed. The Capitol was in chaos. I couldn't get near the press room, there were so many senators trying to catch a few phrases from the newscast.

Worried that there might be a conspiracy to kill off the leadership of the United States, the Capitol Police took charge quickly. They cut off telephone service to and from the Capitol. Setting up ropes across corridors, they rounded up all tourists and herded them out of the building. By early evening, the Capitol had been turned into a funeral home. The Senate chamber was as still as a coffin. Guards stood quietly at their stations, with no one to guard but the marble and bronze statues. Janitors and maintenance men with brooms, mops, and wax began shining the Rotunda floor on which the bier of John F. Kennedy would rest.

It didn't take long for the enemies of Lyndon Johnson to crawl out of the Capitol woodwork. "Old LBJ must have had something to do with it," I heard them say the very next day. The suspicion echoes in every corridor from Senate staff attorneys, legislative aides, waitresses, and tourists. Their grief for John F. Kennedy made their cynicism and dislike of Lyndon Johnson even more intense.

It didn't take long for a power struggle between the Kennedy and Johnson factions on the Hill to flare up. I felt it even in the Senate Dining Room. Most of the time, the fighting was petty, but it showed how deeply feelings ran.

I had two private dining rooms near the Senate restaurant (S-120 and S-138) and one reception room (S-207), which senators and staff would reserve for private lunches, parties, or dinners. Each seated thirty to forty people. The rooms were in such demand that there was usually a waiting list when the Senate was in session. The Kennedy and Johnson factions began waging a pitched battle over who had more of a right to use them first. The Kennedy people had been already scheduled for parties when Johnson hurriedly took the oath of office on Air Force One. The Johnson people began leaning on me to cancel their reservations.

Since the Senate Dining Room did not take reservations, a party of Kennedy people and a party of Johnson people would end up waiting together in the outer reception room for a table to open. The Johnson crowd felt they should be seated first, even though the Kennedy crowd had been waiting longer. And so it went.

Sometimes the petty became ridiculous. Oil billionaire H.L. Hunt used to eat in the Senate Dining Room every day he was in town, which could be for weeks on end. A penny-pinching eccentric, he used to roam the halls of Congress, papering it with petitions to reform the electoral process and to keep the Russians from taking over the country. He was harmless, and everyone knew that he was the unofficial guest of Lyndon Johnson. I had the authority to seat anyone I wanted in the Senate Dining Room, whether they had a letter from a sponsoring senator or not. I used my judgement. If the restaurant wasn't crowded and a dignitary or special friend of a senator wanted to eat there, I would seat him or her. The last thing any senator wanted was a scene in the reception room or an embarrassed, powerful guest. I had been seating Hunt for years, even though he didn't have a letter. No one objected because, although the billionaire wasn't popular, he ate in the shadow of LBJ.

Soon after Kennedy was assassinated, however, I felt pressure from Connecticut Senator Thomas Dodd to kick the old man out. Kennedy men like Dodd suspected Hunt of playing a role in the assassination: Hunt was rich; he was from Dallas; and he had been saying for years that Kennedy had turned soft on Fidel Castro.

Dodd cornered my one day at lunchtime when Hunt was eating in the Senate Dining Room. "Robert," he asked, "whose guest is he?"

"No one's," I said. "He used to come all the time when President Johnson was here."

"Don't let the man in again," advised Dodd. "Unless someone sponsors him, you'll get yourself in a lot of trouble."

I knew Dodd was right. A Kennedy supporter was bound to either create a scene or complain to Senator Jordan. Even if I didn't ask Hunt to leave that day, I knew I'd have to tell him the next day or the day after. Besides, I trusted Dodd's judgement, and I looked on him as a friend. He had taken me to Cape Canaveral in May 1962 to watch John Glenn blast off into space as the first man to orbit the earth. I sat in the VIP section with Dodd and other members of the Aeronautical and Space Sciences Committee—Chairman Clinton Anderson of New Mexico, Stuart Symington, Margaret Chase Smith, and Bourke Hickenlooper of Iowa. No bleachers for Robert Parker that time.

I went over to Hunt's table. "I can't let you eat here anymore without a letter from a senator," I said.

"Who told you that?" Hunt asked. I could see he was angry.

"Mr. Hunt, I just have orders. There are new rules. Senator Everett Jordan is the chairman of the Rules Committee. You'll have to see him."

Hunt left without a fuss and never came back again.



Author: Robert Parker.

Courtesy of Fox Studio

On Monday, June 8, Senator Mike Mansfield filed a motion to cut off all debate on the civil rights bill. According to Senate rules, the cloture vote had to be taken two days later and one hour after the President of the Senate pounded his gavel.

"The Senate now stands at the crossroads of history, and the time for decision is at hand," Senator Mansfield said. He then unfolded the letter from a twenty-nine-year-old mother of four. It was so eloquent and passionate, so right for the moment, that it sent a shiver right through me. It still does as I reread parts of it. Mansfield delivered it in a booming, professorial voice, peppered with dramatic pauses.

"How can we, as responsible Americans, continue taking, arguing, bickering over civil rights as though the privileges, responsibilities, and birthrights of a great percentage of our people were favors or rewards to be handed out by a benevolent few?"

"I am white. By a simple accident of birth, I was allowed to grow up believing in the laws of God and our country. As a child, I learned to recite the Preamble to the Constitution. I learned the Bill of Rights, and memo-

rized the Lincoln Gettysburg Address. I accepted these things as truth. I grew up with the right to feel that I, as an individual, was as good as anyone else, that I had the opportunity to climb as high as my ability, my intelligence, and my ambition would take me. While I did not learn to consider myself as a superior being, I could look upon myself with a lack of inferiority. I did not learn to regard my color with a great sense of pride, but never with guilt or shame.

"I was conceived by a pair of good, respectable, hard-working white parents. I was allowed to grow and mature, to have faith in myself and my future, and when I married and gave birth to my lovely children, to have faith in them and their future.

"I know that my children may go to the school nearest our home. I know that when I give my children a coin to buy an ice cream cone, that coin is good in any store in town. When we are traveling, we can stop at any hotel or motel of our choice. When we go out to eat, we may do so in any cafe or club we wish and can afford. I can sit in any vacant seat in a bus, I can use a public restroom, and if I am thirsty, I may quench my thirst at any public drinking fountain. These things I consider my rights. I take them for granted and know that no one may deny me these rights.

"This morning, the thought occurred to me, that by the same accident of birth, I could have been conceived by a pair of equally good, respectable, hard-working Negro parents. The process is the same, but what immense differences there would have been in my life and upbringing.

"How heartbreaking it must be for a child to have to learn that his future is sharply limited even if his intelligence and his ability is not. How confusing it must be for a child to learn that he may not buy an ice cream cone or a Coke in the same shop as a lighter skinned child, even though his dime has the same value as the other. How could my parents have logically explained to me that a dime from a white hand is worth ten cents, but that the same coin in a brown or black hand is unacceptable? . . .

"At night, when I kiss my children good night, I offer a small prayer of thanks to God for making them so perfect, so healthy, so lovely, and I find myself tempted to thank Him for letting them be born white. The I am not so proud, neither of myself nor of our society which forces such a temptation upon us.

"And that is why I don't feel that this is a southern problem, it is a northern problem, a western problem, an eastern problem. It is an American problem for all Americans. It is my problem.

"I am only one person, one woman. I wish there was something I could do in this issue. I want to help. The only way I know how to start is to educate my children that justice and freedom and ambition are not merely privileges, but their birthrights. I must try to impress upon them that these rights must be given, not held tightly unto themselves, for what cannot be given, we do not really have for ourselves.

"These are the thoughts of but one of your citizens. I realize that no earth-shaking changes will develop from having written this letter, but it is a beginning. If more can be done by people like me, please tell me what I can do. Thank you for your time."

By the time Mansfield had finished the letter, I was in tears. So were Mitchell and Price next to me. In a few hundred words which it took the senator exactly twelve minutes to read, that ordinary Montana woman had made a fool out of the filibuster and those who supported it. She stunned the gallery. Mansfield sat down without another word.

When the voting was completed, the final tally was 71 to 29, four votes more than Mansfield, Humphrey, and Dirksen needed to win. President Johnson had had a very busy night.

There was a sigh. It was over. The Senate had killed the first civil rights filibuster in history. "That's it," I heard someone say from below. Senator Mansfield relaxed in his chair. Senator Russell frowned, then began scribbling on a yellow pad. I felt like leaping over the balcony onto the Senate floor and bear-hugging Senators Mansfield, Humphrey, and Dirksen.

Early one morning a few days after Kennedy's assassination, while Senate pages were still placing copies of The Congressional Record on each desk in the Senate chamber and before most senators had had their first cup of coffee, one of the Capitol Policemen came over to me. "You want to see something?" He pointed to the small, trim figure of Senator Smith, dressed in a conservative business suit. "Watch! She does this every morning."

Senator Smith stole into the Senate chamber, a cavern of empty desks and galleries. Picking her way over to Senator John F. Kennedy's old seat, she reached into her handbag and laid a single red rose on the desktop.

Could Lyndon Johnson ever win the respect and cooperation of a Congress and a nation who felt so deeply about their slain leader?

## Easter Egg Hunt Set for PCC Cascade April 18

The Associated Students of Portland Community College are inviting children through age 12 to attend an annual Easter Egg hunt Saturday morning, April 18, at Cascade Campus, 705 N. Killingsworth. Hunts have been arranged by age group for children three years and under; four to six years; seven to nine years; and 10 to 12 years. An ASPCC spokesman said the Easter bunny will be on hand to greet the children, and coffee and doughnuts will be available for grownups. The hunt will get under way at 10 a.m.



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