

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON

A P R E S I D E N T ' S V I S I O N

PRIMARY SOURCE WORKSHEET

EXCERPT FROM LYNDON B. JOHNSON, "THE GREAT SOCIETY," DELIVERED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, MAY 22, 1964.

Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963–1964. I: 357, 704–7.
Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965.

For a century we labored to settle and to subdue a continent. For half a century we called upon unbounded invention and untiring industry to create an order of plenty for all of our people.

The challenge of the next half century is whether we have the wisdom to use that wealth to enrich and elevate our national life, and to advance the quality of our American civilization.

Your imagination, your initiative, and your indignation will determine whether we build a society where progress is the servant of our needs, or a society where old values and new visions are buried under unbridled growth. For in your time we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society.

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.

The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents. It is a place where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not a feared cause of boredom and restlessness. It is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community.

It is a place where man can renew contact with nature. It is a place which honors creation for its own sake and for what it adds to the understanding of the race. It is a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods.

But most of all, the Great Society is not a safe harbor, a resting place, a final objective, a finished work. It is a challenge constantly renewed, beckoning us toward a destiny where the meaning of our lives matches the marvelous products of our labor.

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QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. When did Johnson deliver this speech?
2. Who was Johnson's audience for this speech? Who is the "you" to whom Johnson refers in the third paragraph of the excerpt?
3. To which era of American history does Johnson refer when he says, "For a century we labored to settle and to subdue a continent"?
4. To which era of American history does Johnson refer when he says, "For half a century we called upon unbounded invention and untiring industry to create an order of plenty for all of our people"?
5. In the second paragraph of the excerpt, Johnson describes moving beyond a rich and powerful society to a "Great Society." List five characteristics of Johnson's Great Society.
6. Reread the second paragraph. What are the dangers of "unbridled growth," according to Johnson?
7. What does Johnson mean when he says that the Great Society is not "a resting place" but "a challenge constantly renewed"? Be specific.
8. How do you think the audience responded to Johnson's speech? How would you respond if Johnson delivered this speech at your high school or college graduation? Explain.
9. List three things this excerpt tells you about life in the United States at the time Johnson delivered the speech.

ACTIVITIES

Use your textbook and other print and online resources to complete the following activities.

1. Imagine you are a student attending the University of Michigan commencement, and you have just heard President Johnson's speech. Write a letter to your parents describing the impact this speech had on you and your plans for the future.
2. Listen to the audio recording of this speech on the website of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum (<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/av.hom/streaming-audio.shtm>). What insights did you gain from listening to the speech that you would have missed had you only read the transcript? Be specific.

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