

# *The Great Society*

## **Great Society Speech, Lyndon B. Johnson, 1964 (Modified)**

I have come today from the turmoil of your Capital to the tranquility (peace) of your campus to speak about the future of your country. . .

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. . .

It is harder and harder to live the good life in American cities today. There is not enough housing for our people or transportation for our traffic. . . . Our society will never be great until our cities are great. . .

A second place where we begin to build the Great Society is in our countryside. We have always prided ourselves on being not only America the strong and America the free, but America the beautiful. Today that beauty is in danger. The water we drink, the food we eat, the very air that we breathe, are threatened with pollution. Our parks are overcrowded, our seashores overburdened. Green fields and dense forests are disappearing. . .

A third place to build the Great Society is in the classrooms of America. There your children's lives will be shaped. Our society will not be great until every young mind is set free to scan the farthest reaches of thought and imagination. We are still far from that goal. . . Poverty must not be a bar to learning, and learning must offer an escape from poverty. . .

A fourth place from this day forth those wishing to immigrate to America shall be admitted on the basis of their skills and their close relationship to those already here. This is a simple test, and it is a fair test. Those who can contribute most to this country--to its growth, to its strength, to its spirit--will be the first that are admitted to this land.

The fairness of this standard is so self-evident that we may well wonder that it has not always been applied. Yet the fact is that for over four decades the immigration policy of the United States has been twisted and has been distorted by the harsh injustice of the national origins quota system.

For better or for worse, your generation has been appointed by history to deal with those problems and to lead America toward a new age. You have the chance never before afforded to any people in any age. You can help build a society where the demands of morality, and the needs of the spirit, can be realized in the life of the Nation.

So, will you join in the battle to give every citizen the full equality which God enjoys and the law requires, whatever his belief, or race, or the color of his skin?

Will you join in the battle to give every citizen an escape from the crushing weight of poverty?

Will you join in the battle to build the Great Society, to prove that our material progress is only the foundation on which we will build a richer life of mind and spirit?

*Source: The speech above was delivered by President Johnson as a commencement (graduation) speech at the University of Michigan on May 22, 1964.*

## ***Major Great Society Programs***

**Economic Opportunity Act of 1964:** The goal of this act was to "eliminate poverty in this Nation by opening to everyone the opportunity for education and training, the opportunity to work, and the opportunity to live in decency and dignity." The programs of the Economic Opportunity Act included, but were not limited to, the Job Corps, Head Start, Adult Basic Education, Family Planning, Summer Youth Programs, Senior Centers, Community Health Centers, and Community Action Agencies.

**Medicare** is the federal health insurance program for people who are 65 or older, certain younger people with disabilities.

**Medicaid** is a federal program that helps low-income individuals or families pay for the costs associated with long-term medical care.

**The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965** provided education aid to states based on the number of students from low-income homes.

**The Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965** expanded funding for existing federal housing programs, and added new programs to provide rent subsidies for the elderly and disabled; housing rehabilitation grants to poor homeowners; provisions for veterans to make very low down-payments to obtain mortgages; new authority for families qualifying for public housing to be placed in empty private housing (along with subsidies to landlords); and matching grants to localities for the construction of water and sewer facilities, construction of community centers in low-income areas, and urban beautification.

**The Higher Education Act** was intended "to strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education". It increased federal money given to universities, created scholarships, and gave low-interest loans for students.

**The National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities** was created to provide greater investment in culture by the federal government. The federal government provides grants for high-quality projects to cultural institutions (such as museums, libraries, and universities) and individual artists and scholars.

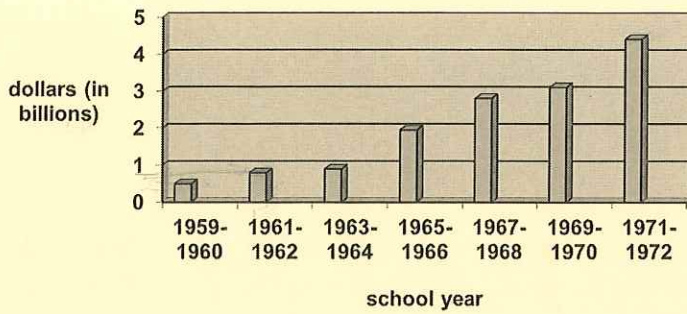
**The Corporation for Public Broadcasting** was created in 1967 in order to provide Americans with educational and informative programming for free. Today, Public media reaches over 98% of Americans.

**The Highway Safety Act** was enacted in the United States in 1966 to empower the federal government to set and administer new safety standards for motor vehicles and road traffic safety. The act created what is now known as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which aimed to reduce the number of injuries and fatalities related to the increasing number of cars in the United States.

**The Water Quality Act (1965)** and **Clean Water Restoration Act (1966)** were enacted in order to create clean water standards and provide money for environmental research.

**The Air Quality Act** set guidelines for air pollution levels and increase the federal government's power to enforce clean air standards.

**Graph A - United States Government Dollars to Public Education, 1959-1972** Source - "America: Pathways to the Present," Prentice Hall, 2005



**Chart B - Percent of Total Population Below Poverty Level (1960 – 1972)**

Source - U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1979

Year	Persons Below the Poverty Level (by # and percent of population)	
	Number (in millions)	Percent of Total Population
1960	39.9	22.2
1966	28.5	14.7
1968	25.4	12.8
1969	24.1	12.1
1970	25.4	12.6
1971	25.6	12.5
1972	24.5	11.9

**Chart C - U.S. Government Spending (in millions of dollars) on Food and Nutrition Assistance to Individuals (1962-1972)** Source – U.S. Government Budget for Fiscal Year, 2007

	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
<b>Total Food and Nutrition Assistance – Includes Food Stamp Program, Child nutrition and special milk programs</b>	275	284	308	299	363	418	505	587	960	2,179	3,128

