

There's More Online!

- ✓ BIOGRAPHY Barry Goldwater
- ✓ BIOGRAPHY Michael Harrington
- ✓ BIOGRAPHY Robert Weaver
- ✓ VIDEO The Great Society
- ✓ INTERACTIVE SELF-CHECK QUIZ



## LESSON 3

# The Great Society

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS • Can government fix society's problems? • How do you think Presidents Kennedy and Johnson changed American society?

Reading HELPDESK



### Academic Vocabulary

- confine
- subsidy

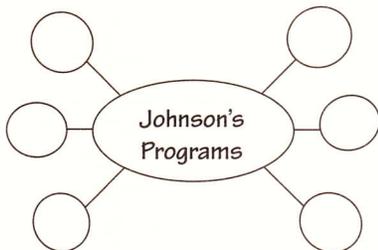
### Content Vocabulary

- consensus

### TAKING NOTES:

#### Key Ideas and Details

**Organizing** As you read, complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the social and economic programs started during Lyndon Johnson's administration.



## IT MATTERS BECAUSE

Lyndon B. Johnson had decades of experience in Congress and was skilled in getting legislation enacted. When he became president, he moved quickly to push for passage of civil rights and antipoverty bills.

## Johnson Takes the Reins

**GUIDING QUESTION** How did President Johnson's experience in Congress help him get legislation passed?

Just hours after President Kennedy had been pronounced dead, Lyndon B. Johnson took the oath of office in the cabin of *Air Force One*. Days later, Johnson appeared before Congress and urged the nation to move forward and build on Kennedy's legacy. "[T]he ideas and ideals which [Kennedy] so nobly represented must and will be translated into effective action," he declared. Although the nation that President Johnson inherited appeared to be booming, not all Americans shared in its prosperity. In his 1962 book *The Other America*, writer Michael Harrington claimed that almost 50 million truly poor Americans lived largely hidden in slums, Appalachia, the Deep South, and Native American reservations. Soon after taking office, Johnson decided to launch an antipoverty crusade.

### Johnson's Leadership Style

Lyndon Baines Johnson was born and raised in the "hill country" of central Texas, near the banks of the Pedernales River. Johnson remained a Texan in his heart, and his style posed a striking contrast with Kennedy's. He was a man of impressive stature who spoke directly, convincingly, and even roughly at times. By the time he became president at age 55, Johnson already had 26 years of congressional experience behind him. He earned a reputation as a man who got things done. He did favors, twisted arms, bargained, flattered, and threatened in order to find **consensus**, or general agreement. His ability to build coalitions had made him one of the most effective and powerful leaders in Senate history.

## A War on Poverty

Why was Johnson concerned about the poor? He had known hard times growing up, and had seen extreme poverty firsthand in a brief career as a teacher in a low-income area. He also believed that a wealthy, powerful government should try to improve the lives of its citizens. Finally, there was Johnson's ambition. He wanted history to portray him as a great president.

Before his death, Kennedy had plans for an antipoverty program and a civil rights bill. Continuing these efforts seemed logical. Johnson knew that any program linked to the slain president would be popular. In his State of the Union address in 1964, he said: "Unfortunately, many Americans live on the outskirts of hope—some because of their poverty, and some because of their color, and all too many because of both. Our task is to help replace their despair with opportunity. This administration . . . declares unconditional war on poverty in America."

By the summer of 1964, Johnson had convinced Congress to pass the Economic Opportunity Act, which attacked inadequate public services, illiteracy, and unemployment. The act established 10 new programs within a new agency, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). Many of the new programs were directed at young, inner-city Americans.

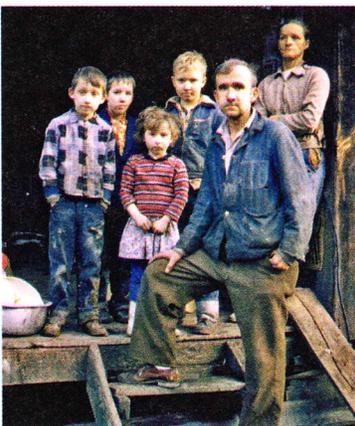
The Neighborhood Youth Corps provided work-study programs to help the underprivileged earn a high school diploma or college degree. The Job Corps helped unemployed people ages 16–21 acquire job skills. One of the more dramatic programs introduced was VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), which was essentially a domestic Peace Corps. VISTA put young people with skills and community-minded ideals to work in poor neighborhoods and rural areas to help people overcome poverty. Additional programs included Upward Bound, which offered tutoring to high school students, and a Work Experience Program, which provided day care and other support for those in poor households to enable them to work.

## The Election of 1964

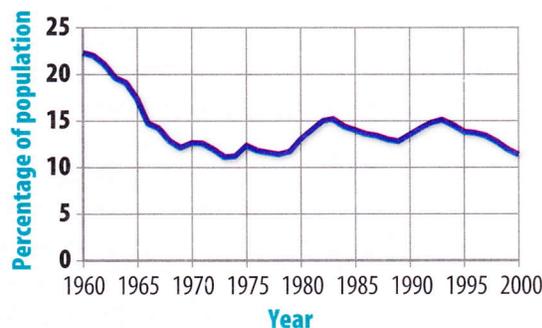
Johnson quickly won public approval, but just as quickly had to run for the office he first gained through tragedy. The Republican candidate in the 1964 election was Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, known for his strong conservatism. "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. Moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue," Goldwater declared when accepting the nomination. Few Americans were ready to embrace Goldwater's message,

**consensus** general agreement

### POVERTY RATE IN AMERICA, 1960–2000



PHOTOS: John Dominis/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

### CHARTS/GRAPHS

At left, an unemployed miner and his family posed on the porch of their Kentucky home in 1964.

- 1 Making Generalizations** Based on the data in the chart, what decade had the greatest decrease in the poverty rate? Why do you think this was the case?
- 2 Analyzing Information** Based on the data in the chart, how successful was Johnson's War on Poverty?

## WHAT WAS THE GREAT SOCIETY?

Health and Welfare	Education	The War on Poverty	Consumer and Environmental Protection
<b>Medicare</b> (1965) established a comprehensive health insurance program for all senior citizens; financed through the Social Security system.	<b>Elementary and Secondary Education Act</b> (1965) targeted aid to students and funded related activities such as adult education and education consulting.	<b>Office of Economic Opportunity</b> (1964) oversaw many programs to improve life in inner cities, including Job Corps, an education and job training program for at-risk youth.	<b>Clean Air Act</b> (1963) and <b>Water Quality Act</b> (1965) supported development of standards and goals for water and air quality.
<b>Medicaid</b> (1965) provided health and medical assistance to low-income families; funded through federal and state governments.	<b>Higher Education Act</b> (1965) supported college tuition scholarships, student loans, and work-study programs for low- and middle-income students.	<b>Housing and Urban Development Act</b> (1965) established new housing subsidy programs and made federal loans and public housing grants easier to obtain.	<b>Highway Safety Act</b> (1966) improved federal, state, and local coordination and created training standards for emergency medical technicians.
<b>Child Nutrition Act</b> (1966) established a school breakfast program and expanded the school lunch and milk programs to improve nutrition.	<b>Project Head Start</b> (1965) funded a preschool program for disadvantaged children.	<b>Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act</b> (1966) revitalized urban areas through a variety of social and economic programs.	<b>Fair Packaging and Labeling Act</b> (1966) required all consumer products to have true and informative labels.

### CHARTS/GRAPHS

- Identifying Central Ideas**  
What was the purpose of the Water Quality Act and Clean Air Act?
- Analyzing Information** Which Great Society program do you think had the most effect on American life? Why do you think so?

which seemed too aggressive for a nation nervous about nuclear war. On Election Day, Johnson won in a landslide, gaining more than 61 percent of the popular vote and winning all but six states in the Electoral College.

#### **READING PROGRESS CHECK**

**Explaining** What parts of Johnson's congressional background helped him get his legislation approved?

## The Great Society

**GUIDING QUESTION** *How does Great Society legislation influence current government programs and philosophies?*

After his election, Johnson began working with Congress to create the “Great Society” he had promised during his campaign. His goals reflected the times. The civil rights movement had brought racial inequalities to the forefront, and the strong economy encouraged people to believe that poverty could be reduced. Johnson noted the Great Society's goals during a speech in May 1964, aiming not to **confine** government efforts but to form a society “where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community.”

Johnson's ambitious vision encompassed more than 60 programs initiated between 1965 and 1968, including Medicare and Medicaid. Medicare had strong support because it was offered to all senior citizens, about half of whom lacked health insurance. Medicare's twin program, Medicaid, financed health care for welfare recipients living below the poverty line. These programs reflected New Deal ideals by entitling categories of Americans to benefits.

Great Society programs also strongly supported education. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 granted millions of dollars to public and private schools. Education efforts also extended to preschoolers through Project Head Start, for disadvantaged children who had “never looked at a picture book or scribbled with a crayon.”

**confine** to limit or restrict

During this period, major civil rights goals were also achieved: the Civil Rights Act of 1964 barred discrimination of many kinds and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 protected voters from discriminatory practices. Johnson also urged Congress to act on several pieces of legislation addressing urban issues. One created a new cabinet agency, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, in 1965. Its first secretary, Robert Weaver, was the first African American to serve in the cabinet. A broad-based program informally called “Model Cities” authorized federal **subsidies** to many cities to improve transportation, health care, housing, and policing.

One notable Great Society measure changed the composition of the American population: the Immigration Act of 1965. This act ended the system established in the 1920s that gave preference to northern European immigrants. The new law opened wider the door of the United States to immigrants from all parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa.

### The Great Society’s Legacy

Great Society programs touched nearly every aspect of American life and improved many lives. In the years since Johnson left office, however, debate has continued over whether the Great Society was truly a success. In many ways, the impact of the Great Society was limited. Some programs did not work as well as hoped. In many cases, the programs grew so quickly they became unmanageable and difficult to evaluate.

Cities, states, and groups eligible for aid began to expect immediate and life-changing benefits. Other Americans opposed the massive growth of federal programs. When Johnson attempted to fund both his grand domestic agenda and the increasingly costly war in Vietnam, the Great Society eventually suffered. Some Great Society initiatives have survived, however, including Medicare and Medicaid, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Project Head Start. Overall, the programs provided some important benefits to poor communities and gave political and administrative experience to minority groups.

An important legacy of the Great Society was the questions it raised. How can the federal government help disadvantaged citizens? How much government help can a society provide without weakening the private sector? How much help can people receive without losing motivation to fight against hardships on their own? Lyndon Johnson took office determined to change the United States in a way few other presidents had attempted. If he fell short, it was perhaps that the goals he set were so high.

#### **READING PROGRESS CHECK**

**Making Connections** What government programs carry on the ideals of the Great Society?

**subsidy** money granted by the government to achieve a specific goal that is beneficial to society

## Analyzing PRIMARY SOURCES

### The Challenge of Poverty

“The walls of the ghettos are not going to topple overnight, nor is it possible to wipe out the heritage of generations of social, economic and educational deprivation by the stroke of a Presidential pen. The war against poverty is a long-range undertaking. It requires staying power as well as a sense of urgency.”

—*New York Times* editorial,  
January 1, 1967

#### **DBQ** USING CONTEXT CLUES

Based on its use in the passage above, what is the meaning of deprivation?

## LESSON 3 REVIEW

### Reviewing Vocabulary

**1. Explaining** Why is the ability to build a consensus an important skill for a leader?

### Using Your Notes

**2. Categorizing** Use the notes you completed during the lesson to group the programs Johnson created into categories.

### Answering the Guiding Questions

**3. Analyzing** How did President Johnson’s experience in Congress help him get legislation passed?

**4. Synthesizing** How does Great Society legislation influence current government programs and philosophies?

### Writing Activity

**5. INFORMATIVE/EXPLANATORY** What connections can you make between the ideals of the New Deal and those of the Great Society? Write a short essay in which you analyze efforts to extend New Deal goals through the Great Society, and evaluate the successes and failures of those efforts.