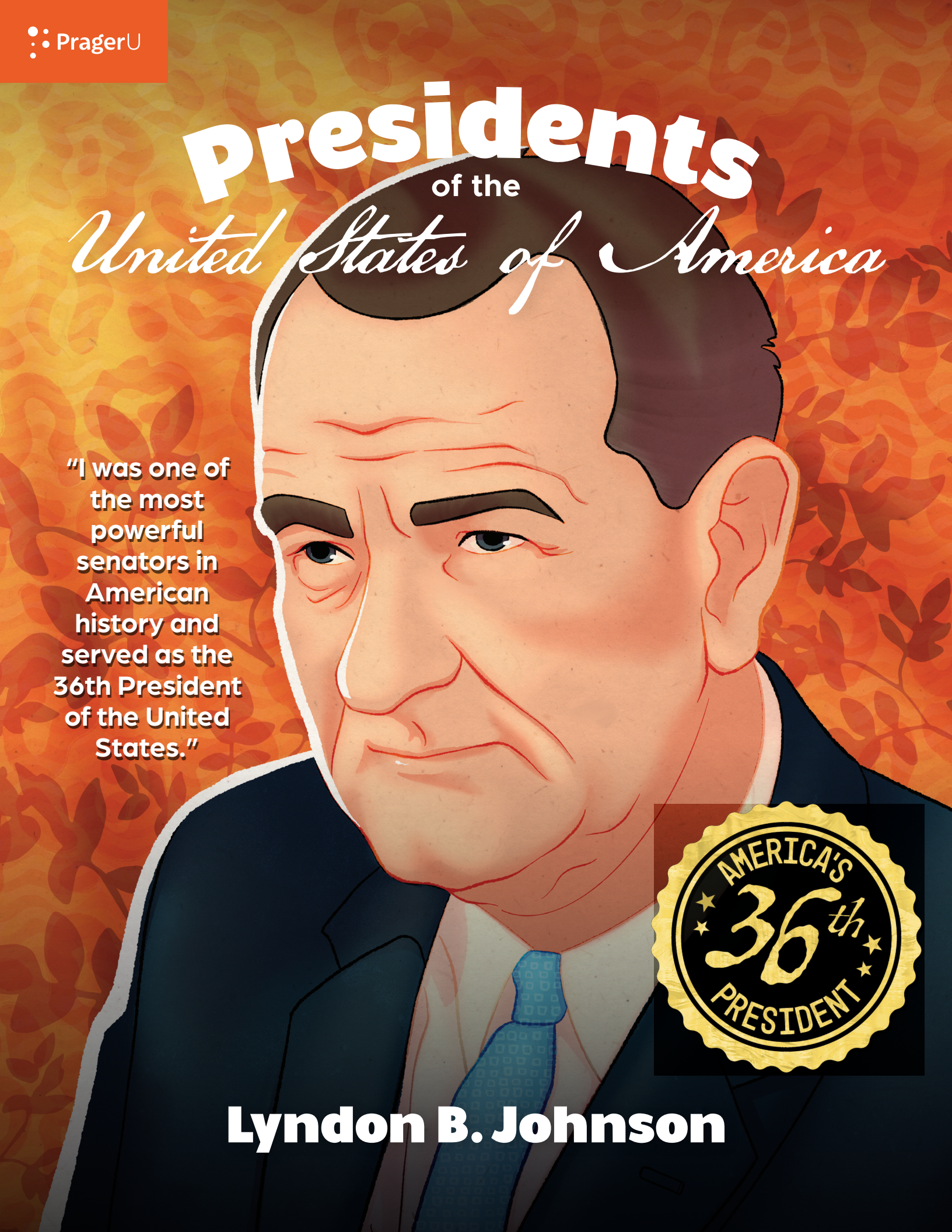
PragerU

Presidents of the United States of America



Lyndon B. Johnson



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Become a Presidential Historian by Solving This Puzzle

In this book, you'll learn all sorts of facts about Lyndon B. Johnson's life and accomplishments. But there's still one last thing we need to know about him.

President Johnson owned two beagles. We need your help to find out what their names were. Your task is to help us uncover the answer! Hidden in the text are bolded letters. Read this book carefully to find them, and fill the letters into the blanks below in the order they appear.

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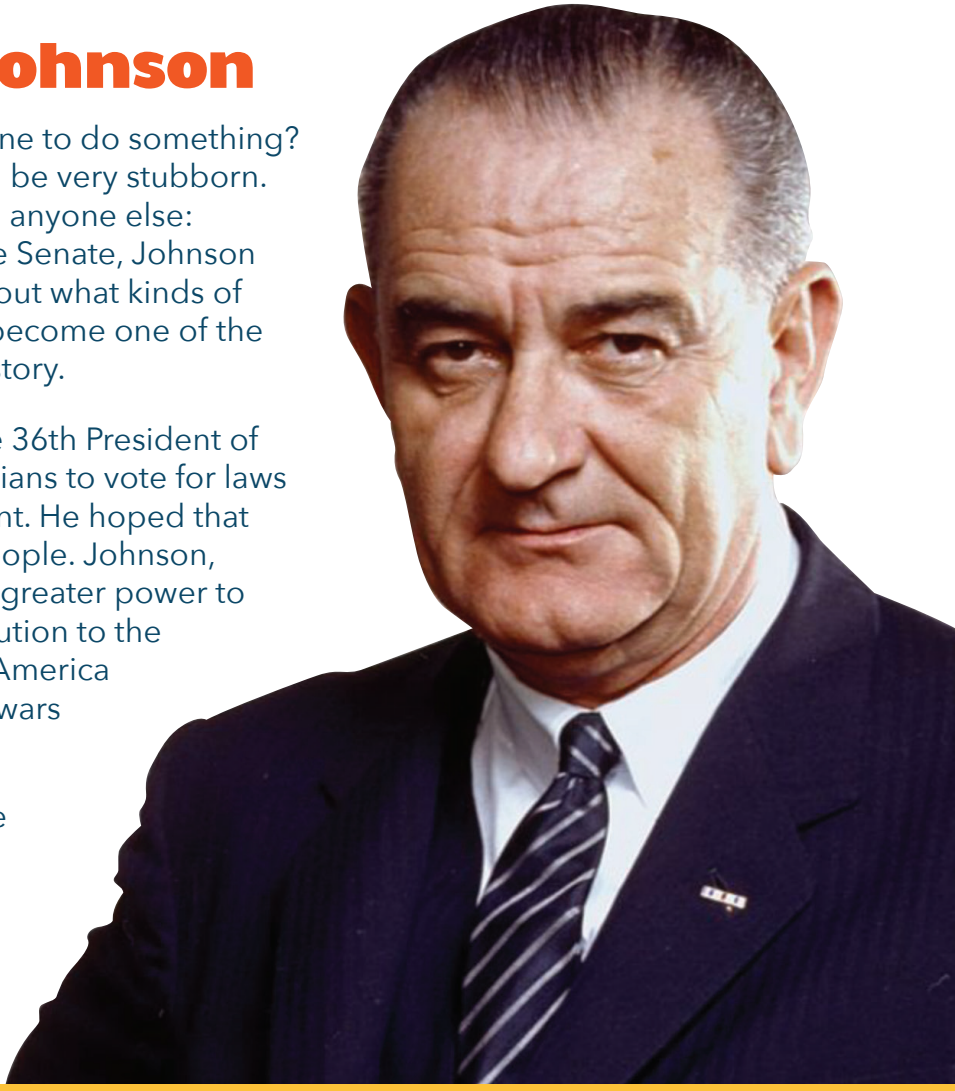
Once you've solved this puzzle, you'll be a true PragerU Kids presidential historian!

Meet Lyndon B. Johnson

Have you ever tried to convince someone to do something? It isn't always easy to do so—people can be very stubborn. One man knew how to do it better than anyone else: Lyndon B. Johnson. As a member of the Senate, Johnson was able to convince his colleagues about what kinds of laws to vote for. He used this ability to become one of the most powerful senators in American history.

Johnson eventually rose to become the 36th President of the United States. He persuaded politicians to vote for laws that expanded the power of government. He hoped that these laws would help the American people. Johnson, however, didn't understand that giving greater power to the government wasn't the ultimate solution to the nation's problems. Even worse, he got America involved in one of the most unpopular wars in American history.

Although Johnson was blessed with the gift of persuasion, his story teaches us that it's not enough to have gifts—we have to think carefully about using them wisely.



Young Lyndon

Lyndon Baines Johnson was born on August 27, 1908, on a farm near Stonewall, Texas. He was the oldest of Samuel and Rebekah Johnson's five children. His father, Sam, was a farmer and a state politician. His mother, Rebekah, was a well-educated woman who was active in her local community.

The Johnson family lived the rural, hardscrabble life. Their home had no electricity or plumbing. Young Lyndon, however, felt he was destined for greater things. His classmates later remembered him saying, "Someday, I'm going to be President of the United States."

He took his first steps toward that goal by getting elected president of his high school senior class. After that, he attended Southwest Texas State Teachers College in San Marcos. Since Lyndon was so poor, he worked as a janitor to pay for his tuition. He also took a job as a teacher. Most of his students—ranging from 5th to 7th grade—came from very poor Mexican-American families. Lyndon worked hard and became principal of the school. His experiences as a teacher also gave him a passion for helping the poor.



Interesting Facts

- He is considered one of the most effective Senate leaders in American history.
- He was a member of the Democratic Party.
- He was often referred to as "LBJ."
- He is the only president (as of 2023) to take the oath of office in an airplane.
- He is the only president (as of 2023) to be sworn in by a woman (Sarah T. Hughes).
- He was the first president to appoint a black American to the Supreme Court (Thurgood Marshall).
- He was the first president to appoint a black American to a Cabinet position (Robert C. Weaver, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development).

Early Career

After graduating college in 1930, he moved to Washington, D.C., where he worked as an aide for Democratic Congressman Richard Kleberg. From then on, Johnson was completely obsessed with politics. He poured his whole heart into succeeding in the political world. His colleagues were amazed at his tireless work ethic.

He did, however, find time for things besides work. Along the way, he met a young woman named Claudia Taylor, who came from a wealthy Texas family and was nicknamed "Lady Bird." They married in 1934 and eventually had two children, Lynda and Luci.





Franklin D. Roosevelt (left) and Lyndon B. Johnson (right)

Entering Congress

Johnson wanted to do more than be an aide, so in 1937 he was elected as a congressman from Texas. He was just 29 years old and an up-and-coming politician. At the time, Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt was serving as president and implementing his progressive **New Deal** policies. Johnson idolized Roosevelt and loyally supported his programs.

During World War II, Johnson remained a congressman but served in the Naval Reserve and as an inspector of the war effort. He flew on one bombing mission and was awarded the Silver Star.



Johnson, however, always had his eye on reaching higher office. In 1948, he ran against former Texas Governor Coke Stevenson for the Democratic Party's nomination to be a U.S. senator. Johnson knew how to get the voters' attention: he arrived at campaign events in dramatic fashion in a helicopter called "The Johnson City Windmill."

When the **primary election** was over, Johnson had won by 87 votes out of almost 1 million. Many historians believe that Johnson had engaged in fraudulent activities to win. His critics sarcastically nicknamed him "Landslide Lyndon." That fall, Johnson easily won the general election.

Boss of the Senate

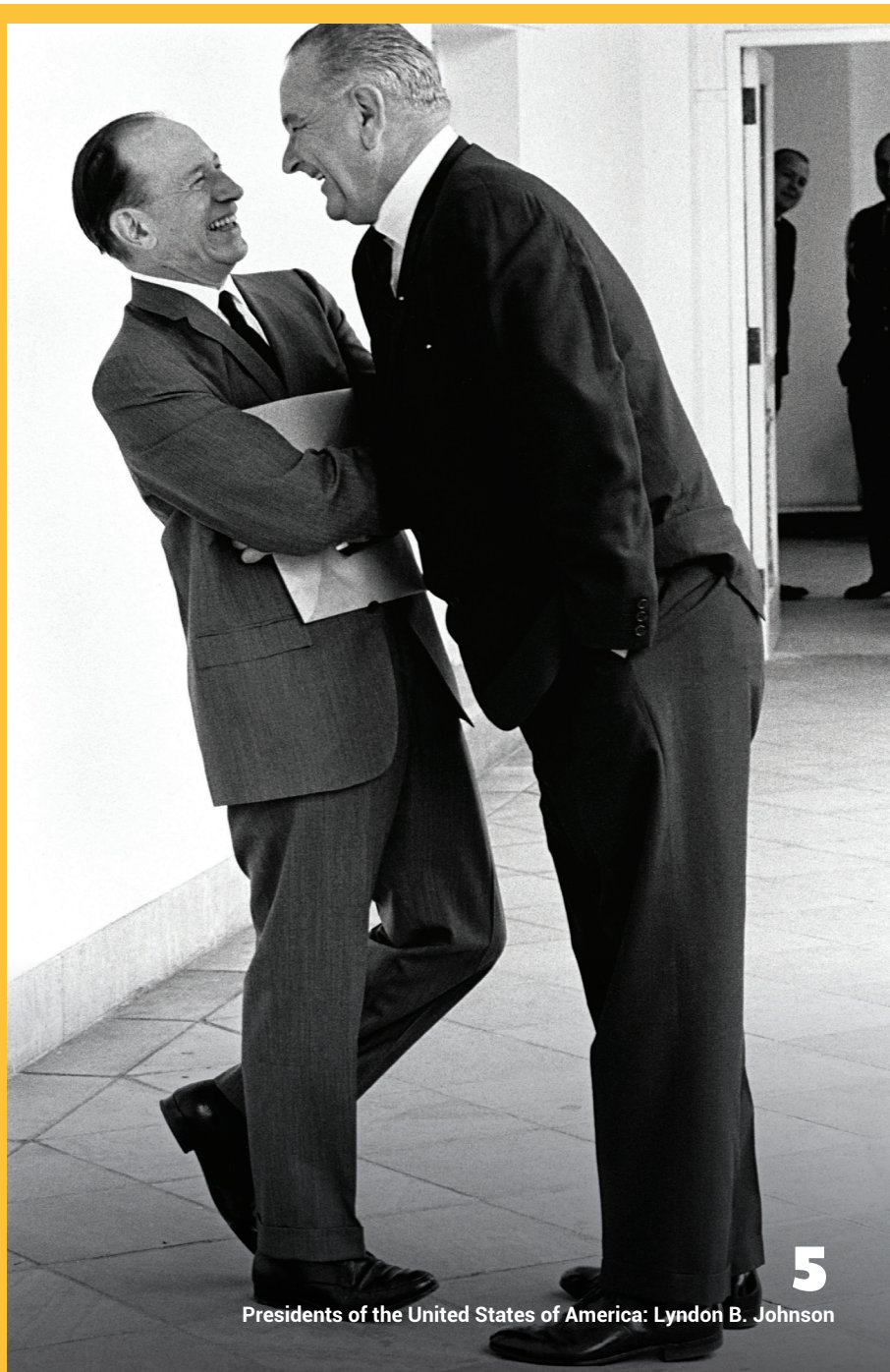
Johnson served in the Senate from 1949 to 1961 and quickly rose to become the most powerful senator in the country. He did anything and everything to gain power: learning the strengths and weaknesses of his rivals, cultivating close relationships with powerful people, and working longer hours than everyone else. By 1955, he had the chamber's top job: **Senate Majority Leader.**

Some believe he was the most powerful Majority Leader in American history—nothing happened in the Senate without his approval. Despite being from different parties, he worked closely with Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower to pass laws such as the **Civil Rights Act of 1957** and the **National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958**, which Johnson hoped would make America the world leader in space exploration.

The Johnson Treatment

Johnson was a strong leader in the Senate because he had the gift of persuading people. He studied his fellow senators and learned about what motivated them and what they wanted. He used this information to negotiate with them and get lots of bills passed.

People that knew him talked about "the Johnson Treatment," or the process he used to persuade others. Two journalists wrote that the treatment "could last ten minutes or four hours." It included many different emotions: "supplication, accusation, exuberance, scorn, tears, complaint, and the hint of threat." Johnson "moved in close, his face a scant millimeter from his target." Those who got the treatment found it very difficult to say no to what he asked for.



A Miserable Vice President

Johnson's ultimate goal, however, went far beyond the Senate. Just as he told his classmates in his youth, he wanted to be president. With Eisenhower leaving office, Johnson prepared to run for the 1960 Democratic presidential nomination. He felt confident that his impressive Senate record would carry him to victory.

He was disappointed, however, when a young senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy, won the nomination instead. Kennedy's Senate record was nowhere near as impressive as Johnson's, but he was young, charismatic, and an eloquent speaker. The voters fell in love with the senator from Massachusetts.

Kennedy, however, was from the Northeastern part of the country and needed support from the South to win the presidency. So he chose Johnson, a Southerner, to be his running mate. The strategy worked—that fall, Kennedy and Johnson defeated the Republican ticket of Richard Nixon and Henry Cabot Lodge.

Being vice president, however, was a miserable experience for Johnson. Kennedy's advisors, who were mostly wealthy, well-educated men from the Northeast, looked down on Johnson and made fun of him. Kennedy rarely sought Johnson for advice and instead relied mostly on his own brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy. There were even rumors that Kennedy was planning to replace Johnson during the 1964 presidential election. Some felt that Johnson's career was over.

Quote

"This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America."
- January 1964

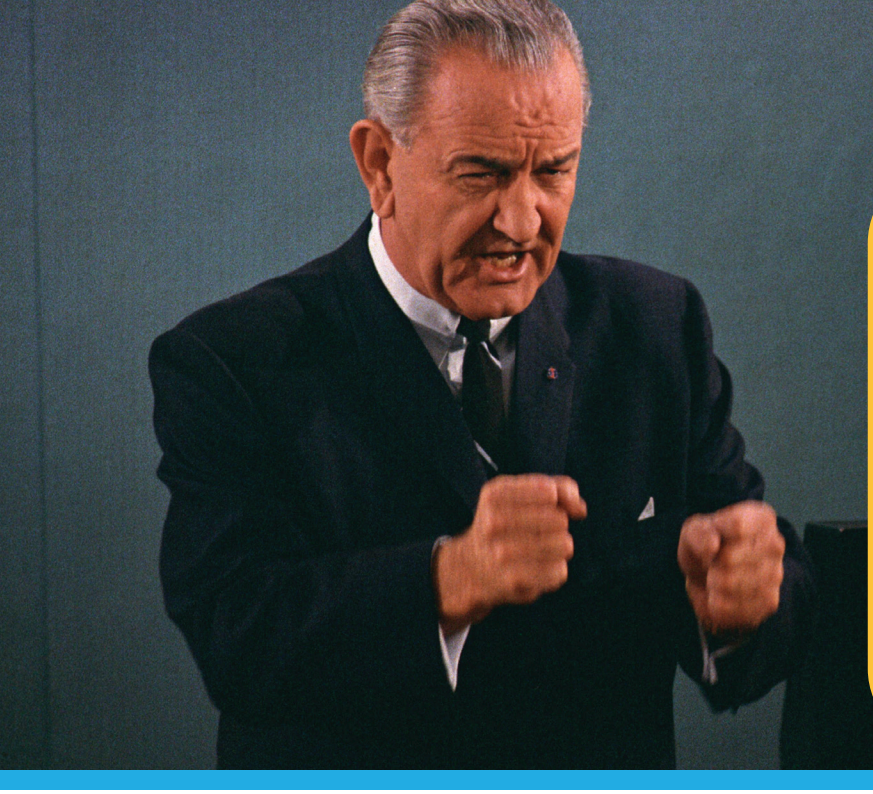




Tragedy in Dallas

All of that changed on November 22, 1963. That afternoon, Johnson was riding in a motorcade a couple of cars behind Kennedy when shots suddenly rang out. Kennedy was fatally wounded and died in a nearby hospital half an hour later. At that moment, Lyndon Johnson became the 36th President of the United States. He took the oath of office shortly after in **Air Force One**, sworn in with Kennedy's widow Jackie by his side.

Although Johnson had attained his ultimate life goal—the presidency—it occurred in the midst of a national tragedy. Kennedy had been a very popular president—the American people were shocked and devastated at his loss. Johnson had to lead the nation in a time of great mourning. In a televised speech five days after the assassination, he said, "All I have I would have given gladly not to be standing here today."



Quote

"The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice, to which we are totally committed in our time. But that is just the beginning."
- May 1964

President

Johnson promised to continue Kennedy's policies. The nation, still holding on to JFK's memory, overwhelmingly elected Johnson in the 1964 presidential election. He defeated Republican candidate Barry Goldwater in a landslide.

LBJ modeled his presidency after his hero and the father of the New Deal, Franklin Roosevelt. Johnson created his own version of the New Deal, called the **Great Society**. The New Deal and Great Society were both based on the same idea—that giving government more control over people's lives could help the poor and make the world a better place. Johnson even declared a "**War on Poverty**" and created or expanded many **welfare** programs to help people. These included **Medicare** and **Medicaid**, which provided health care to the elderly and the poor. They also included food stamps, which gave people money to buy food, and **Head Start**, to help poor children.

Like most **utopian** ideas, Johnson's Great Society programs have failed to eliminate poverty. Instead, they led to more rules for all Americans to follow. These programs, to this day, cost a lot of money and have contributed to America's current massive debt. LBJ didn't realize that the best way to eliminate poverty was not through more rules and bigger government but through greater freedom for all.

Johnson's greatest successes, after all, were those that protected the rights and freedom of all Americans. These included the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**, the **Voting Rights Act of 1965**, and a tax cut, which helped America become more prosperous.

In addition, Johnson got America heavily involved in the **Vietnam War**. Although the cause of the war—to stop communism—was a meaningful and worthwhile goal, Johnson did not know how to use military power effectively. He controlled the military's strategy so much that it didn't have the freedom to do what was necessary to win the war. LBJ sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers to Vietnam, and about 58,000 Americans died in the war, but victory never came. Soon, thousands of Americans were protesting against the war, and the entire nation was torn over what to do. Johnson became unpopular and decided to leave office in 1969.

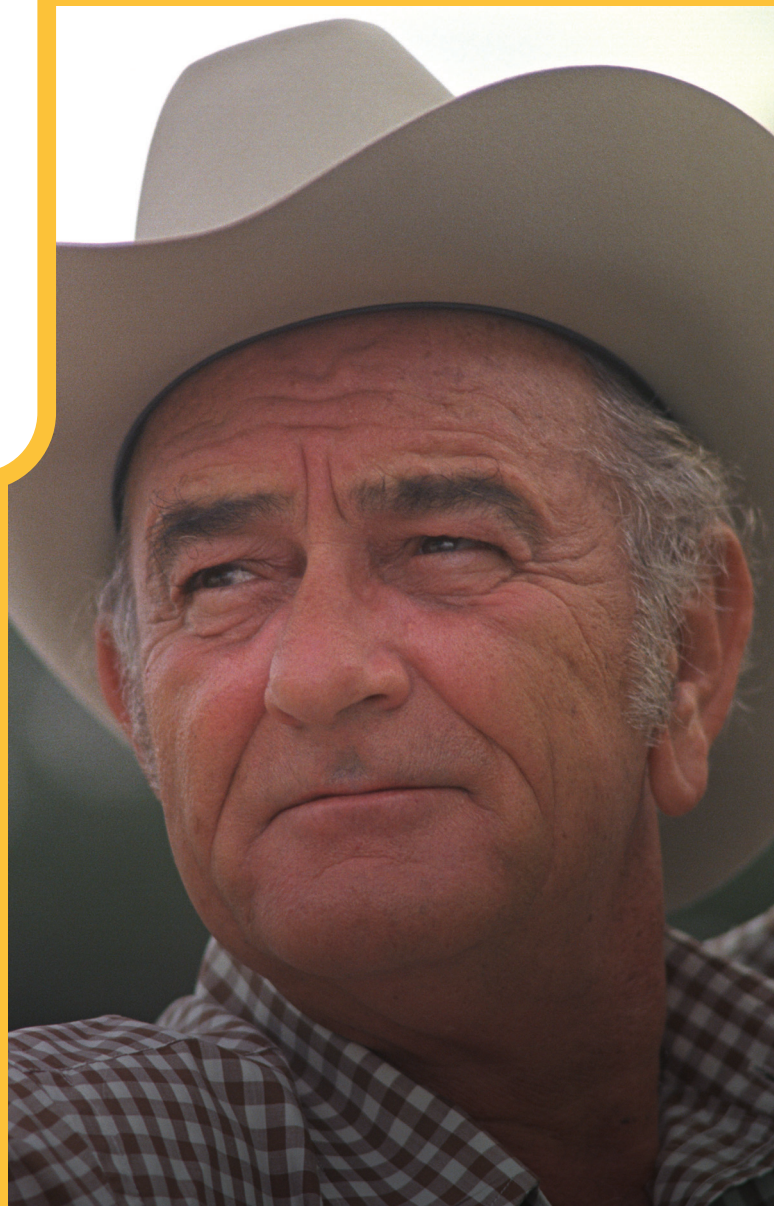
Lady Bird the Businesswoman

Lady Bird Johnson was a well-educated woman who was an active First Lady. She supported her husband's Great Society programs and worked to protect the environment. Mrs. Johnson was also a shrewd businesswoman. When she was 30 years old, she invested some retirement money in a small Austin radio station, KTBC. She worked hard to revitalize the station, making it a profitable business. The station eventually made the Johnsons millionaires.



Quote

"I do not believe that the Great Society is the ordered, changeless, and sterile battalion of the ants. It is the excitement of becoming—always becoming, trying, probing, falling, resting, and trying again—but always trying and always gaining."
- January 1965



Retirement

Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson retired to their ranch in Texas. He wrote his memoirs defending his career and his presidency. It fell to his successor, Republican President Richard Nixon, to end America's involvement in Vietnam.

Johnson had suffered from heart problems for several years. It didn't help that he smoked heavily in his retirement (despite quitting many years earlier). On January 22, 1973, Johnson suffered a heart attack and died at the age of 64.

Legacy

Lyndon B. Johnson dedicated his career to public service and worked diligently toward advancing his political goals, often attaining more power for the federal government and himself in the process. As a representative, a senator, and a president, he was willing to do anything to advance his agenda. Historians suspect that he even cheated in 1948 to win his Senate seat.

LBJ often promised that if the voters gave him and the government more power, he could get rid of problems like poverty. Decades after Johnson left office, it is very clear how empty those promises were. Despite all of the programs he created—many of which are still in place—poverty still exists in the United States. Americans are now left with a massive national debt from the cost of those programs.

Johnson also unwisely escalated America's involvement in the Vietnam War without a real strategy to win it. This proved to be a costly decision, as thousands of American families lost their sons, husbands, and fathers.

Lyndon Johnson was one of America's most ambitious presidents, but it is America that continues to pay the price for his policies.

Quote

"We have chosen to fight a limited war in Vietnam... I wish I could report to you that the conflict is almost over. This I cannot do. We face more cost, more loss, and more agony."
- January 1967

Writing Activity

Consider the pros and cons of ambition. What are the consequences of being overly ambitious or not ambitious enough? Grab a piece of paper and write down your thoughts.

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Answers

NAMES OF JOHNSON'S TWO BEAGLES:
HIM AND HER

Glossary

New Deal: A series of government laws, regulations, and programs implemented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the 1930s. Although the stated goal of the New Deal was to provide economic relief during the Great Depression, it also implemented many policies progressives had supported for several decades. The New Deal greatly expanded government control of the economy and American people's lives.

Primary Election: An election that determines a party's nominee for a political office. The general election determines which party's candidate wins.

Senate Majority Leader: The senator who leads the party with the majority in the U.S. Senate. The Senate Majority Leader usually has significant influence over the laws that the Senate debates and passes.

Civil Rights Act of 1957: The first significant civil rights legislation passed since the Civil War, aimed at protecting voting rights and establishing a federal commission to investigate allegations of voter discrimination.

National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958: Legislation that established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to coordinate and oversee space exploration and research activities in the United States.

Air Force One: The official designated call sign for the U.S. Air Force aircraft whenever the President of the United States is on board. The aircrafts used for Air Force One—Boeing 707s and 747s—are iconic symbols of presidential power.

Great Society: A set of programs signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 and 1965. These laws sought to continue the work begun by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in implementing progressive policies. They expanded the size and reach of government in the areas of healthcare, education, the economy, housing, and the environment.

War on Poverty: A set of government programs and policies initiated in the 1960s to eliminate poverty in the United States and assist the extremely poor through measures such as job training, education, and healthcare assistance. It set a precedent for big government to address social issues through legislation such as the "War on Crime" and "War on Drugs."

Welfare: Government aid, often in the form of money, to address social problems.

Medicare: The national program run by the federal government to provide health insurance for the elderly (65 and older), as well as those with disability status. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Medicare into law in 1965.

Medicaid: A program run by the federal government and the states to provide assistance for healthcare costs for people with low incomes. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Medicaid into law in 1965.

Head Start: A government-run early childhood education program in the United States that provides educational, health, and social services to children from low-income families.

Utopian: Aiming for a perfect society; usually considered unrealistic and often harmful to society.

Civil Rights Act of 1964: A bill signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on July 2, 1964, that ended discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin.

Voting Rights Act of 1965: A bill signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on August 6, 1965, that protects the voting rights of all Americans. It specifically protects minorities who, previously, were prevented from voting because of their race.

Vietnam War: A military conflict from 1955 until 1975 that began when communists in North Vietnam tried to impose a dictatorship over the entire country. The United States ultimately sent about 2.7 million soldiers to support the South Vietnamese against the communists, but this decision became unpopular among Americans.

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