

## Introduction

Vice President *Lyndon B. Johnson* became President on November 22, 1963, when John F. Kennedy was assassinated. He continued many of the programs begun by President Kennedy to help improve life in the United States. He continued this effort after he was elected President in 1964. His programs aided the country's poor and elderly, and helped African Americans continue their civil rights movement. He was unable, however, to survive the political unrest that resulted from the Vietnam War.



*President Lyndon B. Johnson*

## President Johnson's First Task

President Johnson's first task was to lead the United States through the days following Kennedy's tragic death. The man arrested in Dallas for murdering President Kennedy was *Lee Harvey Oswald*. Oswald had a mysterious history and had once lived in the Soviet Union. His past eventually raised many questions about the Kennedy assassination. Oswald, however, never had a chance to talk about his part in Kennedy's murder. Two days after Kennedy's assassination, Oswald was shot and killed.

Television carried 24-hour coverage of the events following Kennedy's death. Americans watched in disbelief as *Jack Ruby* shot Oswald while the police were moving him from a police station to a more permanent jail.

## The Warren Commission

President Johnson appointed a commission headed by Chief Justice *Earl Warren* to investigate Kennedy's murder. After nine months, the **Warren Commission** concluded that Oswald was the *lone assassin*: they believed Oswald was the only person to shoot Kennedy.

However, they could not answer all the questions about Kennedy's assassination. In the years that followed, people continued to wonder about the assassination. As recently as 1992, new investigations suggested that more than one person acted to assassinate the President.

## President Johnson and the Kennedy Legislation

President Johnson served 30 years in the House of Representatives and the Senate before becoming Vice President in 1961. He was skilled at passing **legislation**, or laws, through Congress. President Johnson persuaded Congress to pass many of the programs of the late President Kennedy. Johnson's social and economic programs were nicknamed the **Great Society**.

### Civil Rights Act of 1964

One of the most important pieces of *legislation* passed during the Johnson administration was the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**. This act said there could be no racial discrimination where federal funds were used. The law opened public places and facilities to African Americans and tried to protect their right to vote.

### Congress Strengthens the Right to Vote

Some southern states had a **poll tax**. This was a tax people had to pay in order to vote. It kept poor people and African Americans from voting. Congress ratified the 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment in July of 1964, ending the *poll tax*.

### War on Poverty

Johnson persuaded Congress to set aside money to provide for job training programs and loans to needy college students. In addition, the food stamp program was enlarged to help people on welfare, and states received money for hospitals and health centers.

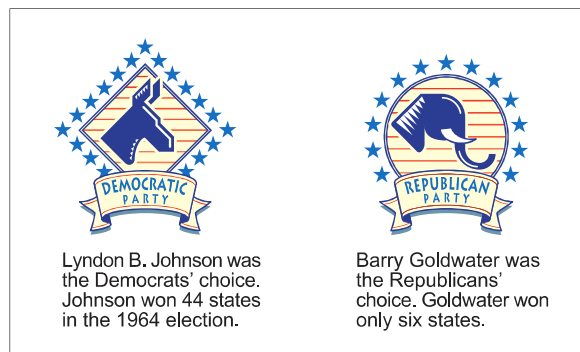
### Wilderness Act of 1964

Cities received millions of dollars to improve mass transit and highways. Congress also cut personal income taxes, which gave people more money to spend. Congress showed its concern for the environment by passing the **Wilderness Act of 1964**. This act set aside nine million acres of land for national forests.



## Election of 1964

Lyndon B. Johnson was the Democrats' choice in the election of 1964. His Republican opponent was *Barry M. Goldwater*. Goldwater had voted against many of the Kennedy-Johnson bills. He also seemed to favor the use of small nuclear weapons in the Vietnam War. Goldwater scared voters and was badly defeated by Johnson.



## The Great Society

As part of the *Great Society*, President Johnson talked of waging a **War on Poverty**, his program to aid the poor. One important bill passed by Congress was the **Medicare** bill. This bill provided low-cost hospital insurance for citizens over the age of 65. Another important bill was a one billion dollar aid program for education. It helped needy students attend school. Schools receiving any of these funds were required to obey desegregation laws.

In 1965 the Appalachian Regional Development bill gave over one billion dollars to help people in the poor areas of the Appalachian Mountains. A Housing and Urban Development bill provided funds to build public housing and help low income families pay rent.

Other acts by Congress and President Johnson aimed at improving housing, transportation, and the environment. Congress created two new cabinet positions—the *Department of Housing and Urban Affairs (HUD)* and the *Department of Transportation (DOT)*. A rising concern about pollution prompted Congress to take first steps toward cleaning up the nation's air and water.

## Johnson and Kennedy Legislation

### DISCRIMINATION

- 1964** **Civil Rights Act of 1964** said there could be no racial discrimination where federal funds were used. It outlawed discrimination in jobs, housing, and public accommodations.
- 1964** **Twenty-fourth Amendment** ended the poll tax in federal elections.
- 1965** **Voting Rights Act of 1965** ended the requirement of voters passing literacy tests in order to vote and allowed the federal government to monitor voter registration.

### CITIES AND ENVIRONMENT

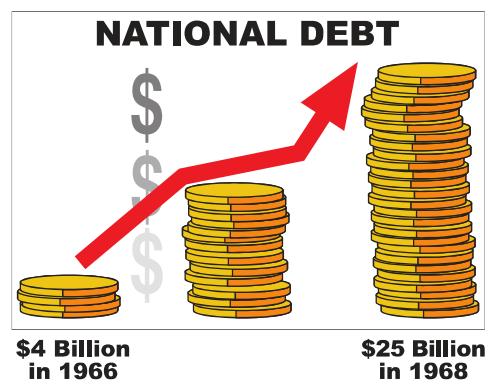
- 1964** **Department of Housing and Urban Development** was created to improve housing by creating federal housing programs.
- 1964** **Wilderness Preservation Act** set aside nine million acres of national land as natural forests.

### POVERTY

- 1965** **Medical Care Act** established Medicare and Medicaid programs.
- 1965** **Appalachian Regional Development Act** set aside money for highways, health centers, and resource development in poor areas of the country.

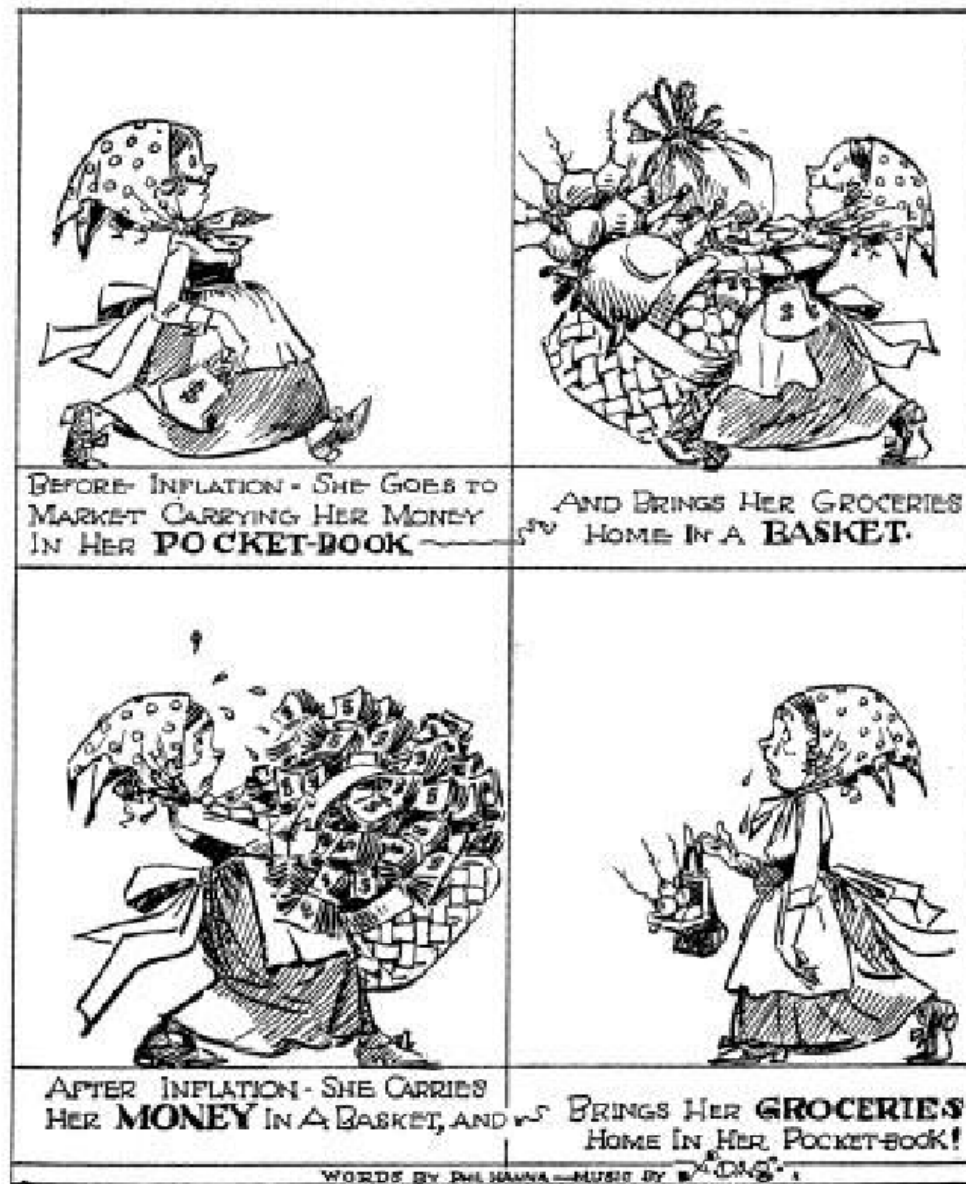
## Inflation

The 1964 tax cut gave Americans more money to spend on goods and services. At the same time, the government also was spending more money on new programs. As a result, there was **inflation**. In other words, prices and the cost of living were rising. The government was going into debt. The **national debt**—total amount of money the federal government borrows and has to pay back to its citizens or other nations who have invested in the United States—grew from almost four billion dollars in 1966 to over \$25 billion in 1968.





## Inflation and the Cost of Living



*As prices continued to go up, the purchasing price of the dollar continued to get smaller.*

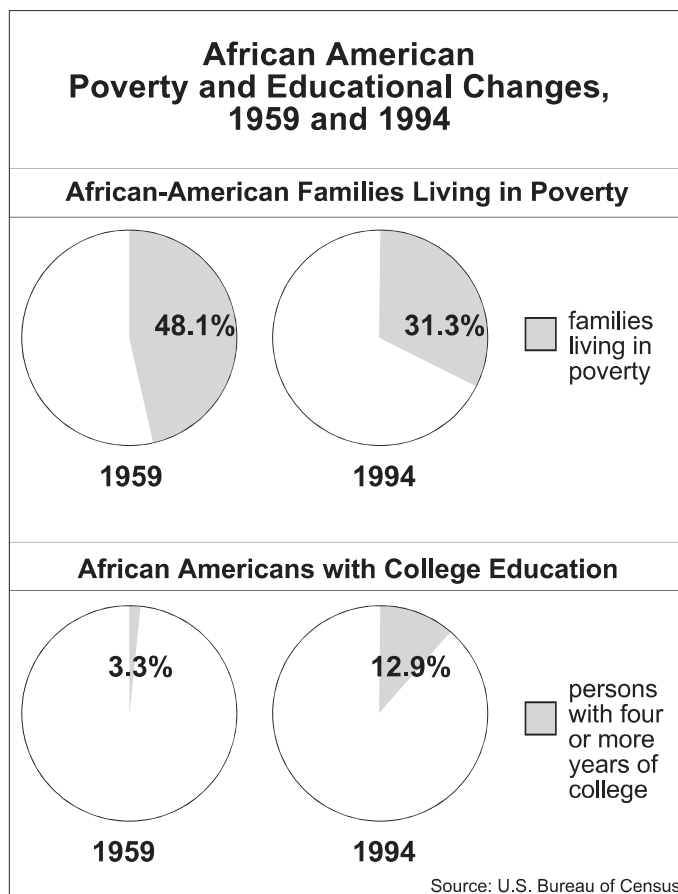
Courtesy of the J. N. "Ding" Darling Foundation

## A Social Revolution

The pace of social change increased in the 1960s. Two major groups led the fight for social changes—African Americans and America's youth.

## African Americans

The President and Congress were slowly desegregating the South. They passed a strong *Civil Rights Act in 1964* that opened public places, including restaurants, to African Americans. Schools in the South were desegregating. At the same time, civil rights groups worked to register African-American voters. Some whites violently worked against desegregation. In 1964 three civil rights workers were murdered in Mississippi. Others were beaten, or their homes were burned. The violence frightened some African Americans away from voting.



In March of 1965, Dr. *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, helped support African-American voter registration. He led peaceful marches through Selma, Alabama. As Americans watched on television, the marchers were attacked by the Selma police. Governor Wallace did not try to protect the marchers.

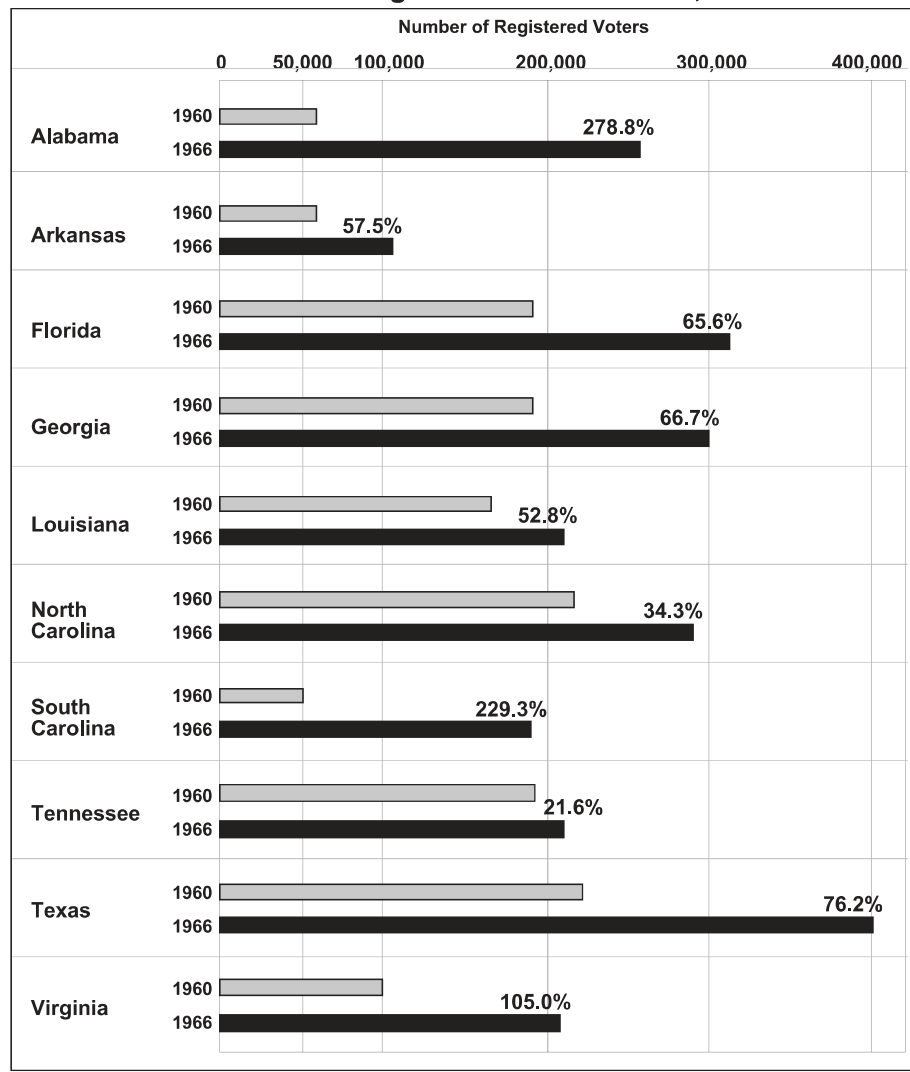
Bus boycotts continued around the South. Protesters staged *sit-ins* on college campuses and at segregated lunch counters.

President Johnson finally ordered the Alabama National Guard, federal marshals, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to protect the marchers. Federal troops escorted the marchers on the four-day walk from Selma to Montgomery.

## Voting Rights Act of 1965

Six months after the marches in Alabama, Congress passed the **Voting Rights Act of 1965**. The act provided federal protection at voter registration sites. African-American voter registration rose 50 percent over the next year.

**African-American Voter Registration in the South, 1960 and 1966**



% = Percentage of increase between 1960 and 1966

## Urban Revolt

Change for African Americans was slower in the North and in large cities. Many African Americans were becoming frustrated, or upset. They wanted conditions to improve much faster. As a result, the urban civil rights movement began to split apart. One group wanted to continue to protest in a *nonviolent* way. Another decided *violence* was the only means to end racial discrimination.

In the summer of 1965, riots broke out in Watts, an African-American neighborhood in Los Angeles. In 1967 riots by African Americans destroyed areas of Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit, Michigan. Forty-three people were killed and 5,000 left homeless in Detroit.

The riots caused a **white backlash**, or turnaround in white opinion. Many white people condemned the riots. Congress failed to pass any new civil rights legislation in 1966–67.

## The Youth Rebellion

Children born during the **baby boom** shortly after World War II grew up in the 1960s. Many of their parents were **affluent**, or well off. These children had been surrounded by countless technological gadgets and were the first *television generation*. Many tended to be aware of social and environmental problems. They knew about the threat of nuclear war and, in the 1960s, they were concerned about the Vietnam War.

Some of these young people rebelled against their parents' way of life and the institutions they felt were responsible for many of the country's problems. They left home to join the counterculture, or a culture different from their parents. They were called **hippies**. They grew their hair long and dressed in different ways. Drug use was a feature of the lifestyles of some of the *hippies*.



## The New Left

Many youths throughout the country became involved in political movements. College campuses became centers for the **New Left**, groups who wanted to change American politics. The followers of the *New Left* blamed the United States for many problems in the world.

Organizations such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) called for revolution in America. Their heroes included well-known Communists. They held frequent antiwar protests against American involvement in Vietnam. Their protests received a lot of television coverage. Many ordinary Americans disliked these outspoken young people.

## Vietnam and the Antiwar Protest

Although the United States was fighting in Vietnam, the United States Congress had not declared war on North Vietnam. Instead, in August of 1964, Congress approved the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**. This gave President Johnson the power, as Commander-in-Chief, to wage war against North Vietnam.



By the end of 1965, President Johnson had sent nearly 200,000 American troops to Vietnam. By 1968 **casualties**, soldiers who were either killed, wounded, or missing in action, numbered more than 100,000. In February of 1968, the Vietcong and North Vietnamese launched a powerful attack against the South Vietnamese called the **Tet Offensive**. The North Vietnamese gained control of many South Vietnamese cities. Eventually, American troops and the South Vietnamese Army regained most of South Vietnam. This victory, however, was at a great cost. Many people were killed and much land was destroyed. In 1969 the number of American troops in Vietnam reached 545,000. The *Tet Offensive* is considered a turning point in favor of the Vietcong and North Vietnamese.

Television brought the horror of Vietnam directly to American viewers. As time passed, they were becoming divided over Vietnam. Some people

believed the United States should fight Communist aggression. Some felt the United States was not fighting aggressively enough to prevent the Soviets and Chinese from aiding North Vietnam, and as a result, more American lives were being lost fighting a war that could not be won. Others, however, believed the United States had no business fighting in Vietnam. The antiwar protesters—people against the war—grew louder and more violent. Many feared Johnson was not telling them the truth about the war.



## The Democrats Split

Democratic candidates for the 1968 presidential election debated the Vietnam War. Democratic Senator *Eugene J. McCarthy* decided to run against President Johnson. McCarthy wanted to end the war in Vietnam. Another Democrat, *Robert F. Kennedy*, who was also against the war, entered the race. Robert Kennedy was the brother of John F. Kennedy. McCarthy and Kennedy received strong support. President Johnson had lost his support because he had continued the war in Vietnam.

On March 31, 1968, President Johnson made a television address. He discussed the war in Vietnam and called for peace talks. However, he surprised everyone when, at the end of his address, he announced that he would not run for reelection. Three days after Johnson dropped out of the campaign, North Vietnam agreed to peace talks.

## A Violent Campaign Year

On April 4, 1968, the day after North Vietnam agreed to peace talks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. Riots, burning, and looting took place in 100 cities, including Washington, D.C. Americans watched both the assassination and the riots on television.

The country was reeling from President Johnson's announcement, the death of Dr. King, and the riots. Then, on June 5, Senator Robert F. Kennedy also was assassinated after making a campaign primary victory speech in Los Angeles. As Americans mourned the deaths of these men, they tried to make sense of the sudden violence.



## The Chicago Convention

Vice President *Hubert H. Humphrey* announced after President Johnson dropped out of the election that he would enter the Democrat's campaign for President. The Democratic Convention was held in Chicago in July of 1968 and was unlike any ever seen. The Chicago convention hall was ringed with barbed wire and protected by armed guards.

Large groups of antiwar protesters camped out on the grounds around the convention hall. Police squads were on hand to control the angry protesters. The antiwar groups yelled at and made fun of the police, calling them **pigs**. The protesters and police wound up fighting before television cameras.

## Summary

President Johnson was successful in getting Congress to pass legislation to improve life for African Americans and citizens who were poor or elderly. He also tried to fight an unpopular and costly war in Vietnam. He served during a violent period in American history. Finally, he decided not to run for reelection in 1968.

In the United States, African Americans organized to end racial discrimination. Their frustrations led to riots in many cities. Rebellious youths organized against the Vietnam War and worked for other social changes.