

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, “TO FULFILL THESE RIGHTS,” COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS DELIVERED AT HOWARD UNIVERSITY, JUNE 4, 1965.

Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson II: 301, 635–40, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1966.

The voting rights bill will be the latest, and among the most important, in a long series of victories. But this victory—as Winston Churchill said of another triumph for freedom—“is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”

That beginning is freedom; and the barriers to that freedom are tumbling down. Freedom is the right to share, share fully and equally, in American society—to vote, to hold a job, to enter a public place, to go to school. It is the right to be treated in every part of our national life as a person equal in dignity and promise to all others.

But freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please.

You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, “you are free to compete with all the others,” and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.

Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates.

This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.

For the task is to give twenty million Negroes the same chance as every other American to learn and grow, to work and share in society, to develop their abilities—physical, mental and spiritual, and to pursue their individual happiness.

To this end equal opportunity is essential, but not enough, not enough. Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with, and the neighborhood you live in—by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the little infant, the child, and finally the man.

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QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. When did Johnson deliver this speech?
2. At what event or occasion did Johnson deliver this speech?
3. For what audience, or audiences, was this speech written?
4. List five examples Johnson provides of “freedom . . . to share in American society.”
5. What does Johnson mean when he says that “freedom is not enough”? Why does he make this point?
6. Reread the last two paragraphs. In addition to voting, what would provide African Americans the ability to achieve what Johnson describes here?
7. Judging from this excerpt, what did Johnson intend to achieve with this speech?
8. 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 an African American student at Howard University in 1965. After hearing the speech, you are invited to attend a small group discussion with President Johnson. List three questions you would ask the president in this discussion.
2. In this excerpt, Johnson quotes one of Winston Churchill’s most famous speeches, delivered in 1942 in response to the Allied victory at the Second Battle of El Alamein. Research and read Churchill’s speech online: <http://www.churchill-society-london.org.uk/EndoBegn.html>. Why do you think Johnson felt it was important to refer specifically to this speech? What connections might Johnson have drawn between England in 1942 and America in 1965? Explain your answer.
3. Listen to the audio recording of Johnson’s speech online: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/36_1_johnson/psources/ra_howard.html. What insight did you gain from listening to the speech that you would have missed if you had only read the transcript? Be specific.

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