

LYNDON BAYNE JOHNSON---36th PRESIDENT OF THE U.S.

(11/22/63 to 01/20/69) Democrat

GOAL: Present evidence of a one-term presidential greatness in leadership unexpected presidential travesty.

“America was built on *Courage*, on *Imagination*, and an *Unbeatable Determination to do the job at hand!*”

Harry S. Truman

LYNDON B. JOHNSON (LBJ)

Fear and sadness wept over our “land of the free” on 11/22/63. Many of us watched in real-time as the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, traveling in an unprotected motorcade in Dallas, Texas, was assassinated. The grief and fear were almost overwhelming, as many of us sat in front of our TV and watched a beloved president slump in his seat and the First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy, attempting to save him and herself.

The perpetrator of this crime was Lee Harvey Oswald. The conspiracy of the entire assassination happening, including the death of the perpetrator, was believed to include the workings possibly of Russia, Cuba, or the Mafia. It was a national time of mourning. It was a time that cried out for leadership! As stated by Charles Dickens in his many variable descriptions of the many seasons of American history— “It was the worst of times.” -- yes, it was one of the darkest days and fearful seasons in American history.

The Vice President, L.B.J., was sworn in on Air Force One (aircraft) that same day as the President of the Thirty-Sixth President of the United States of America. Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Johnson (Claudia Taylor Johnson--known as Lady Bird) were at his side.

LBJ’S HISTORY

LBJ taught history in rural Texas as a young man. He was 6’4” tall, known to smoke 60 cigarettes per day, was straightforward, a great negotiator, and always wanted to be in charge. He was born into poverty, his father having “lost everything.” Being a great persuader, the “Johnson Treatment,” as the behavior was known, was LBJ’s arm around your shoulder and his system of “close talk.”

At the age of 28, he was elevated to the House of Representatives. In 1960, he lost the presidency to Kennedy. Kennedy chose LBJ to be his Vice President. LBJ was personally miserable in his role as Vice President. However, as President following the assassination of Kennedy, he was in his element by amplifying what Kennedy could not/did not get done, and he was instrumental in pushing forward agendas for the betterment of our great nation!

With a significant professional upbringing in the United States Congress, LBJ was elected in 1948 to the Senate. At the age of 45, he was the youngest minority leader in the Senate, and at the age of 46, he was the youngest majority leader in the Senate at a time when the Democrats regained control of the Senate. Two years later, he resigned to become Vice President under Kennedy.

Lyndon B. Johnson was Kennedy's past running mate, and after accepting the role as Vice President under Kennedy, had been Vice President for only 1036 days at the time of Kennedy's assassination. LBJ knew the whole world would be anxiously following his every move. Everybody would be—watching, judging, and weighing every decision he made as he assumed the presidential role of the United States of America. LBJ later admitted, "The times cried out for leadership!" So, with his vision of needed leadership, he intended to move forward in his attempt to establish his so-called Great Society for the American People.

As the newly acquired President, LBJ admitted the administrative body of the US was "like a bunch of cattle caught in the swamp, unable to move in either direction—circling round and round." He admitted the only way to get the job done was to "get on the horse and take the lead." He, then, knew in all this confusion that "I WAS THAT MAN!" And as his decision proclaimed, his lead in this new role showed exceptional and apparent mastery.

He greatly respected the Kennedy family and immediately turned to them for support. He requested their support by stating how much President Kennedy (upon his death) needed them—right now! With a recognized contrite spirit, he proclaimed they would be appointed to strategic government roles because-- "*I know how much he needed you. I need you that much more, and so does our country!*" He shared his great humility and doubts and requested their immediate help, advice, and support. "There is so much I don't know," and "You must teach me!" he contritely proclaimed. Such honesty on behalf of LBJ presented a great love for our country and a spirit of fellowship that needed to occur *right now!*

Important figures of Kennedy's cabinet remained in the White House during this presidential transition—wanting to be helpful—and wanting LBJ to succeed! Johnson's honesty and pleading for their support as the new presidential leader were compelling for the resultant one term that he was President.

As if he (LBJ) had been preparing for this role, the time had presented itself to use the intellectual power and leadership qualities he had acquired from the late President. With what appeared to be a masterful design, he seemed to know exactly what he wanted to accomplish and set forth to execute his movement toward success.

Within hours of the assassination of President Kennedy, L.B.J. was on the phone with Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower, meeting with congressional leaders in his office, and sought others immediately after the assassination to stay—even that night—to do problem-solving. Not wanting to be alone, the night was spent with several male supporters relistening to the events of the tumultuous day. The next day brought a renewal of energy, stating plans, goals, and objectives. Immediately, his goals became part of his presidential leadership efforts.

To present himself as the new leader, he first spoke not through the TV but to Congress. In the presence of his familiar audience of powerful leaders, he requested gridlocks that previously curtailed Kennedy's domestic initiatives from becoming law to cease. Congress was now to move forward for the betterment of humankind! (Life Magazine had stated that the historical evidence was overwhelming that the Congress had sat longer than any previous body of legislatures "while accomplishing nothing.") *Times were able to change!*

To dislodge Kennedy's past stalled goals in Congress, LBJ forcefully declared immediately he would:

1. Get the tax cut out of the Senate Finance Committee!
2. Get the economy "humming" again!
3. Pass legislation that allows everyone in the country to vote!
4. Encourage every boy and girl, regardless of the color of their skin, area of residency, or how poor, to get all the education they can by taking a loan, scholarship, or grant from the federal government!
5. Pass the Harry Truman Medical Insurance Bill!
6. Pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed segregation in businesses, employment, and public places. (When the bill finally passed 73 to 27, the Congressional Record indicated the chamber resounded in applause!)
7. Enforce the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which enforces the prohibiting of race, color, sex, national origin, disability, or age in hiring, promoting, firing, setting wages, testing, training, apprenticeship, and all other terms and conditions of employment!

THE "GREAT SOCIETY"

And so it was—the Great Society was well on its way by promoting racial and economic justice. It was LBJ's way of carrying out his belief that the government was to look after those who needed help. It was within this "call to arms" speech promoting the Great Society movement, which was given with great enthusiasm, that LBJ had a near-fatal heart attack.

Even with this extremely ambitious and almost fatal start, LBJ fulfilled his ambitions to counteract negative ideas about his ability to lead. He acted where quickness was necessary.

Following Kennedy's burial the next day, he made a major speech. His speeches perhaps showed some stiffening and hesitating in the past; however, this time, as he knew people were watching and wondering who this new leader was, he knew they would see him as either wavering or the new presidential leader.

In hopes that the oppressive mode would encourage a positive move forward to initiate change, LBJ moved forward quickly to take advantage of a possible supportive atmosphere within Congress. Therefore, in LBJ's first few years in office, he carried out some of the most extensive legislative programs in the nation's history, which included efforts to curtail the growth of communism.

Organizations immediately funded by LBJ in his one term as President and leadership efforts were:

1. The Warren Commission (an investigation of the assassination of J.F. Kennedy)
2. Office of Economic Opportunity
3. The "Great Society" (1965 agenda for Congress—a rapid aid to education, attack on disease, Medicare, urban renewal and beautification, conservation, poverty, crime prevention, removal of voting rights obstacles, segregation, and explorations orbiting the moon)
4. US Department of Housing
5. National Endowment for the Arts
6. Pedernales Electric Cooperative
7. Corporation of Public Broadcasters

"The Great Society" was an ambitious series of policy initiatives, legislation, and programs spearheaded by LBJ. It took advantage of civil rights legislation, tax cuts, and was a war on poverty. LBJ showed that the following programs would provide a lever to open opportunities for prosperity for those who have been kept outside of economic justice. Two groups were to benefit from the programs—the *elderly and the poor*.

1. The Economic Opportunity Act helped the poverty cycle by developing job skills, furthering education, and increasing job opportunities.
2. One-half of the Job Corps for 100,000 disadvantaged men worked on conservation projects and received education and skill training in special training centers.
3. The National Work Study Program offered 140,000 Americans the chance to attend college who could not afford it.
4. Development of Community Action Programs occurred.
5. Development of Government Training Programs for American volunteers to serve poverty-stricken communities occurred.
6. Loans and guarantees for employers offering jobs to the unemployed were available.
7. Funds for farmers to purchase land and establish coops were available.
8. Help was available for unemployed parents starting in the workforce.
9. Medicare and Medicaid were available.
10. Head Start & Educational Reform became a part of the educational system.

MEDICARE AND MEDICAID

In 1964, after LBJ became President of the US and democrats gained control of Congress, Medicare and Medicaid became law. During the early Kennedy years, the Republicans and some Democrats refused to allow such legislation. These two programs were “safety nets” for the most vulnerable uninsured members in the American Society—the elderly and poor. Medicare covered hospital and physical care costs for the elderly who qualified. Medicaid covered healthcare for people receiving cash assistance from the government.

HEAD START & EDUCATION REFORM

Project Head Start was started by LBJ, Sargent Shriver, and child development experts. The start was at a summer camp run by the Office of Economic Opportunity for 500,000 children three to five years of age. It has been reported to have served 32 million vulnerable children in America.

VIETNAM

In March 1968, a war crisis arose in Vietnam, regardless of efforts to control communism. US troops were increased from 21,000 to 528,000. The bombing of Vietnam finally ceased to promote negotiations.

When LBJ withdrew from candidacy for a second presidential term, it was a surprising choice. As LBJ left the office as President, peace talks in Vietnam were underway.

Lyndon B. Johnson’s Symbolic Leadership Behaviors for Today’s Leaders:

1. Pay attention and learn from the leadership success of other leaders.
2. Even though some leaders failed in “getting things done,” a different person, a different time, and historical outcomes can cause a change in perspective that can result in positive outcomes.
3. Recognize that sometimes it takes a retrospective historical view of situations and choices to appreciate leadership goodness, talent, and significant contributions.
4. Recognize and seize the moment when it is recognized that leadership skills are required and needed for a positive leadership outcome.
5. Know when it is time (for any reason) to “pass the torch” of leadership responsibility for the betterment of your constituents.
6. Allow your leadership replacement to occur gracefully when your positive legacy has been fulfilled.
7. Communicate, collaborate, problem-solve, and establish close working bonds with those who are determinants of future positive change.

8. Know that leadership success is not determined by personal wealth but by a personal determination to make a positive difference.
9. Appreciate that significant and related productive experiences in a field of expertise provide the framework for future positive leadership outcomes.
10. Know that leadership is sometimes an expected result of time, place, and extenuating circumstances—therefore, prepare yourself for the unexpected role of leadership.

In closing: In just one term as President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) (without question) added tremendously to the positive outcomes of the lives of all Americans—especially with his Great Society agenda! However, to some, the magnitude of his presidency was debated mainly due to the Vietnam War. Regardless, this man, tested for his ability to meet a most unfortunate call of the time due to the assassination of the President of the United States, fulfilled a significant role with experiential dignity. His place in history was seen as the most consequential and, to some (unfortunately), the least appreciated. LBJ's contribution to the current history for the betterment of humankind shall always be appreciated by those who understand the challenges of leadership!

Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) died of a heart attack at his Texas ranch on January 22, 1973.

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