

Guide to Reading

Connection

In the previous section, you learned how Cold War tensions escalated under President Kennedy. In this section, you will discover how President Johnson expanded on Kennedy's domestic agenda.

Main Idea

- President Johnson's longtime experience in Congress helped him push through several of President Kennedy's antipoverty bills. (p. 723)
- Johnson's Great Society programs provided assistance to disadvantaged Americans. (p. 726)

- Although controversial, the Great Society programs improved the lives of thousands of people. (p. 728)

Content Vocabulary

consensus, war on poverty

Academic Vocabulary

analogy, confine, sector

People and Terms to Identify

VISTA, Great Society, Medicare, Medicaid, Head Start, Robert Weaver

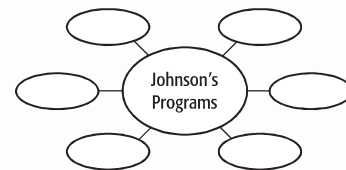
Reading Objectives

- **Explain** what inspired Johnson's Great Society programs.

- **Identify** several specific health and employment programs of the Johnson administration.

Reading Strategy

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



Preview of Events

November 1963

November 1963

Johnson becomes president upon Kennedy's death

June 1964

August 1964

Congress enacts Economic Opportunity Act

January 1965

November 1964

Johnson wins election as president

August 1965

July 1965

Congress passes Medical Care Act, establishing Medicare and Medicaid

The following are the main History–Social Science Standards covered in this section.

11.8.4 Analyze new federal government spending on defense, welfare, interest on the national debt, and federal and state spending on education, including the California Master Plan.

11.11.1 Discuss the reasons for the nation's changing immigration policy, with emphasis on how the Immigration Act of 1965 and successor acts have transformed American society.

11.11.2 Discuss the significant domestic policy speeches of Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton (e.g., with regard to education, civil rights, economic policy, environmental policy).

11.11.6 Analyze the persistence of poverty and how different analyses of this issue influence welfare reform, health insurance reform, and other social policies.

11.11.7 Explain how the federal, state, and local governments have responded to demographic and social changes such as population shifts to the suburbs, racial concentrations in the cities,

Frostbelt-to-Sunbelt migration, international migration, decline of family farms, increases in out-of-wedlock births, and drug abuse.

The Big Idea

Societies change over time. President Johnson had more experience than Kennedy in dealing with Congress and was able to get several of Kennedy's programs approved. After he was elected president, Johnson worked to get his Great Society initiatives, focusing on health and welfare, education, and poverty, approved. The effectiveness of these programs is often debated. They did, however, improve the lives of many Americans.

Johnson Takes the Reins

Main Idea President Johnson's longtime experience in Congress helped him push through several of President Kennedy's antipoverty bills.

Reading Connection How do you think someone's early life affects their career choices? Read on to learn how Lyndon Johnson's early life prepared him for the presidency.

The United States that President Lyndon Johnson inherited from John F. Kennedy appeared to be a booming, bustling place. From new shopping malls to new roads with new cars to fill them, everything in the country seemed to shout prosperity. Away from the nation's affluent suburbs, however, was another country, one inhabited by the poor, the ill-fed, the ill-housed, and the ill-educated.

★ An American Story ★

In 1961, 61-year-old John Rath lived in a sparsely furnished room in Chicago. In the room sat a stove, a sink, a package of cereal, and a tiny icebox. The plaster on the wall was crumbling, the ceiling was cracked, and the window shades were smudged. Telling his story to an interviewer, Rath said:

“I come home to an empty room. I don't even have a dog. No, this is not the kind of life I would choose. If a man had a little piece of land or something, a farm, or well . . . anyway, you've got to have something. You sit down in a place like this, you grit your teeth, you follow me? So many of them are doing that, they sit down, they don't know what to do, they go out. I see 'em in the middle of the night, they take a walk. Don't know what to do. Have no home environment, don't have a dog, don't have nothing . . . just a big zero.”

—quoted in *Division Street: America*

John Rath's life was not the image that many Americans had of their country in the mid-1960s. Writer Michael Harrington examined the nation's impoverished areas in his 1962 book, *The Other America*. Harrington claimed that while the truly poor numbered almost 50 million, they remained largely hidden in city slums, in rural areas, in the Deep South, and on Native American reservations.

Harrington's book moved many Americans and inspired both President Kennedy and his successor, Lyndon Johnson, to make the elimination of poverty

a major policy goal. The nation was prosperous, and many leaders had come to believe that the economy could be managed so that prosperity would be permanent. They believed the federal government could afford to fund a new antipoverty program.

Lyndon Johnson decided to continue with Kennedy's plan soon after taking office. Immediately after President Kennedy was pronounced dead, officials whisked Johnson to the airport. At 2:38 P.M. on November 22, 1963, he stood in the cabin of Air Force One, the president's plane, with Jacqueline Kennedy on one side of him and his wife, Lady Bird, on the other. Johnson raised his right hand, placed his left hand on a Bible, and took the oath of office.

Johnson knew that he had to assure a stunned public that he could hold the nation together, that he was a leader. He later recalled the urgency with which he had to act:

“A nation stunned, shaken to its very heart, had to be reassured that the government was not in a state of paralysis . . . that the business of the United States would proceed. I knew that not only the nation but the whole world would be anxiously following every move I made—watching, judging, weighing, balancing. . . . It was imperative that I grasp the reins of power and do so without delay. Any hesitation or wavering, any false step, any sign of self-doubt, could have been disastrous.”

—quoted in *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*

▼ Urban poverty in Chicago



Days after the assassination, Johnson appeared before Congress and urged the nation to move on. “The ideas and ideals which [Kennedy] so nobly represented must and will be translated into effective action,” he stated. “John Kennedy’s death commands what his life conveyed—that America must move forward.”

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. He remained a Texan in his heart and in his life.

Johnson’s style posed a striking contrast with Kennedy’s. He was a man of impressive stature who spoke directly, convincingly, and even roughly at times. His style was more that of a persuasive and personable politician than of the elegant society man. Finding it difficult to gain acceptance from the Eastern establishment in the nation’s capital, he often reveled in his rough image.

Johnson had honed his style in long years of public service. By the time he became president at age 55, he already had 26 years of congressional experience

behind him. He had been a congressional staffer, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, a U.S. senator, Senate majority leader, and vice president.

As he moved up the political ladder, Johnson developed a reputation as a man who got things done. He did favors, twisted arms, bargained, flattered, and threatened. The tactics he used to persuade others became known throughout Washington as the “Johnson treatment.” Several writers described this often overpowering and intimidating style:

“The Treatment could last ten minutes or four hours. . . Its tone could be supplication, accusation, cajolery, exuberance, scorn, tears, complaint, the hint of threat. It was all these together. . . Interjections from the target were rare. Johnson anticipated them before they could be spoken. He moved in close, his face a scant millimeter from his target, his eyes widening and narrowing, his eyebrows rising and falling. From his pocket poured clippings, memos, statistics. Mimicry, humor, and the genius of **analogy** made The Treatment an almost hypnotic experience and rendered the target stunned and helpless.”

—from *Lyndon Johnson: The Exercise of Power*

With every technique he could think of, Johnson sought to find **consensus**, or general agreement. His ability to build coalitions had made him one of the most effective and powerful leaders in the Senate’s history.

A War on Poverty As president, Johnson used his considerable talents to push through a number of Kennedy’s initiatives. Before the end of 1964, he won passage of a tax cut, a major civil rights bill, and a significant anti-poverty program.

Why was this powerful man so concerned about poor people? Johnson liked to exaggerate the poor conditions of his childhood for dramatic effect, but he had in fact known hard times. He had also seen extreme poverty firsthand in a brief career as a teacher in a low-income area. Johnson understood suffering, and he believed deeply in social action. He felt that a wealthy, powerful government could and should try to improve the lives of its citizens. Kennedy himself had said of Johnson, “He really cares about this nation.” Finally, there was Johnson’s ambition. He wanted to achieve great things so that history would record him as a great president. Attacking poverty was a good place to begin.


Plans for an anti-poverty program were already in place when Johnson took office, and he knew that he

Picturing History

Home on the Range Born and raised in Texas, President Johnson loved to get back to his ranch in the Texas hill country. How does this image contrast with those of his predecessors?



Rural Poverty Photographs such as this one of Alice Mae Wyatt and her children—6-year-old Sally and 17-month-old Henry—shocked many Americans and won support for Johnson’s programs. [Why was the president so concerned about poverty?](#)



*“ . . . many Americans
live on the outskirts
of hope . . . ”*

—Lyndon Johnson

would be able to command strong support for any program that could be linked to Kennedy. In his State of the Union address to Congress in 1964, barely seven weeks after taking office, President Johnson told his audience: “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.” Johnson concluded his speech by announcing that his administration was declaring an “unconditional **war on poverty** in America.”

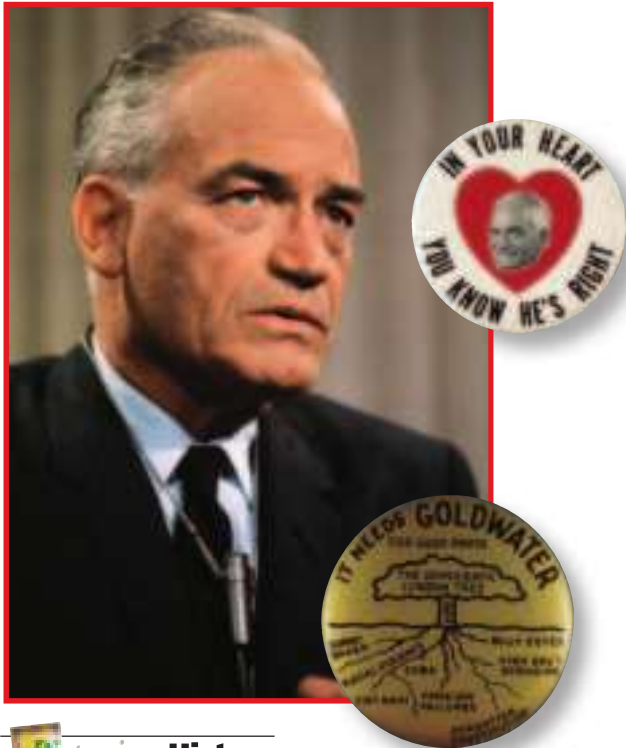
By the summer of 1964, Johnson had convinced Congress to pass the Economic Opportunity Act. The act established a wide range of programs aimed at creating jobs and fighting poverty. It also created a new government agency, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to coordinate the new programs. Many of the new programs were directed at young Americans living in the inner city. The Neighborhood Youth Corps provided work-study programs to help underprivileged young men and women earn a high school diploma or college degree. The Job Corps tried to help young unemployed people find jobs. 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.

The Election of 1964 As early as April 1964, *Fortune* magazine declared, “Lyndon Johnson has achieved a breadth of public approval few observers would have believed possible when he took office.” Johnson had little time to enjoy such praise, for he was soon to run for the office he had first gained through a tragic event.

Johnson’s Republican opponent in the 1964 presidential election was Barry Goldwater of Arizona, a senator known for his outspoken conservatism. He set the tone for his campaign when he accepted his party’s nomination, declaring, “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice! And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue!”

Few Americans were ready to embrace Goldwater’s message, which was too aggressive for a nation nervous about nuclear war. On Election Day,



Picturing History

Conservative Stance Senator Barry Goldwater's conservative ideas were not very popular in 1964, and they posed little challenge to President Johnson. [How many states did Goldwater win?](#)

Johnson won in a landslide, winning all but five southern states and Arizona. "For the first time in my life," he said later, "I truly felt loved by the American people."

Reading Check **Examining** What inspired the war on poverty?

The Great Society

Main Idea Johnson's Great Society programs provided assistance to disadvantaged Americans.

Reading Connection What reforms do you think are most needed today? Read on to find out about the programs Lyndon Johnson initiated.

After his election, President Johnson began working with Congress to create the "Great Society" he had promised the American people. Major goals of the civil rights movement were achieved with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which barred discrimination of many kinds, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which ensured African Americans' right to vote.

The **Great Society** was Johnson's vision of the more perfect and equitable society the United States could and should become. According to Bill Moyers, who served as Johnson's press secretary, Johnson admired Franklin Roosevelt and wanted to fulfill FDR's mission. To do that would require a program that would be on the same large scale as the New Deal.

Johnson's goals were consistent with the times for several reasons. The civil rights movement had brought the grievances of African Americans to the forefront, reminding many that greater equality of opportunity had yet to be realized. Economics also supported Johnson's goal. The economy was strong, and many believed it would remain so indefinitely. There was no reason, therefore, that poverty could not be significantly reduced—especially when some had so much and others had so little.

Johnson first elaborated on the goals of the Great Society during a speech at the University of Michigan. It was clear that the president did not intend only to expand relief to the poor or to **confine** government efforts to material things. The president wanted, he said, to build a better society for all, a society "where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, . . . 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. . . ."

This ambitious vision encompassed a multitude of programs. In the three years between 1965 and 1968, more than 60 programs were passed. Among the most significant programs were **Medicare** and **Medicaid**. Health care reform had been a major issue since the days of Harry Truman. By the 1960s, public support for better health care benefits had solidified. Medicare had especially strong support since it was directed at the entire elderly population—in 1965, around half of those over the age of 65 had no health insurance.

Johnson convinced Congress to set up Medicare as a health insurance program funded through the Social Security system. Medicare's twin program, Medicaid, financed health care for welfare recipients, those who were living below the poverty line. Like the New Deal's Social Security program, both programs created what have been called "entitlements," that is, they entitle certain categories of Americans to benefits. Today, the cost of these programs has become a permanent part of the U.S. budget.

Great Society programs also strongly supported education. For Johnson, who had taught school when he was a young man, education was a personal passion. Vice President Hubert Humphrey once said that

Johnson “was a nut on education. . . . [He] believed in it, just like some people believe in miracle cures.”

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 granted millions of dollars to public and private schools for classroom materials and special education programs. Efforts to improve education also extended to preschoolers, where Project **Head Start**, administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity, was directed at children from disadvantaged circumstances. Another program, Upward Bound, was designed to provide college preparation for low-income teenagers. Some states added their own educational legislation. California, for example, passed laws to improve higher education facilities in 1960 with the California Master Plan. The plan established a network of public higher education facilities and helped ensure that all California residents who graduate in the top percentages of their high school class would be able to attend a California university.

Improvements in health and education were only the beginning of the Great Society programs. Johnson believed conditions in the cities—poor schools, crime,

slum housing, poverty, and pollution—blighted the lives of those who lived there. He urged Congress to act on legislation addressing this issue. 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 a cabinet. A broad-based program informally called “Model Cities” authorized federal subsidies to many cities nationwide. The funds, matched by local and state contributions, supported an array of programs, including transportation, health care, housing, and policing. Legislation also authorized about \$8 billion to build houses for people with low- and middle-incomes.

One notable Great Society measure changed the composition of the American population: the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. For a brief time, this act maintained a strict limit on the number of immigrants admitted to the United States each year: 170,000 from the Eastern Hemisphere and 120,000 from the Western Hemisphere. It did, however, eliminate the national origins system established in the 1920s, which had given preference to northern

Major Great Society Programs

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

Chart Skills

- 1. Interpreting Charts** What was the purpose of the Office of Economic Opportunity?
- 2. Evaluating** Which Great Society program do you think had the most impact on American society? Why?

European immigrants. The new measure opened wider the door of the United States to newcomers from all parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa.

✓ Reading Check **Summarizing** What were the Great Society programs?

Legacy of the Great Society

Main Idea Although controversial, the Great Society programs improved the lives of thousands of people.

Reading Connection What Great Society programs do you think were the most helpful? Read on to learn of the lasting impact of Johnson's Great Society.

The Great Society programs touched nearly every aspect of American life and improved thousands, if not millions, of lives. In the years since President Johnson left office, however, debate has continued over whether or not the Great Society was truly a success. In many ways, the impact of the Great Society

was limited. In his rush to get as much done as he could, Johnson did not calculate exactly how his programs might work. As a result, some of them did not work as well as people had hoped. Furthermore, the programs grew so quickly they were often unmanageable and difficult to evaluate. Cities, states, and groups eligible for aid began to expect immediate and life-changing benefits. These expectations often left many feeling frustrated and angry. Other Americans opposed the massive growth of federal programs and criticized the Great Society for intruding too much into their lives.

A lack of funds also hurt the effectiveness of Great Society programs. The programs themselves were expensive enough. 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 to the present, however. These include Medicare and Medicaid, two cabinet agencies—the Department of Transportation and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)—and Project Head Start. Overall, the programs provided

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

MOMENT in HISTORY

YOUTH'S HELPING HAND

In 1965 VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) was created as part of President Johnson's war on poverty. Roused by the social consciousness of the early 1960s, thousands of students and young people focused their energy into working with local agencies in low-income communities around the nation. One of VISTA's basic themes was to help local communities mobilize their own resources. Since 1993 VISTA has been a part of the AmeriCorps network of service programs.



Profiles IN HISTORY

Esther Peterson 1906–1997

In the 1930s, Boston employers asked women who sewed aprons for them to switch from square pockets to a more difficult heart-shaped pocket, but they did not offer any increase in pay. Esther Peterson, a local teacher and outspoken advocate for women's rights, led the workers in a strike for more money. The women won their pay raise. For 60 years, Esther Peterson continued to use her tact and will to fight for women's rights, trade unions, and consumers.

Born in Provo, Utah, as Esther Eggertsen, Peterson became a teacher

in the 1930s. She taught milliners, telephone operators, and garment workers at the innovative Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers in Industry. In 1961 President Kennedy selected her to serve as Assistant Secretary of Labor and Director of the Women's Bureau. Peterson then encouraged Kennedy to create a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women to focus attention on working women.

Under President Johnson, Peterson served as Special Assistant for Consumer Affairs, where she worked on consumer concerns. Lynda Johnson Robb, daughter of President Johnson, described Peterson this way: "She had

a velvet hammer and talked people into doing what was right, even if we didn't know it at the time." Peterson continued to use her "velvet hammer" for the public good throughout her long life. At the time of her death at the age of 91, she was actively promoting senior citizens' health issues.



some important benefits to poorer communities and gave political and administrative experience to minority groups.

An important legacy of the Great Society was the questions it produced, questions Americans continue to consider. How can the federal government help its citizens who are economically disadvantaged? How much government help can a society have without weakening the private **sector**? How much help can its people receive without losing motivation to fight against hardships on their own?

Lyndon Johnson came into 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. In evaluating the administration's efforts, the *New York Times* wrote, "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."

Reading Check **Evaluating** What was the impact of the Great Society?

HISTORY Online Study Central

For help with the concepts in this section of *American Vision: Modern Times* go to tav.mt.glencoe.com and click on **Study Central**.

SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

- Vocabulary** Define: analogy, consensus, war on poverty, confine, sector.
- People and Terms** Identify: VISTA, Great Society, Medicare, Medicaid, Head Start, Robert Weaver.
- Describe** how the Great Society programs were inspired.

Reviewing Big Ideas

- Analyzing** How did Johnson's war on poverty strive to ensure greater fairness in American society?

Critical Thinking

- Interpreting** What were three legacies of the Great Society? **CA CS1**
- Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list five Great Society initiatives that have survived to the present.

Great Society Initiatives

Analyzing Visuals

- Photographs** Study the photograph on page 725. Why do you think pictures such as this one would help build support for the war on poverty?

Writing About History

- Descriptive Writing** Take on the role of a biographer. Write a chapter in a biography of Lyndon Johnson in which you compare and contrast his leadership style to that of John Kennedy.

CA 11WS1.1