

Chapter 29

Civil Rights, Vietnam, and the Ordeal of Liberalism



Deu_15:11 For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.



OBJECTIVES



- We will study President Kennedy's New Frontier Domestic initiatives.
- We will study President Johnson's Great Society programs and its successes and failures.
- We will study the successes of the Civil Rights Movement leading to the signing of the Civil Rights Bill.

Expanding the Liberal State:

- The presidential campaign of 1960 produced two young candidates who claimed to offer the nation active leadership.
- The Republicans went to VP Richard Nixon who promised moderate reform.
- The Democrats nominated John Fitzgerald Kennedy an attractive and articulate senator from Massachusetts.



Expanding the Liberal State:

- Kennedy was the son of the wealthy, powerful, and highly controversial Joseph P. Kennedy, former American ambassador to Britain.
- He overcome doubts of his youth (43 in 1960) and religion (He was Catholic) to win with a tiny plurality of the popular vote (49.7 to 49.6 and slightly more electoral majority of 303 to 219).



Expanding the Liberal State:

- Kennedy campaigned promising a set of domestic reforms more ambitious than any since the New Deal, a program he described as the “New Frontier.”
- But a congress dominated by Republicans and conservative Democrats frustrated many of his hopes.



Expanding the Liberal State:

- Kennedy did manage to win approval of tariff reductions his administration had negotiated.
- Kennedy began to build an ambitious legislative agenda that he hoped he might eventually see enacted including a call for significant tax cuts to promote economic growth.



Expanding the Liberal State:

- Kennedy's personality and charisma was a mark of his presidency and a central focus of national attention.
- Sadly, he was assassinated in November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas where he traveled with his wife and Vice President Johnson for a series of political appearances.



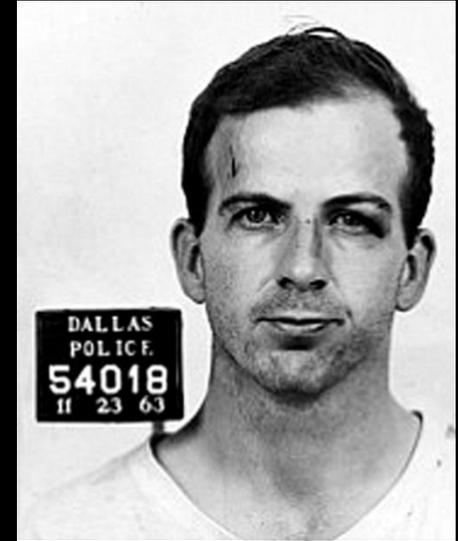
Expanding the Liberal State:

- Kennedy was struck twice by assassin bullets, one in the throat, and the other in the head while on a motorcade.
- He was sped to a nearby hospital where minutes after arriving he was pronounced dead.



Expanding the Liberal State:

- Lee Harvey Oswald who appeared confused and an embittered Marxist was arrested for the crime later that day.
- Oswald then was mysteriously murdered by a Dallas nightclub owner, Jack Ruby, two days later.



Expanding the Liberal State:

- Most Americans accepted the conclusions of federal commissions appointed by President Johnson and chaired by Chief Justice Earl Warren which found that both Oswald and Ruby acted alone.
- However many Americans believe today that there was a conspiracy and that the Warren Commission ignored evidence by a broad conspiracy behind the murderers.



Lyndon Johnson:

- Lyndon Johnson was a native of the poor “hill country” in west Texas and had risen to become majority leader of the Senate.
- He failed to win the Democratic nomination in 1960 but accepted the vice presidency under Kennedy.



Lyndon Johnson:

- Johnson's rough-edged, even crude personality could hardly be more different from Kennedys.
- But like Kennedy, Johnson was a man who believed in the active use of power.
- Between 1963 and 1966 he compiled the most impressive legislative record of any president since FDR.



Lyndon Johnson:

- Johnson was aided by the tidal wave of emotion that followed the death of President Kennedy which helped win support for many New Frontier proposals.
- But Johnson also constructed a remarkable reform program on his own, one that he ultimately labeled the “Great Society.”
- And he won approval of much of it through the same sort of skillful lobbying in Congress that had been an effective majority leader.



Lyndon Johnson:

- Johnson envisioned himself a coalition builder.
- He wanted the support of everyone and for a time he very nearly got it.
- His first year in office was by necessity as he ran for election.



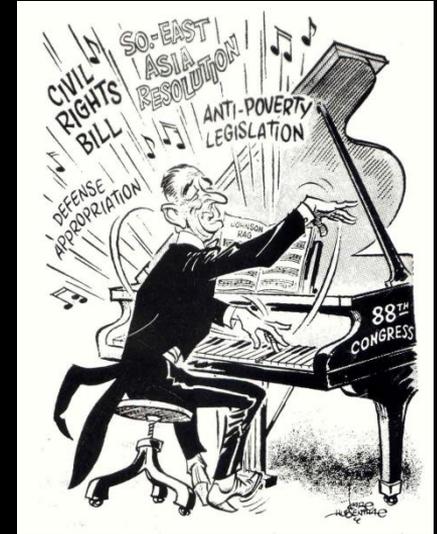
Lyndon Johnson:

- In the November 1964 election, the president received a larger plurality, over 61 percent than any candidate before or since.
- Johnson's opponent, the conservative Barry Goldwater managed to carry only his home state of Arizona and five states in the Deep South.



The Assault On Poverty:

- For the first time since the 1930s, the Federal Government took steps in the 1960s to create important new social welfare programs.
- The most important of these, perhaps was Medicare:
- A program to provide federal aid to the elderly for medical expenses.



The Assault On Poverty:

- It avoided the stigma of welfare by making Medicare benefits available to all elderly
- Americans regardless of need (just as Social Security had done with pensions).



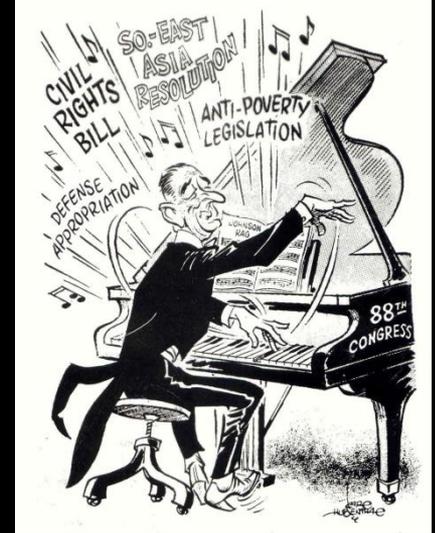
The Assault On Poverty:

- The program also defused the opposition to the medical community by allowing doctors serving Medicare patients to practice privately and to charge their normal fees;
- Medicare simply shifted responsibility for paying those fees from the patient to the government.



The Assault On Poverty:

- Medicare and Medicaid was early steps in a much larger assault on poverty-one that Kennedy had been planning in the last month of his life and that Johnson launched only weeks after taking office.
- The center piece of this war on Poverty was the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) which created an array of new education, employment, housing, and health-care programs.



The Assault On Poverty:

- But the OEO was controversial from the start, in part because of its commitment to the idea of “Community Action.”
- Community Action was an effort to involve members of poor communities themselves in the planning and administration of the programs designed to help them.



The Assault On Poverty:

- The OEO spent nearly \$3 billion during its first two years of existence, and it helped reduce poverty in some areas.
- But it fell short of eliminating poverty.
- That was in part because of weaknesses of the programs themselves and in part because funding for them, inadequate from the beginning, dwindled as the years passed.
- The costly war in Southeast Asia became the nation's first priority.

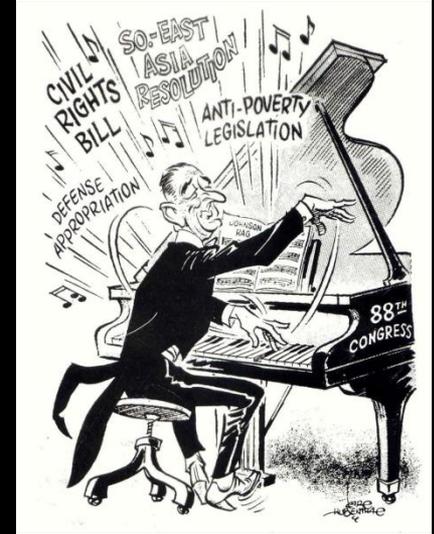


Cities, Schools, and Immigration:

- Closely tied to the antipoverty program were federal efforts to promote the revitalization of decaying cities and to strengthen the nation's schools.

Cities, Schools, and Immigration:

- The Housing Act of 1961 offered \$4.9 billion in federal grants to cities for the preservation for open spaces,
- the development of mass-transit systems,
- And the subsidization of middle-income housing.
- In 1966 Johnson established a new cabinet agency, the Department of Housing and Urban Development whose first secretary, Robert Weaver, was the first African American ever to serve in the Cabinet.



Cities, Schools, and Immigration:

- Kennedy, had long fought for federal aid to public education, but he had failed to overcome two important obstacles:
- Many Americans feared that aid to education was the first step toward federal control of the schools, and Catholics insisted that federal assistance must extend to parochial as well as public schools.



Cities, Schools, and Immigration:

- Johnson managed to circumvent both objections with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and a series of subsequent measures.
- The bills extended aid to both private and parochial schools and based the aid on the economic conditions of the students not on the needs of the schools themselves.
- Total federal expenditures for education and technical training rose from \$5 billion to \$12 billion between 1964 and 1967.



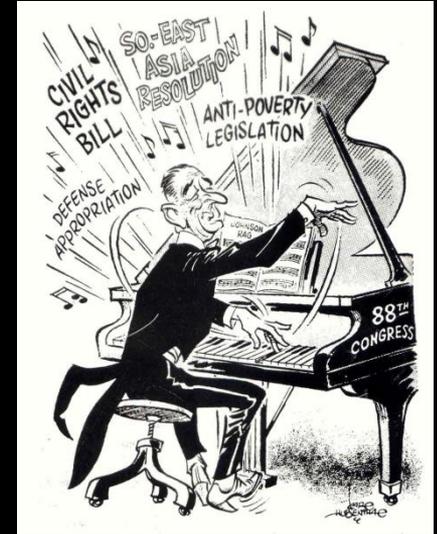
Cities, Schools, and Immigration:

- Johnson Administration also supported the Immigration Act of 1964, one of the most important pieces of legislation of the 1960s.
- The law maintained a strict limit on the number of newcomers admitted to the country each year (170,000),
- But it eliminated the “national origins” system established in the 1920s, which gave preference to immigrants from northern Europe over those from other parts of the world.



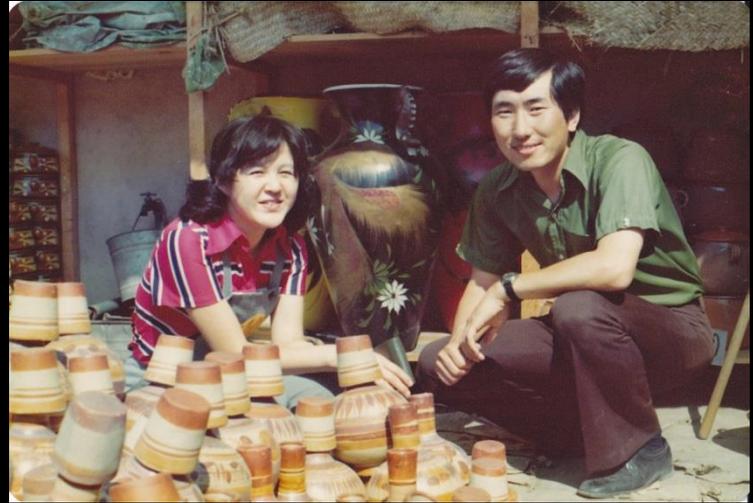
Cities, Schools, and Immigration:

- It allowed people from all parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa to enter the U.S. on an equal basis while it restricted immigration in some parts of Latin America.
- This allowed a large group of Asians to enter the country.



Legacies of the Great Society:

- Taken together, the Great Society reforms meant a significant increase in federal spending.
- For a time, rising tax revenues from the growing economy nearly compensated for the new expenditures.



Legacies of the Great Society:

- The Great Society was hampered by the escalating costs of the Vietnam War and federal spending exceeded tax revenue causing a deficit.
- The high costs of the Great Society Programs,
- the deficiencies and failures of many of them,
- and the inability of the government to find the revenues to pay for them,
- contributed to a growing disillusionment in later years with the idea of federal efforts to solve social problems.



Legacies of the Great Society:

- The Great Society, despite its failures was also responsible for some significant achievements.
- It substantially reduced hunger in America.
- It made medical care available to millions of elderly and poor people who would otherwise have had great difficulty affording it.
- It contributed to the greatest reduction in poverty in American history.



THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY:

- The nation's most important domestic initiative in the 1960s was the effort to provide justice and equality to African Americans.
- Kennedy when he came to office was sympathetic to racial justice but he was not committed to overturn the status quo desiring not to alienate the Southern Democrats so key to his electorate.



THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY:

- Kennedy's intervention during the 1960 campaign to help win the release of Martin Luther King, Jr from Georgia prison won him a large plurality of the black vote.
- But like many presidents before him, he feared alienating southern Democratic voters and congressmen.



THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY:

- Kennedy's administration set out to contain the racial problem by expanding enforcement of existing laws and supporting litigation to overturn existing segregation statutes,
- hoping to make modest progress without creating politically damaging divisions.



THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY:

- But the pressure for more fundamental change could not be contained.
- In February 1960, black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina staged a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter,
- and in the following weeks, similar demonstrations spread throughout much of the South, forcing many merchants to integrate their facilities.



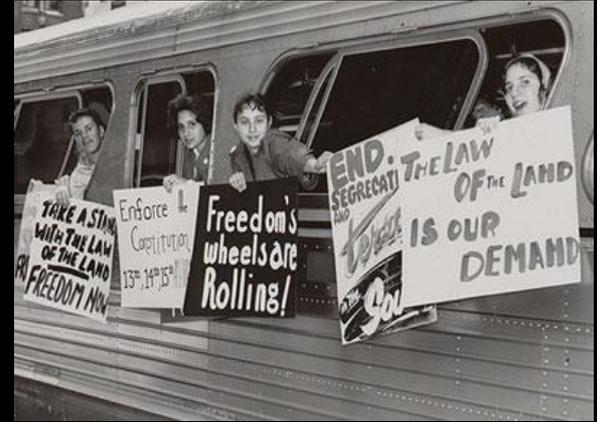
THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY:

- In the fall of 1960, some of those who had participated in the sit-ins formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) which worked to keep the spirit of resistance alive.
- In the early 1960s, the primary membership of SNCC was college students.



THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY:

- In 1961, an interracial group of students, working with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) began what they called “freedom rides” (reviving a tactic CORE had tried without much success, in the 1940s).
- Traveling by bus throughout the South, the freedom riders tried to force the desegregation of bus stations.



THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY:

- In some places, they met with such savage violence that the president finally dispatched federal marshals to help keep the peace.
- Kennedy also ordered the integration of all bus and train stations.



THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY:

- SNCC workers began fanning out through black communities and even into remote rural areas to encourage African Americans to challenge the obstacles to voting that the Jim Crow laws created.
- The Southern Christian Leadership Conference created citizen education and other programs, many of them organized by Ella Baker, one of the most successful grassroots leaders of the movement.



THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY:

- In October 1962 Kennedy sent federal troops to the city Oxford, Mississippi to restore order and allow James Meredith the right to attend the University of Mississippi.



THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY:

- In Alabama in April 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. launched a series of nonviolent demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama, a city perhaps unsurpassed in its commitment to segregation.
- Police Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Conner used dogs, tear gas, electric cattle prods, and fire hoses even against small children and demonstrators as the nation watched in horror.



THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY:

- Two months later, Governor George Wallace pledged to stand in the doorway of a building at the University of Alabama to prevent the court-ordered enrollment of several black students.



THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY:

- Only after the arrival of Federal Marshalls and a visit from Attorney General Robert Kennedy did Wallace give way.
- That same night NAACP official Medgar Evers was murdered in Mississippi.



A National Commitment:

- To generate support for legislation and to dramatize the power of the growing movement, more than 200,000 demonstrators in August 1963, marched down the Mall in Washington D.C.
- They gathered before the Lincoln Memorial for the greatest civil rights demonstration in the nation's history.



A National Commitment:

- President Kennedy, who had at first opposed the idea of the march, in the end gave it his open support after receiving pledges from organizers and speakers would not criticize the administration
- Martin Luther King Jr. in one of his greatest speeches, gave his “I Have a Dream” speech.



A National Commitment:

- The assassination of President Kennedy three months later gave new impetus to the battle for Civil Rights Legislation.
- The ambitious measure that Kennedy had proposed in June 1963 had stalled in the Senate after having passed through the House of Representatives with relative ease.



A National Commitment:

- Early in 1964, after Johnson applied both public and private pressure, supporters of the measure finally mustered the two-thirds majority necessary to close debate and end a filibuster by southern senators;
- The Senate passed the most comprehensive civil rights bill in the nation's history.

