Johnson’s Great Society 1964-1968

1960s was a period of economic prosperity: the affluent society. But, deep pockets of poverty existed, especially in the South, in Appalachia and among minorities (~20% of Americans and a disproportionate number of Blacks lived below the poverty line of $3000/year in 1963). Johnson tried to address this issue with some success.

Results of the 1960s economic boom:
- GNP soared (production of goods and services up 60%)
- Consumer spending increased
- Tax revenues up
- 14 million moved above poverty line (22 to 11% of population)

LBJ used his political skill and the sense of grief over Kennedy’s assassination to get legislation through Congress to fight a “war on poverty” and to build a Great Society to eradicate poverty and to end racial injustice.

1964: Congress passed a number of acts which had been stalled under JFK’s administration – Federal money for education, mass transportation, a tax cut, anti-poverty programs and two civil rights acts (1964 and 1965).

Great Society: most extensive liberal social program to help the disadvantaged funded by the federal gov’t; LBJ following in FDR’s footsteps and achieving some of Truman’s failed legislation (Fair Deal)

**Great Society programs:**
- Economic Opportunity Act ($1 billion)
- Head Start for preschoolers
- Job Corps for high school dropouts
- VISTA (Volunteers in Service for America) domestic Peace Corps
- Financial and tutoring services for university students
- Neighborhood Youth Corps: job training and counseling activities
- Community Action Program – with participation by the poor to help themselves
- Appalachian Regional Development
- Medicare- health insurance for the elderly (over 65)
- Medicaid – health insurance for the poor

LBJ created new Cabinet-level department (Housing, Education and Welfare) indicating his commitment to social welfare.

Immigration act ended quota system which had existed since 1920s and had excluded non northern Europeans.

Highway beautification program promoted improving general quality of life (pet project of LBJ’s wife, Lady Bird Johnson).

Overall assessment: massive federal intervention and spending on liberal social programs to create a limited welfare state. But success undermined by the draining of funding (by the late 1960’s) due to financial commitment to fighting the war in Vietnam. Also, underlying economic and social/racial inequalities persisted.